



Blackstone River Monitor

Fall 2005 Volume 5, Issue 2

Newsletter of the **Blackstone River Watershed Association**

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The Blackstone River Watershed Association

(BRWA) was founded in 1976 and is dedicated to restoring, enhancing and preserving the Blackstone River system and its watershed.

From the President...

Interview with Mark Briggs
By Lynne Welsh

Mark Briggs has been a Board member since 2003. He hails from a farm in Pennsylvania, which he attributes as the source of his early love of nature.

In 1993, Mark moved to west Sutton and bought a house on Lake Singletary, but he soon realized the idyllic lake was changing. Trees were being cut down in order to build huge homes where three-season cabins had once been. He was driven to action and became involved with the Conservation

Commission. Seeing a need to strengthen the town's ability to guide new development, Mark spearheaded the writing of Sutton's Wetland and Riverfront Administrative By-law, two years before MassDEP amended the State law to protect riverfronts.

Mark has not stopped there. In addition to being on the Conservation Commission and BRWA Board, he is active in many other organizations: the Lake Singletary Watershed Association, Trout Unlimited, Sierra Club and the Atlantic Salmon

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BRWA Annual Meeting November 15, 2005

Meeting starts at 7 pm
Brigham Hill Community Barn
37 Wheeler Road, Grafton

You're invited to the Annual Meeting to help celebrate all of the BRWA's recent accomplishments and to learn more about an important issue that's critical to our future.

Program:
Can our Water Supply Keep Up With Growth in The Blackstone Valley?

- Fishing for Solutions

Presented by:
Vandana Rao,
Assistant Director of Water Policy
Executive Office of Environmental
Affairs, and

Bryant Firmin, Massachusetts
Department of Environmental
Protection

Water is a crucial resource for all species, human and non-human alike. Considering the rate of growth that the Blackstone Valley is experiencing, how can we ensure that we have water of sufficient quantity and good quality to meet our increasing demands, as well as to maintain streamflow?

Come learn from the experts as they provide an overview of state policies, efforts, and planning at the regional and local level.

(continued next page)

Officers

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Lynne Welsh, Northborough

Vice President

Phil Neeland, Northbridge

Treasurer

Maggie Plasse, Blackstone

Secretary

Donna Williams, Grafton

Watershed Program

Jim Plasse, Blackstone

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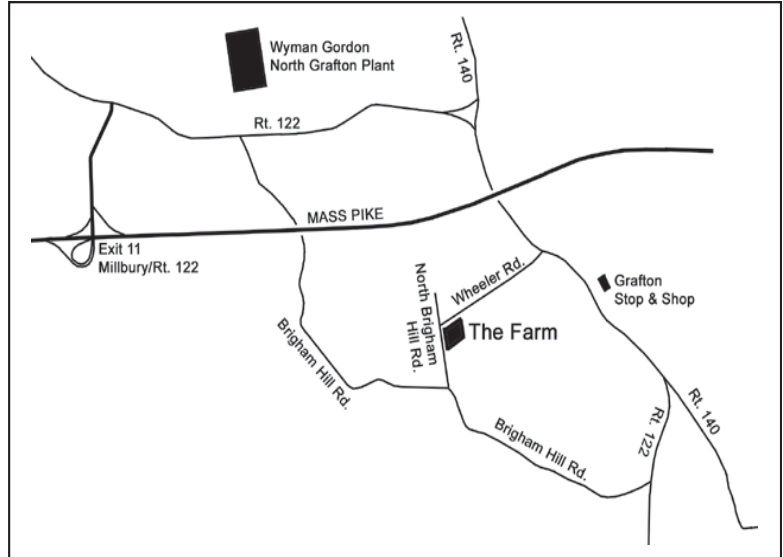
brwa@verizon.net

Annual Meeting

(from previous page)

Business meeting will follow the program. Refreshments will be served.

Map to Brigham Hill Community Barn: 37 Wheeler Road, Grafton



The Slate of Directors to be voted on at the meeting is listed below. This list is complete at the time of press. Additional directors maybe added before the meeting.

Officers

President- Jim Plasse

Vice President – Phil Neeland

Treasurer- Maggie Plasse

Secretary- Donna Williams

Directors

Spaulding Aldrich

Herb Andrews

Mark Briggs

Michele B. Decoteau

James DeNormandie

Bonnie Frechette

Rosemary Longo

Steve MacIndoe

Dona Neely

John Pelczarski

Lynne Welsh

We look forward to seeing you at the Brigham Hill Community Barn on Tuesday evening, November 15!

Uxbridge High School is Farming Beetles

By Nicole Gardner

(Nicole is a Horticulture/Landscape Design student and the Horticulture Club President for 2006)

Lythrum salicaria, commonly known as purple loosestrife, is a wetland plant hardy in North America. This plant became established in the early 1800s and is considered extremely invasive throughout the US and southern Canada. In trying to exterminate the purple loosestrife, many techniques have been tried. Chemicals are hazardous and mechanical removal only removes fragments of the roots and as a result produces a larger loosestrife. Another method that has been tried is biocontrol, using two-leaf eating beetle species within the genus *Galerucella*. These beetles eat away at the purple loosestrife, decreasing the population of the plant.



The first Massachusetts purple loosestrife biocontrol project was started in 2000. The intent of the project was to release *Galerucella* beetles throughout Massachusetts to investigate the efficacy of purple loosestrife biocontrol and build a volunteer-based capacity to undertake beetle propagation, releases, monitoring, and other tasks.

At Uxbridge High School, teacher Dave Worden and volunteer students are working hard on their own biocontrol project. Ocean State Power donated over \$500 to the school to build a greenhouse for the purple loosestrife and to farm the beetles. The Horticulture/ Landscape Design class worked hard in building the greenhouse themselves.

Team leaders Dave Worden, Tim Smith (Massachusetts Coastal Zone Wetlands Management), Julie Riendeau (the BRWA), and Viola Bramel (US Army Corp of Engineers), spent a sunny April afternoon digging up purple loosestrife plants at River Bend Farm. Members of the Horticulture Club (Nicole Gardner, Kathryn Mayo, Mike Worden, Eddie Stack and Becky Jodrey) donated many hours of time to pot up, water and secure netting around the plants. The nets were needed over the purple loosestrife in the greenhouse to contain the beetles and their larvae. The Horticulture Club raised money for the project by propagating and selling perennials.

The team leaders worked with students to get the right number of beetles into each of the netted plants to ensure proper growth. There is evidence that the beetles have already mated and laid eggs on the leaves. The beetles are busy eating the leaves as evidenced by the 'shot holes' in the leaves. The small beetles, measuring only one millimeter long, do quite a lot of damage to the leaves. The Environmental Science classes will be conducting the experiment at Rice City Pond in Uxbridge, MA. They will be introducing the beetles, surveying the numbers of beetles in their different stages, and the distribution of the population of beetles, purple loosestrife and native plants over the next three years. This is a fantastic opportunity for students to do authentic science fieldwork, while learning embedded lessons on entomology (the study of insects), conducting experiments, surveying techniques, wetland ecology, botany and plant identification.

Unibank Grant Award

Unibank awarded the Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA) a \$15,000 grant to be distributed over three years. Ken Redding, Chief Executive Officer of UniBank, presented the first installment to James Plasse, treasurer of BRWA while Donna Williams, BRWA secretary and Maggie Plasse co-treasurer look on.

The BRWA has a dream, to make the Blackstone River fishable and swimmable by the year 2015. Unibank is a strong supporter of the BRWA's goals and shares its dream.

The grant will help fund the BRWA's Environmental Outreach Program for the middle reach of the Blackstone River watershed. Concerned citizens will be organized onto "stream teams" and will work to safeguard and improve the quality of the water and habitat in the Blackstone River watershed. The

teams will conduct shoreline surveys, identify issues that affect the water, flora and fauna, develop action plans to correct problems and work with state and local governments to accomplish these goals.



Photo Caption: (L-R) Kenneth J. Redding, UniBank CEO; Donna Williams, BRWA secretary; James Plasse, BRWA treasurer and Maggie

Snail Mail or Email?



E-mail saves time, money and paper. If you'd like to receive your newsletter electronically, please email Julie at brwa@verizon.org.

If you prefer to receive a paper copy of the newsletter, do nothing and we will continue to mail it to you!

Are We Losing Water in the Blackstone Valley?

by Lynne Welsh

The BRWA, along with groups in Rhode Island and the Worcester area, monitor the water quality and observe water flow at approximately 70 sites within the Watershed. This past summer several of those sites in the Mumford River went **DRY!!** Two sampling locations on Dark Brook near Purgatory Chasm had no flow over a several month period.

There are many reasons that the streams may run dry: beaver activity, dam impoundments and releases, or reduced recharge to the water table. BRWA has been concerned about flow in the Watershed for sometime and in 2002 we worked with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, now Department of Conservation and Recreation, to undertake a flow study of the Mumford River Watershed. That study is now complete and will shortly be available on our web site.

The Mumford sub-watershed was chosen because of concerns raised by Conservation Commissions in Northbridge and Douglas. It is one of three major tributaries to the Blackstone River in

Massachusetts, and as a major tributary with cleaner water, it helps keep the Blackstone healthy.

What that study found is that most of the water is controlled by dams and if the dams are not coordinating with each other and operating under the same policies, then water may be held in a lake or pond and put severe stress on downstream areas.

Is this the cause of the dry conditions we have seen in Purgatory Chasm? More evaluation has to be done. The Valley is one of the fastest growing areas of Massachusetts and development is a factor in depleting the water table at the outer margins when development has cleared trees and put in lawns so that recharge is greatly reduced. The good news is, if man-made issues cause the condition, then we have a chance to change them.

As an organization that watches over the water resources in our Valley, the low flow observations over the past summer is alarming. We will be analyzing our data and other information over the winter and have an update in an upcoming issue of the Monitor. Please contact us if you are interested in helping or you have similar observations.

Mark Briggs...

(continued from page 1)

Federation. He also participated in the development of the Blackstone River Watershed Action Plan and recently joined the board of the Central Chapter of Congress of Lakes and Ponds (COLAP).

As he grows older Mark says he feels more strongly about preserving nature. He gets 'extreme satisfaction' in small accomplishments, "Planning is key. If I

can get someone to move their driveway 10 feet farther away from a wetlands, I am happy".

"Good plans make good projects!" says Mark and we hope he stays with BRWA to help us make better plans for the future.

First Annual Water Chestnut Clean-up

by Julie Riendeau

A sign unveiling was held at 9:00 am on August 13 2005, at the boat launch on West River Road - the sign was donated by DCR. The sign shows how we can 'Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers' from spreading from waterbody to waterbody. We then went to the Italian/American Club off Rt 16 to the worksite at the West River. A roll off dumpster had already been installed in the backyard of the club.

We rolled up our sleeves to begin removing the invasive water chestnut from the river. The dense growth of this plant can effectively choke a waterbody, making boating, fishing and swimming nearly impossible. The weed also shades out native aquatic plants and offers little value to wildlife.

Canoes and kayaks, donated for the day by Wild Bird Garden and Friends of the Blackstone, were unloaded and carried to the River. We jumped into boats and paddled out to the weed infested area and started to hand-pull the weeds.

A photographer from the Telegram & Gazette accompanied by Lynne and Mark Welsh went out to get pictures. We were all working to fill laundry baskets, trash bags, canoes and rowboats then paddling back to be unloaded by the land crew. We found it to be hard work to unload the rowboat because it was so full. Some of us found the laundry baskets easier to handle and some found it easier just to take the whole canoe into the dumpster and dump it out. We learned the lesson of how the seeds are spread so easily; some were attached to our clothing and ropes dragging from our boats.

It was a very hot day, hovering around 100°, so we kept stressing breaks and lots of water. When Jeff Hickson from Wild Bird Gardens came to pick up his kayaks, we took a paddle out to pull some weeds so he could get a good look at the extent of the infestation. After working for a few more hours, we started to clean things up and get everything loaded and put away.

It was a long, hot, hard day, but we all felt good about what we had done. Everyone has committed to come again to help next year. It was a pleasure working with such a great group of people!

Volunteer Eradicators:

Julie Riendeau, Steve Riendeau, Mike Quesnel, Matthew Goyette, John Goyette, Mark Plourde, Ginger Padykula, Wayne Leary, Jonathan Neitz, David Worden, Brooks Worden, Bonnie Frechette, Charles Sweet, Ronnie Fischer, Louise Price, Linda Konvalinka, John LaPoint, Philip Kneeland, Mark Welsh and our President Lynne Welsh.

Thanks to:

- Wild Bird Gardens
- Friends of the Blackstone
- Italian/American Club
- Whole Foods in Bellingham
- Wal-Mart
- Shaws in Whitinsville
- Savers Bank in Uxbridge
- Commonwealth National Bank in Whitinsville
- McDonalds of Uxbridge
- Aubuchon Hardware of Whitinsville
- Uxbridge Dept of Public Works
- Dept. of Conservation & Recreation



Volunteers fill dumpster full of invasive water chestnuts during the clean up.

Successful Water Quality Monitoring Season

The third year of water quality monitoring of the Blackstone River Watershed has been a great success! With responsibility for 34 monitoring sites between Grafton and the Rhode Island border, The Blackstone River Watershed Association has been a major partner in this monitoring project of the Blackstone River Coalition.

This was a very hot and dry summer and the stress on the River, its feeder streams and the entire habitat of the watershed will be revealed in the data taken this year. These data will be used to promote better management and improve water quality of the watershed and its ecosystem.

We couldn't have succeeded without the efforts of the 38 field and laboratory volunteers who put in volunteer time worth an estimated total of \$36,480.

Four River Access Sites Approved

Canoeists and kayakers will soon have several guaranteed access sites to the Blackstone River. The BRWA has been working with both Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission (JHCBRVNHCC) to provide boaters with guaranteed perpetual access to the Blackstone River.

Permission from local conservation commissions for public boat launch areas has been obtained for sites at the Blackstone Gorge in Blackstone, Plummer's Landing in Northbridge, Hartford Avenue in Uxbridge, and the Millville Lock in Millville. Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's Planning and Engineering Department are reviewing and commenting on the construction design documents and plan to put the work out for bid in the spring.

While many of these locations have served as unofficial boat launch spots for years, constant use has resulted in severe erosion at some sites and the banks need to be stabilized to prevent further damage. This project will not only ensure permanent access by boaters and fishermen, but

Thanks to all the BRWA volunteers who participated in this project: Jim Amerault, Ashley Ballou, Rick Ballou, Terry Beaudoin, Luke Beaudoin, Peter Blinn, Susan Brostrup-Jensen, Ann Marie Brostrup-Jensen, Don Brown, Ralph Dudley, Gwen Farrell, Amanda Gallerani, Jenny Garber, Dee Gordon, Joanne Holahan, Calvin Kooistra, Rosemary Longo, Jennifer Mellen, Steve MacIndoe, David MacIndoe, Wyatt Mills, Gwen Mills, Scott Mulcahy, Dona Neely, Joan Newton, Renee Nunes-Rais, Andrew Rais, Sue Perkins, Jim Plasse, Maggie Plasse, Mike Pouliot, Michelle Reed-Walsh, Matt Selby. Sue Smith, Bob Smith, Shirley Smith, Trish Stefanko, Charles Sweet, and Eli Weiner.

For more information on water quality monitoring, please visit our web site at www.zaptheblackstone.org

also will enhance public safety, lessen the environmental impacts from erosion, and in some cases provide limited parking areas.

In addition to the boat access site, a major renovation of the Blackstone Gorge Viewing Area is in the planning stage. In addition to receiving a new canoe access ramp, there will be other improvements to this scenic and last remaining wild section of the Blackstone River, in the form of landscaping, new walking paths and a new railing at the overlook.

Two of the planned boat access sites, one on River Road and one on Route 122 in Uxbridge, are still awaiting permitting approval by the Uxbridge Conservation Commission. The planned portages at both Riverdale Mills in Northbridge and The Millville Rapids in Millville are both on private land and we are working to obtain rights of way from the owners.

When completed, these protected sites will provide all of us with continued access to the Blackstone River for recreational enjoyment.

Contact BRWA at BRWA@verizon.net and we will notify you by e-mail when the permitting process comes the various local conservation commissions.

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We're on the Web!
See us at:
www.theBRWA.org

Join or Renew Your Membership

A majority of the Association's funding comes from individual, sponsor, patron and benefactor memberships. All members receive our newsletter & reports, discounts on the Annual Canoe Race, window decal, plus advance notice of upcoming events. Questions? Call us at (508) 278-5200.

Membership Status

New *Renewal*

Please enroll me/us as:

Campaign 2015*

- Campaign 2015 - membership (\$ 25 includes a trout pin)*
- Campaign 2015 - family membership (\$ 50.00 – includes two trout pins)*
- *Extra trout pin - \$ 15*

Regular Membership

Please check the appropriate membership category:

- \$ 5.00 Student/Senior*
- \$ 10.00 Individual*
- \$ 25.00 Family*
- \$ 40.00 Organization*
- \$ 50.00 Patron*
- \$ 100.00 Corporate*

Member Information:

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Please send this to BRWA at the address listed at the left!