



# Blackstone River Monitor

Spring 2007

Volume 6, Issue 3

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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.

*Newsletter of the Blackstone River Watershed Association*

## From the President...

By Jim Plasse

Now that winter is over, I hope many of you are planning to take advantage of some of the natural treasures in the Blackstone Valley. The Blackstone River is an excellent place for canoeing and kayaking for people of all abilities. Those of you who like the thrill of white water might want to try boating the section of the River between Millbury and Grafton. For a gentler scenic tour of the River, the section between South Grafton and the Blackstone Gorge can't be beat for its natural beauty. You can obtain free maps and recommended

tours at the River Bend Farm Visitor Center in Uxbridge or on line from the National Park Service, at the John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor website. Those of you who like to walk and observe nature may want to try a hike along the Blackstone. There's a great walk that extends along the old canal towpath from the former Stanley Woolen Mill on Route 16, in Uxbridge to Plumbers Landing in Northbridge.

In this edition, we have some interesting articles for you. One is about how the BRWA, along with the other member organizations of the Blackstone River

## 31<sup>st</sup> Canoe and Kayak Race May 12

Mark your calendar!!! Saturday, May 12, 2007, is the BRWA 31st Annual Canoe and Kayak Race. This year we hope that Mother Nature will be kind to us. We're looking forward to blue skies, warm breezes, and water levels that are "just right" for paddling! We made more changes this year so that you don't get bored with the "same old race." Come out and join us!

There are two major changes for 2007. First, we will have one starting line for everyone, which means 12 fun miles to paddle!! All classes will start in South Grafton this year. The starting line is across the street from the Fisherville Mill site in South Grafton. The site is right on Rt. 122A at 53 Main Street, South Grafton. This is a great spot to start a race: there's plenty of parking, there's no hill to descend to launch your boat, the site is level, there's plenty of room for the kids to run and there are plenty of spots to watch the start of the race. The finish line is yet to be determined. The canal at River Bend Farm is scheduled for maintenance and may be drained at racetime.. One option is to

end the race at Rice City Pond. Details will be made available on the BRWA website, as soon as they are known. Race classifications have changed. The New England Canoe and Kayak Racing Association (NECKRA) and the New England Downriver Champion Series folks worked with us this winter to ensure that our categories were fair and that each group would be well represented. View the BRWA website for a list of race classifications.

### Can you help?

- ➔ Become a sponsor for the race
  - ➔ Serve on the planning committee
  - ➔ Volunteer the day of the race
  - ➔ Clean-up for the race
- April 21 clean-up at portage site at **Riverdale Mills** in Northbridge.  
April 28 clean-up at the starting line in **South Grafton** .
- ➔ Sign up for the race?

For more information, please contact Rosemary Longo at 508/839-9548, email her at [roseisarose@hotmail.com](mailto:roseisarose@hotmail.com) or check out the BRWA website at [www.theBRWA.org](http://www.theBRWA.org).

## **Officers**

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Jim Plasse, Blackstone

### **Vice President**

Dona Neely, Hopedale

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Maggie Plasse, Blackstone

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Andrew Myers, Whitinsville

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John Pelczarski, Sutton

Shirley Smith, Mendon

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## ***From the President,***

***continued from front page...***

Coalition are encouraging local businesses to be more environmentally friendly to the River and its watershed by practicing simple no cost or low cost housekeeping techniques in a program called *In Business for the Blackstone*. There is also an article on how homeowners can have green lawns and gardens while minimizing the environmental impacts.

The 31st Annual Canoe Race will be coming up in May and that is a great opportunity for all of you to come to the River and either paddle in the race or cheer on the participants. Refreshments, music and fun stuff for kids will be available at the finish line. Come and enjoy a fun time for the whole family, rain or shine.

The Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program is now in its fourth year of measuring the health of the Blackstone River and its tributaries and streams. The volunteers provide invaluable information to state and federal agencies responsible for ensuring that our waterways are protected.

The Stream Team Program is expanding to include not only the Mumford River but the West and Mill Rivers as well. We are seeking volunteer Stream Team members to participate in this important task.

The invasive species control program will continue with the removal of the Asian Water Chestnut infestation on the West River this spring, with both mechanical and volunteer manual harvesting of the weeds.

As you can see, the BRWA continues to be very active in preserving and enhancing the Blackstone River and its tributaries. The BRWA's programs continue to grow because of the many volunteers who donate time and talents to the programs listed above. I encourage you to become an active member of the BRWA. Attend the monthly meetings and meet people who, like you, care about the waterways their neighborhoods. Participate in one of the volunteer programs and know that you are doing your part to make the Blackstone Valley a better place to live.

## **The Blackstone River Watershed's Stream Team needs your help!**

In collaboration with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Riverways Adopt-A-Stream Program, the Blackstone River Watershed Association will be conducting river surveys along the Mill River and West River during the month of May 2007. The data collected from the survey are used to determine which factors are negatively affecting the river (pollution, erosion, trash etc.). Additionally, action plans are created and reported to local town officials. River surveys are an excellent opportunity to learn more about the local resources and a great way to make new friends and build connections within the communities.

Stream teams provide on-going stewardship for the River and work on projects to protect and restore the River and the adjacent land. Participants will receive *free* river survey training. Additionally, stream team members survey their section of the River on their own schedules!

Together we can help protect, restore and advocate for healthy rivers, resources and communities. For more information or to register, please call the Blackstone River Watershed Association's office at (508) 278-5200 or via email at [info@thebrwa.org](mailto:info@thebrwa.org)

## ***In Business for the Blackstone* Continues to Gain Support**

by Dona Neely



The *In Business for the Blackstone* team, which includes representatives from the Blackstone River Watershed Association, the Blackstone Headwaters Coalition, Blackstone River Watershed Council, and the Blackstone River Coalition, has been busy promoting good housekeeping practices to small and medium sized businesses in an effort to minimize the threat of contaminated stormwater runoff to community members, local business, and organizations throughout the Watershed area.

In the first quarter of this year, we have recognized **Lampin Corp.** in Uxbridge, as well as the **Millbury Federal Credit Union** and **Goretti's Supermarket** in Millbury. We have also gained the active support of the **Millbury High School Environmental Council** who is busy reaching out to local businesses, and have partnered with the Douglas Board of Selectmen, who voted to enroll the **Town of Douglas** in the program! Additional information on the *In Business* program and local companies that are enrolled can be found on the "What we're doing" section of the BRC's website [www.zaptheblackstone.org](http://www.zaptheblackstone.org).

We have also been busy educating various audiences on the threat that polluted stormwater runoff poses to our local water bodies and action that they can take to minimize the contaminants collected on their site. Talks have been given to attendees at the BRWA Annual Meeting, the Water Quality Monitors' Summit, and the Millbury Redevelopment Initiative. Additional presentations are scheduled for the current Leadership Blackstone Valley participants, representatives of the Central Business Environmental Network and Associated Industries of Massachusetts, and members of the Uxbridge Rotary and Grafton Lions organizations.

The EPA lists stormwater runoff, or rain water or snow melt that can not be absorbed into the ground, as a leading source of degraded water quality in our rivers, lakes, and estuaries. As water travels across impervious or non-porous surfaces such as rooftops, roads and parking lots, it collects a stew of pollutants that can include chemicals, oil, metals, litter, and debris. The runoff is directed to the nearest storm drain or catch basin and then discharged directly into the nearest waterway. The ten good housekeeping practices promoted by the *In Business* program can prevent these contaminants from entering our waterways.

### **Top Ten Good Housekeeping Practices:**

1. Clean and maintain storm drains and catch basins regularly
2. Keep parking lot and loading area clean
3. Design lot features that infiltrate, filter, or detain runoff
4. Use environmentally-sensitive landscaping practices
5. Ensure dumpsters remain closed and leak-proof
6. Move stored materials indoors or keep properly covered
7. Wash vehicles and equipment responsibly
8. Conduct routine maintenance on vehicles to prevent leaks
9. Make a spill response plan and clean-up kit accessible
10. Train employees on good housekeeping practices

As a member of the BRWA, you can contribute to the success of this program by encouraging the Watershed area-based businesses that you work in and support to participate. Help protect the water quality of the lakes and streams that are used for swimming, fishing, and drinking water and get us closer to the goal of *Clean by 2015!* Contact Dona Neely for additional details: [dona.neely@zaptheblackstone.org](mailto:dona.neely@zaptheblackstone.org) or 508-878-1728.



## In Business ...continued



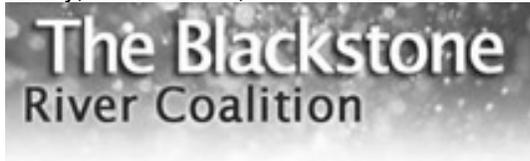
Millbury High School's Environmental Council Advisor Terry Hamilton, Goretto's Supermarket's President Mark Goretto and In Business Program Coordinator Dona Neely, center left to right, along with Goretto's Store Manager Gary Francis and Controller Kathy Crewe (rear right) and the officers of the Environmental Council, celebrate the store's participation in the In Business for the Blackstone program. The management team of Goretto's, which is located right along the river in Millbury, has made the commitment to be more "ecologically responsible" and make "a greater effort to be aware of what is going into the Blackstone River."

## BRWA's President and Treasurer Receive Award!

The BRWA Board members are proud to share the news that the organization's President and Treasurer were recently recognized as 2006 John H. Chafee Award Recipients for their contributions. The announcement, as printed by the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, is printed below.  
*Congratulations and thank you, Jim and Maggie!*

Jim & Maggie Plasse stepped up as volunteer community leaders to guide the 30 year old Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA) into a complete renaissance. As BRWA Board members, they have strengthened the organization's capacity through fundraising and strong participation in the Blackstone River Coalition, and led the effort in removing invasive Asian Water Chestnuts from the West River. By creating an interactive website and improved newsletter, Jim & Maggie strengthened the network of BRWA members and local organizations, and are a driving force in expanding public outreach and contributing significantly to the health and wellness of the Blackstone River.

The Blackstone River Coalition (BRC) is pleased to announce its newly appointed Board of Directors representing the member organizations and its first elected slate of officers, actions taken at its February 1, 2007 meeting at Harris Public Library, Woonsocket, RI.



### Board of Directors:

Blackstone Headwaters Coalition - Peter Coffin  
Blackstone River Watershed Association - Steve MacIndoe  
Blackstone River Watershed Council - Dave Newton  
Save the Bay - Wendy Waller  
Mass Audubon - Donna Williams  
Trout Unlimited - Roland Gauvin  
RI Conservation Law Foundation - Jerry Elmer  
Lake Singletary Watershed Association - Mark Briggs  
College of the Holy Cross - Bill Sobczak

President: Donna Williams (Grafton, MA)  
Vice President: Mark Briggs (Sutton, MA)  
Treasurer: \*Peter Coffin (Mendon, MA)  
Secretary: Wendy Waller (Providence, RI)

\*Since the election, Peter has resigned as Treasurer to assume the position of Coordinator. We are very pleased that he has taken that position, and are looking to fill the office of Treasurer.

## Native Lawns are Green Lawns

By Maggie Plasse

We Americans love our lawns! Approximately 20 million U.S. acres are planted as residential lawn and 30-60% of the potable municipal water in the U.S. is used for maintaining lawns. Add to that the fact that we use 67 million pounds of synthetic pesticides yearly and it is easy to see that our love for green lawns is polluting our rivers and depleting our diminishing water supply. So, what is an environmentally minded person to do?

While speaking to Andrea Cooper from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA), I found out the secret is to work with nature. This means creating conditions for grass to thrive and resist damage from weeds, disease and insects. A healthy lawn can out-compete most weeds, survive most insect attacks and fend off most diseases.

***Develop healthy soil.***

***Choose a grass type that thrives here.***

***Mow high often and with sharp blades.***

***Water deeply but not too often.***

***Correct thatch build-up.***

***Set realistic goals.***

Lawns grow best in soil that is loamy, that is, has a mixture of clay, silt and sand. Periodically adding organic matter like compost, manure and grass clippings improves the soil by retaining water and adding nutrients.

Most lawns need to be fertilized yearly. Be careful not to over-fertilize, this could harm the lawn. A slow acting fertilizer in a slightly acidic soil is best.

Choose a grass that grows best in New England; it will resist local pests and diseases better. Native grasses such as fescues are well adapted to growing in sun or shade, are hardy enough to withstand summer droughts and cold New England winters. Once the lawn is well established, watering should not be necessary.... Mother Nature will do the job.

Mow high, often and with sharp blades. Longer grass has more leaf surface to take sunlight. Grass grows thicker and develops a deeper root system that helps the grass survive drought and tolerate insect damage.

Most lawns are watered too often with too little water. It's best to water a lawn when it really needs it and to water slowly and deeply. This trains the roots to grow downward. Before watering again, let the soil to dry completely and water in the early morning to reduce evaporation.

All grass forms a layer of dead plant material called thatch. When thatch gets too thick, it prevents water and nutrients from penetrating the soil. Over use of fertilizer can create a heavy layer of thatch. You can reduce thatch by raking or sprinkling a thin layer of soil or compost over the grass. In a healthy lawn, earthworms and microorganisms keep the thatch in balance by decomposing it and releasing nutrients into the soil.

Set realistic goals. Even a healthy lawn is likely to have some weeds growing in it. For more information on "green" lawn care, contact me at [maggie.plasse@earthlink.com](mailto:maggie.plasse@earthlink.com)



## Saving Rare Species: Why Do We Care?

By Shirley Smith

In the recently published 12<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Natural Heritage Atlas, there are maps of every Massachusetts town in the Blackstone River Valley. These include Auburn, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Mendon, Millville, Northbridge and Sutton. In some towns, Mendon and Uxbridge in particular, up to half of the land area is shown to be priority habitat of rare and endangered species. Others, like Auburn, Douglas and Millville, have very little. The protected species include the American Brook Lamprey, the Wood Turtle, and a number of trees and plants. (To find the endangered species in your town, go to <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/nhspecies.htm> and click on Town Lists.) One or two species are so rare that they are kept secret for fear collectors will decimate the population and cause extinction.

The source of this protection is the 1973 Endangered Species Act. It puts species conservation above development concerns and, is called by many, according to the Cato Review of Business and Government, "...the single most powerful law ever passed." Since any disturbance of these habitats, often located on privately owned land, is severely restricted by this law, it does curtail and infringe upon the rights of the landowner. (Robert Meltz. The Endangered Species Act and Private Property: A Legal Primer)

A local builder, staring in disbelief at the Mendon map, said, "How can they do that?" It is a good question and the answer lies in centuries of philosophical debate that go back to Aristotle. The basic premise of the argument is that group interests, or the common good, is outweighed by individual interests. It is the moral basis of government and even many of our local zoning laws are predicated upon this concept. The Endangered Species Act is based upon scientific evidence that the interests of the many outweigh the benefits to an individual.

The National Wildlife Federation lists many compelling reasons why it is urgently important to preserve the biodiversity of plants and animals. Medical prescriptions with an economic value of \$80 billion are linked to wild species plus the incalculable value of yet

undiscovered potential cures. Agricultural crops are tightly dependant on the biodiversity of pollinators and wild plants. This adds \$10.2 billion to soybean and corn production. Hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching account for \$108 billion in annual revenues and employ as many people as the computer industry.

So, what has that got to do with the eel-like Lamprey swimming up Muddy Brook in Mendon? Or the Wood Turtle basking in the sun on the banks of the Blackstone River in Uxbridge? The answer is we don't know. And the law, "...one of the earliest legislative expressions of "the precautionary principle," says that we don't have to know. (Jeff Curtis and Bob Davison. The Endangered Species Act: Thirty Years on the Ark.) In other words, we shall not destroy what we do not understand.

Another factor is the complex and dynamic interconnection between all of the organisms in an ecosystem. Removing one single species creates a domino effect and damages the entire intricate network. That is why lawmakers have not limited the act, despite continued attacks from developers and property rights advocates. Curtis and Davison, two environmentalists who have worked with the law over the past three decades, report that, since 1973, Congress has, "...managed to enhance rather than diminish the original vision of the ESA." The law has not only survived, it has been strengthened.

It is not likely, however, that this could be the case without the approval and the votes of the majority of all Americans. Is it possible that there is a more self-serving and personal motivation for this support? When a citizen of the United States hears about a species that is threatened by extinction, is his primary motivation really the belief in the individual's responsibility to society? When a resident of Mendon or Uxbridge hears about the threats to the Brook Lamprey or the Wood Turtle, is that resident really concerned with the "common good?" Or could it be, is it conceivable, that deep in the individual psyche, there is a primordial fear whispering a modified version of John Bradford's oft repeated words, "There, but for the Grace of God, and the Endangered Species Act, go I"?

That, too, is a good question.

## Tackling Stormwater in the Blackstone River Watershed



To further implement the Campaign for a Fishable/Swimmable Blackstone River by 2015, the Blackstone River Coalition is targeting

polluted runoff and stormwater volume as the major issue impacting water quality. **The Tackling Stormwater Initiative is a four-pronged approach serving municipal decision makers, developers, businesses, and homeowners.** This program is grounded in the data generated by the BRC's well-respected, watershed-wide volunteer water quality monitoring program, which has an EPA/MA DEP/RIDEM approved Quality Assurance Project Plan, and supports 76 volunteers monitoring 74 sites throughout the watershed on a monthly basis. **This well-crafted program will help communities meet their EPA Phase 1 or Phase 2 Stormwater Management Permit.**

As a BRWA member and because you are an advocate for the River, you can help the BRC reach out to these groups. If you have connections to local decision makers in your community, know developers or engineering firms, or frequent a local business that might welcome becoming "In Business for the Blackstone", please contact BRC Coordinator Peter Coffin at 508-753-6087 x 24 or coffin@mwhisp.net, or BRC President Donna Williams at 508-753-6087 x 18 or dwilliams@massaudubon.org.

The details:

\* **Local Decision Makers:** Using the historic October 15, 2005 flood as the "teachable moment", the BRC sponsored a highly successful Blackstone Watershed Stormwater Management conference in January 2006, which highlighted Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) and Low Impact Development (LID) to reduce stormwater impacts. Following up on the conference, we offer "Stormwater 101" presentations to interested communities to help them revise their bylaws and regulations to allow and encourage OSRD and LID, or develop a stormwater management

bylaw. OSRD and LID both drastically reduce the amount of stormwater that is generated, thus reducing the amount that has to be treated and managed. We also plan to provide technical assistance with developing bylaw and regulation revisions to targeted communities. The recent floods have boosted stormwater management into a much higher municipal priority.

\* **Developers:** Not only do we need to have the appropriate regulatory structure in place, but developers, engineers, landscape architects, and other professionals also must be trained in creative solutions to stormwater management by incorporating Low Impact Development best management practices. We are working with EOEA and the Mass Watershed Coalition to sponsor a major conference in early 2007 that will illustrate how developers can save money both in construction and in permitting costs. We will then present follow-up workshops to bring home the connection between land use and water quality.

\* **Business Owners:** The "In Business for the Blackstone" initiative is voluntary leadership program that educates small and mid-size companies in the watershed on the detriments of polluted stormwater runoff and encourages the adoption of good housekeeping practices that can reduce the risk of pollutants in their runoff. These practices are easy to adopt, have little or no related implementation cost, and can benefit the company's bottom line. Companies that adopt these practices will earn the distinction of being "In Business for the Blackstone" and will be recognized as such with window decals, publicity, and advertising opportunities. This voluntary program is vital to Blackstone watershed communities to help them meet their EPA Phase 2 Stormwater Management permits. Already "In Business" are Lampin Corporation of Uxbridge, Millbury Federal Credit Union, Goretto's Supermarket of Millbury, and the Town of Douglas.

\* **Homeowners:** The BRC provides watershed-based outreach materials for homeowners to help them understand their role in improving water quality in the watersheds. This information will be distributed at the many events that occur such as the Blackstone Valley Home and Business Expo, Heritage Homecoming, the Clean Water Festival, CanalFest, etc., as well as through the BRC website [www.zaptheblackstone.org](http://www.zaptheblackstone.org).



## Join the BRWA

### The BRWA is a volunteer organization.

The BRWA relies on grants, donations and membership dues to support the above programs. Donations to BRWA are tax deductible.

- Friend \$10-25
- Keeper \$25-49
- Protector \$50-99
- Guardian \$100+
- Benefactor \$1,000+
- Steward \$5,000+

Please make check payable to:  
Blackstone River Watershed Association  
271 Oak Street, Uxbridge, MA 01569

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ ZipCode \_\_\_\_\_

Phone# \_\_\_\_\_

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Please send only email newsletters and notices.

**Great Canadian Canoe**  
508-865-0010  
64 Worcester Providence Turnpike  
Sutton, MA  
Mention that you are a BRWA member  
and receive 10% discount on all items

## BLACKSTONE RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

The Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA) is dedicated to enhancing and preserving the Blackstone River system and its watershed. To support this commitment, the BRWA monitors conditions, identifies areas of concern, and engages citizens in the protection and enjoyment of our natural resources.

### Outreach activities are centered on three primary goals:

- Increase public involvement through educational and recreational opportunities;
- Protect and improve the water quality of the Blackstone's water bodies; and
- Safeguard and restore areas of critical habitat throughout the Watershed.

The BRWA is active in the Blackstone River Coalition (BRC), a membership-based, non-profit organization that supports the Blackstone River's watershed organizations from Worcester, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island.

The BRWA holds public monthly board meetings on the second Thursday of every month from 7:00-9:00pm at River Bend Farm Visitor Center, Uxbridge, MA.

Visit [www.thebrwa.org](http://www.thebrwa.org) or email [info@thebrwa.org](mailto:info@thebrwa.org) to get more details on how you can get involved. Become a member and join us!

### BLACKSTONE RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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