



# Blackstone River Monitor

Spring 2009

Volume 9, Issue 1

*Newsletter of the Blackstone River Watershed Association*

## From the President..

How clean is the River? This is a question asked by people at our outreach activities. The answer is somewhat complicated and hard to answer in fifteen seconds. Everyone agrees that there have been remarkable improvements to the Blackstone River and the Watershed in the past thirty years. However, the changes from year to year are often not that obvious.

Cities and towns have long since stopped discharging raw sewage into the riverways. People have

become more aware of littering and trash dumping and have become better environmental stewards. However, due to increases in housing, businesses and shopping centers in previously rural areas, we now have new threats to deal with such as increased stormwater runoff from increased impervious surface areas. There are also threats from failing septic systems and from habitat deterioration caused by invasive plants like the purple loosestrife.  
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## The 33rd Canoe/Kayak Race May 16, 2009!

By Rosemary Longo

Spring is here and planning for this year's race is under way. There are a few changes to the race classes this year but many things will stay the same. The finish line will be announced the week of the race depending on water levels and conditions. We'd love to go through the S turns again and come up the canal, but that is up to Mother Nature.

On Saturday, May 9, 2009, a group will be clearing trees and limbs that might be a danger to paddlers from Plummers Landing down to River Bend Farm. Persons interested in this should be very experienced paddlers. The starting point could change due to condition of the river that day so please call first (contact info below).

Day of race registration will open on May 16, 2009, at 9:30 a.m. at the starting line and end at 10:30 a.m. The race will start promptly at 11:00 a.m. For directions to the starting line visit [www.thebrwa.org](http://www.thebrwa.org). For Mapquest, Google, or GPS directions to the race starting line the address is 53 Main Street, South Grafton, MA 01560.

The cost of this year's race has stayed the same and pre-registrants will receive a free t-shirt. The cost to maintain the race rises like everything else and donations are harder to come by. If you or your company would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to the BRWA it would help us to offset some of our cost and allow us to continue to hold this race annually.

We've made a few changes to our classes this year. On the kayak side,  
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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.

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## Canoe/Kayak Race *(Con't from pg 1)*

the only change is to those in Class F, over 50 years of age. This group will now be referred to as the "Grand Masters." Once age 50 is attained there should be something grand to it! In most paddling organizations 40 and above is master so....50 deserves to be Grand!

In the canoe classes, there are several changes. We have many classes that only have one or two canoes and after surveying some other races it was determined that for the size of our race we have too many classes. The changes are as follows:

- All Kevlar canoes will be in racing classes, not recreational classes.
- There **will** be no differentiation between straight and bent shaft paddles.
- The century series has been eliminated and the Masters class has been added. The Masters class is for paddlers over 40. This is a tandem class as we have a solo recreational class.

The entry form for the race is available on our website at [www.thebrwa.org](http://www.thebrwa.org).

To volunteer or for general questions and information please contact Rosemary Longo at [roseisarose@hotmail.com](mailto:roseisarose@hotmail.com). Please put canoe/kayak race in the subject line of your email. You can also contact Rosemary at (508) 839-9548.



## The BRWA would like to welcome the following new members:

Tom & Donna Bik, Blackstone  
 Blackstone Conservation Commission  
 Arvin & Bernice Glicksman, Uxbridge  
 Tammy Heiselmeyer, Wrentham  
 Allen & Patricia Kent-Vandenberg, Mendon

## Purple Loosestrife: The Devil in Disguise

By Shirley Smith

In old English folklore, there are tales of the devil hiding evil intent behind a pleasing disguise. So it is with the Purple Loosestrife. It presents as an irresistibly lovely flower and some might find its lavender hued blossoms to be a gardener's delight. In reality, however, Purple Loosestrife (a.k.a. PurLoo) is a hardy, highly competitive, and invasive species. Each plant produces one to three million seeds. These seeds have a 60 to 70% survival rate and can remain viable for several years. As if that isn't enough, the root systems can send out up to 50 shoots per plant to make new plants. Given those statistics, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to be able to figure out that Purple Loosestrife can destroy biodiversity by displacing native species. It can be no surprise that Purple Loosestrife can totally dominate the shorelines of the rivers, brooks, lakes and ponds of the Blackstone River Watershed. And it can be no surprise that Purple Loosestrife can fill in our wetlands, reduce flood retention, and cause our water bodies to become increasingly shallow.

For small, isolated infestations, Michelle Robinson, aquatic biologist with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), recommends that, before the flowers form seeds, you cut the stems near the base of the plant. Then, stuff the spikes into plastic trash bags. When that is done, you spray the cut stems with an herbicide, such as Round Up, that is considered safe for use around water. The filled bags should be disposed of in a landfill where they will preferably be incinerated. It is necessary to check the cut locations for several years to destroy any new growth. See the DCR website: Purple Loosestrife, An Exotic Invasive Wetland Plant for more information.

For larger areas, where cutting is not practical, there is a viable solution. The Blackstone River Watershed Association is investigating a biological control, a leaf-

feeding beetle that targets the Purple Loosestrife. Future newsletters will report more detail.

But whatever you do, don't be fooled by the striking beauty of these purple flowers. They do hide a decidedly evil intent. They are truly the devil in disguise!

### What can you do about it?

The BRWA is starting a program to help control the spread of purple Loosestrife using the *Galerucella* beetles. In the upcoming months, volunteers will be searching for any present populations of PurLoo beetles in areas known to have stands of purple loosestrife. The next step will be for beetles to be raised by private citizens and then released in carefully selected sites in the Blackstone River Watershed to act as biological control of the purple loosestrife plant.

The PurLoo beetle has been used all over the country for over ten years and there have been no sustained negative effects. Their use has resulted in up to a 90% reduction of purple loosestrife vegetation. The goal will not be to eliminate purple loosestrife, but to control it so that the native plant population will have a new competitive edge. If the purple loosestrife is eliminated in an area, the beetles will die out or migrate to new purple loosestrife stands since they need a diet of purple loosestrife to survive.

If you wish to help in the purple loosestrife control project, please contact the BRWA at [info@thebrwa.org](mailto:info@thebrwa.org) or call the BRWA office at (508) 278-5200.



## Letters to the Editor

### A Small Town Fights Back

By Shirley Smith

As the picture came up on the big screen, an audible gasp could be heard from the large audience. It was a picture of the infamous delta that stretched out into a small lake in the Blackstone River Watershed, a delta that was formed by 50 years of accumulated sediment from State Highway Route 16 storm runoff. This delta featured a large pipe protruding from the shoreline. And this pipe was connected to four or five catch basins that channeled millions of gallons of stormwater into the lake. The presentation by Peter Coffin of the Blackstone River Coalition was part of the Massachusetts Congress of Lakes and Ponds (COLAP) Annual Meeting at Worcester State College. The focus of this part of the program was to illustrate what individuals and small groups can accomplish. The successful efforts of a small local lake association in getting Mass Highway to install catch basins with deep sumps and eliminating that delta was held up as a prime example. A second picture showed the Mass Highway heavy equipment and big dump trucks actually doing the work.

This same problem is repeated again and again throughout the Blackstone Watershed and every other watershed in Massachusetts. Storm runoff from state highways are dumping, not only road sand, but salt, de-icing chemicals, oil, grease, zinc, nickel, and lead directly into our lakes, ponds, rivers and streams.

So it was no surprise that, at the conclusion of the presentation, a number of people from watersheds across the state came up to me and asked in amazement, "Can you tell us how we can do this?" I explained that the first thing to understand is that what Mass Highway is doing is absolutely illegal. I explained how Mass Highway had been sued in Federal Court by the Charles River Watershed for allowing untreated stormwater to pollute the river. And they won!

Judge William Young ruled that Mass Highway was in violation of the Clean Water

Act and said they have, "...long ignored their legal responsibility to protect the Commonwealth's water resources for the health of all residents." The next thing is to gather evidence: pictures, test results, eyewitness accounts, anything you can come up with. Bring these to your state representative or senator. Mass Highway has six districts throughout the state. Contact the environmental analyst in your Mass Highway District. Write to local newspapers about the problem and get reporters involved. Publicity is very helpful in achieving results. If these results aren't forthcoming, if promises aren't kept, let people know. It will happen.

### The Importance of Being Involved

By Shirley Smith

"Eventually we'll realize that if we destroy the ecosystem, we destroy ourselves." These are the words of Jonas Salk, better remembered for the discovery of polio vaccine than environmental interests. It would seem that this is a self evident and basic truth. But is it? Our daily lives are filled with clear and present concerns. We have worries about money, jobs, families, health, and a host of other issues. The interconnected degenerative changes to our woodlands, rivers, and wetlands, to the air we breathe, to the water we drink, are far from our minds. That is because these changes are so gradual. They are slow and insidious. We are too busy to think about the cumulative effects that are twenty, fifty, or hundreds of years in the future. And when we do think of it, it is with a feeling of helplessness. What can one person do, what can I do to make a difference, you may ask. After all, isn't it the government's job to solve these problems?

But just who is the "government?" Is it some far off amorphous entity? No. The government is us. The government is we the people. It begins with the individual citizens of our Blackstone River Watershed Towns. We are the ones who have the greatest effect on the quality of the environment and quality of life in our community. It is our actions that define the  
(*Con't pg 6*)

## Quinsigamond River Stream Team

By Donna Williams, Blackstone River Coalition

The Quinsigamond River is the jewel that runs through the middle of Grafton and connects us all. From Hovey Pond all the way down to Fisherville we see kayakers, canoeists, wildlife watchers, anglers, ice fishermen and many others enjoying this beautiful waterway and its bounty. The sunlight sparkling on the surface of Lake Ripple and reflections of fall foliage enrich our travels. We all look for the nesting swans. The Quinsig is an important resource that holds our admiration, but it also requires our attention to protect and restore it.

You can help do both by joining the Quinsigamond River Stream Team. In collaboration with the Blackstone River Coalition, the Blackstone River Watershed Association will be conducting a river survey along the Quinsig during the month of May. The survey will be done from both the land and the river itself, so paddlers are welcome! The data collected from the survey will be used to determine any factors that are negatively affecting the river (pollution, erosion, trash, etc.) and then to create an action plan to protect the river. River surveys are an excellent opportunity to learn more about your local resources, spend time with family and friends, and is a great way to build connections within the community. Together we can help protect, restore and advocate for healthy rivers, resources and communities.

Interested volunteers should plan to attend the Quinsigamond River Shoreline Survey Training Workshop, conducted by Rachel Calabro of Save The Bay, on Wednesday, May 6, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Brigham Hill Community Barn, 37 Wheeler Road, N. Grafton. Refreshments!

To register or for answers to your questions, please contact Michelle Walsh at 508-278-5200 or via email at <mailto:info@thebrwa.org>, or contact Donna Williams at 508-839-2138 or <mailto:dwilliams@massaudubon.org>.



## Letters to the Editor *(Con't from pg 4)*

ecological conditions of our towns. It is the cumulative decisions of our own local boards that have the most profound effect on our surroundings. The Boards of Selectmen are the chief policy makers for our local governments. The Planning Boards are especially significant as they oversee the manner in which development occurs. The Conservation Commissions oversee state wetland laws. The Boards of Health oversee sanitary codes. Land Use Committees protect and acquire sufficient land for the common interest and welfare of our citizens. Community Preservation Committees work to fund open space preservation. These boards and committees are the first line of defense in protecting our environment. These boards can positively or negatively impact important resources. Do you want that impact to be positive? Do you want that impact to define the existing and future conditions of our communities?

If the answer is yes, then it is urgent that the residents of our Blackstone Watershed Towns make the effort to go to their websites or town halls to find what vacancies exist for either elected or appointed positions. It is urgent that these residents make an effort to find the time and the energy to participate in their Town governments and be a part of the decision making process that affects our environment.

There is no question that this involvement will require some fortitude and commitment. It would be so easy to yield to any one of a multitude of excuses. It would be so easy to yield to the temptation to say, "Let someone else do it." On top of that, it takes a certain amount of courage to stand up to the faction that believes our environment should be sacrificed to the needs of the business community and that financial matters should take top priority. We need people in the governments of our watershed towns who can envision the consequences of this policy. Perhaps Mahatma Gandhi said it best: "Only after the last tree has been cut down, Only after the last river has been poisoned, Only when the last fish has been caught, Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten."

*Editor's Note: We welcome letters on issues affecting the Watershed. Shirley is a Mendon resident, member of BRWA and a founder of Lake Nipmuc Association.*

## Letter from the President *(Con't from pg 1)*

This issue of the BRWA Newsletter has an interesting article on this invasive plant and what can be done about it. There are also some articles on how local citizens, like you can get involved to protect and improve the water and habitats of the Blackstone River Watershed. In addition to our monthly water quality monitoring program, our Stream Team Program is being expanded to include the Quinsigamond River. A shoreline survey of this major tributary to the Blackstone will be held this spring.

Finally, I hope that you will be able to make it to our annual canoe race on Saturday May 16, 2009. The race starts at noon at the Fisherville Mill Bridge in Grafton and ends at River Bend Farm State Park in Uxbridge.



## Calendar of Events

### **Race Preparation Meeting**

May 9, 2009

Noon --Lunch will be served

Location: River Bend Farm Visitor Center

RSVP: Rosemary Longo at [roseisarose@hotmail.com](mailto:roseisarose@hotmail.com)

### **Gardening for Wildlife**

Speaker: Christy Barnes, Mass Audubon

May 11, 2009

7:00 - 9:00PM

Location: Blackstone Public Library, visit [www.thebrwa.org](http://www.thebrwa.org) for directions

### **Rain Gardens and Water Gardens**

Speaker: Donna Williams, MA Audubon

May 19, 2009

7:00 - 9:00PM

Location: Blackstone Public Library, visit [www.thebrwa.org](http://www.thebrwa.org) for directions

### **Managing Wet Weather in the Blackstone River Watershed: The Lull before the Storm**

May 14, 2009

2:30 - 8:00PM

Sponsored by the Blackstone River Coalition

Alternatives Unlimited Inc., Whitinsville, MA

Visit the BRC web site: [www.zaptheblackstone.org](http://www.zaptheblackstone.org) for more information

### **33rd BRWA Annual Canoe and Kayak Race**

May 16, 2009

Registration 9:00AM

Race begins at 11:00AM

Starting line is at Fisherville Mill, South Grafton. Finish line is at River Bend Farm in Uxbridge.

Volunteers needed. Email Rosemary Longo at [roseisarose@hotmail.com](mailto:roseisarose@hotmail.com)

### **BRWA Monthly Meeting**

Second Thursday of each month

7:00-9:00PM

Location: River Bend Farm Visitor Center

Please contact Jim Plasse at [jim.plasse@thebrwa.org](mailto:jim.plasse@thebrwa.org) for more information.



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### Why Join BRWA?

The Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA), established in 1976, is dedicated to restoring, enhancing and preserving the Blackstone River, the Blackstone River system and its watershed. The BRWA is working to take what was one of the most polluted rivers in the United States and turning it into the jewel of the Blackstone Valley. The organization participates in water quality monitoring, shoreline surveys, cleanups, monitoring, and removing invasive species in the River. To support this commitment, the BRWA monitors conditions, identifies areas of concern, and engages local citizens in the protection and enjoyment of our natural resources.

The BRWA is a volunteer organization. We rely on grants, donations and membership dues to support our programs. Donations to BRWA are tax deductible.

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