

WATERSHED

A Newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

Volume 29 No. 2

Spring 2012

Military Families Have Fun Too!

On Tuesday July 10th WPWA hosted a free Family Aquatic Exploration Day for **Operation: Military Kids**. OMK is a program run by the US Armed Forces that provides numerous activities for families of military personnel who are actively serving. Volunteers from the RI Red Cross and the RI National Guard joined WPWA's staff to help make the day-long event a great success for 22 children and their parents.



Families head upriver to experience the beauty of the Wood River.

Half of the group began their day with a kayak safety lesson followed by a paddle up the Wood River to Frying Pan Pond. Along the way they spotted a great blue heron, red-wing blackbirds, painted turtles and countless damsel and dragonflies. While the other half explored the river below the Barberville Dam for critters like dobsonflies, crayfish, and frogs.



An OMK family enjoys a picnic lunch at WPWA's riverside campus.

The groups switched activities after a lively lunch at our newly renovated campus on the banks of the beautiful Wood River. WPWA was pleased to once again provide a fun-filled family event for our troops thanks to a generous donation from the Forrest & Frances Lattner Foundation. Their generous gift made it possible for over 75 people to participate in a similar program last year and their donation this year will benefit even more. We expect the same overwhelming turnout at the upcoming OMK Family Aquatic Exploration Day on Thursday, August 8th. Special thanks to WPWA's 2012 Summer Intern Rosemarie Thomas for helping to make this a fun and educational experience for all who attended. For more information on Operation Military Kids visit:

www.operationmilitarykids.org

Family Fun Fishing Day is an ever-popular event where WPWA volunteers and staff teach kids the basics of fishing. For the past several years the event has been held at the Carolina Trout Pond where Bluegills abound! On Friday, July 13th participants enjoyed perfect weather, patient instruction, and while they caught a few fish of their own they also enjoyed watching an osprey do the same. Special Thanks to the RI DEM Aquatic Resource Education Center for the use of their poles and tackle!



Jay Boyer helps siblings, Mackenzie and Matthew, with their fresh catch!

><(((°>

From the Executive Director

Summer is here and there are many people out enjoying the watershed's rivers and ponds. This summer WPWA has been working hard to remove sections of fallen trees on the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers that create a hazard to small boaters. This is thanks to a one-time small grant from the RI Trail Advisory Committee to remove trees that fell across the rivers during Tropical Storm Irene. I have been accompanying a contractor on weekly paddles to assist in the tree removal process and to ensure that the cutting is done in a way that strikes an even balance between boater safety and ecology. We do this type of river maintenance every year with support from your membership and donation dollars. This work is just one example of what WPWA does for the community and our members. Be safe on the rivers this season and be sure to renew your membership, if you have not already, to show your support for ALL the programs and efforts WPWA provides annually to protect this beautiful watershed.



WATERSHED GREEN CORNER

These articles are brought to you by RI NEMO - Produced by URI Cooperative Extension for RI Stormwater Solutions, a project funded by the RI Department of Transportation, in partnership with the RI Department of Environmental Management and RI municipalities. Articles have been formatted by WPWA to fit this space.

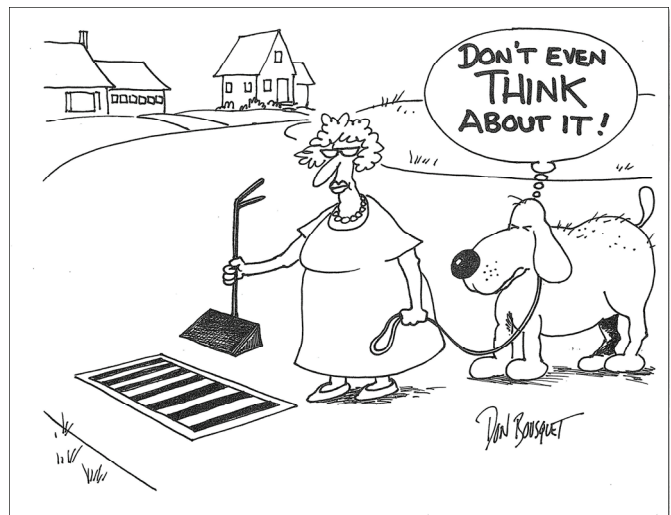
With the passing of the Fourth of July fireworks and parades we are reminded to keep our pets indoors, safe from the loud noises and crowds. This month, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association is asking you not only to think about keeping your pets safe but also to think about keeping our local waters safe from pet waste!

Pet waste doesn't just decompose. It adds harmful bacteria and nutrients to local waters, when it's not disposed of properly. When left on a paved surface, dog waste

becomes yet another contaminant that stormwater (the water you see flowing down the street during a heavy rain) can transport to local waters. **When heavy rains wash down the sidewalk and street, and right over dog waste, they pick up particles of that waste.** That stormwater then flows either

directly into our rivers, or down storm drains and then to other local waters.

Fortunately, picking up after your pet is easy if you're prepared. Simply carry a plastic bag with you on every walk with your dog, and you'll have all the equipment you'll need to remove your dog's waste.



Thank You **Don Bosquet** for your cartoon donation!

Throw your pet waste into the nearest trash can (never down a storm drain!), and you're done. **There are even compact, refillable bag dispensers that you can attach right to your dog's leash.**

For additional tips to help safeguard our waters, visit: <http://www.ristormwatersolutions.org>



Freshwater Indicators for the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed *by Denise Poyer*

How's the water? This question is often asked of me when I describe my job as Program Director at WPWA, which includes water quality monitoring. The scientist in me wants to explain that natural systems are extremely complex and there are so many variables it's hard to say for sure. This does not really answer the question in any type of helpful way. So, the general answer is – pretty good. But how do we wade through all the information and come up with this answer? This was why the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program developed Watershed Counts.

Watershed Counts is a program designed to provide guidance to answer important water quality questions. It is a broad coalition of agencies and organizations that have committed to work together to examine and report regularly on the condition of the land and water resources of the Narragansett Bay Watershed Region. The coalition's first report (2011) featured information on five key indicators (climate change, impervious cover, beach closures, fresh water flow and invasive species). In 2012, indicators were added for marine water quality, freshwater quality, open space and resource economics. These indicators will be used to describe the condition of the watershed region and then to communicate this information to the public and decision makers in order to inform and guide future management and development of the watershed. The indicators consider the region's interwoven economic and environmental assets.

With a grant from EPA's Healthy Waters Program, *Watershed Counts* pulled together a committee to develop the freshwater quality indicators.



The committee included staff from four watershed councils, WPWA, Woonasquatucket

River Watershed Council, Taunton River Watershed Alliance, and the Blackstone River Coalition. Representatives from URI Watershed Watch, RIDEM and MA DEP also participated. While the focus was on rivers and streams for the 2012 report, next year the committee will develop indicators for water quality in ponds and lakes.

Early on it was decided to base our conclusions on the Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut 2010 state water quality assessments. Under the Federal Clean Water Act, states are required to adopt water quality standards for their surface waters. These standards define the goals for a waterbody by designating its uses and setting criteria to protect those uses. They then look at water quality through a series of lenses, evaluating specific water quality parameters to decide whether the water is safe for swimming and boating (the recreation use), whether water quality will allow fish and other aquatic animals to live and thrive (the aquatic life use), and whether it is safe to eat fish caught from the water (fish consumption). These uses can concretely impact all of the people who utilize the rivers. *Watershed Counts* partners decided to visually present the information by ranking water quality as acceptable (blue), partially acceptable (yellow) and unacceptable (red) based on a combined evaluation of these uses. River segments that were not assessed (no or insufficient data) are colored gray.

Continued on next page



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To view and download these maps in full resolution and color, visit www.watershedcounts.org and select “Freshwater Quality”.

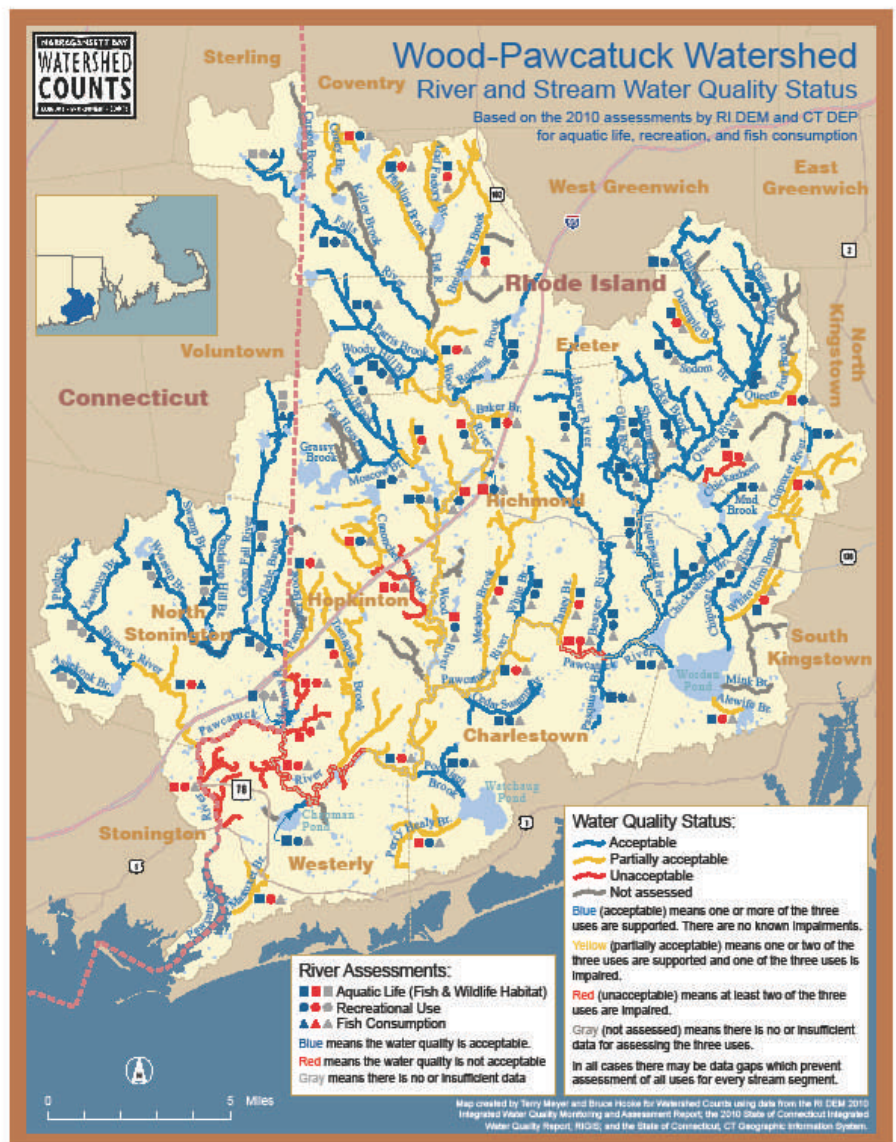
The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed overall, is in good shape. Of the 340 river miles, only 9% have unacceptable water quality and only 9% are unassessed. Areas of the most concern are sections of the rivers below working industrial sites that have waste discharge permits. These include sections on the Pawcatuck and the Ashaway Rivers. Canochet Brook may have influences from inadequate septic systems and former mill activities and the Chickasheen has agricultural influences. The lower Pawcatuck is in a more heavily urbanized area of the watershed and has problems with road runoff, inadequate septic systems, and agricultural input. There is one section just below the CT border where it is not unusual to see cows in the river. Though these farmers are now taking steps to limit livestock access.

High bacteria counts are responsible for many of the river sections deemed partially acceptable. This may be largely due to natural occurrences from wildlife, but human influences such as road runoff and pet waste may also contribute. These sections still provide excellent boating and fishing opportunities, however swimming may not be advisable, especially after heavy rains. Sections of the Wood River, from the confluence of Roaring Brook (near Frying Pan Pond), downstream to the Alton Dam, are labeled partially acceptable due to impairments to the habitat quality. This is because there are excessive populations of an invasive aquatic plant, Eurasian milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), which covers large areas of the ponds behind the Wyoming, Woodville, and Alton dams.

What the maps also show is where data is lacking. In particular, there is very little information regarding the suitability of consuming fish from the rivers. This

tends to be more of a concern in urban watersheds, where years of industrial pollution have left behind metals and toxins in the sediment. Fish consumption advisories usually refer to long lived species that may have accumulated toxins, such as mercury. Species such as trout are short lived and safer to eat. In the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed it is generally believed that the water quality is good enough for the state to stock game fish such as trout or bass. These fish are meant to be caught for sport and served for dinner. Studies done in Connecticut on the Pawcatuck River do confirm this.

Maps of the entire Narragansett Bay and surrounding watersheds (which includes the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed) can be found on the Watershed Counts website: <http://watershedcounts.org>. The 2012 Report has more information on the freshwater indicators.



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The Mitch and Betty Salomon Fund was established in 2002 to honor two of the hardest working and most inspiring founders of WPWA. In addition to many other contributions, Betty was the tireless builder of membership through the first decade of the organization, and Mitch single-handedly founded the Watershed Watch, recruiting and training all the early monitors. Betty and Mitch asked that the fund be used to protect water quality and recognize volunteers who work to protect and enhance the Watershed environment.

To mark Betty's 90th year, the members listed above have made special contributions to the fund in past months. Additional contributions would be welcome and appropriate in the weeks to come.

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RI Rivers Council
Active Watershed Education Course

\$6,000
EPA/Watershed Counts
Water Quality Indicators

\$3,500
RI Trail Advisory Committee
River Maintenance

\$1,600
Town of Hopkinton
Water Quality Monitoring

\$1,000
RI State Senate
Water Quality Monitoring

\$500
RI Foundation
RI Blueways Alliance
River Trail Maps



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