

WATERSHED

A Newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

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Clearing the Air About Wyoming Dam

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2015 conducting field work to assess structures in the rivers that contribute to flooding concerns, particularly bridges, culverts and dams. When the draft technical report was introduced it indicated that some of the structures, particularly several dams, may in fact worsen flooding impacts.

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Keeping Your Rivers Safe, One Tree at a Time

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If you haven't already renewed your WPWA membership, please support our efforts on behalf of our watershed and you, our member, by

doing so today!

*Renewing your membership will ensure that our programs and advocacy continue for the rest of 2016, and beyond.
Thank you!*



Glowing Jellyfish and Sunsets Enchant Paddlers

Paddlers on our three Bioluminescent Paddles this summer were treated to gorgeous sunsets, starlit skies, jumping fish, and loads of glowing comb jellies! [Read more...](#)

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The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) and its long list of partners are developing a Flood Resiliency Management Plan to help communities in the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed become more resilient to the impacts of flooding, while also benefiting water quality, fish and wildlife, and habitat. The history of flooding and flood damages in the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed is well-documented. The landmark 2010 flood remains the flood of record for the region, and an example of extreme precipitation and flooding events becoming more frequent in the

northeast as a result of climate change.

The primary objectives of this watershed planning project are to:

- Assess the vulnerability of the Wood-Pawcatuck River watershed to flooding and storm-related damages,
- Develop a comprehensive, watershed-based management plan to help communities become more resilient to the impacts of flooding (i.e., enhance flood resilience) and
- Focus on strengthening natural ecosystems that also benefit water quality, fish and wildlife, and habitat.

WPWA has retained the engineering firm of Fuss and O'Neill to assist in the research and development the management plan. As part of this project they spent the summer of 2015 conducting field work to assess structures in the rivers that contribute to flooding concerns, particularly bridges, culverts and dams. When the draft technical report was introduced it indicated that some of the structures, particularly several dams, may in fact worsen flooding impacts. All of the dams in the watershed were constructed in the late 1800's and early 1900's to power various mills. They were not constructed to retain storm water or provide drinking reservoirs. Where the mills are no



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longer functioning, and in most cases have been destroyed, the dams now primarily provide recreation and aesthetic values.

Because the high hazard classified Wyoming Dam is on the schedule for immediate repair, WPWA contacted RIDEM, the dam's owner, with the information included in the draft technical report. This information indicates that the Wyoming Dam could be contributing to the periodic flooding of the Valley Lodge area in Richmond, located less than one mile upstream of the dam. Before spending large sums of tax payer's money, WPWA suggested RIDEM should study alternative options to addressing the failing dam. Alternatives could include a partial breach or full removal of the dam, replacing the dam with a rock ramp, or repairing the dam. The study would have looked at the benefits and disadvantages of each option. This would include both social impacts – recreation, water quantity, fire safety, and aesthetics- as well as environmental impacts –water quality, habitat health, fish passage, and flood resiliency.



RIDEM's response was that they had already decided to repair the dam and could not provide any evidence that an alternatives analysis had been conducted. WPWA then met with the town officials from Richmond and Hopkinton, the two towns immediately impacted by the dam. It was agreed that WPWA would ask both town councils consider sending a letter to RIDEM requesting a study of all alternatives be done at Wyoming Dam before a repair was implemented. The Richmond Town Council considered

the request on Sept. 6 and agreed that the process merited further study. They unanimously voted to send a letter to the RIDEM Director requesting a study. The Hopkinton Town Council considered the request on Sept. 19, 2016. At that meeting many misinformed Hopkinton residents expressed strong disapproval at any consideration to removing the dam. Consequently the Hopkinton Town Council unanimously voted to submit a letter to RIDEM requesting the dam repair be expedited. WPWA has repeatedly stated that if both towns did not agree to the request for a study of alternatives to repairing Wyoming Dam, we would not pursue the matter any further. Alternatively, the Richmond Town Council did vote to make such a request and thus they do intend to pursue the matter under their own jurisdiction.

To learn more about the process used in developing the flood resiliency management plan, the public is invited to attend either of two community meetings where engineers and scientists will present the information from the draft reports and technical memos. They will be held on:

1. **Thursday, October 13, 2016** from 10 a.m. to noon at the H.L. Arnold Fire & Safety Complex, 208 Richmond Townhouse Road, Carolina, RI 02812.
2. **Thursday, October 20, 2016** from 10 a.m. to noon at the Westerly Library, Third Floor Terrace Room, 44 Broad Street, Westerly, RI 02891. Public parking is available on the street (2 hour intervals) or the lot next to the Post Office located on High Street.

Local knowledge and suggestions for improving flood resiliency and related issues in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed were an important component in developing the watershed plan and will continue to be as the plan is finalized. Therefore, we urge all concerned citizens and WPWA supporters to attend these October community meetings. [Return to Top](#)

Keeping Your Rivers Safe, One Tree at a Time

This summer WPWA took advantage of the low water flow in the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers to cut fallen trees that create dangerous portage conditions. Each year trees fall into your rivers as part of the river's natural process of meandering. These fallen trees provide a variety of benefits to wildlife both in and out of the water. Among other things, they create perches for predators, sunning platforms for amphibians, and gathering places for fish. Fallen trees can also help protect the riverbank from further erosion and slow the flow of flood waters.

Despite these benefits, trees that span the full width of the river can create extremely dangerous conditions for paddlers. Boats can become pinned against a fallen tree leaving the boater no choice but to bail out. If the flow is extremely strong, many times the boat must be abandoned. When paddlers are able to navigate to the river bank and get out, they often must climb slippery steep banks all while pulling their boat behind them.



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What's Happening

October 22, 2016 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM
[Audubon Society of RI Fall Birding Adventure--Exeter](#)

November 18, 2016 6:30 PM - 7:30 PM
[Audubon Society of RI Winter Duck Workshop with Laura Carberry-- Exeter](#)

Related News

[What to Do When You Find Wildlife in Distress](#)

By ecoRI News staff/ecoRI
May 07, 2015

[Hotter, Longer Summers in Rhode Island are Becoming the Norm](#)

By J. TIMMONS ROBERTS, MELISSA ELIOT and GREGORY WELLENIUS /ecoRI
September 12, 2016

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Each year WPWA works hard to remove sections of these trees on the watershed's two primary rivers. This is made possible thanks to your donations, membership support and a small grant from the Rhode Island Trail Advisory Committee's trail maintenance grant program. Each tree blocking the river must be assessed for its potential to endanger paddlers and weighed against its benefits to the ecosystem. Removing the smallest possible section of the tree opens up passage for boaters while preserving the most amount of habitat possible. The cutting effort is very hard work and almost always results in a nasty case of poison ivy. But there is great satisfaction in knowing the work helps keep paddlers safe from harm.

Many times the cutting crew encounters a beaver dam blocking passage. Rarely are the beaver dams breached by the crew because permission from state wildlife officials is required to do so. And there are often ways to paddle around or over the dams. Not so was the case on the upper Pawcatuck River this year (see photos). Explaining the reasoning and process of breaching a beaver dam is quite abstract, so we created this special [video](#) (or click the before and after photo below) that we know you will enjoy. [Return to Top](#)



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Glowing Jellyfish and Sunsets Enchant Paddlers

Paddlers on WPWA's three Bioluminescent Paddles in Ninigret Pond this summer were treated to gorgeous sunsets, starlit skies, jumping fish, and loads of glowing comb jellies! Kayaking at night in a coastal salt pond is not something people are inclined to do on their own, and our over 30 participants appreciated the opportunity to be led on a safe, guided paddle to observe these interesting little creatures.

Comb jellies, or ctenophores, are gelatinous animals that live in salt water all over the world. However, they don't have the stinging tentacles of the lion's mane and sea nettle jellyfish that most people are familiar with. Our local comb jellies are safe-to-touch grape- to walnut-sized predators that swim along finding microscopic larvae and small crustaceans to eat. During the day, you can see shimmering, rainbow-like lines (or combs) running down their bodies as they swim and eat in our coastal waters. At night they are even cooler, as they are capable of "bioluminescence"—that is, they can produce blue-green light when they are agitated, such as with a kayak paddle. When they are present in large numbers, each stroke of the paddle at night sends several blue-green "blobs" tumbling off the blade, putting on quite a show!



Last summer WPWA planned to lead four bioluminescent paddles, but the weather didn't cooperate and for some reason the comb jellies just weren't around. This year, we wanted to make sure that our paddlers had a much better experience so we didn't schedule any paddles until we knew that the jellies were out there and we had a good weather forecast. This "Pop-up Paddle" strategy ended up working great! Paddlers on all three nights (August 16th, August 27th, and September 2nd) experienced lovely, calm weather and the jellies were out in force. There were also plenty of small "bait fish" being chased up to the water's surface by young bluefish and striped bass, with one minnow even landing in leader Chris Fox's kayak! A volunteer on our last paddle brought along a waterproof

spotlight which allowed us an interesting view of the goings-on below the water's surface, including the presence of many good-sized needlefish—much to the excitement of an 11-year-old paddler in the group.

At the end of the evening we were so happy to hear our fellow paddlers saying “That was a fun excursion, unlike any I can remember,” “It was one of the highlights of our summer,” “That’s one of the coolest things I’ve ever done!” and “It was a real treat!” It was a real treat for us, too—thank you all for joining us! [Return to Top](#)



2016 Urban Youth Paddle Program a Big Success!



WPWA recently completed our Urban Youth Paddle Program on the Upper Wood River for the summer of 2016. We are happy to say that the program was a great success! We hosted 221 middle- through high-school youth from all over the state, most of them from the urban centers of Woonsocket, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Providence, on over a dozen paddles. To accomplish this we had the help of eighteen dedicated volunteers, most of whom took part in a special kayak rescue training conducted by WPWA.

This program was made possible by a generous \$5000 grant from the RI Trail Advisory Committee and you, our members. In addition, volunteers contributed over 150 hours of their own time, with a total value of over \$3,600. Providing urban kids with the opportunity to experience the beautiful Upper Wood River is very important to us, and WPWA hopes to be able to offer this excellent summer program again next year. [Return to Top](#)



Improving River Access, Why Does It Have to Cost a Fortune??



The Dubs family generously donated a public access site on the Pawcatuck River to WPWA in 2008. You may know it as the John Jay Cronan Fishing Access Area on Church St. in Richmond, RI near the popular Meadowbrook Pond. While WPWA owns the property, the State of Rhode Island holds a legal easement over the property to provide and maintain public fishing access to the river. But there’s not much to maintain, just a gravel parking lot (see photo at left).

As it is today, the property is a poor representation of best management practices.

Stormwater from Church Street runs unchecked across the gravel parking lot straight into the river adding untold quantities of sand and road related chemicals to the river (see photo at right). Cars can also drive directly into the river and there is no handicapped accessibility for visitors (see photo below). Rather than pressuring RIDEM

to improve the access area, WPWA raised over \$130,000 to rehabilitate the land. For that price you might expect improvements to include waterslides and world class bathrooms. Not so. Why? Because of the cost to develop a site plan and obtain a wetland permit.

To date, WPWA has expended over \$30,000 and countless man hours developing a plan that includes handicapped accessibility. Sadly, the design team was told informally during the permitting phase that the plan is too aggressive to meet with permit approval. While WPWA supports strict wetland regulations that ensure development within wetland boundaries is responsible, those regulations should not make improving conditions within an already significantly altered wetland so cost prohibitive.



As a result, the project is now well behind schedule and over budget. After costly negotiations with RIDEM permitting staff, the design was altered. The project design team incorporated as many of the suggested changes as were feasible. But there were two recommended changes that WPWA simply could not agree to. Sacrificing the handicapped accessibility and “softening” all the riverbanks which would surely result in the need to return throughout the years to make costly repairs. The primary goals of the project were to create universal access without the need to raise money every year to repair and maintain the property.

Thankfully the project is back on track with the altered design and once again under review by wetland permitting. We are remiss that the cost overruns will come at the expense of the educational signage that was originally planned for the

property. Our fingers are crossed that permit approval will soon be obtained allowing construction to begin in October.

Hopefully WPWA can raise additional funds to restore the valuable educational component of the project. Would you or someone you know be willing to make a generous one-time gift to WPWA to help make that a reality? [Return to Top](#)

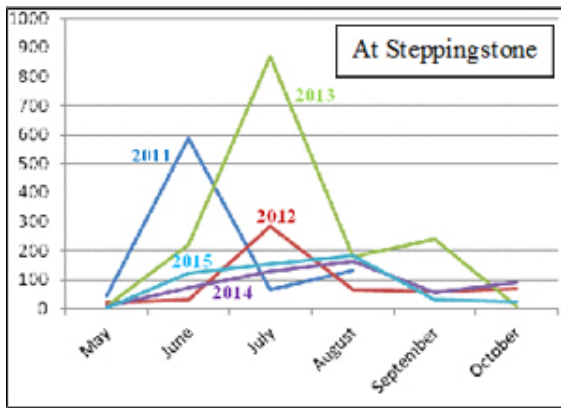
Bacteria in the Wood River

By Ron Marafioti, Trout Unlimited Narragansett Chapter (225)

A few months ago we were reviewing the data the URI had analyzed and compiled from water samples TU225 had provided from the Falls River in the Arcadia Management Area (AMA; see photo at right). During that review, we discovered very high levels of enterococcia in the water at all three sites TU225 draws samples from for the [URI Watershed Watch Program](#). Enterococcia, which is a bacterium “... shed in human and animal feces...” (www.mmbr.asm.org/content/76/4/685.full), at high levels, can promote human health hazards. For example, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (www.dem.ri.gov), closes Rhode Island’s cherished beaches to recreational use if the level of enterococcia reaches 60 colony-forming-units (cfu) per 100 mL.

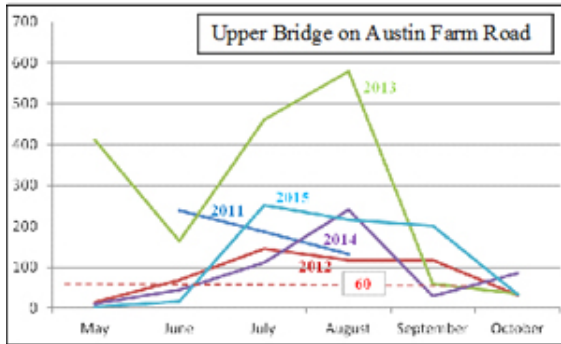


The following charts illustrate the levels of enterococcia found in the water samples taken from the three sites TU225 monitored for the URIWW between 2011 and 2015. As you can see, most of the levels of enterococcia



found are well-above 60 cfu per 100 mL.

Based on these findings, the Water Resources Division of RIDEM will be placing the Falls River on their [Impaired Waters List](#) after they complete their current reports, and then will try to identify the source(s) of this bacteria.



During late summer 2016, TU225 committed to sampling the water in the Wood River to help assess and, if necessary, warn the users of this part of the River of potential health hazards due to the elevated level of enterococci. Hopefully this information provides useful input that the many users of the Arcadia Management Area will digest and make improved decisions on how they use and abuse the Wood River. For example, each time a fisher person wets his or her line with their saliva, they should think of the potential effects of enterococci on their health. And as a second example, the author watched a man and his wife escort their dog into the waters of the Wood, where they watched him/her defecate in the River 30 feet upstream from where parents let their children swim at the Check Station. Yes, both of these actions are illegal according to RIDEM

regulations applicable to the AMA, but both occurrences still happen.

Here are the results of the water samples provided to the URIWW for analysis during late Summer/Fall 2016. Keep in mind that a level of 60 cfu/100mL causes beaches to be closed to recreational use. Please use this information to help guide your use of the streams in the AMA:

| Sample Date (2016) | Result (cfu per 100 mL) |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 26 August | 365.4 |
| 23 September | TBD |
| 21 October | TBD |

We will update this information as new results are available. [Return to Top](#)

