

WATERSHED

A Newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

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Spring 2010

Rhode Island Rivers Council Grant Engages Local Students *by Denise Poyer*

Field Trips and Research Data Management with Chariho Middle School Science Classes

An important goal for middle school science classes is to teach students how to gather data, organize and analyze the information, and then use it to support a hypothesis. This is required as part of the RI Grade Span Expectations. What better way to do this than to have kids collect data in the field alongside scientists who do this every day? Chariho Middle School (CMS) has come up with a great program that not only helps kids learn scientific methods, but gets them outside to learn about local stream habitats as well.

Two CMS science teachers, John Labriola and Dan Potts, have designed a program around the national education program "Salmon in the Classroom". Every seventh grader in the school is involved in raising Atlantic salmon using equipment provided through RI Department of Environmental Management's Aquatic Resource Education Program. The goal is to eventually release the salmon into the best habitat they can find for them. First the students must research habitat requirements for these fish, including temperature and water chemistry for the eggs. Then they must determine where the young salmon should live in the wild for their best chance at survival into adulthood.

An important step in this process is to have students attend field trips to examine three sites on the Meadow Brook. After collecting data on these sites, the students are required to analyze their data and establish which site, if any, would be best to release the salmon fry.



CMS Science Teacher, Dan Potts, and his students discuss their collected data

WPWA became involved with this project through a grant from the Rhode Island Rivers Council (RIRC). The RI General Assembly created the RIRC to coordinate efforts to improve the quality of the state's rivers and their watersheds. Because CMS is collecting data in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed, WPWA wanted to find a way to work with the students to organize and post the data on our website. We also wanted to provide some expertise in the classroom and field trips so that the students could learn from field scientist as well as their teachers.

The objectives for this program state: "Through their research and field experience students will develop an understanding of the biotic and abiotic factors which affect the stability of an ecosystem. In addition students will demonstrate their ability to gather, organize, and apply scientific information in order to support a hypothesis. Finally, students will develop knowledge of the affects of human activities on the health of an ecosystem." WPWA's role was to assist with training the students to use sampling equipment; accompany classes on their field trips; and then develop, train, and institute a data management system that can be posted on both CMS and WPWA's websites.

WPWA met with the teachers in January to develop a timeline and determine desired outcomes. During February and March WPWA used data from previous years' field trips to develop a format for analyzing and posting the data. Also in March WPWA took part in classroom exercises at CMS to train students in the use of sampling equipment such as dissolved oxygen, nitrate, and phosphorus test kits; flow measurements; and benthic aquatic macroinvertebrates identification. In April WPWA staff attended three days of field trips with the students.

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From the Executive Director

June marks the time for our annual membership drive. If you haven't yet renewed, please visit www.wpwa.org and do so online or fill out and remit the form on page 3. In this edition of *Watershed* we present our 2009 supporters. Upon reflection, I can't help but feel proud and overjoyed by the generous contributions our members have made through these tough economic times. The support you provide to WPWA helps make all of our watershed protection efforts possible. **I extend a hearty Thank You to all our 2009 supporters and especially to those who have recently renewed their memberships.**

This summer there are a multitude of projects and programs in full swing at WPWA. So many, in fact, that *Watershed* alone can't keep you fully apprised of all our great work. By providing us with your email address we can send you special announcements and updates which might not be included in the newsletter. Keep in mind that it will never be shared or sold by WPWA. Send us an email to be sure you're on our list and visit our website regularly for updates.

Before heading onto a river during the paddling season, first check our River Conditions Map online (www.wpwa.org/river.php) for up to date paddler warnings. A major warning you'll find cautions against paddling through the village of Shannock until the end of the 2010 summer. WPWA's Lower Shannock Dam removal project is finally underway and the deconstruction will make portaging there impractical. I recommend that paddlers avoid the section of the Pawcatuck River that runs from the Horseshoe Dam to the Lower Shannock Dam. Paddlers will still have easy access into the river immediately below the construction area. Stay safe while on the rivers this summer and ALWAYS wear a life jacket.



Continued from page 1

In addition to the normal data collection WPWA brought an electric backpack fish shocker so that students could also sample for resident fish. During May and June, WPWA organized the students' data in the new system, and then instructed select classes in how to use the system and how to post the data on-line. The only piece of this project left to do is to post the results of this project on WPWA's website, which should be done by the end of this month.



WPWA Program Director, Denise Poyer, electrofishing with CMS Students on the Meadow Brook

Field trips are especially important in helping students put into practice basic science techniques that they've learned in the classroom. The kids take actual measurements, make judgment calls on habitat parameters, and look at living creatures while trying to identify them. Equally important is the personal experiences the students have in the outdoors.

They are exposed to the sensation of what a stream temperature of 10 degrees Celsius feels like (very cold) or that water pressure will push your waders into your legs. There is the thrill of discovering insects on the underside of a log or struggling to scoop up a fish with your net before they escape. There is cooperation and confidence in discussing with classmates what percentage of leaf cover is over the stream, or how much sand, gravel and cobble comprises the stream bed. As much as it is common sense to practice these skills outside it

is also empowering to the student. Things come together in their minds – the macroinvertebrates that are food for the salmon, the trees shading the water to keep the temperature cool, and the rocks providing riffles that integrate more oxygen into the system for the aquatic animals.

In the short term it is hoped that programs such as "Salmon in the Classroom" will improve students' scores on standardized tests. It is known that field trips like these engage students in a way that classroom-only learning never can. "Quantitative and qualitative studies highlight the immense benefits of an integrated environmental education framework. In one study of 40 schools, 92 percent of students who were taught using the environment as the integrating context academically outperformed their peers in traditional programs."¹ For some students the exposure and intimate look at the natural world through habitat assessment inspires them in future classes. Chemistry, physics, and biology take on a personal meaning because they have seen firsthand how these play a role in the life of their fish.



CMS students gathering stream data

WPWA was very pleased to be able to take this project a step further and post the students' data to provide validity and importance to the information collected. We hope to secure more funding in the future to work on similar projects with other schools in the Watershed.

¹ Quote from RIEEA "Environmental Literacy Plan Case for Support"; study from EETAP Resource Library No. 46, February 1999.

Thank You to everyone who showed their support by purchasing a Kayak Raffle ticket!

The lucky winner was
Joan Leonard McGrath,
a WPWA member of nearly 15 years!



Special Thanks to
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for generously donating the
Perception *Express* Kayak
and Bending Branches *Whisper* Paddle.

In Upstream Waters,
By WPWA Member, Ben Korgen

On a morning bright and chilly
I went to the water's head
Over moss, rock and lily
To the largest trout to tread.

Uneducated prey were they
Creatures without reason yet
By instinct feared the bottom shift
Or overhead a silhouette.

With only current treading moves
They rested in the cut bank shade
Cave guard sentries waiting for
An erring meal to promenade.

Camped on bank I waited for
Failing light when big trout stir
A miner's lamp upon my head
I tied a fly with squirrel fur.

Heard familiar sucking sounds
From waters near the cut bank steep
Insects pulled down in the water
While I slid into the deep.

Like a reaper I drew poolward
Sneaking, flicking arcs of line
Laid my fur fly on the surface
Where the pool and wood entwine.

The living shock that sudden started
Left the deep and reached my hand
Snapped the creatures on both ends
And too the intervening strand.

The battle ended when I dragged it
On its side in grasses tall.
Lamplight arced across its form
And it was not a trout at all.

Dark blue back of mottled marble
Gold bars upright on each side
Red dots scattered in profusion
Scorning camouflage to hide.

Never had I caught one like this
But I'd seen it once before
Saw it in an ancient painting
Of a fish that was no more.

My breast was filled with pride but then
Reflection found its way within.

I wondered had I manhood proven
That this creature now was mine?
Needed I sadistic pleasure
Or upon its flesh to dine?

It seemed that creatures of the sea
Would better in the water be.

I knelt and raised the salmon's head
Leaned and looked into its eye
For an instant we were brothers
Here to knowledge unify.

Quickly moved it to the water
Watched it swim and said goodbye.

Saw it as a messenger
Hidden secrets to reveal
From afar in unknown waters
Here to break a hidden seal.

From the distant upper ocean
Came alone to go upstream
To reveal the source of life
In the universe unseen.

W PWA's Annual Meeting was held on Thursday, May 20th at the SK Land Trust's Barn in Matunuck, RI. It was a wonderful evening of great food and drinks and even better company. Bidders of the Silent Auction items kept their fingers crossed until the event came to a close while WPWA Trustee, Ed Lombardo, had listeners captivated by his tales and photographs documenting the native Brook Trout on the Wood River. Sincere **Thanks to all who attended** for helping to make the event a great success!

- And to...* **Auction Item Donors**
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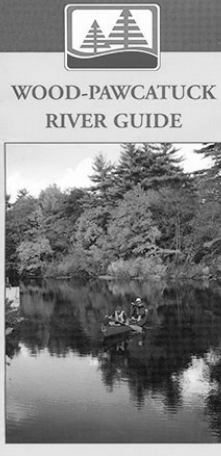
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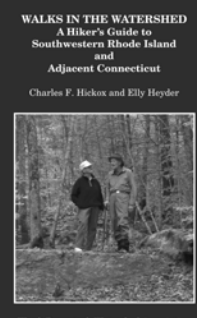
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Cont. from page 6

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If you have been wrongly omitted from any part of this list please contact Danielle Aube at the WPWA office.



Thank You for Your Support!

WATERSHED TECH CORNER

River Conditions Interactive Map

WPWA has launched an interactive feature on our website for paddlers of the Wood & Pawcatuck Rivers – a River Conditions Map (RCM).

WPWA hopes to engage the public with this new feature in letting everyone know about obstructions or other problems that may be encountered on the rivers. WPWA staff cannot cover all of the river sections all of the time so our members and the public are needed now more than ever!

If you have recently been out on a section of the Wood, Chipuxet, or Pawcatuck River, and have seen something of special concern that other paddlers should be aware of, please make a note on the RCM. To do this you must first go to www.wpwa.org, and then hover over *The Watershed* on the top tab menu. From the drop-down menu click on *River Conditions* which will bring you to a page titled River Conditions Report. You can ‘grab & drag’ the map or

navigate around it using the arrow keys or zoom tools in the upper left hand corner. It is usually best to zoom in first to get to the section of river using the Sattelite mode which can be selected from the top right on the map. Using your mouse, right click once your cursor is hovering over the area of concern. A message will pop up asking you to enter information about the conditions. Click on this message to fill out a form which will alert WPWA staff to update the map.

If you paddle with a GPS unit you can record the latitude and longitude of the site in question which can be later entered on the map. Below the RCM, click on “click here” which brings up the same form but allows you to enter the lat. & long. manually. This provides WPWA staff and the paddling public with a more accurate location of the problem or sighting.

These forms will be sent to WPWA to be checked for accuracy or duplication. We may contact you if we have any questions. Once we have verified the information we will post it to the map. Please be as detailed as possible about the location and type of problem.

The more people who send us information, the more useful it will be to other users. This is only our first year but use of the map is already catching on with the general public. There were a number of obstructions from downed trees in sections of the Wood River from the flood. We were able to post this information for June paddlers, thanks to several members who reported them on the map. These reports also helped WPWA staff locate and remove the obstructions.

Of special interest during the summer months will be low water conditions. This can make paddling especially difficult on the Chipuxet and upper Wood River or the rapids below White Rock on the Pawcatuck River. Please keep in mind that most of the information posted on the map comes from the general public. While WPWA will endeavor to keep information as current as possible, conditions on a dynamic system like a river can and often do change suddenly.

While you enjoy this wonderful watershed by boat, always remember to wear your life jacket and paddle safely.

Email denisep@wpwa.org for more information



Thank You to all who showed up to help fix the bridge at Browning Mill Pond!



From L to R Bob & Gail Ornstein, Peter & Maureen Gallagher, Ray Turgeon, Elly Heyder, Susan Sewall, & Danielle Aube seated.
Not pictured are Cindy Jennerwein, Joe Jamroz, Dave Harrington & Chris Fox

The 2.3 mile loop trail around the pond is now ready for hikers thanks to WPWA members and volunteers resetting the bridge that makes crossing Roaring Brook on the western edge of the pond possible.

Opinions expressed in *Watershed* are not necessarily those of WPWA, its Board of Trustees, or staff.

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