

In the Mainstream

Newsletter for Members of the Norwalk River Watershed Association [NRWA]
New Canaan, Norwalk, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, Wilton, CT, and Lewisboro, NY

www.norwalkriver.org

Spring/Summer 2009

IS CARING FOR YOUR LAWN POLLUTING YOUR WATER?

By Louise Washer

Remember the company ChemLawn? The name always amazed me. Even 15 years ago I wondered why people would willingly, knowingly put "chemicals" on their lawns. Today many companies have names with "green" in them to reflect consumers' heightened awareness of "green" issues, such as the fact that whatever we put on our lawns ends up in our streams, rivers, and oceans. But simply trusting these companies to care for your lawn in the healthiest and most effective way is still a tricky proposition. It's important to understand what your yard needs and doesn't need, to use as many organic and natural solutions to problems as possible, and to let lawn care professionals know your concerns. Luckily the best path to a healthy lawn is one that keeps surface and groundwater safest from pollutant-laden runoff.

KNOW YOUR SOIL

Before fertilizing, test your soil for pH and nutrients to determine how much lime or fertilizer it needs. Pick up a soil kit at hardware stores and nurseries, or request free testing from the CT Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven (203-974-8521 or www.caes.state.ct.us/Departments/soilwater.htm).

Measure your soil's "pH." The goal is mid-range pH that is optimal for healthy bacteria growth and soil microorganisms. They promote decomposition, making nutrients and minerals available to plants. Unbalanced soil "locks" nutrients and minerals, making them unavailable to plant roots. For acidic (low pH) soil, add lime; for alkaline (high pH) soil add compost or manure. The best time to do this is early fall or early spring. To minimize runoff, never fertilize just before a big rain storm. Avoid over-fertilizing; do not apply more than recommended by the product label, as it can harm your plants.

GO ORGANIC

Why? Because using high nitrogen, chemical fertilizers and pesticides create

an "addicted yard." Such fertilizing creates rapid growth which makes plants vulnerable to disease and attracts insect pests that lead to pesticide use. The result: an unhealthy cycle. *Instead:*

***Keep grass 3-4" high and leave clippings.** They decompose quickly and do not contribute to thatch accumulation.

***Mow over leaves in fall to grind them.** This adds organic matter to the soil, helps it absorb rainwater and decreases runoff.

***Add clean compost or organic fertilizer.** Some organic brands: Natural Choice, BioPak, Feedback, Basic Concept, and Plant Health Care.

***Plant natural pest repellents.** Yarrow, crocus, English daisy, wild violas, bugleweed, marigolds, purple flower and milky spore keep away unwanted pests.

***Combat weeds & pests naturally.** Use non-toxic alternatives (e.g. horticultural oils, Neem oil, soap solutions, corn gluten, etc.). Create your own mixture with one pint lemon juice, one pint white vinegar, two tablespoons baby shampoo, and two tablespoons vegetable oil.



"Norwalk River Shorebirds" Copyright © Dona Menton

USE LANDSCAPING SOLUTIONS

A well-landscaped yard helps reduce runoff and erosion, keeping pest repellents and fertilizers on lawns and out of streams. You can help protect water quality by mulching to inhibit weeds and retain moisture, covering bare soil, slowing runoff, using porous driveway surfaces, creating rain gardens and redirecting rain spouts to planted low areas, and planting trees and shrubs to hold soil on slopes. Remember, eventually, what you put on the ground goes into the Sound.

INVITATION TO THE PUBLIC

NRWA Annual Meeting Program and Refreshments "The Year in Review"

Slide show event yearbook

Update: State of the Norwalk River

Tips: How you can be more "green" on your property, and
Presentation of Community Awards

Board members and students will take us on a photographic journey from the river's headwaters to Long Island Sound while narrating this presentation looking back on a year of community efforts restoring habitats, measuring water quality, cleaning shorelines, hiking newly blazed trails, kayaking the river and capturing it on film. Dick Harris, well-known Director of Harbor Watch/River Watch, whose volunteers and scientists have been tracking water quality for years, will give his annual update on the state of the river.

Members of NRWA and the public are encouraged to attend.

Wednesday May 6, 7:00-9:00 PM
Wilton Public Library
137 Old Ridgefield Road, Wilton, CT

Call 877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463) toll free for information/directions.

NRWA NEWS

Website. Our website has been given a facelift! Please visit www.norwalkriver.org to check out our new look, get the latest information on upcoming events, download recent publications, and browse the watershed. Thanks to The Sounds Conservancy for funding and our webmaster, Brent Colley (Coleyweb.com), for donating his time and expertise. NRWA now accepts online donations via PayPal on our website.

Four-Season Yard Worker Tip Sheet. NRWA's one-page tip sheet organizes landscaping chores by season and gives suggestions on responsible ways to handle property maintenance to benefit your plants, animals, properties, the water you drink, and the watershed where you live and work. Recommendations include advice from area landscaping professionals. Visit our website to download this tip sheet in English or Spanish and pass it on to your yard workers.

Eco-10K Run. A 10k race was held on September 7, 2008, with donations benefiting the NRWA. It was a great showing and NRWA would like to extend our thanks to the organizers (Marc Chapman of Kilometers, Tina Hassenstein of Bring 'N Buy, and Fred Cone) for their outstanding efforts, as well as to the sponsors: Early Bird Café, Gym Source of Westport, Sports Water Bottles; Fairfield County Bank, Ridgefield Deli & Grocery, Roche Inc. Construction Management, Steve's Bagels & Cafe; Southwest Café, and Ridgefield Theatre Barn.

Responsible Business Network (RBN). This is NRWA's newly initiated campaign to promote responsible business practices and acknowledge those businesses that lead the way toward protection of our natural resources and a cleaner Norwalk River. NRWA invites interested businesses to take the pledge and contribute to NRWA to help us continue our mission of environmental education through free programs and publications. We work to improve the water quality and quality of life in the watershed where your business thrives and your customers and employees live. Benefits include being listed in our newsletter and on our website as a responsible business, as well as a certificate of membership for showcasing your pledge to your customers. Thank you to the following businesses which have already joined the Network and taken the environmental pledge. See www.norwalkriver.org for more information.

Didona Associates (Landscape Architects)

70 North Street, Suite 301, Danbury, CT 06810
203-778-1840

www.didonaassociates.com

Contact: Jane Didona, didona@didonaassociates.com

Kaiser-Battistone (Septic System Specialists)

10 Van Tassel Court, Norwalk, CT 06851
203-838-7000

www.kaiser-battistone.com

Contact: Bill Hall, kbseptic@aol.com

Golf-Art.com/The Frame Center

609 Ethan Allen Highway, Ridgefield, CT 06877
203-438-8989

www.Golf-Art.com

Contact: Skip Rooney, skiprooney@golf-art.com

Thank You!

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

We gratefully acknowledge donors from April 2, 2008, through March 31, 2009. Contributions received after March will be listed in the Spring/Summer 2010 newsletter.

THE RIPARIAN SOCIETY

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CBET Foundation, Inc.

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Thanks for Gifts of Services

Coleyweb.com – Website Design and Maintenance
Zion's Hill United Methodist Church – Meeting Space

In the Mainstream © 2009

Norwalk River Watershed Association, Inc.

The mission of the Norwalk River Watershed Association is to improve the water quality and the quality of life in the region by fostering education, cooperation, and action on the part of individuals, businesses, community groups, and governmental agencies in the seven Norwalk River Watershed Towns.

Officers of NRWA Board of Directors

Sara da Silva, President (Norwalk)
Lillian Willis, Vice President (Ridgefield)
Mark Riser, Treasurer (Ridgefield)
Louise Washer, Secretary (Norwalk)

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

NRWA programs highlight the importance and features of the river and its watershed and ways people collectively and individually can improve the region.

Programs are free, unless specified, but space may be limited, and reservations are suggested. Call the leader listed or **NRWA toll free at 877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463)** for more information, directions, and reservations. Hikers should always wear hiking shoes and bring water.

RIVER SPRING CLEANUPS

These events are frequently co-sponsored by town and City Conservation Commissions. A massive upstream cleanup was also held on March 28th. Please consider joining one of the upcoming cleanups listed below. Call the listed contact to find out where to meet and what to bring. Please help us make a difference!

April 18 – Oyster Shell Park, Norwalk and Calf Pasture Beach (NECC)

April 25 – Merwin Meadows to School Road, Wilton

May 2 – Georgetown (Ralph Bosch, boschland@aol.com)

May 9 – Wall Street, Norwalk

INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS

April 18, Saturday, 9 AM. Opening Day for Trout Fishing on the Norwalk River!

April 18, Saturday, 9 AM – Noon. **Shoreline Clean-up at Oyster Shell Park.** Join NRWA and Norwalk League of Women Voters for a shoreline cleanup of Oyster Shell Park at the mouth of the Norwalk River. Volunteers will pick up trash and record data about what they find. Boots, long pants, and work gloves are recommended. Contact Sara da Silva at 1-877-NRWA-INFO to sign up, and for information on where to park.

April 18, Saturday, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM. **Beach Cleanup at Calf Pasture Beach.** An NECC Earth Day Initiative. Contact Thomas Mahoney at 838-4708 or tmahoney@NECCLife.org

April 21, Saturday, 9:30 AM. **River Training.** Veteran's Park School in Ridgefield. Contact Donna Roscoe at donna@roscoe.cc.



Students from Fairfield University at last year's Oyster Shell Park Cleanup.

April 25, Saturday, 9 AM. **Norwalk River Cleanup.** Trout Unlimited - Mianus Chapter's annual spring cleanup of the Norwalk River needs volunteers to help clean between Merwin Meadows and School Road, which always yields a truckload of trash. Contact Jeff Yates at jyates@mianustu.org or 203-216-7078 for information and directions.

April 25, Saturday, 12 AM – 2:30 PM. **Hiking Tour of Local Mines.** Join local historian Brent Colley and Redding Conservation Commissioner Jerre Ross, on a rare hike to explore the historic granite mines in our area. Meet at the south end of the Branchville RR Station in Ridgefield. For reservations and further directions, call Brent Colley at 860-364-7475.

April 25, Saturday, 2 PM – 5PM. **Arbor Day Celebration & Native Plant Symposium.** At Ridgefield Parks & Rec. Food, great products, handouts, outdoor ideas and advice from over 30 different *GREEN* groups, organizations, arborists, companies and more to supporting environmental landscaping and native plants. There will be a native plant presentation at 4 PM with guest speaker, Dr. Douglas Tallamy, author of "Bringing Nature Home." In event of rain, all events will be indoors.

May 6, Wednesday, 7 PM – 9 PM. **Annual Meeting – A Year in Review.** Please join NRWA for our annual meeting at the Wilton Library, during which we will share with you a slide show presentation (narrated by our event leaders and students)

showcasing this year's achievements, including a summary of habitat restoration, trail hikes, snowshoeing adventures, kayaking tours, water quality studies from Dick Harris (Harbor Watch/River Watch), etc. The pro-gram will include tips on what individuals and communities can do on their properties to be more 'green' and end with a presentation of community awards. Contact Sara da Silva at 1-877-NRWA-INFO to make a reservation, and for more information. Refreshments will be served.

May 9, Saturday, 8:30 AM – Noon. **River Clean-up at Wall Street.** Join Keep Norwalk Beautiful and the Norwalk River Watershed Association for a litter cleanup in the Wall Street area along the banks of the Norwalk River. Meet at Fat Cat Joe's. Boots, long pants, and work gloves are recommended. Contact Sara da Silva at 1-877-NRWA-INFO to sign up or to receive more information on where to park.

May 16, Saturday, 11 AM – 3 PM. **Norwalk-Wilton Tree Festival at Cranbury Park.** The first Norwalk-Wilton Tree Festival is a collaboration of four partners in the two communities and a day of free-of-charge family fun to promote the urban forest. The festival offers activities like a popular rope tree-climb for kids secured in harnesses and hard hats and showcases a diverse lineup of environmentally-minded exhibitors (including NRWA) in pop-up tents and demonstrations by experts in tree care, a primer for the

householder with trees on the property. Cranbury Park is located at 300 Grumman Avenue in Norwalk.

May 28, Thursday, 2 PM – 9 PM. Sustainable Gardening Expo. Stamford hosts first-ever sustainable gardening expo at the Stamford Government Center Lobby. The community is invited to learn about gardening for cleaner water naturally. Home gardeners, students, and landscape professionals from Stamford and neighboring areas are invited, and local vendors and organizations representing sustainable gardening practices will participate. Come find out about native plants and where to buy them, alternatives to pesticides, managing turf organically, rain gardens, community gardening and more! The public is also invited to listen to lectures in the evening, given in English and Spanish, about sustainable - water quality focused - environmental management projects, and resources for healthier personal land care. Vendor displays open to public in lobby from 2:00-8:00 PM; Lectures in Senior Center Auditorium, 2nd floor from 6:00 - 8:45 PM. To RSVP for lecture seating and for more info: <http://sustainablegardeningexpo.eventbrite.com/> Free to the public.

July 12, Sunday. Kayak tour of Norwalk Harbor. Co-hosted by Appalachian Mountain Club's Flat-Water Coastal Paddling Committee Chair Jean-Ellen Trapani. Commentary about local shellfish industry and biodiversity. Bring your own kayak or rent from the Small Boat Shop, 144 Water Street, South Norwalk. Call 203-221-7439 for reservations and time of event.



CELEBRATE EARTH DAY ON APRIL 22ND AND ALL YEAR LONG!



Upcoming Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days:

- April 25th - Weston**
Public Works Facility (8:30am-12:30pm)
May 9th - Greenwich
Greenwich High School (9am- 2pm)
June 6th - Darien
Town Hall (9am-1pm)
September 12th - Norwalk
Andrew's Field (8am-2pm)
July 11th - Stamford
Scalzi Park at Bridge Street



Reduce your use of plastic bags! This is incredibly important to our wild birds, fish, and environment. Start using reusable cloth bags to pack your groceries. It's not enough to just recycle the plastic bags.

Reduce Runoff and Water Your Yard - Your gutters can be retrofitted to attach to a **rain barrel**, which collects and stores rainwater for use in your landscape. Locally-made rain barrels can be purchased from companies, such as the following: Aaron's Rain Barrels: <http://www.ne-design.net/> or The New England Rain Barrel Company: <http://www.nerainbarrel.com/>

FISH LOSSES MOUNT

Over the past 15 years, studies in Long Island Sound show a continued decrease in winter flounder and other desirable cold fish species (e.g. lobster, Atlantic herring, cunner, ocean pout, skate), while most of the warm-water fishes have been increasing (e.g. striped bass, summer flounder, butterfish, menhaden, scup) (*Sound Health*, 2008). The regional warming of water temperatures could be contributing to this change in local fish populations. Other factors such as over-harvesting, polluted runoff, hormone-disrupting chemicals in wastewater, and increasing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are all thought to play a role in the decline of popular local fish species. Further

upstream, reports by the New England Fisheries Management Council indicate that American Shad and River Herring are not returning to their natal rivers in sufficient numbers to sustain their populations.

The September 2006 issue of *Smithsonian* contains two articles which speak to fish decline worldwide. "Seeing Is Believing," (p. 56-58), shows indisputable pictures that catches are decreasing in size and variety. In "Victory at Sea," (p. 46-55), investigations in the world's largest protected area around the isolated Phoenix Islands in the Pacific, have left scientists amazed by the abundance and variety of mature life in the ocean there. Marine Biologist Gregory Stone says about his investigation, "It was the first time I had seen what the ocean may have been like thousands of years ago."

There are vast implications of these changes in fish populations because fish, and the insects and smaller creatures that sustain them, are critical parts of the food chain. Factors leading to worldwide fish decline of desirable species include over-fishing; trawling with vast nets; taking of immature fish; dams that make upstream travel to spawning grounds difficult; pollution of waters from drugs and harmful chemicals; depletion of oxygen in bottom waters from excess nutrients (e.g. fertilizer runoff); warming of waters from cooling of machinery, impervious surfaces, un-shaded streams and weather patterns; sedimentation of waterways from runoff that suffocates insects that feed the fish; and increases in invasive species that out-compete or eat the more valuable native fish.

Fish, and the life that sustains them, are essential to mankind's survival. All individuals need to take steps to help these resources. Watershed residents need to keep natural buffers around local streams and ponds to reduce polluted runoff, warming, and sedimentation; pump and maintain their septic systems; support improved wastewater treatment plants and open space; speak up at public hearings and act for better protection locally and worldwide. Individuals and entities at all levels must cooperate to reverse and control factors that contribute to the decline of essential fish resources. Every person can make a difference!



FAREWELL TO A PRESIDENT: LILLIAN WILLIS OF RIDGEFIELD

On January 1, 2009, NRWA founder Lillian Willis stepped down as President of NRWA after more than 13 years of dedicated service to the organization. She assumed the position of Vice President until the Annual Meeting on May 6, when she will fully resign from the Board because – as of January 19, 2009 – she is the new Executive Director of The Nature Museum at Grafton in Vermont.

Lillian and other co-founders formally incorporated NRWA as a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit in 1996 to connect and inform watershed communities, and enacted a mission to educate residents, local business leaders, and officials about the natural resources – most importantly fresh water – that surround them and ways people could cooperate to protect and enhance them.

Lillian has a very long list of professional and volunteer accomplishments over the years, including positions with the Girl Scouts in Wilton and The Nature Conservancy’s Devil’s Den Preserve in Weston/Redding.

She was one of the originators of the River Study Program, which focused her interest in water and educating adults and children so they would understand the interconnection between natural resources and humans and be motivated to work to conserve and protect them. That led to service on the Ridgefield Conservation Commission and election to the Planning & Zoning Commission /Inland Wetlands Board. She was one of the founders of The Discovery Center, a nature center without walls in Ridgefield that uses open spaces for education and recreation, a member of the Advisory Board of the Weir Farm Arts Center, and a Merit Badge Counselor and Advisor for more than 25 Eagle Scout Projects on area open spaces.

Today, we can thank Lillian, along with her husband and children, for blazing and maintaining many miles of trails throughout the watershed, starting River Study, organizing annual spring river cleanups, writing many publications, yanking barberry and other invasives from open spaces, and countless other initiatives which have greatly benefited from her perseverance. As Director of The Nature Museum at Grafton, with its satellite museum at the Fish Ladder on the Connecticut River in Bellows Falls, she will continue to impact the watersheds of Connecticut. She is a true advocate of the environment and will be greatly missed in Connecticut. NRWA is greatly appreciative of her commitment over the years and extends our utmost gratitude to our top watershed steward. Thank you, Lillian!

MEMBERSHIP FORM

- I support the improvement of the Norwalk River, its tributaries and its watershed. I would like to learn more about the needs of the region and ways we can all help.
 - I would also like information about opportunities to *volunteer*.
 - Enclosed is my tax-deductible, annual membership contribution.
- I would prefer to receive the semi-annual newsletter, *In the Mainstream*, via:
- The name and address written below, or
 - The email address listed below.

Riparian Society
Steward \$1000 and up
Protector \$750-\$999

Benefactor \$500-\$749
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Basic Membership
Supporter \$50-\$99
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Oyster Shell Park by Sara da Silva

**Please make check payable to: NRWA, Inc., and mail to the
Norwalk River Watershed Association, Inc., P.O. Box 197, Georgetown, CT 06829**

Name _____ Tel. _____ Email _____

Address _____
Street Town State Zip

HIGH WATER MARKS: DONNA ROSCOE

Dedication and inspiration... Donna Roscoe has been exemplifying these qualities for the past 16 years while keeping the River Study Program active each year in Ridgefield. For those unfamiliar with it, River Study is a hands-on educational curriculum originally developed in the 1970s by Lillian Willis and other members of the Junior League of Stamford-Norwalk. It focuses on teaching concepts of river ecology and land-use/water-quality interactions to interested parents who, in turn, lead river-focused classroom activities and field trips to fourth- and fifth-grade students (often their own children). Although once active in four of the six CT watershed towns, the program now runs in Wilton and Ridgefield, partially with the aid of Donna Roscoe.

Donna started as a parent volunteer River Guide for River Study in 1993, when her daughter was in first grade. She took over as School Captain at Ridgebury School in 1996 and continued through 2001. She also became Co-Town Captain in 1997 and the sole Town Captain from 2000 through 2005, when the Town took over the program. This development occurred through Donna's persistence to raise the program from a PTA Enrichment Program to a curriculum requirement within the Ridgefield Schools. The Ridgefield River Study curriculum now includes science experiments, and math and writing components. However, the adult classroom training support for River Guides has gone largely unfunded and a replacement training coordinator hard to find. To make training easier for volunteers to deliver, Donna digitized the training components, and organizational responsibility was recently turned over to NRWA. Meanwhile, Donna has continued to lead the adult training and serve as a mentor to new guides – all because of her ardor for the unique program. "This was a rare opportunity to educate adults in concepts that were basic to the environment."

Donna is tireless, authentic, enthusiastic, inspiring to kids and adults, and a true lover of nature and the Norwalk River and its ecosystems. We thank her for promoting a greater understanding of the River and its wonders in our community's children and adults alike and hope a new volunteer will step forward to learn from Donna and help continue River Study for years to come.



Donna Roscoe points out skunk cabbage, a wetland plant.

NRWA Is Looking for Volunteers

River Rangers, River Guides, River Adult Training Coordinator, Hike Leaders, Trail Workers, Board Members, Grant Writers, Environmental or Website Writers, Graphic Designers, Gardeners, Scientists...these are just some of the volunteer positions we would like to fill. The more help we have, the more we can do. You can make the difference! Let us know your interests, expertise, and where you would like to help. Contact info@norwalkriver.org. We'll get back to you and see how we can mesh our needs with your talents and availability. Every person counts, so please let us hear from you.



NORWALK RIVER WATERSHED
ASSOCIATION, INC.

www.norwalkriver.org

P. O. BOX 197
GEORGETOWN
CT 06829

877-NRWA-INFO
(877-679-2463) Toll Free

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