

# 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 2011

## WATER QUALITY UPDATE

By Kristen Begor, Dick Weisberg and Dick Harris

Unfortunately, year after year the water quality of the Norwalk River falls short of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CT DEP) quality criterion at a number of sites. This information is available only because the river is tested by Fairfield County's only citizen-based volunteer water-quality-monitoring program, Harbor Watch/River Watch (HW/RW). The organization began in 1986 as a citizen's monitoring program and then was funded by the CT DEP for six years, from June 1998 through June 2005. In 1993 HW/RW was formally incorporated into Earthplace of Westport, CT. Since then, HW/RW has greatly expanded its water quality testing and monitoring services to include local rivers, harbors and the Long Island Sound. After its contract with CT DEP expired, HW/RW was able to continue monitoring the river and its tributaries thanks to contributions from numerous interested parties in the watershed, including the Norwalk River Watershed Association. HW/RW has a CT state-certified bacteria laboratory to support its testing and monitoring efforts as well as EPA-approved quality assurance project plans (QAPPs-4) to guide and to assure high quality data. Bacteria studies are now carried out year-round with 14 established sites being maintained weekly from May 1st to September 30th. During the cold-weather months, all sites are monitored monthly. All data are collected under the guidance of an EPA-approved quality assurance plan and are freely shared with CT DEP. HW/RW states its objective as, "to increase watershed literacy and encourage environmental stewardship for both students and community volunteers who participate in the program."

By means of its continuous, twelve year investigation, HW/RW seeks to obtain data on the levels of fecal coliform bacteria, as well as levels of nutrients (phosphorous and nitrogen), dissolved oxygen, and conductivity at selected locations in the Norwalk River and in its major tributaries (Silvermine River, Comstock Brook and Cooper Brook). Based upon data published in the HW/RW annual water quality reports available on the NRWA website (norwalkriver.org), the water quality in the Norwalk River is impaired with reference to fecal coliform, and impoundments along the Norwalk River suffer from avoidable eutrophication due to excess levels of phosphorus

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## ALLENS MEADOWS WILTON: TREES GO IN AND INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES COME OUT

NRWA planted 14 trees in Allen's Meadows with the help of Lee Horticultural Services of Wilton, which donated the labor, as part of Wilton Go Green's 350.org celebration last October. Community members pitched in to water the new trees, the planting of which was the first step in a year-long plan by NRWA and Wilton to enhance and refurbish Allen's Meadow, funded in part by a grant from the US Dept. of Agriculture Forest Service.

In November, NRWA board member, David Havens, and members of the Environmental Club at New Canaan's St. Luke's School spent over five hours removing invasive plants, such as multi-flora rose, bittersweet and barberry from trails. "I have to say that everyone pitched in, and we were able to get off to a good start," said Havens. The next volunteer workday is April 30<sup>th</sup> when Havens and his son David will lead a New Canaan cub scout troop in further invasive removal. See our events listing for more information.



Allen's Meadows: Becky Bunnell and Peggy Reeves help plant trees (above) and students from the St. Luke's remove invasive plant species (below).



### NRWA AND NORWALK LAND TRUST JOIN FORCES TO SPONSOR OYSTER SHELL PARK SHORELINE AND TRAIL CLEAN-UP SATURDAY, APRIL 16 AT 9:30AM

PLEASE JOIN US!

FAMILIES WELCOME

Kayakers and canoeists are needed to launch from Veteran's Park and paddle to Oyster Shell Park for a clean-up at the high water mark. Volunteers on land will meet at Heritage Park (corner of Ann St. and N. Water St.) and will clean the park trail as well as help haul in trash gathered by boaters. Check our website for more information: norwalkriver.org. The Small Boat Shop of Norwalk will be loaning additional canoes. The city of Norwalk and several local businesses will also be contributing to this joint effort to help improve the Norwalk River watershed and the open spaces of Norwalk.

## VOLUNTEER ACTION

### NRWA and REI Teamed Up to Clean Up The Norwalk River Valley Trail

About 30 volunteers from the watershed community and the staff of the new REI (Recreational Equipment Inc.) outdoor store in Norwalk met in September and cut back three years worth of weeds along the Norwalk River between Broad St. and New Canaan Ave. in Norwalk. Someday this section of trail will become part of the 27-mile-long Norwalk River Valley Trail between Norwalk and Danbury. "The great turnout for this volunteer event sponsored by both NRWA and REI reflects the community's enthusiastic support for the trail plans," says David Park, Board member and event organizer. See our events calendar here or on our website at [norwalkriver.org](http://norwalkriver.org) for volunteer workdays along the trail this spring.

### NRWA AND THE NEW CANAAN ROWERS HOSTED A RIVER CLEAN-UP EVENT ON INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEAN-UP DAY

New Canaan Crew Team members put down their oars for a few hours and joined the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) sponsored by the Ocean Conservancy. The event, co-sponsored by NRWA, took place at Veterans Memorial Park where the team picked up garbage on the water's edge. Connecticut's Save the Sound provided supplies such as latex gloves, garbage bags and tally sheets. The Ocean Conservancy uses the tally sheets worldwide to identify the origin of the oceans' garbage. Nick Flynn, New Canaan rower and event organizer, estimates the group picked up about 300 pounds of garbage. One rower, Alex Mauboussin, came determined to retrieve a submerged pink bicycle that he rowed past each day. His first attempts failed, but he then used an abandoned hose and called on the assistance of a few more helpers to dredge the prize reluctantly out of the mud. Rower Charlie Campbell said he was glad to be able to retrieve a few of the beer bottles that bang his boat as he rows.

Last year on International Coastal Cleanup day, nearly 500,000 volunteers picked up over 7 million pounds of marine debris in 108 countries and locations around the world including 45 US States. In 2010, in Connecticut alone, there were 30 clean-up sites, more than ever before!



New Canaan Rowers: Top row, left to right: Tim Steckler, Claire Campbell, Nick Flynn, Charlie Campbell, Eddie Nilan, Sammie Escherich, Mary Campbell, Kerinne O'Connor and Bea Tobey. Front row, left to right: Clara Dannemann, Alex Yanoff and Hannah Foley.

## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

We gratefully acknowledge donors from March 12, 2010, through March 22, 2011. Contributions received after this date will be listed in the Spring/Summer 2012 newsletter.

### THE RIPARIAN SOCIETY

#### Benefactor

Wilton Garden Club

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#### Thanks for Gifts of Services

Ray and Bradley Cooke--Website Improvements and Maintenance  
Lee Horticultural Services of Wilton--Ordering, Transporting and Planting our ATB Grant Trees in Allen's Meadows, Wilton  
Small Boat Shop--Lending Canoes During Shoreline Clean-up  
Jeff Kress of St. Luke's--Database Consulting  
Colleyweb.com--Website Design  
St. Luke's School, New Canaan--Meeting Space

#### ***In the Mainstream* © 2011**

Norwalk River Watershed Association, Inc.

*The Norwalk River Watershed Association, incorporated in 1996, is a not-for-profit membership organization whose mission is to improve the water quality and aesthetic value of the 40,000-acre Norwalk River watershed; to encourage recreational use of the existing trails and open space; and to promote research, education, cooperation, and action on the part of the stakeholders in the seven watershed towns in CT (Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, New Canaan, Weston, and Norwalk) and NY (Lewisboro).*

#### **Officers of NRWA Board of Directors**

Kristen Begor, President (Wilton)  
Mark Riser, Treasurer (Ridgefield)  
Louise Washer, Secretary (Norwalk)

## Water Quality (continued from page 1)

discharged by publicly-owned waste treatment plants and overzealous applications of lawn and garden fertilizers.

In the 2009 and 2010 reports on its monitoring activities in the Norwalk River, HR/RW notes that over the years, the visible pipes that once discharged raw sewage to the Norwalk River have been eliminated. According to HW/RW this improvement has been compromised however by increasing development and the associated expansion of impervious surfaces, which continues to impair the river's water quality due to the pollutant-laden stormwater runoff from these developed sites. Point source discharges of raw sewage have been replaced by nonpoint source stormwater discharges, which are far more difficult to find and correct.

HW/RW remains committed to improving the health and the public perception of the Norwalk River. It intends to continue its research in support of its primary goal to educate the public, younger generations in particular, about what is required to save this valuable river.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

NRWA programs highlight the importance and features of the river and its watershed and ways people 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.

**Saturday, April 2, 9 am-12pm. Wilton Town Clean-up and Norwalk River Clean-up.** The Wilton Conservation Commission invites volunteers to come out to pick up litter in town and the Trout Unlimited Mianus Chapter invites volunteers to clean up along the river near Merwin Meadows. Town volunteers should assemble at the gazebo in the village center at 9 a.m. Plastic bags and gloves will be distributed and street assignments provided. For more information, call Mike Conklin of the town Department of Environmental Affairs at 203-563-0182. Trout Unlimited Mianus

Chapter's annual Norwalk River Cleanup in Wilton will begin at 9 am at Merwin Meadows Park in Wilton. Volunteers will clear trash and debris from a 1-mile stretch of river. Bring waders and a pair of gloves, and help haul a truckload of trash out of the river before opening day of trout season. For more information email Jeff Yates at [jyates@mianustu.org](mailto:jyates@mianustu.org).

**Saturday, April 16, 9:30 am. Oyster Shell Park Clean-Up.** Canoeist and kayakers are needed to launch from Veteran's Park in East Norwalk and paddle up to Oyster Shell Park. Canoes needed to carry bags of trash. Small Boat Shop will supply additional canoes. Paddlers need to dress appropriately including life jackets. Volunteers on land meet at Heritage Park by the Maritime Aquarium entrance to receive trash from boats and clean up along the trail in the park. This is a joint effort between the NRWA and the Norwalk Land Trust. Rain date is Sunday April 17. For more information contact David Park at [davidpark66@att.net](mailto:davidpark66@att.net) or (203) 866-7555.

**Saturday, April 23, 9 am-12 pm. Norwalk River Valley Trail Maintenance Day.** The public is invited to join the NRWA, REI Norwalk (Recreational Equipment Inc.) and the Norwalk River Valley Trail Committee for a trail maintenance day. Volunteers will cut back weeds along an existing section of trail between Broad St and the New Canaan Ave electric sub-station. Some tools will be provided, but more will be needed from home. Meet at Broad St. in Norwalk just off Main Ave. (look for Walgreen's on Main), park along Broad St. by the Rt. 7 overpass. For more information, contact Katie Ulvin of REI at 203-838-1938; [kulvin@rei.com](mailto:kulvin@rei.com) or David Park of NRWA at 203-866-7555; [davidpark66@att.net](mailto:davidpark66@att.net).

**Tuesday, April 26 9:30-11 am. River Study Training for Parent Volunteers in Ridgefield.** Veteran's Park School, Ridgefield. For more information contact Donna Roscoe at [donna@roscoe.cc](mailto:donna@roscoe.cc).



### LET YOUR TOWN LEADERS KNOW YOU CARE ABOUT WATER QUALITY

As part of a Harbor Watch/River Watch school project during the winter of 2008/2009, two Wilton High School students, Angela Yi and Katie Jacobs took discharge samples from the three sewage treatment plants on the

Norwalk River. E coli bacteria samples were analyzed at the state-certified HW/RW laboratory at Earthplace. Nutrient samples were analyzed at York Analytical Laboratories, Inc. in Stratford. The results showed significant quantities of phosphorous released to the receiving waters because phosphorous removal units are turned off during the winter months. One plant (the Route 7 plant) has no provision to remove nutrients. In a similar fashion, sanitizing ultraviolet lamps are also turned off during winter months, which often causes downstream testing sites to exceed the CT DEP E. coli bacteria criteria for a Class B River, one the state classifies as "fishable and swimmable." This release of phosphorous and bacteria by the sewage treatment plants is in compliance with the Environmental Protection Agency's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits for the treatment plants which do not require treatment during the winter months when no swimming or fishing occur. HW/RW and NRWA invite you to write to your local representative if you agree that future permits for all three plants should require phosphorous removal and bacteria sanitization on a year-round basis.

## Interested in Volunteering?

River Rangers, River Study Adult Training Coordinator, Hike Leaders, Kayak/Canoe 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](mailto:info@norwalkriver.org).

**Saturday, April 30. Allen's Meadows Invasive Species Clean-up Day.** The cub scouts of pack 70 in New Canaan are River Rangers and this spring will help the watershed by working with NRWA Board member Dave Havens to remove invasive plant species from Wilton's Allen's Meadows Park. For more information or to help out at the event, contact Havens at 203-853-5876; [havensd@stlukesct.org](mailto:havensd@stlukesct.org).

**Saturday, April 30, 11am-4pm. Green Earth Fair at Earthplace in Westport.** For more info visit [www.earthplace.org](http://www.earthplace.org).

**Sunday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 11 am-4 pm. Wilton Go Green Festival.** Visit the NRWA table at this community-wide event that celebrates green living. For more info visit [wiltongogreenfestival.com](http://wiltongogreenfestival.com).

**Thursday, May 19, 6:15 - 8 pm. Historic Mining Tour of Georgetown** (NRWA Annual Meeting Event). Local historian, Brent Colley, will lead a tour of historic Georgetown's mining industry. Meet at the Branchville Station on the north end. The tour begins with a talk about the Branchline and the mines in the Branchville area and continues with a walk around the station via West Branchville Road to show where the buildings were and discuss the railroad's role in the industry. Then tour members drive to the world-famous Branchville mine and hike down to talk about why it's significant. Refreshments at the Georgetown Saloon to follow. The public is encouraged to attend this free event. For more information on the mines, see Brent Colley's website at

[www.historyofredding.com/HRBranchville.htm](http://www.historyofredding.com/HRBranchville.htm). For more information on the tour, call 877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463).

**Saturday, May 21, 11 am - 3 pm. Norwalk-Wilton Tree Festival at Cranberry Park.** The fifth annual Tree Festival is a collaboration of the Norwalk Tree Alliance, Norwalk Dept. of Public Works, Wilton Garden Club and Wilton Tree Committee. The festival offers family-style activities such as a rope tree climb for kids and showcases a diverse line-up of environmentally-minded exhibitors (including NRWA), demonstrations by experts in tree care and a primer for homeowners. Rain or shine and free admission. Cranberry Park is at 300 Grumman Ave, Norwalk, near Rt. 7. For more info visit [norwalktreealliance.org](http://norwalktreealliance.org).

**Monday, May 23 through Sunday, May 29 is "Kayak & Canoe Safety Awareness Week."** Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia and Wilton First Selectman Bill Brennan will be supporting a proclamation along with many local and state officials and organizations. The US Coast Guard Aux 72, the Outdoor Sports Center of Wilton, the Small Boat Shop of Norwalk and local kayakers have joined forces for the effort as a result of several kayaking mishaps in recent years. "Operation Paddle Smart" literature will be handed out at the Calf Pasture Beach kayak launch on Memorial Day weekend and other events will be announced. For more information contact David Park at [davidpark66@att.net](mailto:davidpark66@att.net); 203-866-7555.

**Saturday, June 4, 10 am - 12 pm. Natural History Walk at Weir Farm to Celebrate both National Trails Day and Connecticut Trails Day.** Join the staffs of the NRWA, the Weir Farm National Historic Site and the Norwalk River Valley Trail Steering Committee for a guided hike through land proposed for the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT). During the hike, the group leaders will discuss the collaborative 5-town planning efforts presently underway for the establishment of the NRVT Trail stretching from Norwalk to Danbury. The informative 4 to 5-mile hike will begin at Weir Farm, 735 Nod Hill Road, Wilton. To reserve your spot and for parking directions, contact Greg Waters at 203-544-9829 ext. 11.



A guided natural history hike at Weir Farm, Wilton.

**Saturday, June 18, 11:00 am.** Join NRWA board member and kayaker David Park for a book signing and discussion on "Kayaking in and around the Norwalk Islands" at Downunder Kayaking, Saugatuck Center, 575 Riverside Ave, Westport. David will then lead a kayak tour up the Saugatuck River to a fresh water dam and back down into the Saugatuck harbor area. For more info contact David at [davidpark66@att.net](mailto:davidpark66@att.net) or 203-866-7555.

**Saturday, August 6, 10 am-noon. Butterflies!** (Rain date: August 7th) Lepidopterist Victor DeMasi, Research Affiliate for the Peabody Museum and NRWA Advisory Board Member, has been studying butterflies and moths in an area along the Norwalk River since 1977. He'll introduce area butterflies and moths, discuss their food and habitats and show his remarkable collection. Meet at the Simpaug Turnpike, Redding, just east of Rt. 7, Ridgefield. Easy walk. To reserve a spot, contact Vic DeMasi at 203-938-9016; [victormonarch@yahoo.com](mailto:victormonarch@yahoo.com).



### Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days:

- April 23<sup>rd</sup>- Weston**  
Public Works Facility (8:30am-12:30pm)
- May 14<sup>th</sup>- Greenwich**  
Greenwich High School (8am-1pm)
- June 4<sup>th</sup> - Darien**  
Noroton Heights RR Station (9am-1pm)
- June 9<sup>th</sup> - Stamford**  
Scalzi Park at Bridge Street (9am-2pm)
- September 10<sup>th</sup>-Norwalk**  
Norwalk High School (8am-2pm)
- September 24<sup>th</sup>- New Canaan**  
Wastewater Treatment Plant (8am-2pm)
- October 1<sup>st</sup>- Westport**  
Yark Waste Site (9am-2pm)
- October 29<sup>th</sup>- Wilton**  
Miller/Driscoll School (9am-3pm)

## NRWA RECEIVES GREEN COAST AWARD

This award recognizes Fairfield County individuals, businesses and organizations that are socially and environmentally responsible, promote sustainability, have high ethical standards and make conscious decisions every day to improve our communities and the health of the planet. The award was presented in November at the Green Faire Expo of Fairfield County, sponsored by The Community Innovation Grants Program of The Connecticut Clean Energy Fund & Sustainable Stamford.



Kayakers exploring the Norwalk Islands.

## STEWARDSHIP OF THE NORWALK ISLANDS

By David Park

The Norwalk Islands lie one mile offshore and stretch approximately four nautical miles into Westport. Several of the islands are open to the public, a few are private and some are part of the Stewart McKinney Wildlife Refuge. The Islands are considered the jewel of Norwalk, a wonderful asset which enriches the quality of the lives of both local residents and out-of-area visitors. Proper stewardship of the islands requires an understanding of their fragile eco-system.

Over the past 10 years or so, the number and variety of nesting birds on the Norwalk Islands has increased dramatically including Osprey (a fish hawk), Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Black Crowned Night Herons, Oystercatchers, Terns and many others. There are now 15 active Osprey nests in the area compared to just two nests over 10 years ago. During fall and winter, we

are visited by Harbor Seals and Grey Seals that swim down from Maine and Canada. All of this wildlife is a sign of a healthy but fragile environment that is dependent on small feeder fish and vegetation as a food source.

It is important to appreciate the impact the watershed of the Norwalk River has on the waters of the Long Island Sound as well as on the Norwalk Islands and their wildlife. The Norwalk River watershed begins in the Great Swamp Aquifer of northern Ridgefield and flows through the towns of Wilton and Norwalk as well as parts of New Canaan, Weston, Redding and Lewisboro, NY. All of the precipitation in these areas in the form of snow, ice and rain eventually finds its way by underground and surface streams to the Norwalk River and to the Long Island Sound. Unfortunately, some of these waters include urban and suburban run-off that are considered "non-point" sources of pollution. Typical sources of pollution include bacteria from animal feces, septic tank leakage, nitrogen from lawn fertilizers and contaminants from streets and parking lots such as oil and antifreeze. All of these pollutants affect the Long Island Sound and the Norwalk Islands.

The water quality is one point of concern; the other is a rise in public use which includes increases in the number of boaters, kayakers, picnickers and campers. Public use should be encouraged, but with that comes certain responsibilities regarding respect for the natural habitat and other users of the public property. From time to time, some rules have been ignored primarily by campers who leave trash behind, break glass, set off fireworks (which scare animals, contain toxic heavy metals and are a fire hazard), bring their dogs along (which impact the water and wildlife) and sometimes camp without a permit. This trend has slowly been decreasing over the years, but we hope someday to see these abuses stop altogether through advocacy, common respect for others and enforcement. The jewel of Norwalk will be an even brighter spot for the public to enjoy along with all the wonderful wildlife.

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## MEMBERSHIP FORM

- I would 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.

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Oyster Shell Park by Sara da Silva

Yes, my company has a Matching Gift Program. Company Name \_\_\_\_\_

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

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Protect water and the organisms that need it. Do NOT flush medicines down the drain or toilet. Instead turn them in at the pharmaceutical collection day in your town.

## HIGH WATER MARKS: DAVID PARK

NRWA would like to thank one of our board members, David Park, for his outstanding contribution to the organization. Avid kayaker and canoeist, bird-watcher, river guide, author, speaker and fundraiser, David is a tireless trailblazer, both figuratively and literally. He has helped lead NRWA and local environmental awareness in new directions while also quite literally proving himself a hardy weed-wacker leading volunteer work groups in an effort to help blaze the Norwalk River Valley Trail. An NRWA board member for two years, David also serves on the Norwalk River Valley Trail Steering Committee representing Norwalk and the NRWA on the proposed 28-mile-long trail between Norwalk and Danbury.

David is retired and has lived in East Norwalk since 1985. He has been active in local public service for many years. His posts have included a mayoral appointment to the Norwalk Historical Commission where he served as chairman for several years as well as a position as board member and secretary of the East Norwalk Improvement Association which oversees the East Norwalk Library and its programs.



David Park with his kayak on the Sound.



David Park at a book signing at the Norwalk Library.

David has been a canoeist of New England lakes and rivers all his life and a kayaker of local waters for 15 years. He has been documenting the local active osprey nests for 12 years, and in 2009 published a local, niche guidebook titled *Kayaking in and around the Norwalk Islands*. The book has sold more than 500 copies since first printed in November 2009 and is available on the NRWA website at [www.norwalkriver.org](http://www.norwalkriver.org).

Since producing the book, David has been giving presentations at libraries, retail outlets and other venues on local kayaking opportunities and kayak safety as well as guiding kayak tours and giving talks on environmental issues and stewardship of the Norwalk Islands.