

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

Fall/Winter 2011/2012

TWO NEIGHBORING RIVERS RANK AS AMERICA'S MOST ENDANGERED

By Louise Washer

For the last two years, *American Rivers*, a 38-year-old, 65,000-member conservation organization based in Washington, DC, has named nearby rivers, the Delaware (in 2010) and the Susquehanna (in 2011), America's #1 Most Endangered River. Both earned the title for the same reason: natural gas drilling with a technique called hydraulic fracturing, or hydrofracking for short, is occurring in their watersheds. Both watersheds exist in the Marcellus Shale region, which holds vast reserves of natural gas between layers of underground rock. Connecticut lies outside the Marcellus Shale area and so will remain free of the direct threats hydrofracking poses, but neighboring New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania face the serious risk of damage to waterways and to the fish and wildlife we all share, not to mention the drinking water in those states' major cities.

Hydrofracking works by injecting, with tremendous force, large volumes of water, mixed with sand and chemicals such as benzene, deep underground to create intense pressure that breaks up shale rock and releases gas. The resulting toxic wastewater, millions of gallons of it, presents a threat to rivers, aquifers and ultimately wildlife and drinking water.

Until relatively recently, extracting this gas proved prohibitively expensive. In the last half decade, however, as new technologies have



Photograph courtesy Damascus Citizens for Sustainability

A Pennsylvania gas well in the Delaware River Watershed which provides drinking water to over 17 million people, including those in New York City.

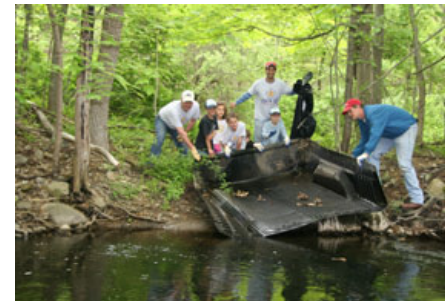
emerged, "fracking" has become viable and now occurs in over 30 states, expanding most rapidly in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Colorado, Pennsylvania and now possibly New York and New Jersey. The expansion has resulted in large part because of the Bush Administration Energy Policy of 2005, which exempted the oil and gas industry from the Safe Drinking Water Act. Called the "Halliburton Loophole" after the energy firm that first sought the exemption, the act leaves regulation of hydrofracking to state and local officials who lack the resources to hire the teams of qualified inspectors needed to monitor drilling. Pennsylvania alone has drilled over 21,000 wells since 2005. The PA Department of Environmental Protection has reportedly quadrupled its staff in recent years to around 65 inspectors, but managed to inspect only 9,000 in 2010. Meanwhile, over 6,000 new wells are slated to be drilled this year.

The Upper Delaware River Watershed

Continued on page 2

VOLUNTEER ACTION: RIDGEFIELD CUB SCOUTS CLEAN UP THE NORWALK RIVER

About 20 boys (and siblings) from Cub Scout pack 116 of Farmingville Elementary School in Ridgefield met last spring at the Branchville Station and walked north along Route 7 cleaning the sides of the road and along the river. The scouts received NRWA River Ranger patches for their hard work. Scout leader Thomas Mantione said, "We had a wonderful turnout and the Cubs did a great job." The pack plans to host NRWA board member Dave Havens this fall for a talk on invasive plant species and their effect on the watershed.



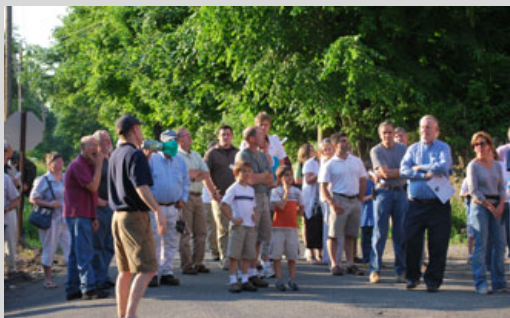
Photograph courtesy of Tizzie Mantione

Ridgefield Cub Scout pack 116 and pack leaders pull garbage from the Norwalk River.

More Than 85 People Turn Out For NRWA Tour of Historic Mines

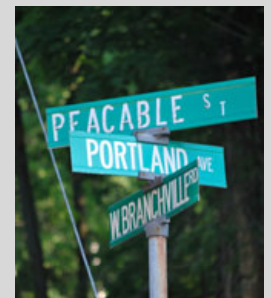
Mining in Branchville? Most of the participants who attended the NRWA-sponsored tour of historic Branchville mines led by local historian, Brent Colley, in June said they previously had no idea mines had ever existed locally. Mr. Colley led a discussion of the economic development of the area that resulted from the opening of the mines and the establishment of the Branch Line railroad around the turn of the century. Both

brought new influxes of European immigrants, such as the Anconas, who came from Italy and opened a general store. Colley's tour began at the Branchville train station and continued up Peacable St., into the woods and down to the "world famous" mica mine.



Photographs courtesy of Doris Kaye

Brent Colley leading his tour of historic mines beginning near Peacable Street in Branchville.



Most Endangered, Continued from page 1

Basin, which flows through Pennsylvania and New York, is the source of drinking water for over 17 million people in Philadelphia, New York City, and half of New Jersey—over 5% of the U.S. population. The Susquehanna sustains another 6 million. The Cuomo administration is currently seeking to lift what has effectively been a moratorium in New York State on fracking. On September 7th the New York Conservation Department released a draft environmental document available at www.dec.ny.gov/energy/75370, that proposes allowing limited drilling. The public has the right to comment until December.

“Natural gas drilling poses one of the greatest risks our nation’s rivers have faced in decades,” says Andrew Fahlund, senior vice president for conservation at American Rivers on the group’s website. “Without strong regulations, public health and drinking water will be threatened by the toxic, cancer-causing pollution that results from hydraulic fracturing.” The EPA is currently conducting a national study on the drinking water risks associated with hydrofracking. In the meantime, hundreds of poorly monitored wells continue to be drilled every month right next door to us.

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE
DAMAGE HYDROFRACKING HAS
ALREADY CAUSED WATCH
GASLAND
THE SUNDANCE
AWARD-WINNING
OSCAR-NOMINATED
DOCUMENTARY BY JOSH FOX**

MAYOR CUTS RIBBON ON NORWALK RIVER VALLEY TRAIL KIOSK DEDICATED BY NRWA AND REI

In June NRWA hosted a ribbon cutting and the dedication of a new information kiosk for the Norwalk River Valley Trail in Matthews Park, Norwalk. The kiosk is located at an NRVT trail head near the Matthews Park parking lot and includes trail maps of the region. The kiosk was funded in part by a grant from REI (Recreational Equipment Inc) awarded to the NRWA for improvements to the trail. The construction and installation was donated by the Norwalk Department of Recreation and



Photograph courtesy of David Westmoreland

From left, NRVT Steering Committee Chair Pat Sesto, Katie Ulvin of REI Norwalk, NRWA board-member David Park, Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia, NRP employee Steve Green who designed and built the kiosk, NRP Director Michael Moccia, and NRVT Steering Committee member Dan Landeau.

Parks (NRP). NRP employee Steve Green designed and built the kiosk. “I studied the design of the Lockwood Matthews house and used the motifs in the sign to make it fit with the feeling of the mansion,” says Green. The NRVT will ultimately run 27 miles from Calf Pasture Beach in Norwalk through Wilton, Ridgefield, Redding and into Danbury.

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.

Riparian Society

Steward \$1000 and up
Protector \$750-\$999
Benefactor \$500-\$749
Patron \$250-\$499
Contributor \$100-\$249

Basic Membership

Supporter \$50-\$99
Donor \$30-\$49

Contributions of \$50 or more qualify donors for a complementary NRWA Trail map.

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**

Name _____ Tel. _____ Email _____

Address _____
Street Town State Zip



Oyster Shell Park by Sara da Silva

**Or you can donate on-line
using PayPal through our
website!
www.norwalkriver.org**

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; reservations are suggested. Call the leader listed or **NRWA toll free** at **877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463)** for information, directions, and reservations. Hikers should always wear hiking shoes and bring water.

Saturdays in September. Various beach cleanup sites. September 17th is International Coastal Cleanup day sponsored by the Ocean Conservancy and organized locally by the CT Fund for the Environment's Save the Sound program which lists over a dozen cleanup sites on the 17th and more throughout the month, including two in Norwalk, at ctenvironment.org. Wear work gloves and appropriate footwear.

September 24, Saturday, 7:45AM-1PM. Moving Planet. Join this bicycle and hiking event in support of the Norwalk River Valley Trail and green transportation. The activities are part of a larger global event sponsored by 350.org called Moving Planet, in which people from 180 countries will rally to create awareness of climate change and support for sustainable transportation. Rain or shine. Bike rides begin at 7:45, picnic at 11:30 and ribbon cutting at 1:00 at the trail head across from Comstock Community Center in Wilton. Cost \$10. For a schedule of events and to register, visit wiltongogreen.org or soundcyclists.com.

September 26, Monday, 9:15AM-11AM. Ridgefield River Study Adult Training. Veteran's Park School in Ridgefield. Contact Donna Roscoe, donna@roscoe.cc.

October 1-2, Saturday-Sunday, 11 AM – 5 PM. Audubon Greenwich's Hawk Festival & Green Bazaar. Come celebrate the annual hawk migration over Audubon Greenwich's "Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch." There will also be live birds of prey shows, games & activities for all ages, eco-friendly business exhibits, great food and music. For more info, visit greenwich.audubon.org.

October, 9, Sunday, 9AM-10:30AM Autumn Nature Walk Along the Norwalk River. Join NRWA Board member Dave Havens for a guided walk along the river in South Norwalk. Havens will discuss the history of the river in this area and point out migrant and aquatic birds as well as various food sources for the wintering birds, their habitats, and the need for clearing the walk and the shoreline of debris and invasive plant species. For more info and to reserve a spot, call 877-NRWA-INFO.

November 5, Saturday, 9:30 AM-12:30 PM. Annual Aldrich Park Invasive Workday. Wear work shoes and gloves and bring water for this continued attempt to control invasive plants at an important Ridgefield open space with town trails that are also part of a 5-mile section of the Norwalk River Valley trail system. There are jobs for a variety of age levels. Adults and students ages 9 and up are encouraged to help. Weed wrenches welcome! Meet at the Aldrich parking area on the north side of New Road, just one mile west of Route 7 in Ridgefield. For more info call 877-NRWA-INFO.

January 9, Monday, 7:30 PM. Kayaking In and Around the Norwalk Islands book discussion. Join NRWA board member and avid kayaker David Park for a book signing and discussion of his guidebook, "Kayaking in and around the Norwalk Islands." The local book has sold hundreds of copies and includes information on kayaking the areas between Westport and Darien. An 18 foot sea-kayak and gear will also be on display. Westport Public Library, 20 Jesup Road, Westport. Free event.

February. Snowshoe Hike at Lake Windwing. Join us for a snowshoe hike on the trails around beautiful Lake Windwing in Ridgefield. This program is weather permitting and for ages 8 and up. Parking is available near the ball fields off South Shore Drive, Ridgefield, CT. Check our website for the date. For more information and to register, contact NRWA at 1-877-NRWA-INFO.

March. Spring Amphibian Walk. March is a magical time to search for frogs and salamanders! Dave Havens of NRWA will give a short introduction on amphibians and how to spot them. Then we'll go on a woodland walk to visit vernal ponds coming to life with salamanders, newts, frogs and toads. Search for eggs, tadpoles, learn about their seasonal habitats, life history, and some of the many species which live in our area. Meet at St. Luke's School in New Canaan at the 1st parking lot on the right, behind the ball field. Bring tall waterproof boots. Check our website for the date. Call 1-877-NRWA-INFO for reservations.

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.

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)

Announcing...
NRWA's 2012
Student Photography
Contest and
Traveling Exhibit
Deadline January 15
Grades K-12
Check Website Soon for Details

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

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: VIC DEMASI

The Norwalk River Watershed Association would like to recognize lepidopterist Victor DeMasi for his years of volunteer service to the organization. DeMasi, a Research Affiliate for Yale's Peabody Museum, serves as an NRWA Advisory Board Member and leads his famous butterfly walk for NRWA members and the surrounding community each August. DeMasi has been studying butterflies and moths in an area along the Norwalk River since 1977. His *Butterflies!* walk begins with a presentation of samples from his remarkable international butterfly collection and an introduction to area butterflies and moths. The walk continues through a natural meadow, one not maintained or mown, and participants observe the butterfly population. Across the street from this town-owned meadow lies DeMasi's property, a beautiful former dairy farm. In its fields DeMasi cultivates the native meadow grasses and flowering plants that area butterflies need to survive. He points out milkweed, ironweed, Dutchman's pipe and buddleia. DeMasi's meadow teams with butterflies, many more than in the natural



Photographs courtesy of Louise Washer

DeMasi leads a tour of the butterflies and the meadow flowers they need to survive.



Vic DeMasi presents a sample of his remarkable butterfly collection at an NRWA-sponsored *Butterflies!* walk in August, 2011.

town-owned meadow, and he deftly catches a selection in his large net for up-close inspection. "Let's see if it's a guy or a girl," he says, as he points out the area between the claspers on an orange Fritillary. Next he demonstrates a "butterfly nose job," as he places a butterfly on the nose of a brave attendee. "They like the salt from your face," he explains, and tells of a "nose job" he observed once that went on for 12 hours. *Butterflies!* is an inspiration and an education exciting to those of all ages. By appointment, DeMasi also gives tours of his full butterfly collection at the Peabody Museum in New Haven. For more information contact us at 877-NRWA-INFO.



DeMasi administers a "butterfly nose job."