

Parker River Currents

PRCWA Annual Meeting Speaker

Vernal pool ecologist **Matthew Burne**, will be the guest speaker at the Parker River Clean Water Association Annual Meeting on **March 6th**. Matt has published several books on vernal pools and is highly regarded as an expert on the topic.

Matt is currently the Conservation Director for the Walden Woods Project. The mission is focused on preserving the land, literature, and the legacy of Henry David Thoreau.

He is also the co-founder and Vice-President of the Vernal Pool Association dedicated to promoting the study, appreciation and protection of vernal pools.

The Annual Meeting will be held from 1- 3:30 PM at the Newbury library in Byfield on Lunt Street.

Directions: (Exit 55 from I-95., Central Street west, go 1 block and turn left on Lunt Street). The public and PRCWA members are invited to this free meeting. Refreshments will be served.



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MET GRANT AWARDED FOR TURTLE PROTECTION

PRCWA has been awarded a \$44,000 multi-year grant from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET). The award will go towards the protection and head-starting of the rare Blanding's Turtle in the watershed (See additional info on page 3).

Several area schools, including the Triton Regional M/HS in Byfield, Doyon Elementary in Ipswich, the Bagnall Elementary in Groveland, the Hunking School in Haverhill, the Cashman and Amesbury Elementary have volunteered to help in this effort. Also lending their support are the Georgetown Public Library and Mass Audubon Sanctuary in Topsfield. We thank all that chosen to help restore this rare species in our basin.



Come to the PRCWA Annual Meeting
Sunday, March 6, 2016

Memorial Bench Donation in Honor of Dave Mountain



A sunny day this past October on the banks of the Parker River by the Central Street dam in Byfield made a perfect setting for the dedication of a rustic stone bench in memory of David Mountain, founder of Parker River Clean Water Association. Dave had also served on the Newbury Planning Board and most recently as a Newbury selectmen. The bench inscription read, "David Mountain, servant to the Town, friend of the River".

Tributes to Dave were given by George Comiskey, PRCWA president; former PRCWA president Don Bade; Tim Purinton of the MA Department of Ecological Restoration; Geoff Walker, Chairman of Newbury Selectmen; Steve Colburn, a colleague from Boston University; and Dave's daughter, Carrie.

State Watershed Advocate Retires

Long-time Department of Ecological Restoration staffer, Russ Cohen retired after three decades of State service. At a pot-luck dinner last summer, which took place in the Barn at Essex County Greenbelt, colleagues and friends recounted his efforts through the years. Russ was well-known by advocates as a tireless worker on behalf of the environment.

Russ was all about problem solving, relations and networking. If he didn't have an answer to a problem in your watershed, he would locate a resource to help you with your issue. His best attribute was bringing together people, like connecting dots in an intricate maze helping to solve the problems of Massachusetts rivers.

2015 YEAR IN REVIEW

Turtles - Led by biologist Mark Grgurovic, educator Susan Speak and naturalist Mark Irving, we had one of the best years ever in terms of outreach, education and research of the Blanding's Turtles. Thirteen nests were protected between the towns of Groveland, Georgetown and Byfield. These nests produced 128 hatchlings, by far the largest number protected by PRCWA volunteers and researchers. During the 2014-2015 school year, several educational institutions successfully "head-started" pairs of hatchlings to juvenile stage in their classrooms, thus helping in the early survival years. Thank you so much Triton Regional in Byfield, Spofford School in Boxford, Bagnall School in Groveland, Doyon School in Ipswich, Thompson School in North Andover, as well as Mass Audubon and the Georgetown Peabody Library!

A Blandings Turtle grown to ten times its hatchling weight of 10 grams is released to area wetlands last July. The hatchling has been fitted with a transmitter attached to its back to observe movements and survivability rate.



Fish Count

Parker River volunteers counted an estimated 5000 herring making its way over the fish ladder at Central Street in Byfield in the spring. This is one of the largest counts in many years. The uptick in the herring was confirmed by video evidence (which records night passage) being conducted by the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF). DMF's Ben Gahagan reported over 19,000 Alewife and Blueback counts April through June! Ben Gahagan's crew continues with its efforts to improve passage and seeding (herring stock) in the Parker River. We look forward to working with Ben on another successful year.

Water Quality

Water quality testing at 13 sites along the Parker River and its tributaries Georgetown, Rowley, Newbury and Newburyport. High bacteria continue to be a problem in downtown Rowley. Results will soon be posted on our website. Many thanks to all our volunteers who monitor these sights through variable conditions!

Removal of invasive Water Chestnuts from the Upper and Lower Mill Ponds in Rowley

PRCWA would like to thank all our volunteer and the Essex County Greenbelt Association for turning out for another successful invasive water chestnut weed pull. Each year we continue to make gains in the restoration of these ponds to their natural beauty by eradicating these water chestnuts from the Upper and Lower Mill Ponds. Special thanks to Maggie Brown, Americorp MassLIFT member from ECGA for leading the event and, Mike Carbone, Dave Rimmer, Steve Malynn, Jack Vanloan, Laura Jones and her children, Boone and Meila.



Tire Removal in New Fish & Wildlife Land

PRCWA assisted in a joint effort to remove and recycle 608 tires and clear miscellaneous debris from designated priority and sensitive wetland habitat within a large conservation area locally named the "Upper Parker River Wildlife Management Area" was completed in October 2015! The tires from this historical dump site were removed to reduce breeding grounds for mosquitoes that can be vectors for disease; the cleanup also restores a unique natural environment.

The challenging cleanup was completed with the help and support of many partners including the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW), Northeast MA Mosquito Control and Wetlands Management District, PRCWA, the Towns of Groveland and Georgetown.

Patricia Huckery Northeast District Supervisor for the DFW said, "The area is one of the top habitats in Massachusetts for turtles and salamanders of conservation concern. Many common wildlife species, including white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, waterfowl, beaver, spotted turtles and salamanders, and snapping turtles also inhabit the area. Located between the towns of Georgetown and Groveland, the area is an ideal location for environmentalists and sportsmen, as well as serving to protect each of the town's aquifers and public water supply wells. Mass DFW has acquired over 150 acres of land between the neighboring towns during the past several years.

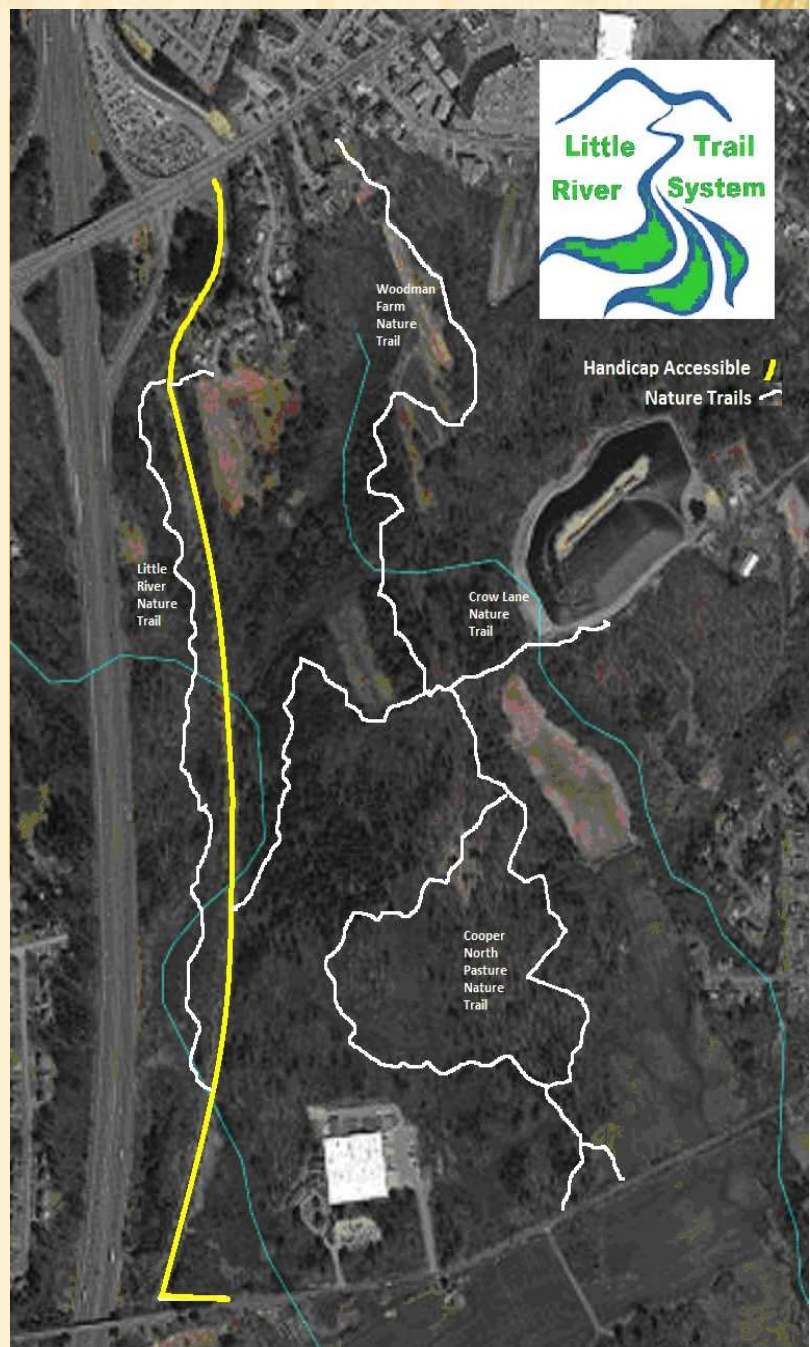


Additional Trails Proposed for the Little River Trail System!

PRCWA in partnership with the City is pursuing a Recreational Trail Program Grant to develop this educational and recreational tool to inform the community on the importance of the Upper Little River watershed.

Much investment by the City of Newburyport has been placed into this area because of the threat of flooding. Large amounts of rain water gather at the impervious surfaces of the shopping centers that lie north along a high plateau. Flood water is known to come cascading down into the Little River. By preserving this area of the City, the goal is to make sure the Upper Common Pasture does its job soaking up and dispersing massive storm water drainage.

Trails are the best way to educate on an emotional and experiential level the direct benefit toward a high quality of life for Newburyport and surrounding communities. The paths weave around unique eco-systems such as vernal pools and crosses near the wetlands and eco-systems that not only absorb storm water runoff but exhibit a wide range of plant and animal diversity that is dependent on the Little River. The Little River Trail System is the single most powerful way to educate and preserve the Upper Common Pasture.

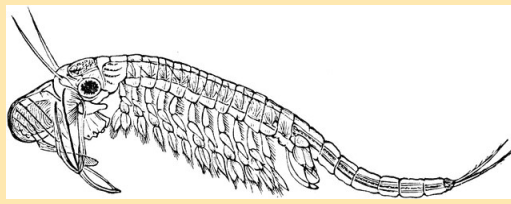


An educational and recreational 5.4 mile trail network introducing the importance of the Little River Watershed, the historic Common Pasture and protection of the environment and wildlife habitats.

WHAT ARE VERNAL POOLS?

Vernal pools are unique wetland habitats known for the spotted salamanders, wood frogs, and fairy shrimp, that use them to breed. Vernal pools fill with water from rain, snow, and rising groundwater and remain ponded through the spring and into summer. Vernal pools dry by summer, or at least every few years. Drying prevents fish, which is critical to species that rely on fish free breeding habitats.

Mole salamanders and wood frogs migrate from their upland habitat to breed in vernal pools on the first rainy nights in March or April when the temperature is above 40 degrees. This is known as "Big Night". Often people with flash lights patrol roads near vernal pools to help frogs and salamanders cross where roadkill is a problem. After laying their eggs in the pools, the salamanders and frogs return to nearby uplands where they live the rest of the year. Amphibians are the top species that act as a "bellwether" for environmental conditions.



Good Causes and Organizations to Support

Turtle Rescue League – A non-profit organization based in Southbridge, MA with a dedicated staff and members from all across the USA, committed to helping turtles. Provides rehab advice and to the PRCWA turtle program. <http://www.turtlerescueleague.com/index.html>

American Turtle Observatory - a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt research organization that provides small grants to support landscape conservation and long-term research for North American freshwater turtles. <http://www.americanturtles.org/>

Help the Ipswich River Watershed Association Fight the Kinder Morgan Pipeline – A project of unprecedented scale that will be constructed through miles of wetlands and directly threaten the public water supplies of seven communities. If it can happen there, it can happen anywhere, including the Parker River.

Learn more: <http://www.ipswichriver.org/featured/gas-pipeline-opposition-movement-grows/>

Waiting for the Next Flint Michigan

The unfolding tragedy of the lead in the water system in Flint Michigan should probably be a stark reminder of the problem of placing the cost of infrastructure over the health of its residents. Placing infrastructure cost over the health of its people is not relegated to Michigan.

I remember sitting at a stormwater conference several years at Northern Essex Community College with a few watershed advocates, but mainly the meeting was directed towards municipal officials on the new EPA regulations regarding compliance with the Clean Water Act. As the meeting was about to unfold, the mayor of the host city of Haverhill came in and boomed, "Don't worry, I promise we are going to fight the new EPA regulations tooth and nail!" Almost the entire room seemed to erupt in applause.

Stormwater remains the leading cause of pollution in our State. Most of the east coast rivers do not meet water quality standards and little is being done to correct the situation. EPA still issues stormwater permits for the municipalities, but those permits expired 8 years ago.

At a Labor Day event some time ago in Market Square in Newburyport many people stopped by the PRCWA booth and asked, "What is causing that smelly, brown ooze floating along the docks of the Newburyport marina." I told people it comes from the combined sewer overflows that emptied into the river during the last storm from the larger cities upstream. "You need to contact your Congressman and tell them you want something done to correct the situation on the Merrimack River."

If you think government will be issuing permits to correct the problem, think again. We are at a point where environmental regulations are scorned everywhere and politicians promise to outdo each other on weakening them. Organizations like the Mass Municipal Association is lobbying State House to give EPA control to the Mass DEP where local officials can yield more political clout. One of the first executive orders (EO 562) our current Governor issued upon taking office, would sunset any current State coded regulation and would require State agencies to remove any regulation that would be cost burdensome on business. Any State regulation that is stricter than Federal requirements would sunset within the year.

Regulations, in essence are meant to be burdensome in order to benefit society in whole. With current attitudes nationally starting to expand here in Massachusetts it is more probable we will be seeing more of the brown smelly ooze coming down the Merrimack River. Our waters will more likely become more polluted and thus less drinkable, less swimmable and less fishable. Environmental advocates and the people must convince our government officials we don't want to return to times when rivers caught fire. Until then, we wait to hear about the next Flint Michigan.

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Parker River *Currents*

Have You Paid Your Dues Lately?

JOIN the Parker River Clean Water Association. You are on our mailing list because we believe that you are interested in what we are doing – and have participated with us in some of our programs – or have attended one of our annual meetings. Please use the form below to return with your contribution - - and THANKS!

Please mail to: PRCWA, PO Box 798.
Byfield, MA 01922

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— ~~\$25~~ Family:

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— \$250 Sponsor

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