

# Parker River Currents

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## Parker River Annual Meeting *Sunday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015*

Tom French, Director of Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) will be the keynote speaker at the Annual Meeting of the Parker River Clean Water Association (PRCWA)

Tom will speak on the mission of NHESP and the program of "headstarting" rare turtles. Many species of turtles throughout the country and world are in decline and biologists believe headstarting increases the turtles' chance of survival.

In Massachusetts, Blanding's Turtles are considered a "Threatened" species. Teachers in local school classes have agreed to "headstart" Blanding's hatchlings, saving them from becoming trail snacks for predators before they reach maturity.

NHESP was created in 1983 with the goal of protecting and conserving rare and threatened species in Massachusetts. The Program works to identify what State species are rare and need to be protected. The program's biggest success so far is bald eagles. When the program started in 1983, the state didn't have any bald eagle nests, but there are now 40 protected pairs across the Commonwealth.

Organizing the annual Massachusetts bald eagle count, rappelling down a Boston high rise to band peregrine chicks, or studying a dead whale on the beach, are just a few of the tasks in Tom's life. He is an interesting and dynamic speaker who is passionately committed to the work of NHESP. He is sure to be enjoyed by all!

The meeting will be held at 1 PM Sunday, March 1st in the Newbury library on Lunt Street in Byfield. Free Refreshments will be provided. The public is invited.



*Tom French releasing Red-Tailed Hawk*



## PRCWA mourns the loss of two long-time members in 2014

In November, we were saddened to learn of the passing of David Mountain, Founder, Director, and President emeritus of the Parker River Clean Water Association. Dave will be remembered as a man with a passion, not only for the environmental health of the Parker River, but also as a student of the history of early mills sited on the River. Together with Tim Purinton, who is now the Director of the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, Dave co-authored the influential *Tidal Crossing Handbook: A Volunteer Guide to Assessing Tidal Restrictions* which has been used as a template from coast to coast. He also wrote *The Mills of Byfield*, a pamphlet about the history and role of village mills in early New England.

With Dave's leadership and grant writing skills, the organization began to undertake projects that reflected the mission statement. The annual fish count of the migratory river herring began; a symposium for area teachers about outdoor education was held; the water quality monitoring program was established, a PRCWA festival was held; and information tables were manned at various local meetings.

Tim Purinton had this to say about his old friend, *"When a mentor passes, the loss inspires reflection upon life choices, and the pivotal points that determine personal trajectory. A mentor is not always a close friend, or a family member, but can still profoundly impact a perspective and direction. David Mountain had a unique ability to build success from scratch, to resolve sticky problems, and to convince other people that his vision was the clearest."*



*At a ceremony last June, PRCWA members dropped rose petals into the Parker River in memory of Rich Marks*

Rich Marks was a dedicated steward of the Parker River, involved with a number of projects which furthered our mission. Rich was a faithful member of the water quality monitoring team since its inception in 1997. This commitment involved collecting water samples monthly from an assigned River location. Appropriately, Rich's collection site was the Newbury town landing, a location he cared very much about in terms of clean water, and where he enjoyed boating, fishing, and clamming.

As an avid fisherman, it will come as no surprise that Rich was also involved with another of our long term projects - counting migratory river herring every spring as they return from the ocean to swim upstream and spawn in freshwater. Rich volunteered every spring, year after year to accumulate the wealth of information being used by the Massachusetts Marine Fisheries to seek answers to the reason for the decline in river herring numbers. Biologist Ben Gahagan recounted, *"The last time I saw him he was performing a count in the rain, accompanied by his dog, with fine cigar in hand. I remember remarking to myself that this man surely knew how to live and I will forever carry that thought with me."*

Rich could be counted on when a voice and presence were needed in the Newbury Town Hall for a hearing or other public meeting involving environmental issues. On less serious occasions, such as biodiversity festivals, he was glad to demonstrate how to tie fishing flies.



# Little River Nature Trail News

## Gloria Braunhardt Bike Path Dedication

PRCWA held a sign dedication ceremony on November 15<sup>th</sup> honoring Gloria Braunhardt. Gloria, along with Al Decie, Jr., was largely responsible for spearheading the campaign to preserve state-owned land off Route 95 now known as the Little River Nature Trail. Their citizen advocacy group, Citizens for Environmental Balance, went on to assist in protecting the Common Pasture, a large area mostly located within city limits, and worked successfully in 2002 to convince the citizens of Newburyport to adopt the Community Preservation Act.

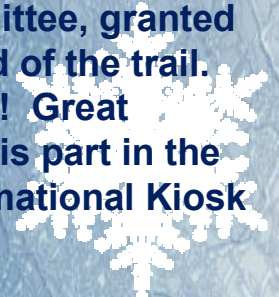
The event was well attended by City officials, trail enthusiasts and members of the Braunhardt family.

*Donna (Braunhardt) Hills  
and PRCWA Director,  
Jack Van Loan unveil  
trail sign*



## Little River Nature Trail Kiosks Complete

Many thanks to the Newburyport City Council which, after recommendations from the Community Preservation Committee, granted funding to construct and install two trail kiosks at either end of the trail. PRCWA is pleased to announce the kiosks are now in place! Great appreciation goes to PRCWA members Jack Van Loan for his part in the construction and Marlene Schroeder for her excellent informational Kiosk display board!





# 2014 Year in Review

**Fish Count** – Ben Gahagan of the MA Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) reported an estimated 7189 river herring passed through the electronic counter off Central Street in Byfield in 2014. This amount is similar to the 2013 counts, the only difference being that more Blueback Herring passed through than Alewife last year. Volunteer counts came in at about 2600 during the same time periods. PRCWA is encouraged by the latest results which show a rebound of sorts in the lower basin. Many thanks to the great efforts by the staff of DMF and to our wonderful PRCWA Fish Count volunteers.

*Ben Gahagan and State Fisheries staffers at the fish ladder in Byfield*



**Blanding's Turtle Program** – PRCWA turtle restoration efforts continued for the 14<sup>th</sup> year, led by Biologist Mark Grgurovic and science educator Susan Speak, protecting the "Threatened" Blanding's Turtles in Georgetown, Groveland and Boxford. The Consultants, along with PRWCA volunteers, were able to safeguard 11 Blanding's nests over the summer, which yielded over 60 hatchlings. This year the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) is funding a head-start program in area classrooms over the course of the school year to raise 28 of the hatchlings to juvenile size. It is hoped that this program will increase the future population of this rare species. NHESP also helped fund the creation of a new nesting area that should greatly reduce attempts by Blanding's to cross over heavily traveled roads.

**Stormwater** – In the spring, PRCWA participated in a Stormwater Faire organized by the Newbury Stormwater Committee at the Parker River Wildlife Refuge. Children earned a "Water Warrior" Badge for their crusade to "Stop Stormwater Pollution" by participating in fun activities and interactive demonstration projects on how a watershed works.

Northern Essex Community College was the site of a Stormwater informational meeting for adults in October. The meeting was directed towards municipal officials to provide an overview of the 2014 Draft Massachusetts MS4 Permit. New regulations are being considered in order to comply with updated "Clean Water Act" guidelines. PRCWA anticipates aiding communities in conforming to the new regulations, which should be in force by next year. The new Merrimack Valley Planning Commission Planner, Joe Cosgrove, hopes to work on a stormwater collaborative for the local municipalities.



# 2014 Year in Review (cont'd)

**Road Stream Crossing Surveys** – Congratulations to the Ipswich River Watershed Association (IRWA) for conducting surveys of road crossings and providing training to PRCWA member volunteers as well on this important project. Undersized and restricted culverts cause flooding and halt wildlife and fish migration. As part of the Parker-Ipswich-Essex rivers restoration alliance, IRWA staffers and interns prioritized problem crossings in the three watersheds, as part of the UMass Extension project. The three-year project was funded by a MET Grant. Much thanks and credit goes to Brian Kelder, Restoration Program Manager for IRWA.

**Water Chestnut Pull** – For the third year in a row PRCWA and the Essex County Greenbelt Association (ECGA) partnered in pulling the invasive aquatic plant, water chestnut, from the Mill Ponds in Rowley. Unfortunately, we ran out of time to completely pull the weed from lower Mill Pond guaranteeing more fun next year. We all will miss Americorps worker Dani Christopher who lead the project the last two years.



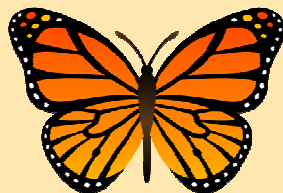
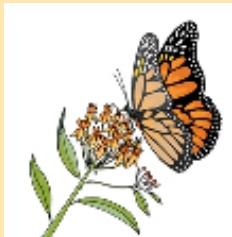
*Dani Christopher and Mike Carbone show how it's done by filling their boat to the brim with water chestnuts*

**Water Quality** – Volunteers did another fantastic job in 2014 by having near perfect attendance in their monthly WQ site sampling assessments! Test results show high nutrient readings along Rte 1, near Elm Street in Newbury, while pathogens present a problem in central Rowley by Ox Pasture Brook. The Rowley Board of Health has sought assistance from the environmental consultant group Horsley Witten to study the problem in the downtown district.

# Tidbits

The Essex County Greenbelt Association held a recent retirement ceremony for David Santomena, the former Director of Land Conservation for ECGA. David was well known in the Parker River watershed for the many land acquisitions that he helped engineer during his 14 years of service. The Common Pasture in Newbury and Newburyport, and “Turtleland” in Georgetown/Groveland/Boxford are areas where he and Greenbelt’s assistance were greatly appreciated. One wonders what our landscape would look like today if not for his guidance and perseverance in seeing projects through. Not to worry too much though—David has taken a job with the Trustees of Reservations, so we are bound to see an increase in protected land under their domain in the near future.

The Center for Biological Diversity is petitioning the government to place the Monarch Butterfly on the Federal Endangered Species List. Scientists have noted a 90 percent decline in their population in the last 20 years. There are many reasons for the drop, including climate change, but eradication of the Milkweed plant seems to be the root cause. Once a common plant, the increasing use of herbicides in the farm belt on the crop prevents Monarch’s from finding a suitable place to lay their eggs. Local Citizenry can help by adding Milkweed to their own gardens. Ask your local boards to suggest landscape architects to include milkweed in their planting plans for rain gardens and low impact design projects.



In some very bad news, the Department of Environmental Protection approved the final methodology for defining safe yields for every watershed in the State, as well as streamflow criteria for issuing water withdrawal permits for water suppliers. PRCWA wrote dissenting comments after the DEP determined through its methodology that the Parker River could withdraw SIX times more than what is currently being withdrawn in the basin. Despite documented evidence showing the Parker River frequently running dry, MassDEP ignored our comments and gave very little assurance during meetings that streamflow criteria conditions in Water Management Act (WMA) permits would mitigate future withdrawals. PRCWA has cited that DEP does little to enforce current violations in WMA permits and promised water suppliers at a meeting in Wilmington that they will not be fined if they lack necessary mitigation credits. Parker River’s 20-year withdrawal permits are not due for renewal until 2019. Perhaps by then DEP will see the folly of their ways and repeal this methodology. Ironically, they have termed this policy the Sustainable Water Managements Initiative.

Interesting in becoming more involved with your watershed? PRCWA is in need of engaging individuals who are interested in becoming members of the Board. Call 978 462-2551 for more information.



# From the President



It was perhaps 15 years ago when local developers, Craig and Shep Spear, proposed building a mini-city between the towns of Georgetown and Groveland in a largely undeveloped 500-acre swath of land that overlapped the two towns. The proposal, crafted under the State's Chapter 40B program, would have built thousands of housing units and strip malls, along with the necessary infrastructure (roads and drainage), etc. in this area.

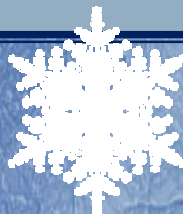
Selectmen, planning board members, conservation commissioners, and open space committees representing the two towns gathered for a site walk and to hear the proposal. At the end of the presentation, the Spears asked what area they would be most interested in protecting. "All of it," came the reply from many in attendance. "No, seriously," responded Shep Spear. "Yes, we want to protect it all" came the response again. During the time when development was at an all-time high, the Spears were justified in thinking that protecting this land would be a longshot.

The conservationists in Groveland, such as Mike and Jan Dempsey, Rich Lombard and Bob Guptil, had heard about an eventual plan to enter these properties off Salem Street in Groveland and began enlisting biologists, through grants, to conduct surveys of the area. What they discovered confirmed what others had been seeing for years. The area was a great biological reserve for a variety of plants and wildlife. Suzanne Fowle of the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program would later write in her statewide survey of rare reptiles and amphibians, "I found the greatest diversity of species of all sites within this large un-fragmented habitat in Georgetown and Groveland."

Not only were there great biological reasons, but the division line between the towns also divided two aquifers which served the town's water supplies. Groveland acted first in acquiring 70 acres of land with the help from Mass Fish & Game, Essex County Greenbelt (ECGA), Trust for Public Land, Sierra Club and many other private funders. Georgetown acted similarly buying 46 acres with the assistance of ECGA, and funding from the Community Preservation Act and a self-help grant from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA). PRCWA held a biodiversity day walk to help with public outreach. The two towns added to these purchases over the years, but eventually the local monetary well ran dry.

It was greatly applauded when it was learned that Mass Fish & Game acquired another 155 acres in what has become known as "Turtleland" this past year. The acquisition fills in most of the remaining puzzle of undeveloped land between these two towns. Many thanks goes out to State land agent Anne Gagnon, who acted quickly to acquire and protect these properties.

On October 31, MA F&G Commissioner Mary Griffin came to celebrate the event with many of the same town officials and environmental advocates who began the process 15 years ago. Commissioner Griffin then visited one of the local classrooms where young students are head-starting Blanding's Turtles, which they are learning are a species in decline throughout the State. Some of the names students have come up with include Nick, Notch, Shelly and Longshot. Ask any of these students why they would name a turtle, longshot—they would probably tell you it's because they believe the Blanding's Turtles still have a chance!





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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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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