

# *Parker River Clean Water Association*

## *Newsletter*

*Spring 2009*

*Volume 17*

## **PRCWA GALA CELEBRATION IS A SUCCESS**

More than 160 people attended the PRCWA March 28 Triple Celebration Benefit which honored Don Bade's retirement as PRCWA president, his 80th birthday, and the 15th Anniversary of PRCWA.

The event brought together people with diverse interests and engendered community enthusiasm. Representatives of other environmental organizations as well as representatives of State Environmental programs were present to show their appreciation.

Senator Bruce Tarr made an eloquent speech as he presented Don with a Commendation from the Legislature. The Board presented Don with a photo album of his activities with PRCWA over the years. Many volunteers helped with the refreshments, decorations, and set up. We will miss his leadership, but continue to enjoy his participation on the board.

## **CANOE/KAYAK TRIP ON THE TIDAL EGYPT/ROWLEY RIVER**



April 25, 2009 was an ideal day to be on the river – warm, a slight breeze, and too early for pesky insects. The put in at the very end of Railroad Avenue in Rowley was timed an hour before Boston high tide. This allowed the boaters to paddle upstream with the tide, enjoy a picnic lunch while the tide turned, and paddle back to the put in with the outgoing tide. Sixteen people in kayaks and canoes enjoyed the trip. About half of the participants were new to PRCWA activities. Another trip may be scheduled for the fall.

This tidal paddle meanders upstream several miles through beautiful salt marsh with woods in the distant landscape. Soon after the put-in, the modern world is left behind, leaving the paddlers with a gorgeous vista, very little changed in hundreds of years. Further upstream, the river narrows with tall reeds on either side, suggesting that Moses might have been found in just such a setting, and the reason for the name "Egypt" River. Soaring red tail hawks annoyed the swallows who flitted through the sky. George Ellmore of Tufts Biology Department, led a mini field trip walk across the marsh. A grad student explained his research project about the impact of loose strife and native vegetation on bird habitat. Becky Smith of Clean Water Action told about the work her organization does to protect drinking water sources. Jay Baker talked about his work with the Mass Bays project, while attorney Nora Chorover, explained her work with polluters and how their subsequent fines get applied to environmental projects or groups.



## Fish Count Monitoring at the Newbury Central Street Dam



The Fish Count training for the annual counting of migrating alewife herring by the Parker River Clean Water Association (PRCWA) took place on April 8, 2009 at the Newbury Library in Byfield on Lunt Street. Rob Stevenson, board member of PRCWA, and conservation biologist at UMass Boston presented the training program.

Fish count volunteers were given the history of alewife migration, necessary instruction and equipment to participate in the count. New volunteers joined the returning volunteers.

The Parker River Clean Water Association has conducted the annual alewife counts since 1997. Each spring the alewife herring migrate upstream from the ocean to fresh water. Our primary focus is the fish ladder at Central Street in Byfield where the tidal water of the Parker meets the first of the dams and ladders on their way to the fresh-water of the Parker where they will spawn. Volunteers watch and count at fish ladder. We have been concerned by the significant decline in the numbers of fish being observed.

We thank the fish count volunteers and especially Amy Madden, who again agreed to coordinate the program. Thanks a lot Amy!

### WQM Program to Strengthen Standards

Water Quality Monitor (WQM) coordinator, Lynette Leka, has been working to upgrade our program standards and procedures to a more rigorous level. Following discussion by the PRCWA Board, including a presentation by Paul Somerville of Massachusetts Marine Fisheries, it was decided to upgrade the program so as to qualify for a Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) certification.

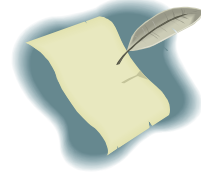
To accomplish this, Lynette is receiving direction and assistance from Cindy Delpapa of the Massachusetts Riverways Program. This upgrade represents a significant increase in work for Lynette, but will yield results that have greater credibility. The process is time-consuming and exacting to meet the State Standards. PRCWA is grateful for the assistance from Riverways as it would be a more arduous and difficult task without their guidance.

River monitoring is the process of observing and /or measuring different aspects of a river system to learn about its health. Water quality indicators, such as chemical indicators, give us a snapshot of the river, telling us what is in the water at the place and time it was measured.

Lynette has reviewed and revised sampling procedures as well as an assessment of all the monitoring locations. This information has been entered in a binder which includes photos of the locations, so each sample will be consistently taken at the same position, following identical procedures each sampling time. Lynette has also cleaned out and restocked all the WQM kits, disposed of expired chemicals and ordered fresh supplies. A training session was held for all volunteers to acquaint them with the upgrades.

PRCWA is most fortunate to have Lynette as our coordinator. Lynette has extensive lab experience and data coordination from her career in nutrition research for the New England Medical Center and Tufts University. Lynette, we thank you so much for your contribution to one of our most important programs.

## President's Letter



*Dear Members and Friends,*

*It is quite a challenge to fill retiring president Don Bade's shoes. However, Board members are working to have continuity to existing programs and thinking about new, watershed-wide programs. We are interested to know what you think about these possibilities.*

*One new topic is to focus on raising public awareness of the many vernal pools in the watershed and work to certify many of these by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. We are thinking about having an information program about vernal pools for the public. This would be followed by a certification workshop closer to the time when salamanders, frogs, and toads will be returning to the vernal pools to spawn. Another topic is a watershed-wide program to address invasive plant species. This project could happen as separate projects in each town in the watershed, perhaps focusing on just one or two invasive species. Invasive species crowd out the native plants. Many towns have begun an eradication program using volunteers to pull bad plants.*

*Recently I had the pleasure of welcoming 7 environmentalists from Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador to learn about the Parker River Clean Water Association. They came through the Quebec-Labrador Foundation whose offices are in Ipswich. QLF is a non-profit organization that fosters long-term leadership development within community-based conservation initiatives; developing models of stewardship of natural and cultural resources; and aiding in community service, economic development, and heritage preservation in rural regions in the United States and abroad. The guests were eager to learn about PRCWA.*

*Although they arrived with interpreters, I was grateful to Kim Kudym, Spanish teacher at Triton Middle School, who helped me with her Spanish fluency skills. The guests appreciated her presence too. Kim and I enjoyed taking them to the Common Pasture viewing platform along Scotland Road.*

*I am especially appreciative to have George Comiskey as vice-president. He not only seems to think of everything that needs to get done, but also ways to accomplish the tasks. Thanks also to Gale Bell who creatively puts our newsletter together.*

*Best regards,  
Marlene Schroeder*



## TURTLE CROSSINGS AND ROAD KILL

Late May and early June herald the peak of activity when normally-aquatic Snapping, Painted, Spotted, Red-bellied, Blanding's, and other turtles leave the relative safety of their water world and venture overland in search of nesting sites. With alarming frequency, these ancient reptiles are cut off from traditional nesting areas by an ever-increasing network of roads, leaving the turtles vulnerable to high rates of road-kill. Dubbed the "Killing Grid" by herpetologists studying the dilemma, roads take a terrible toll on female turtles.

In 1906, Massachusetts had 20,000 miles of roads, mostly 15 feet wide and designed to allow for horse-drawn vehicles. During the last century, Massachusetts has added 15,000 miles of roads, mostly at a minimum of 22 feet in width. Turtles know nothing of these statistics. It is believed that turtles, with their strong homing instinct, know where their favored ponds and nesting places are. In many cases, roads have been constructed across traditional travel routes within the lifetimes of specific turtles. Many of the turtles seen crossing roads are egg-bearing females heading for nesting places. The consequences of a collision between a car traveling 30 miles an hour and a turtle traveling a mile in a day is usually deadly. It is injurious to the species as a whole if it is a female with eggs. With mortality naturally high for eggs and young hatchlings due to predation or weather conditions, many turtles ensure their perpetuation by having few offspring over many years. Many turtles do not begin to lay eggs until they are 12 - 15 years old. The loss of one egg-producing female means a potential loss of decades of reproduction.

What can an individual or groups do? Citizens can assist turtles attempting to move to and from nesting areas by helping them across roadways. While this act should not be attempted if any human risk is involved, a successful road crossing can make the difference between nesting now and well into the future, versus no nesting at all. Always remember to help a turtle only when it is safe to do so and always move the turtle in the direction it is heading. Snappers may be safely held by the tail with one hand on the underside of the animal to support their weight, while Painted, Spotted, and other turtle species can be safely grasped by the sides of the shell. Do NOT take the animal to another location or a pond! To do so would be like taking it to a foreign country.

For more useful turtle conservation tips and turtle FAQs, go to [http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhosp/conservation/herps/turtle\\_tips.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhosp/conservation/herps/turtle_tips.htm). Encounters with rare, state-protected turtles such as Box, Wood, Red-bellied, Bog, or Blanding's should be reported to MassWildlife with photo and map documentation. To report a rare turtle species, visit the MassWildlife website in the Natural Heritage area at: [http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhosp/species\\_info/report\\_rare\\_species.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhosp/species_info/report_rare_species.htm).



Turtle researcher Susan Speak and PRCWA board member George Comiskey saw this turtle crossing a road. Her shell had been crushed by a possible mowing accident, but had healed. The turtle was estimated to be over 30 years old.



## **Larkin Mill and Ox Pasture Brook Dam Removals**

Plans are underway for the removal of 2 dams in the Parker River Watershed. The Larkin Mill Dam, upstream from Larkin Rd in Byfield, is undergoing the required study that must be done before dams can be removed. It is hoped that the removal of this dam will improve fish passage and the health of the river.

Restoring even a small portion of the Parker to its original free-flowing state would be quite an accomplishment. The Federal Marine Fisheries – a part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) – is interested in restoring a healthy migrating (anadromous) alewife herring run in the Parker River. PRCWA hopes to play an active role in assisting in this project and its follow up. The dam is owned by the Town of Newbury who recently gave approval for study funds at their Town Meeting. This dam is located at the site of a very early mill on the Parker.

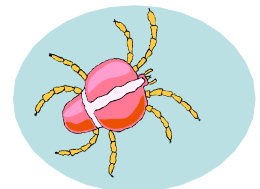
Massachusetts Riverways Program also plans to remove a dam on Ox Pasture Brook, a tributary of the Mill River, a main tidal tributary to the Parker River. The primary goal of this project is to restore diadromous and resident fishes to Ox Pasture Brook by removing an existing barrier to fish passage (the dam) and restoring both stream and wetland habitat in the currently impounded portion of the Brook upstream of the dam. Although specifically designed to benefit rainbow smelt, American eel and other fishes that currently spawn or otherwise use the area immediately downstream of the dam will also benefit. This project is expected to enhance the overall ecological function of the area by restoring tidal hydrology and stream continuity within the larger Mill River and Parker River systems. The Lower Ox Pasture Brook Dam is owned by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and is located entirely within the 1,882 acre William Forward Wildlife Management Area.



## **LYME DISEASE**

Lyme disease is transmitted by deer ticks attaching to the body. Deer ticks are brownish and much smaller than dog ticks. Tick bites are sometimes accompanied by a red bulls eye rash around the site. Lyme infection often has “flu-like” symptoms and can be treated with antibiotics. Contact a physician if you find a tick attached or experience flu-like symptoms.

In tick areas, such as long grass and woods, insect repellent containing DEET can be sprayed onto skin and clothing. Wear light colored clothing so ticks are more visible. Tuck long pants into socks and boots, and wear long sleeves. Do a “tick check” of clothing, people, and pets after being in potential tick areas. Ticks can be removed gently with tweezers and saved in a jar for later identification.





## Do You Have Photos of Significant Flooding?

Notice has just been received that FEMA in cooperation with Mass. DCR has started working on updating the flood plain maps for Essex County. As a first step, they are requesting input from the cities and towns on the accuracy of the base maps that will be used to determine where the flood plains are. These base maps are derived from the USGS topo maps. PRCWA knows that the current flood plain maps are way off for many locations in the watershed. This is a good opportunity for PRCWA to start interacting with FEMA on getting the flood plain delineation corrected. After the cities and towns provide their input, an updated base map will be published and public comment invited.

To have input into this process we are asking folks who have photos of flooded areas in the watershed taken during major storm events in the last 20 years or so to email them to [parker.river@verizon.net](mailto:parker.river@verizon.net). It is most helpful to have photos with visual benchmarks such as fences, buildings, trees, posts etc. that can be viewed now to determine the water height when the photo was taken.

For a brief description of this program, look at the following links:

FEMA Flood Map Modernization (MassGIS) [http://www.mass.gov/mgis/fema\\_mod.htm](http://www.mass.gov/mgis/fema_mod.htm)

Map Modernization (FEMA) [http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/mm\\_main.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/mm_main.shtm)



Poles "benchmark" water depth during Mother's Day Storm flooding on Parker St. in Newburyport.



## Flooding Photos Over the Years



**Little River near Little River Nature Trail**



**Flood overtops Hale Street in Newburyport**



**Residential yards flooded**



**Newburyport Industrial Area in flood**



**Flooding adjacent to MBTA station in Newburyport**



Label Here



# Parker River

## Currents

### Membership Dues - It's That time!

Yes, it IS TIME to RENEW your membership, or 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: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 Individual
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 Family:
- \_\_\_\_\_ #Adults, \_\_\_ #Children \_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 Supporting
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 Contributing
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 Sponsor
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$500 Patron
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$1,000 Benefactor