

PARKER RIVER CURRENTS

December 2010



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ANNUAL MEETING

Mark your calendar for January 30, 2011
1PM at the Newbury Library on Lunt Street in Byfield

We are pleased to announce that Massachusetts River Alliance Executive Director, Julia Blatt and Policy Director, Susan Beede will talk about the important work of the Alliance - work that impacts the well being of the Parker River Watershed, particularly issues on Safe Yield (how much water can be safely taken from the river and still maintain healthy ecosystems - the most critical problem we face) and improving stormwater management to reduce pollution from road runoff and other “non-point” sources. Read more about the work of the Alliance at <http://massriversalliance.org>.



MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance

A NOTE FROM THE PRCWA PRESIDENT

Dear Members and River Advocacy Friends,

I am so glad to have Julia Blatt and Sue Beede as speakers at our annual meeting. You will find them extremely interesting. Our vice-president, George Comiskey, is a River Alliance board member and very involved on behalf of Parker River. *See George's letter on safe yield and the Massachusetts proposed policy elsewhere in the newsletter.* It has been a busy year with our seasonal projects - Water Quality Monitoring finished just a week ago, the Turtle research project successfully released 25 Blanding's hatchlings, the roadkill survey volunteers identified high mortality areas, and the annual fish count volunteers were happy to see a slight increase in the number of river herring migrating upstream, and the Little River Nature Trail is being enjoyed by many.

In September I attended the New England Fishery Management Council meeting in Newport, RI to lobby for changes in regulations that would protect river herring, (the fish on our logo) from being netted and discarded in large numbers as “bycatch” by the large boats known as Midwater Trawlers. The Council meets again in January in Portsmouth, NH to present possible changes. PRCWA participated in community programs in Newburyport, Georgetown, and Newbury.

All of this and more is made possible by the support of our volunteers, members and river friends like you. Thank you so much for your continuing and committed support. I look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting in January.

~Marlene



Season's Greetings!



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What's Going on with River Herring



Did you find a post card in this newsletter?
Please sign and mail it.

Read on to find out why mailing this card is so important

Every spring river herring come from the ocean and swim upstream into the fresh water of the upper Parker to spawn. In the 1970's as many as 30,000 fish could be counted making their way up the fish ladder at the Central Street Dam in Byfield. In 1997 Parker River Clean Water volunteers began counting returning herring - but things were different. Counts of returning river herring were very low; sometimes even less than 1000. Volunteers would sometimes see fish but often as not, no fish were seen during their counting period. After counting for 12 years and about 4000 volunteer hours, PRCWA has the most complete data record of any Massachusetts coastal stream where river herring are counted. Many have wondered why the river herring counts have crashed.

One likely reason is the recent expansion of industrial-scale fishing using midwater trawlers. These 165 foot boats often work in pairs towing a net between them hauling up as much as 500,000 pounds of sea life. Along with the desired fish, immense numbers of herring and other unwanted fish are being netted by these oversized corporate operations. These unwanted fish, referred to as "bycatch", are discarded, usually dead. The trawlers have the ability to catch an entire school of fish - without leaving any behind as feed or to reproduce.

Herring are a major food source for many of the fish we like to eat and catch recreationally - striped bass, tuna, haddock and cod. At this time there is no comprehensive monitoring program that identifies what is being discarded. This practice is putting the marine ecosystems at great risk. Because of their declining numbers, fishing for river herring is illegal in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and North Carolina, but ironically hundreds of thousands are being discarded dead as bycatch by the trawlers. In an attempt to protect river herring, Parker River has joined with the Herring Alliance in urging the New England Fishery Management Council to make changes to the regulations that will set limits to the bycatch which dictates that fishing in certain areas must stop when too many river herring have been caught by trawlers. Read about the Herring Alliance at www.herringalliance.org

Please sign and mail the enclosed post card to help us lobby for a bycatch cap



A RIVER USED TO RUN THROUGH IT DROUGHT CONDITIONS ON THE PARKER

Pictures are truly worth a thousand words. Photos of the drought conditions in the Parker River illustrate the dry conditions experienced this summer and the plight of wildlife dependent on the river. The Parker River and Ipswich rivers have essentially become a series of pools rather than flowing rivers.

Flow statistics from the Parker River USGS gauge in Byfield

indicate that the flow data this year will be the lowest flow in the history of the Parker River noted on the Byfield gauge. Already 2010 has the lowest 20 days of flow on record. Mean daily flow in August is typically 6.7 to 7.3 cubic feet per second but the gauge this August was reading a flow of only 0.01 cubic feet per second. Last year the flow was 8 to 20 cfs.



"Stranded Snapping Turtle can't find water in the Parker River in Georgetown."



SAFE YIELD – PARKER RIVER’S MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM

Related to understanding the drought situation is the ongoing battle over what constitutes a “Safe Yield” withdrawal of water from streams by water suppliers. For some years river protection advocates have been at odds with the State over the definition of “Safe Yield.” There have been ongoing discussions and committee meetings that have yet to satisfy the concerns of river advocates – See the article, “Safe Yield of the Parker River Basin” on page 5.

Safe Yield refers to how much water can be pumped from the river by water suppliers and still leave a safe amount of water to protect river ecosystems. The State has failed to meet its own requirements regarding safe yield and doing required pumping tests before issuing water permits for the amount that can be pumped by a water supplier.

River advocates united under the River Alliance umbrella group have been working to develop a definition and formula for “Safe Yield” but there still exists considerable differences between their recommendations and what the State is proposing. At this point the State’s proposal is suggesting that a “Safe Yield” for the Parker could allow up to ten times more water to be pumped from the River than is currently being allowed – although the River is dry in a number of places! Go Figure!



The Parker River has dried up in Georgetown for the past several years.



Safe Yield of Parker River Basin



For those of you wondering what the future holds on what can be sustainably withdrawn from the Parker River, PRCWA recently submitted the following letter to EOEEA Policy Director, David Cash on the impending decision.

The Parker River Clean Water Association would like to thank all the members of the committees involved in the Sustainable Water Management Initiative process over the past year. The consequences of finding a proper safe yield methodology cannot be understated, considering the length (20 years) of the Water Management Act permits.

We would also like to thank Todd Richards of Fish & Wildlife for pulling together interim results of his Fish & Flow report to share with all the stakeholders. The well-researched report is an excellent indicator of how depleted streamflows directly impact aquatic habitat. We are hopeful that his work will play a significant role in developing appropriate safe yields and streamflow criteria. He is truly a river hero!

The Board of PRCWA has reviewed the safe yield options presented at the Technical Subcommittee meeting on September 14 for consideration by the committees. Safe Yield Option A, the most “protective” allocation would allow for nearly 10 times more than the currently permitted withdrawal from the Parker River basin. If adopted, Safe Yield Option A could have devastating consequences for the Parker River and the rare wildlife species that depend on it.

This past summer, the main stem of the Parker River, its tributaries and wetlands were severely stressed by the hot, dry weather and well pumping. By mid-August, data collected from the Byfield USGS gauge by one of our Board members indicated the Parker River had the lowest 20 days of flow on record and 63 of the lowest 100 days on record.

Top 100 lowest flow days from 1946-2010:

1993 - 2

1995 - 20

1999 - 15

2010 - 63

The upper reaches of the Parker River in the vicinity of the Georgetown wells went completely dry, as did several downstream reaches and tributaries. Photos documenting the impacts can be observed at our website: www.parker-river.org/PR_Drought_2010.html.

The situation was even more dire in Georgetown because rare Blanding’s turtles were hatching in priority habitat near the river, and did not have any aquatic habitat near the nests to facilitate their survival.

The Board of PRCWA is in agreement with the river advocates on the SWMI committee that safe yield be calculated on a sub-basin scale and on a monthly basis. With climate change models predicting increasing summertime drought frequencies, our watershed would truly suffer under any of the safe yield options presented on September 14.

We understand that state officials and environmental advocates have expended a great number of hours and resources in trying to determine an appropriate safe yield methodology for protection of our rivers. But, it is of utmost importance to get it right for the benefit of future generations who will inherit the consequences of these decisions. In closing, consider the words of famed abolitionist Lydia Child,

“Every human being has an attendant spirit; and wise are they who obey its signals. If it does not always tell us what to do, it always cautions us what not to do.”



LICENSE PLATES FUND PARKER RIVER CLEAN WATER ASSOCIATION GRANT



The Parker River Clean Water Association (PRCWA) was awarded a grant this summer from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET)! This funding will enable PRCWA to assess the long-term viability of the Blanding's Turtle, a listed species by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP).

Since the Trust's inception in 1988, the MET fund has provided over 17 million dollars to various environmental groups. The primary source of income is environmental license plate revenue which has funded over 650 grants. This is the third time that PRCWA has been the recipient of a MET grant in our 16-year history.

"Turtle research is one of the most popular programs that our citizen-science volunteers enjoy contributing to," states PRCWA President Marlene Schroeder. "Rare species are an indication of a healthy eco-system within a community. Their decline represents an irreplaceable loss to our watershed's natural heritage and biodiversity throughout the State."

Researchers and volunteers plan on intensely surveying all potential

nesting habitats and tracks in the upper watershed areas of the Parker River watershed. The empirical data and results will aid in developing conservation measures that will better protect Blanding's at the local, state and federal level.

PRCWA encourages those who wish to help MET preserve Massachusetts waterways to purchase one of four environmental license plates, the Leaping Brook Trout, the new Land & Water plate, the Blackstone Valley Mill, or the Right Whale & Roseate Terns. You can visit your local Registry of Motor Vehicles or reserve a plate online at the www.mass.gov link (search keyword MET) where you can learn more about the Trust and the programs it supports.

PRCWA also gives special thanks in this effort to our project partners, the conservation commissions of Georgetown, Boxford, and Groveland; the Boxford Trails Association/Boxford Open Land Trust (BTA/BOLT); the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, and our very supportive PRCWA members and the Citizen Science volunteers.



Gardens Begin to "Flourish" Around the Base of Signs



Folks passing by the Little River Nature Trail Signs in Newburyport on Hale Street and Storey Avenue have noticed the Little River Nature Trail sign gardens beginning to take shape this summer. Jerry Mullins, PRCWA board member, has spearheaded the effort to create a lovely garden by each sign with native plants that will attract butterflies and birds. The Country Gardeners of Georgetown has been most helpful and generous in obtaining plants for the gardens. PRCWA is very grateful for their expert help and would like to thank CGG president Barb Harrold, and members Pat Ratay and Deb Falcinelli who were especially helpful with plant transportation. PRCWA board member, Jack Van Loan, helped Jerry with much of the heavy work while board member Nick Hurlin helped to obtain a truckload of mulch. Sheila Mullins and PRCWA member Marilyn White faithfully helped with the hand watering to get the plants establish

Directions to the Little River Nature Trail
"Gateway to the Essex County Scenic Highway 1A"



Northern entrance is on Storey Avenue, across from the bus station. Users park in shopping plaza or bus lot. Follow the dirt path behind the large sign to trail beginning marked by small sign. Southern entrance is marked by a sign on Hale Street, just east of Hale St. Rt. 95 overpass. Follow dirt path behind sign. Parking is available in pull out near sign. Enjoy birds, butterflies and wildlife along the trail, viewing platform, and paved remnants of old Rt.95. Report unusual sightings to parker.river@verizon.net



Parker River

Currents



ANNUAL MEETING – Public Welcome!
Sunday, January 11, 2011 1:00–3:00pm
Newbury Library in Byfield
Season's Greetings!

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

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