

Parker River Clean Water Association

Newsletter

Spring 2017

PRCWA ANNUAL MEETING WITH TURTLE RESCUE LEAGUE

Learn about the great work of the Turtle Rescue League (TRL) at our Annual Meeting! The TRL provides rescue, rehabilitation, and transportation services throughout all of Southern New England. Hear from the experts on how to care for a sick turtle, what to do about a turtle in the road or in your backyard. PRCWA has benefited greatly from the services of this wonderful organization. They have provided invaluable care for many of our classroom head-start Blanding's Turtles.

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The annual meeting will be held 1-3 PM, Sunday April 9th at the Newbury Library on Lunt Street in Byfield, exit 55 off Rt. 95, Central Street west a short distance to Lunt Street.

Refreshments will be served during a short intermission break

A WONDERFUL THANK YOU TO LONGTIME VOLUNTEERS

This year we learned that two of our notable PRCWA volunteers will be stepping down from leadership positions in two of our most important programs. Susan Speak, who started our Blanding's Turtle rare species program in the early 2000's, will seek more time to spend with family and friends.

Susan was devoted to her work in the program. This effort involved countless hours in the field during the hot summer months tracking nesting turtles, protecting nests and moving hatchlings from their nests to the river making sure they were on their way in life's journey. It wasn't unusual to hear from her late at night after her encounters with foxes, coyotes, or ATV's. Sometimes this led to awkward conversations with the Georgetown police.

Most fondly, we remember her constant advocating for the program to the general public who shared the nearby athletic fields. A teacher by trade, it was wonderful to see the awe in children's faces as Susan explained, with turtles in hand, the importance of our work.



Lynette Leka has been involved as our Water Quality Program Coordinator for the last decade. She succeeded Frances Doyle in PRCWA's longest running program. Finding a volunteer lab specialist of her quality willing to dedicate the hours needed to do this work was not easy to do, but she did it without much fanfare or drawing attention her herself. A birder and naturalist, she understood how important this watchdog program was to everything living thing that uses the Parker River as a resource.

Lynette was very detailed in her analysis and her work drew the praises of several State agencies and officials. The Division of Watershed Management would request to use and cite her data every five years as part of their required assessments. Besides her lab work and report analysis, Lynette would spend a lot of time behind the scenes preparing for the monthly tests. She was great at answering questions and training new volunteers in the field.

Susan and Lynette will remain in some capacity with PRCWA. Susan head-starts Blanding's Turtles in her elementary classroom, a program that she began four years ago. Lynette is currently training her successor, Heather Gilbert.

PRCWA salutes these two fantastic people for their dedication to the mission of PRCWA!

2016 DROUGHT



A half-dozen dead Blanding's Turtles lie in bucket



The Parker River well fields lie empty in August

This summer was one of the worst droughts in the history of Essex County. The Parker River and its tributaries were especially affected by the prolonged lack of rainfall. In Georgetown, the 80-acre well field and river turned to a scene of sun-baked mud and dying vegetation. Other major streams ceased flowing or slowed to a trickle, including the basins in the communities of Rowley, Newbury and Newburyport. As groundwater supplies dwindled, towns were reporting homeowners private wells were also failing. The USGS depth gauge in Georgetown recorded the lowest level in its 52-year history.

The drought had a devastating effect on aquatic habitat, according to Mass Fisheries Director, Todd Richards. PRCWA submitted pictures and testified at meetings in front of the Mass Drought Management Task Force (DMTF) in Boston this summer. The Ipswich River Watershed Association and PRCWA urged that an emergency water ban be declared in the northeast, but the committee balked, instead opting to see more October reports from the drought indices.

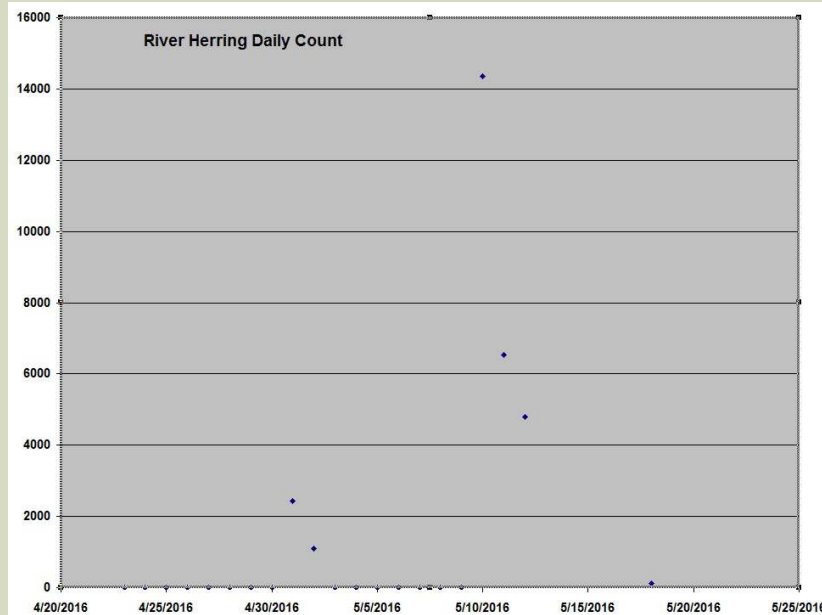
A letter crafted by DEP in August requested that communities institute water bans in the northeast, but the response and results were mixed and there were indications of confusion among towns about what actions needed to be taken. Some communities restricted outdoor water use, but did not institute full bans. West Newbury had instituted a full ban because its system could not keep up with the demand. PRCWA applauds the town of Rowley for instituting a full ban almost immediately, but other municipalities waited until the end of summer, if at all.

PRCWA believes there needs to be improvements in the Commonwealth's Drought Management Plan to allow for proper responses and action. Climate change models for the northeast predict more periods of prolonged droughts in future years, along with more intense storms. The task force reached out to watershed groups this winter and asked for suggestions to improve its plan. Ultimately, individual communities in the Parker River will need to step up their efforts in conserving water. As Ben Franklin once said, "When the well is dry we know the value of water."

2016 PROGRAM REPORTS

FISH COUNT

This year's fish count showed dramatic increases in herring by both the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) and PRCWA volunteer counters at the Central Street ladder in Byfield. Ben Gahagan credits the improved count to the repairs of the fish ladder and weir underneath the bridge. DMF indicates continued tagging efforts taking place, along with species transport to Pentucket Pond in Georgetown. Volunteers did note that river herring were being observed trapped in upstream passages that had gone dry during the drought. Over 33,000 Herring were estimated to have crossed over the counting ladder!



TURTLES

Despite oppressive drought conditions, 164 healthy hatchlings emerged from 18 Blanding's nests this year. Fifty of the turtles are thriving in classrooms as part of our head-start program in the Amesbury, Groveland, Newburyport and Ipswich school districts, along with the Georgetown Public Library.

Many thanks go out to Turtle Coordinator/PRCWA Board member, Mark Irving and the many volunteers who helped with the monitoring of these rare turtles. This all could not be possible without the grant funding from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust. PRCWA will be able to continue its work in the future with the help of a recent award of a federal State Wildlife Grant (SWG) administered by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

In the pictures below, Mark Grgurovic enlists the help of several friends in clearing nest areas of overgrown vegetation. Alan Aulson's "Goats-to-Go" assisted with the work.



2016 PROGRAM REPORTS (continued)



NEST BOX MONITORING

Listed below are the 2016 results of the data collected from our nest boxes of Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows located on Georgetown Water Department land and in the North Pasture in Newburyport. Typically, the nest boxes designed and maintained by Richard Lombard attract Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. The citizen science nest records are sent to the Cornell Ornithology Lab where their observations are compiled with those of other participants in a continent-wide effort to better understand and manage the impacts of environmental change on bird populations.

Georgetown Water Department Land

Year	Species	Total # Nest Attempts	First-Egg –Date of Season	Total # of Eggs	Total # of Nestlings	Total # of Fledgling	Nest Attempts Fledglings
2016	EABL	4	04/21/2016	24	18	17	4
	TRES	6	05/09/2016	28	22	22	5

North Pasture - Newburyport

Season	Species	Total # Nest Attempts	First-Egg –Date of Season	Total # of Eggs	Total # of Nestlings	Total # of Fledgling	Nest Attempts Fledglings
2016	TRES	1	06/05/2016	5	4	3	1

INVASIVE PLANT REMOVAL

We have been monitoring reports of Milfoil and Fanwort located in the upper-watershed Great Ponds. The Milfoil was chemically treated on Rock Pond in Georgetown and appeared successful in knocking back the spread of this growth. PRCWA assisted the Rock Pond Association in helping to combat this invasive plant, which will need constant monitoring. Pentucket Pond is starting to show the effects of Fanwort coming back along the northern and southern shores. The conservation commission and residents are looking at funding sources to prevent the overgrowth of the pond.

It was a different story dealing with Water Chestnut removal on Mill Pond in Rowley, especially Lower Mill Pond. PRCWA ran out of time in its efforts to remove all that was necessary to rid the pond of this spreading growth. Be on alert for a call out for more hands to assist in this effort this year with our partners, the Essex County Greenbelt Association. We extend our best wishes to Greenbelt's Americorps worker Maggie Brown who moves on to new career work in the environmental field.



FUTURE COSTS

Several years ago PRCWA occupied a booth at Market Square during Newburyport's Labor Day festivities. While people were interested in the programs that our organization offered, many residents and visitors were upset by the brown, smelly substance floating down the Merrimack River. People asked, "What is the cause of that and what can be done?" I explained that most cities upstream haven't taken steps to separate their combined sewer and stormwater systems, and the result during severe storms is sewage overflows across acres of impervious surfaces that drain into the river. I replied, "You need to complain to your Federal representatives and State and local officials and demand clean water action!"

For the most part, these calls go unheeded as government officials complain that the costs are too high to fix these systems and there are other budget priorities that must be undertaken. The Environmental League has long been advocating that one percent of the budget be allocated for the environment, but administration after administration has lowered this line item to about a half a percent today.

Many years ago, PRCWA attended a regional stakeholder meeting between EPA and municipal officials at Northern Essex Community College. The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) presented their Phase II plan for communities with designated stormwater areas. (stormwater runoff continues to be the number one cause of pollution in our rivers and streams). The Haverhill mayor kicked off the event by announcing that he would fight the new regulations tooth and nail, as the function hall erupted in applause. The small table of watershed advocates sat silently.

EPA's new five-year phase II program was supposed to begin its implementation in 2007. It's been ten years and counting since then. There is hope that it may happen this year, but with the dismantling of the EPA there is an air of great uncertainty that new regulations may again be delayed indefinitely.

The new Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) regulations are not meant to be too intrusive. The 2002-2007 MS4 program mainly called for a plan to control construction runoff and a 6-10 page yearly report. But, PRCWA found from the EPA website that many communities in our area were not complying with that. How difficult was it to report that so many catch basins were cleaned, new run-off regulation enacted, open space acquired, etc.? Many communities do these actions as part of their routine municipal service. The new plan calls for greater community outreach, mapping, testing and finding sources of the pollution.

It has been heartening to see the recent article in the Newburyport Daily News about the River Valley Charter School rally highlighting the cleanup program for the Merrimack River. The Gulf of Maine Institute (GOMI) students in our area have also done excellent work testing our river and estuaries. One study showed how much personal care and pharmaceutical products are ending up in our river system. Students in Amesbury, Groveland, Ipswich and Newburyport are enthusiastically helping PRCWA with our various programs.

The song by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young tells us to "Teach Your Children Well." For the future health of our planet, maybe the adults would be better served by listening to what the children are trying to tell us.



**Uncontained Sewerage
overflow in Massachusetts**

REMEMBERING MARLENE

Marlene Schroeder

June 23, 1936 – April 18, 2016

Marlene's first involvement with PRCWA was as presenter for several SYEFEST (School Yard Ecology For Elementary School Teachers) workshops. With her background as an elementary school teacher and passion for environmental activities, her workshops were very well received. She did these workshops for several years.

When Don Bade retired as President of PRCWA, Marlene took over. She increased the emphasis on general watershed education. For several years, PRCWA held an educational event in conjunction with the Mass Audubon Joppa Flats Center's open house.

When Marlene developed cancer in the fall of 2011, she no longer had the energy to continue as PRCWA President, but she remained involved as Vice President. When the Town of Newbury Stormwater Committee needed to host educational events, Marlene was there at the 'Stormwater Faire', helping the kids learn about stormwater. She also spearheaded the Dave Mountain Memorial Bench project, which included holding the dedication of an engraved stone bench in September of 2015 – the bench is located on land owned by the Byfield Water District next to the Parker River Central Street Dam.

Marlene was also active in environmental issues within the Town of Newbury. One of her greatest environmental achievements was getting Coffin's Island along Scotland Road protected as Conservation Land. She regarded the defeat of 2 separate proposals for a solar farm on the Pikul Farm property along Scotland Road as her crowning achievement, preventing a poorly sited solar project from impacting the Common Pasture, which is one of the largest 'wet meadow' areas in Massachusetts.

Marlene will be greatly missed by PRCWA.



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!

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

— **\$15 Individual**

— **\$25 Family:**

— **#Adults, _ #Children** —

— **\$50 Supporting**

— **\$100 Contributing**

— **\$250 Sponsor**

— **\$500 Patron**

— **\$1,000 Benefactor**

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