

The

FALL 2008

# WatershedNews

## *The President's Statement*

This newsletter should arrive around Thanksgiving, which coincides with a new moon this year; dark nights and full stomachs make for a lot of sleeping. WRWA's activities wind down as we head into dark winter days, although there will still be hikes (see inside) and planning is under way for the spring. Don't wait for us, though; get out on your own - one of the best ways to fight winter blues is a good walk on a blustery day.

On November 2, I was fortunate to be on the Keystone Arches Trail in Chester. Tom and Nancy Condon did a stellar job leading a hike for WRWA and Springfield Naturalists' Club members, pointing out flora and fauna and historical sites. The students at Gateway Regional High School have put up some excellent informative kiosks. It made for a great day.

On the trip to the meeting point to start the hike, I was anticipating a break from ubiquitous campaign ads, looking forward to being out in the woods "away from it all", but as I drove there, a radio commentator was reading from Walt Whitman, and talking about him as the "poet of democracy" who wrote about the people of a young republic, making the choices that built it. This made me think about the import of what WRWA does. When we work to protect our land, water, and air, and the species which use them, when we get other people out enjoying them and learning to value them, and when we teach that conservation ethic to the next generations, we contribute actively to the health and well-being of our community, our country, and our planet.

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This isn't just a matter of semantics or of saving a beautiful spot solely because, as Teddy Roosevelt said of the Grand Canyon "You cannot improve on it. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it." Stewardship of the land is also a matter of hardheaded economics. Too often decisions about natural resources put resource depletion and degradation in the category of "externalities" - costs ignored because they are not borne by those making the decision or getting the benefit. In tough economic times, it can be easy to think only in the short term. Responsible citizenship dictates that we take the long view, because those who come after us will pay that bill. Just as we exercise our right to vote, we need to exercise our right to protect

our land, air, and water.

We need your help - volunteers for river cleanup, storm drain labeling, the ASERP program, and a new initiative to document as many of the species along the Westfield as possible. We need adopt-a-stream volunteers, and people who push to get conservation science programs in the schools. We need volunteers for trails, water sampling, surveys of culverts and dams, and a host of other jobs. Get involved - with WRWA, the Wild and Scenic Committee, the Environmental Center at Westfield State, with other environmental organizations in our area - but get involved.

Mark Damon

## **River Cleanup**

By Mark Damon

On October 4th, about 150 volunteers (just under 100 showing up at the Riverwalk area in Westfield and another 40+ in Agawam) pitched in for WRWA's annual river cleanup. We covered sites on the Westfield in Huntington, Russell, Westfield, West Springfield, and Agawam, and on two tributaries - Little River and Powder Mill Brook - in Westfield. Our total for the day included 126 bags of trash, 28 tires, and 97 other large items, including fencing, a plastic bin, plastic roof sheeting, bicycles, a large car hood, easy chair, a box spring, a swing set, microwaves, a couch, a vacuum cleaner, and various construction debris and general metal bars. Special thanks go out to the students from Springfield Vocational-Technical High School who helped out so much at the Agawam site, to Lane Construction, who sent a large contingent with trucks to some of the Westfield and West Springfield sites, and to the Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts who did such a great job. Thanks to them and to all of you who helped make this one of the best cleanups ever!

## **Russell Biomass Update**

By Henry Warchol

In August of 2008 the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU) denied Russell Biomass LLC its request to be exempt from the Towns Zoning requirements. The average truck traffic entering Russell would be 75 to 80 vehicles per day to deliver 2,000 tons of wood daily, plus eight trips for ash removal. Furthermore, employee traffic would have much impact on the Town of Russell. Russell Biomass managing partner Peter Bos was disappointed in the DPU decision, stating that it results in a delay in the

construction. It is apparent that other methods of fuel delivery are to be implemented.

The Concerned Citizens of Russell, Trout Unlimited (TU), and Connecticut River Watershed Council (CRWSC) are appealing the Russell Biomass plant's approved permit by the DEP to withdraw 885,000 gallons of water per day from the river. This combined group effort has been challenged by Russell Biomass with the claim that TU and CRWC do not have standing. The hearing is scheduled for Dec. 22, 2008 at the DEP office.

## **WRWA Endeavors to Join Appeal of Russell Biomass Permit**

By Mark Damon

The Westfield River Watershed Association is one party in a brief presented to join an appeal of the permit issued to Russell Biomass for withdrawal of water from the Westfield River. The basis for the appeal is an inadequate assessment by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) of the maximal amount of water that may be withdrawn from the river without undue ecological effects. Other participants in the brief include the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, the Berkshire Environmental Action Team, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

## **A Survey of the Biodiversity Along the Westfield**

By Mark Damon

In order to better protect the Westfield's ecosystems, WRWA is trying to put together a database of the plants, animals, fungi, and microbes in the river and along its banks.

We're still at a preliminary stage now, but if you'd like to help, you can start by making notes of all the different species you can see in or near the water (by near, we mean up to 10 meters - about 33 feet - from the water's edge) and when and where you saw them. If you can't identify something, try to describe it and contact us; we may have someone who can. Watch the newsletter and website for more information as this project develops.

## **WRWA Represented At The Big MOE**

By Mark Damon

On September 28, WRWA had a booth at the Massachusetts Outdoor Exhibition (the Big MOE) at Hamilton Rod and Gun Club in Sturbridge. This well-attended event provides an opportunity for outdoor enthusiasts of all ages, and 30-40 people stopped by our booth and learned about the river cleanup, the ASERP program, the culverts survey program, canoeing, hiking, storm drain labeling, and other activities in the Westfield Watershed. We hope to see a few more of them around at our events in the coming year. Many thanks to Bill Rose for getting us registered for this event.

## **City Of Westfield Hires New Conservation Coordinator**

By Sheryl Becker

The Westfield Conservation Commission has hired Karen E. Leigh as Conservation Coordinator. Leigh was appointed by the Commission on October 28<sup>th</sup>, under a three-year contract, and officially began her job on November 24<sup>th</sup>. Leigh, a resident of Wilbraham, received her Master's degree in Wetlands Conservation, has served on the

Wilbraham Conservation Commission for seven years, and has worked as West Springfield Conservation Coordinator since July 2004. The post has been vacant since December 2007 and is seen by Mayor Boulanger as a "critical position", which must be filled despite the town's spending freeze.

A Conservation Coordinator's duties are to guide and support a town's conservation commission in the implementation of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (WPA), including the Rivers Protection Act. For the commission to be able to review proposed projects they must know all resource areas (wetlands) on the proposed site, how the project proposes to comply with the performance standards for each of those resource areas under the WPA, and appropriate courses of action for approval or denial. Site visits, reviewing plans, documents, reports and wetland delineations are all part of the review. In addition, it is always important for the coordinator to keep an open dialogue with the applicant(s) and representative(s) for the project, in order to smoothly facilitate the process.

The position sounds challenging to Leigh, although she is eager to work with the Westfield Conservation Commission, the mayor, and the city as a whole. "Generally I think it is always a challenge for a conservation coordinator or member to not be seen as either a radical environmentalist or excessively pro-development, but to ride the fence in between and consider all the issues involved. In addition, the Westfield coordinator position itself had been vacant for almost a year and previously only had part-time status. The commission recognized this to be woefully insufficient for their needs and they are eager for full-time technical and office support. I look forward to the challenge of organizing the department, increasing the knowledge and efficiency of the commission, and implementing educational programs." Leigh

is also eager to meet with the WRWA Board in order for them to impart their knowledge of the watershed and to collaborate on projects with her in the future.

Education is the key to better protection of wetlands and waterways, according to Leigh. She finds that many people are unaware that their town has a conservation commission and that the WPA exists, as well as how they can influence their natural resources, both positively and negatively. "When most people learn and understand what impacts their actions have on the environment, they are willing to change. I have found that with the majority of people, when they learn simple things they can do that will prevent environmental degradation, they are very agreeable. Unfortunately, for some folks only the law can change their actions."

Leigh also stated that she will encourage the Commission to update the town wetland bylaw to strengthen Westfield's wetlands protection. "My review of projects is not focused on the prevention of development, but rather, to allow people to work with their land while ensuring the protection of wetlands. This will ultimately provide everyone with clean water and better living conditions."

"I feel that, as with most volunteer boards, the Westfield Conservation Commission is a group of people who just want to do the right thing and give something back to their community. You have to respect that. I am excited that there is opportunity in Westfield to reach out to people with projects and educational programs. This is the fun part of the job. I believe that knowledge is to be shared, so to have an opportunity to give what I know to others is invaluable to me. Protecting the environment begins with knowledge. When a community sees and knows the beauty of their city and the threats to that beauty, they get involved. That's when change happens."

## Whistler's Mother & WRWA

By Tom Condon

Whistler's mother probably lived here in the Westfield River Watershed, for at least her husband did. Back on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, WRWA hosted a hike out to the Keystone Arches up along the West Branch of the Westfield River. These arched railroad bridges were the foundation for America's most advanced railroad in the 1840s. George Washington Whistler, Whistler's father, designed this railroad for the Western Railroad Company. To cross the Berkshires, the railroad had to climb to 1,458 feet, a tremendous task for the engines of the day, so the grade had to be as low as possible. Whistler designed a series of 10 arched bridges, 5 of which still remain, to ease the trains up along the river to the crest of the Berkshires.

A group of 18 joined us for the walk out to each of the bridges. Leaving Middlefield Road, we dropped down a gravel access road to the river and the first set of bridges. The Double Arch Bridge is the easiest to access, but it is still in use, so view it from the river, not from above. The Keystone Arch Bridge Trail follows the road until it approaches the active CSX tracks and then it veers off into the forest. The trail climbs gently over small rises as it passes through a forest rich in beech trees. The students at Gateway High School have erected a 3 signs to help orient you to the cultural and natural history of the area.

Following the trail will take you to the top of two of the Keystone Arch Bridges. The view from the top is spectacular, but if you have a fear of heights, you may want to view them from afar. The tallest bridge rises 70 feet from the river below and there are no railings. Between the two bridges is the rock cut cleared for the rails and used for fill. This section of the railroad has been

abandoned when CSX rerouted the line, so you can safely walk the old rail-bed and see where the men cut and blasted the rocks.

Upon finishing this rail, George Washington Whistler moved to Russia to take on a new challenge, the Moscow to St. Petersburg Line. He unfortunately would die of cholera on this job. His wife and her young sons were left destitute. One son, James McNeil Whistler, went on to become the famous painter of his mother.

## **Join WRWA for Other Outings This Winter**

### **Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow**

Date: February 22, 2008

Join WRWA for a natural history based cross-country skiing trip this winter at Maple Corners Farm in Granville. The farm rents skis, but you can bring your own as well. Maple Corners grooms many miles of trails of varying degrees of difficulty. We'll base our journey on the skill levels of the participants and the snow conditions at the time. Please call Tom Condon (564-0895) to register for the hike and get the current details.

## **Nighttime at Noble View**

Date: December 13, 2008

Join us for a walk under the full moon to an outstanding view of the Westfield River Watershed. We'll meet at 7pm at the Nobleview Parking area off of South Quarter Road in Russell. The hike is along the AMC's access road. We will stop occasionally and call owls. Dress for the weather, bring along a flashlight, and a mug for hot chocolate, as well as a snack to share. There is no fee for the hike, but Nobleview does request a donation. Please call Tom Condon (564-0895) to register for the hike. We should expect to be out for 2 hours.

## **Need A Holiday Gift Idea?**

"Five Feet and Rising: The Flood of '55" DVD's are available at The Little Black Dog Gallery in Pilgrim Marketplace at 36 Union Avenue in Westfield for \$9.95. Hours are 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Mon. – Sat. and noon to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. "Five Feet and Rising," recounting the flood that devastated Westfield and surrounding communities, includes historical photos and interviews with survivors. For further information, contact Kathy Meyer at 568-4252.

## Westfield River Symposium

The symposium will be held on Saturday, March 28, 2009 in the Scanlon Banquet Hall at Westfield State. At this point, the theme has yet to be decided, but it will involve a number of speakers in the morning and a couple of field trips in the early afternoon.

**Here are the names and addresses of our officers and directors for 2008-2009.**

<b>Officers:</b>					
President:	Mark Damon	54 Pleasant Street	Westfield	01085	572-9991
First Vice President:	Bill Rose	39 Sunset Terrace	Feeding Hills	01030	786-0195
Second Vice Presidents:	Sheryl Becker	101 Regency Park Dr.	Agawam	01101	821-0818
	Heather Comee	10 Maple Street	Southwick	01077	427-5089
Secretary:	Tom Condon	80 General Knox Road	Russell	01071	564-0895
Treasurer:	Kenneth Taylor	8 Greylock Street	Westfield	01085	562-4947
<b>Directors:</b>					
	Tracy Adamski	26 Aldrich St.	Northampton	01060	572-3256
	Allan Guagliardo	72 Colony Circle	Westfield	01085	568-4770
	Kathy Meyer	87 Old Farm Road	Westfield	01085	568-4252
	George Reichert	75 Blair Road	Blandford	01008	848-2074
	John Shuttleworth	63 Warwick St.	Longmeadow	01106	567-3648
	Fran Siska	47 Salvatore Drive	Westfield	01085	562-4998
	Phillip Sousa	29 Yankee Circle	Westfield	01085	568-3982
	Bob Thompson	10 Lyon Hill Road	Chester	01011	354-9636
	Henry Warchol	2 Sackville Road	Westfield	01085	562-3467
	Mike Young	721 West Road	Westfield	01085	562-8498
<b>Honorary Directors:</b>					
	Dan Call	777 College Highway	Southwick	01077	569-9677
	Dave Pardoe	25 Sampson Road	Huntington	01050	

For more information on WRWA's activities, check our website at [www.westfieldriver.org](http://www.westfieldriver.org)

