

The

Fall 2011

WatershedNews

The President's Statement

Hi Everybody,

The weather has been unpredictable this fall, but we did manage to have two great activities: the "Fly Fishing Clinic" and "River Clean Up". Both were a big success and a reports on both are in this issue of the newsletter. There are articles of interest concerning the watershed. If anybody has an article of interest to include in future newsletters, please contact a board member. We're attempting to diversify our newsletter a bit, make the content more than the same wrap-ups and updates on our events we provide each issue. So please send us any article or "column" ideas that you think would be interesting.

We all are getting ready to snuggle in for the winter and the board will be busy planning the activities and events for the upcoming year. We are always thinking of something new to try, so if anybody has an idea for an event or activity then contact a board member. Our members and readers are our most important asset.

Enjoy the holidays and be ready to "JUMP IN" with ideas.

Bill Rose

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Agawam Sewer Line Break: Violation of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act

By Sheryl Becker

On March 17th, 2011, Agawam DPW was notified of an unattended backhoe in town. The DPW arrived to find not only a backhoe, but raw sewage gushing out of a broken pipeline. The line was repaired within a few days; however 720,000 gallons of raw sewage flowed into the Westfield River, which is within 500 yards of the break site, and the surrounding Meadows section of town. The cleanup of the Meadows, including extracting the excavator from the wetlands, took many days, and was done at the town's expense. On August 11th, following an investigation by the Agawam Police, 30 year-old Joseph O'Malley of West Brookfield was indicted by a grand jury for allegedly causing the leakage.

O'Malley was allegedly using an excavator on property near (but not part of) his business, Extreme Paintball, when he struck a sewer line, causing the leak. The location of the breakage is protected wetlands, and O'Malley had no permission to excavate there. According to the District Attorney's Office, O'Malley was digging in the area to prevent water runoff from entering his property.

In conjunction with the Agawam Police Department, staff from the Wetlands and Waterways program of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's western regional office investigated the case, resulting in O'Malley being charged by a grand jury with violating the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, the Massachusetts Clean Water Act, and injury to real or personal property of the Town of Agawam. He worked in wetlands without permission of the Agawam Conservation Commission. Under the Wetlands Protection Act, local conservation

commissions set conditions for any work done within 100 feet of a wetland. O'Malley was arraigned in late August on charges of unlawful altering of bordering land subject to flooding, discharge of pollutants and injury to real or personal property.

According to 22News, Agawam Mayor Richard Cohen said that he hopes taxpayers will be spared the cleanup expense, now that the case is in the hands of the courts. "The Town was the victim here, and it's very important to me that we turn it over to the DA's office," Cohen said. "It's very important because taxpayers are not going to pay for this."

What's With This Weather?

By Julie Richburg

Westfield River Invasive Species
Partnership

Tornado in June, Irene in August, snow in October.... whether you feel strongly about the human influences on our climate or think this year is just exceptional, we have lately had to face some weird weather events in Western Massachusetts. In some cases, natural disturbances can be a boon to native species and habitats - in fact some species require disturbance to survive. Think about early successional habitats such as grasslands or shrublands. These areas need periodic disturbance to keep from becoming forest and shading out the sun loving grasses and other plants. Forests also are adapted to periodic disturbance. Wind and ice storms cause canopy gaps allowing trees, shrubs, and other plants (such as blackberries) that need a lot of sunlight to get established. Some of our local wildlife also takes advantage of these openings. For instance, how many of you have seen black bear scat just full of blackberry seeds?

But disturbance is also good for more insidious members of our local flora – non-native invasive plants. Invasive plants often have characteristics that allow them to rapidly take over in disturbed areas – ability to grow quickly, produce abundant seed, and to tolerate a wide variety of soils. Plants such as autumn olive, garlic mustard, and Japanese stiltgrass grow quickly in disturbed soils such as those along roadsides or the banks of rivers.

The recent flooding of the Westfield and other rivers in Western Massachusetts and Vermont has created vast swaths of disturbed areas with lots of new exposed soil. These areas are ripe for germinating invasive plants where there is a seed source or other plant parts (such as rhizomes) that can start new populations. In addition to these plants' seeds and rhizomes moving to new locations downstream via floodwaters, our efforts to clean-up and repair storm damage may also spread these plants if we are not careful with the fill we bring in or moving our equipment from contaminated to clean areas.

Japanese knotweed is a disturbing example. This species occurs along many sections of the Westfield River and has been spreading downstream during normal high water events. Knotweed, also known as Japanese bamboo, is a large perennial plant with hollow shoots and broad triangular leaves. It has an extensive underground rhizome (root-like structure) that can sprout even if broken into pieces. Reports from the Westfield watershed, as well as watersheds throughout Western Mass and Vermont describe large tracts of land covered with sediment following the flooding and newly created river banks covered with sprouts of Japanese knotweed. One family along the Deerfield River has gone from having a very small stand of knotweed at one corner of their property, to knotweed sprouts throughout nearly all of their fields and forests – about

26 acres of infestation! In Vermont, organic farmers are considering walking away from some fields as the only way to get rid of the new knotweed infestation may require herbicide.

Equally troubling is that early reports are indicating that areas previously infested with knotweed did not provide the level of bank stabilization that our native plants do. As our climate changes, one of the best things we can do for our native species and habitats is try to make them as healthy as possible, by preventing invasive species from becoming established, controlling them if they do get established, and ensuring that other threats like erosion and pollution are prevented or addressed. If you own land within the Westfield River watershed, learn about what plants are on your property, especially non-native invasive ones. With a little planning and some work to control some key species, you will be able to help our native habitats survive or regrow following the next tornado, flood, or October snowstorm. And your downstream neighbors will thank you!

Fly Fishing Clinic

By Bill Rose

The fly fishing clinic was held on September 17th. The weather was ideal and we had 27 people including children, young adults and senior citizens, some there for a second time. Some of the children helped to gather insects out of the river and we even had an entire family get involved. The fly tying demonstration had people around the table for the entire event and folks brought their fly rods to learn how to cast with them, which kept the fly casting instruction area busy all day. This event gives people a first-hand experience of what the river has to offer. During the clinic participants mentioned that they are very interested in attending other WRWA activities

Annual River Cleanup

By Lynn Bannon

It is time to stop using river banks as dump sites. On October 2 this year, teams of volunteers spread out across the Westfield River watershed in Westfield, West Springfield and Russell to clean up the banks of the Westfield River and its tributaries. At this year's annual cleanup, sponsored by WRWA and organized by long-time Board member Mark Damon, ninety-two bags of trash were dragged out. The volunteers also removed six tires, three mattresses, two car hoods, a shopping cart, a car door, an axle, a steering assembly, two tarps, a traffic cone, siding, a muffler, an exercise bike, three cushions, various wood piles and boards and assorted scrap metal.

The more than 60 volunteers that rainy day included many high school and college students. A large work crew, sent courtesy of Lane Construction of Westfield, tackled heavy jobs and used their trucks to haul the trash to the various pickup areas where the local departments of public works removed it. So why is there still so much trash to remove every year?

Different locations tell different stories. In addition to those who dump large items like tires, car parts and furniture, there are individuals who never got that 1960's message, "Every litter bit hurts." Rest stops in Russell show that drivers park near the river, then toss their coffee cups and other food and beverage trash out the window, rather than bring it home. Areas with a place to wade on a hot day show that families with babies change diapers and leave them on the river's banks. The dike in Westfield occasionally hosts those who drink their beer and alcohol, then smash the bottles. Signs of illegal camping in different areas include all kinds of trash around the camp sites.

As those who live in this area know, our watershed houses an incredibly rich variety of wildlife and diverse recreational opportunities. The watershed is a treasure well worth protecting and preserving. WRWA, with the help of caring citizen volunteers, will continue to clean up and spread the word about our wonderful watershed.

Agawam Annual WRWA/CRWC Cleanup

By Sheryl Becker

Along the lower portion of the Westfield River another successful cleanup took place on October 22. The Agawam cleanup, along the lower Westfield River and along the Connecticut River near the confluence, had to be rescheduled due to both high water levels and dangerous conditions. More than 40 people showed up to help beautify and protect the riverfront areas, including United Water employees, who did a wonderful job not just picking up debris and litter at Pynchon Point, but also cutting tree limbs with a chain saw, brush clearing, and power sweeping river silt from the walkway down to the river. In addition, Nancy Bobskill, the Agawam High School environmental science teacher, along with about 10 of her students, donated their much appreciated time and effort to the cleanup. Last, but not least, we owe Dick Bennett, of the Agawam Beautification Committee, a great deal of thanks this year, as he assisted with preparation, organization of volunteers, and the work itself. Another visitor was Channel 22, WWLP! The newsclip can be seen at: <http://www.wwlp.com/dpp/news/local/hampden/volunteers-cleanup-along-area-rivers>. A photo album of the day's work can be seen at: <https://picasaweb.google.com/sher1earth/2011RiverCleanup>.

Westfield Stormwater Surchage

By Cory Andros

Residents of Westfield are now required to pay a stormwater surcharge of \$5.00 per quarter, after the City Council passed an ordinance establishing a Stormwater Utility in 2010. The Department of Public Works will use those revenues to cover the costs of repairs and to maintain the existing stormwater infrastructure.

Jimmy Mulvenna, the Public Works Director and manager of the stormwater utility budget, explained what the money is being used for. The surcharge generates about \$584,000 a year that is used to contract street-sweepers for the City of Westfield, equipment for catch basins, and to fund other small maintenance projects (three or four were completed this year). The street-sweeping was previously funded by the Highway Department, but their budget was cut by nearly \$150,000. Four employees of that department have switched to Public Works, where a portion of the overall surcharge goes to their salaries.

Flooding from Tropical Storm Irene

By Mike Young

It's been a wild year for meteorological events in western Massachusetts, with blizzards last winter, tornadoes in early June, flooding in August, and a freak October snowstorm that resulted in massive power outages! Tropical Storm Irene brought 6-11+ inches of rainfall to the Westfield Watershed within 12-18 hours on August 28, with rainfall totals at some locations expected to recur only 2-3 times in a thousand years! Those rains produced historic flooding along the uncontrolled West

Branch of the Westfield River, with the greatest flows ever recorded at the stream gage just upstream of Huntington (which has been operating for 78 years), and substantial damage in Chester. The main stem of the river also experienced flooding, with stores along Rt. 20 in Westfield sustaining some damage. However, the Knightville Dam on the East Branch of the Westfield River, and the Littleville Dam on the Middle Branch prevented worse flooding from occurring on those streams and the main stem. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimates that river levels would've risen an additional 10 feet (reaching to within 4 feet of the 1955 flood of record) in those downstream areas had the dams not been operating, and credits those two dams with preventing an additional \$200 million worth of damage.

Tom Wisnauskas, who manages the dams for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, reports that they were close to issuing warnings for downstream areas at the peak of the rainfall, as the levels behind the reservoirs were rising very rapidly. Luckily, the rainfall began to subside, and the dams were able to control the flows. The Knightville Dam normally has no pool behind it during the summer, but the storm filled the reservoir to about 55% of capacity, reaching to within about 24 ft of the level of the spillway after Tropical Storm Lee passed through the region a few days after Irene. The Littleville Dam impounds Littleville Lake, a backup water supply for the city of Springfield and a recreational resource for the area. Its level rose to within about 20 feet of its spillway, storing about 49% of the reservoir's capacity at that peak level. Substantial amounts of sediment were deposited into the upper parts of the reservoir, some of which has now been removed. Thanks to Tom Wisnauskas for providing the information on which this article is based, including a copy of the USACE "Reservoir Regulation Bulletin, Flood of August 2011 (Tropical Storm Irene).

Gift Memberships / Membership Renewals

If you have someone on your holiday gift list who cares about the environment and really doesn't need more stuff, a gift of membership in the Westfield River Watershed Association is a thoughtful way to honor your family member, friend or colleague and help protect and promote this special natural resource. Our memberships run by the calendar year, so your own membership will soon be up for renewal too. You can use the form on the next page for either purpose, but please write "GIFT" at the top of the form if you're giving a gift membership (we'll use your name from the check to acknowledge your gift in our welcome letter to the recipient). A WRWA membership is a great way to celebrate a birthday, graduation or other important event, as well!

Here are the names and addresses of our officers and directors for 2011-2012.

Officers:					
President:	Bill Rose	39 Sunset Terrace	Feeding Hills	01030	786-0195
First Vice President:	Sheryl Becker	101 Regency Park Dr.	Agawam	01101	821-0818
Second Vice President:	Brian Conz	53 Balfour Drive	Springfield	01118	572-8084
Secretary:	Mike Young	721 West Road	Westfield	01085	562-8498
Treasurer:	Fran Siska	47 Salvatore Drive	Westfield	01085	562-4998
Directors:					
	Cory Andros	139 N. Blandford Rd.	Blandford	01008	231-4330
	Mark Damon	54 Pleasant Street	Westfield	01085	572-9991
	Allan Guagliardo	72 Colony Circle	Westfield	01085	568-4770
	Timblin Judy	15 Lake Shore Drive	Southwick	01077	569-9018
	Kathy Meyer	39 Rachael Terrace	Westfield	01085	568-4252
	Allan Ouimet	16 Russell Rd.	Westfield	01085	539-0964
	George Reichert	75 Blair Road	Blandford	01008	848-2074
	Aaron Reyes	100 Park Drive	Westfield	01085	572-8380
	Phillip Sousa	29 Yankee Circle	Westfield	01085	568-3982
	Henry Warchol	2 Sackville Road	Westfield	01085	562-3467
Honorary Directors:					
	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

WESTFIELD RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

2012 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New _____ or *Renewal* _____ ? (Note: Memberships run Jan.-Dec. Memberships submitted on Oct. 1 or later will be credited to the next calendar year.)

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____
(We send email updates re: events to our members, so it's very helpful to have your email.)

NEWSLETTER: I would like to receive the WRWA newsletter by (check one):
Email link _____ (saves on postage and printing) or Snail Mail hard copy _____

GET INVOLVED: Please fill out this next section, even if you've filled it out in previous years. I would like someone from WRWA to contact me about becoming actively involved in the following areas:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| _____ River Cleanup | _____ Fishway Monitoring |
| _____ Water Quality Studies | _____ Salmon Stocking and Restoration |
| _____ Open Space Preservation | _____ Membership Development |
| _____ Newsletter, Public relations | _____ Serve as Board Member |
| _____ Event staffing | _____ Other (please offer details/ideas): |

Please make check payable to "Westfield River Watershed Association, Inc." and **Send to:** WRWA Memberships, P.O. Box 1764, Westfield, MA 01086

Membership Categories (check one):

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| _____ Individual (\$20) | _____ Family (\$30) | _____ Student (\$10) |
| _____ Life Member (\$300 and up) | _____ Business (\$50-100) | _____ Corporation (\$100-500) |
| _____ Government (\$100-300) | | |

Additional Support: If you would like to make an additional contribution to support the activities of the Westfield River Watershed Association, please note the additional amount here: \$_____.
(Note: WRWA is a 501-c-3 charitable organization. Membership dues and additional donations are tax deductible.)

Thank you for your support of the Westfield River Watershed Association. www.westfieldriver.org

