Blackstone River Monitor

Summer 2006 **Volume 6, Issue 2**

Newsletter of the Blackstone River Watershed Association

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The Blackstone River Watershed Association (BRWA) was founded in 1976 and is dedicated to restoring, enhancing and preserving the Blackstone River system and its watershed.

From the President...

by Jim Plasse

I would like to start by thanking all the hardy racers and spectators who attended the 30th Annual Canoe/Kayak Race, in spite of the bad weather conditions.

This has been an exciting spring for the BRWA. We are in our third year of water quality monitoring and members of the newly formed "Stream Team" have successfully completed a shoreline survey of the Mumford River. We are also working closely with other grass roots watershed and environmental groups in the Blackstone Valley, under the umbrella of the Blackstone River Coalition, to coordinate and deal with regional watershed issues such as storm water management and local flooding.

I would like to thank Julie Riendeau for all her hard work as BRWA office manager and invasive species control coordinator. Julie is moving on to another job after two years with the organization. We will all miss her cheerful presence and enthusiasm. Julie was instrumental in making the effects of invasive plants known to the BRWA and residents of the community and in initiating our invasive species control program. The board of directors joins me in wishing her well in her new endeavors.

Nicole Wenger, our environmental outreach coordinator will be taking on the invasive species control duties. Nicole is a familiar face in the Blackstone Valley, she lectures on bird banding for Mass Audubon, teaches science classes to home-schooled kids, sat on the Massachusetts Envirothon committee, and has worked as a park interpreter at River Bend Farm Visitor Center. Nicole is coordinating our program that deals with the removal of 12-acres of Asian Water

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Canoe and Kayak Race 2006

Oh what a day! The30th Canoe/Kayak Race was supposed to be a party unlike any other that we had hosted. We had planned so many wonderful events. Several area musicians were coming to play, Puffles the Clown and Smokey the Bear were coming to entertain us, and we had planned many fun events on the canal.

However, Mother Nature had her own plans. The rains came, and came, and came! The River rose but not as much as the forecasters had predicted. DEP was nervous about the level of water in the treatment plants along the river and of course, safety was on everyone's mind. The River was drastically low days before the rains. Some paddlers called asking if there were spots where they might have to 'walk' their boats because of the water being so low. Therefore, when the rains came the paddlers were ecstatic! Water is what they wanted and water is what they got! The Millbury flow gauge had hit 5 3/4' and seemed to steady between there and 6'. The Friday before the race, I got one phone call after another from folks stating their concerns, asking if the race would be cancelled or to say, "no, don't cancel we need to race, race, race! We want to paddle that River!"

The morning of the race brought confusion. Things that could have and should have been set up weren't due to the weather. Some volunteers slept in thinking the rain had cancelled the race.

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thebrwa.org

Earth Day 2006

On Earth Day, April 22, 2006, Boy Scouts from Massachusetts and Rhode Island held a Camporee at the Blackstone River and Canal State Park in Uxbridge, MA. The scouts got a lesson in water quality monitoring from Jim Plasse, BRWA President and Water Quality Monitoring Coordinator for the midsection of the Blackstone River.

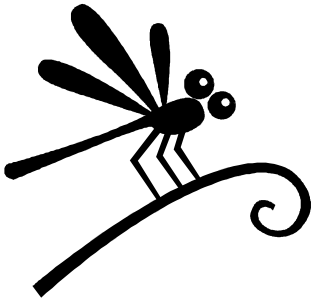


Lions' Club - Troop 1 - Bellingham, MA

BRWA Volunteers Improve Riverdale Portage Path

In April, BRWA volunteers repaired and improved the portage path at the Riverdale Dam. In addition to cutting brush and removing debris from last fall's flood, the BRWA volunteers installed landscaping timber steps that will provide bank stabilization and prevent erosion. The flooding and subsequent release of the dam floodgates by personnel at Riverdale Mills washed away the old canoe portage location. The portage path had to be rerouted downstream to a new gravel put-in area. In addition, two new metal signs were installed at the portage site to direct boaters toward the portage path and away from the dam and Mill's industrial area.

In other river access news, contracts will be issued to improve the Blackstone Gorge viewing area and boat launch area. According to Blackstone River and Canal Park Director, John Pelczarski, "in-house" park staff will do the improvement to the river access sites at Plummer's Landing, Hartford Street and Millville Lock.



Race … from Page 1

Many racers woke up to the rains that morning and opted to stay in bed. However, the diehards came to race.

Seventy-five racers braved the weather and raced with some of the fastest times we've ever recorded. The timers barely got to the finish line when the first of the racers was dashing in! We experimented a tad this year. The 12-mile race started in South Grafton so that all racers could end at River Bend Farm. With that starting point though, an additional portage was encountered. We haven't heard of any complaints yet about that starting line and may keep it for future use. The traditional starting line was used for the recreational classes. The only difficulty was the loss of the walking bridge behind Polyfoam Corporation due to the October floods. It made it hard for friends and family to watch the race starting line there. As soon as the racing class went by the recreational classes were in and gone!

Everyone got to try out the new portage at Riverdale Mill that was created by the BRWA and some of our veteran paddlers. Though it appears to be a long distance around the dam, the new stairs and markings helped to get the racers through as did the Northbridge Boy Scouts.

All total there were 53 participants in the recreational classes and 22 participants in the racing class. We did have a couple of upside boats here and there, but everyone ended the race safely. There was much concern about the 'S' curves below the spillway due to the fast moving water and the shortage of volunteers, so we ended the race at the spillway instead of the Stanley Woolen Mill portage. We know many paddlers wanted to head for the 'S', but without enough safety personnel and the rising waters, the decision and concern for safety had to be made. Hopefully, next year we'll resume ending the race by going through the spillway and up the canal.

Once at River Bend Farm, the Uxbridge First Night Committee and the Mendon Lions served food. Awards were handed out to the 1st through 3rd place racers. Lisa DeHaan, one of our safety volunteers, received the Good Sportsman Award, donated by the Maple Sugar Gang, for her assistance with a tandem team that overturned. Ray Boswell accepted the 1st Swimmer of the Race award for his 'splash'. Paul Metzer of Sutton was the recipient of the Sunken Kayak award as he was reported to have rolled over more times than any other racer this year.

We would like to thank all of the volunteers, who showed up despite the weather. Many thanks to our water safety crew; Ranger Chuck Arning, Ranger Sue Andrews, Ranger Ray Boswell, Linda Konvalinka from the Blackstone Valley Paddle Club, and Lisa DeHaan. Mike Baril and the Central Massachusetts Public Safety Association provided our safety crew on land. We extend a huge thank you to John Pelzarski, Val Stegemeon, and the crew at River Bend Farm for all they do (and they do a lot for us!). We would appreciate it if you took some time to view the list of our sponsors and raffle donors on our website at www.thebrwa.org. Without our sponsors, we wouldn't be able to hold this race and we appreciate everything they do for us. Please patronize them whenever possible.

We thank Bill and Val Paul for their hard work that day as well as members of the BRWA Board for coming out in rain. We thank Richard Chiros of Woodhaus in Grafton for juggling 100 odd tasks during the entirety of the race

For those racers still waiting for their trophy - we're just about finished. We had a small problem getting more boats. You should be seeing your trophy in the mail soon. If you don't see it by July 1, please contact me.

There are still LOTS of T-shirts for sale for $10.00 each. Contact me if you would like to purchase a shirt.

If you have any comments about what you'd like to see at future races or any input about the race at all, please contact me at (508) 839-9548 or at roseisrose@hotmail.com. We hope those of you who did participate enjoyed yourselves and let's hope the next race is a tad warmer with some sunshine!! See you next May!!!
Rosemary Longo – Race Chair

Photos courtesy of Jeff Davis of Northbridge





Paddle!!! Paddle!!!



Kayaks were well represented in the Race



Fathers and sons - what an adventure!



Dad and daughter, smiling and braving the



Lisa and Linda –
a couple of great safety crewmembers



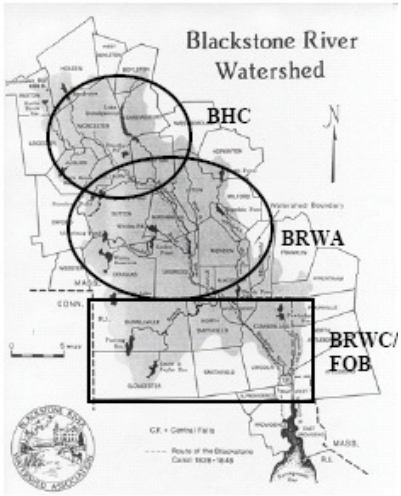
The Grafton crew is off!!!

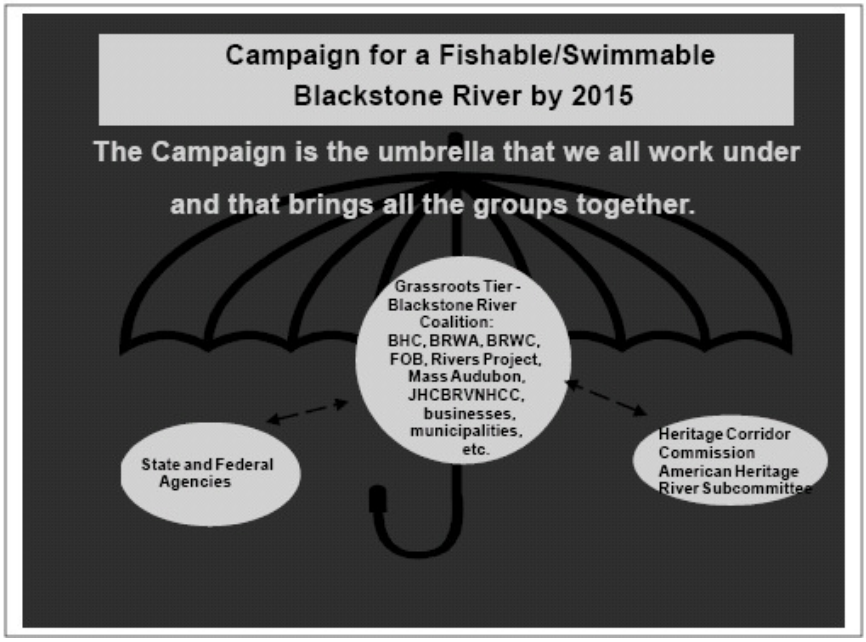
The Blackstone River Coalition (BRC) Explained: Where Does the BRWA Fit In?

The BRWA is one of the BRC's many partner organizations, agencies, municipalities, and academic institutions working to restore the Blackstone River and to improve the health of the Blackstone River watershed. The BRC's primary goal is to coordinate efforts and fully implement the Campaign for a Fishable/Swimmable Blackstone River by 2015. The Campaign is the umbrella that brings all the groups together and working toward that common goal. All of the BRWA's programs and projects help win the Campaign.

Members include:

Blackstone Headwaters Coalition (BHC)
Blackstone River Watershed Assn. (BRWA)
Blackstone River Watershed Council/
Friends of the Blackstone (BRWC/FOB)
Mass Audubon
Save The Bay
Conservation Law Foundation
Trout Unlimited
College of the Holy Cross
John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley
National Heritage Corridor Commission
American Heritage Rivers Program





Mumford River Stream Team Survey Update

With sunscreen, clipboards and GPS units in hand, stream team volunteers set out in May and June to visually assess the health and condition of the Mumford River in the towns of Sutton, Douglas, Northbridge and Uxbridge, Massachusetts. The stream team river survey was funded through a grant provided by UNIBANK and survey training was conducted in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Riverways Adopt-A-Stream Program and the Blackstone River Watershed Association.

Dedicated and hard working volunteers collected data along the entire 13.8 mile Mumford River. Specifically, volunteers assessed the river for signs of pollution, trash, erosion, and structural factors effecting storm drains and dams. On Wednesday, June 14, 2006, at 6:30pm at the River Bend Farm Visitor Center, stream team surveyors and MassRiverways will meet to discuss and prioritize action plans to present to local town officials. Action items will aid in the protection, preservation and clean-up efforts throughout the surveyed communities. If you would like more information or would like to be part of this team, please contact Nicole Wenger at (508) 944-5886 or via email at nwenger@comcast.net.

A very special thank you to UNIBANK, local town conservation commissions, MassRiverways - Adopt-A-Stream, the Blackstone Heritage and Canal State Park, neighbors and businesses abutting the Mumford River and the following survey volunteers: Sam and Douglas Bowen, Nancy DeMers, Olivia/Glenn/Evan Herbert, Cal Koorster, Barbara and Jennifer Lonergan, Shelley and Mitchel McGonagle, Beth and Paul Milke, Howard and Nancy Perkson, Maggie and Jim Plasse, Michael Pouliot, Jean and Valerie Sahakian, Alex Thompson, Dawn Andersen, Erin Andersen, Bob and Joanne St. Germaine, Tyler and Jackie Hirsch and Valerie and Guylan Qudsieh.



Volunteers survey the Mumford River at Wild Bird Gardens

Stormwater Swirls Trouble

By Dona Neely

Stormwater is just rainwater or melting snow – right? Well, it should be, but due to the increasing impacts of industrial, commercial, and residential development, EPA's "National Water Quality Inventory: 2000 Report to Congress" lists urban runoff and storm sewers as the fourth leading source of degraded water quality in rivers, the third most significant cause of pollution in lakes, and the second leading cause of impairment in estuaries.

Development results in an increase in impervious surfaces and a decrease in vegetated and forested land. Impervious surfaces account for 95-100% of the land used for a shopping center or business district and 35-45% of the land used in a medium density residential development. Rooftops, roads and parking lots cause surface runoff; water that is directed to storm drains that discharge directly into our lakes and streams. Along the way, the stormwater gathers debris, litter, spilled fuel and oil, chemical residues, animal waste, and other pollutants and rushes them to our waterways. Additionally, runoff prevents the stormwater from recharging the aquifers and can cause downstream flooding.

Good housekeeping practices can lessen the

Continued on next page…

BRWA Receives Grants to Remove Invasive Water Chestnuts

Thanks to generous grants from both the MA Executive Office of Environmental Affairs the NE Grassroots Environmental Foundation, and the Worcester Community Foundation, the BRWA plans to remove the invasive Asian Water Chestnut infestation on a 12-acre section of the West River in Uxbridge.

The Harvard University Botanical Gardens originally brought these aquatic plants to the United States from Asia in the late 1800s. They escaped from the Gardens and having no natural enemies, the plants have spread throughout Massachusetts and the Northeastern United States. They have infested part of the West River, covering the water with a dense mat of vegetation, reducing the flow of the river, displacing native species and impeding boating and fishing in the area.

The BRWA has hired Lycott Environmental to mechanically harvest the invasive plants in most of the affected area. Volunteers will be needed to hand pull the remaining weeds in the nearby shallow areas, where the mechanical harvesters cannot reach.

The Asian Water Chestnut is an annual plant that dies in the late fall. Removal will begin after the plants have sprouted, but before the seeds can mature and drop into the river sediment.

If you wish to help with the hand-harvesting portion on July 8, 2006 and are interested in learning more about the control and elimination of invasive aquatic plants in our area, please contact Nicole Wenger at (508) 944-5886 or via email at nwenger@comcast.net.



Mechanical harvester on West River in Uxbridge

Stormwater …from previous page

negative impacts of stormwater. Municipalities can encourage low impact development practices, minimize the use of road salt and accumulation of street sand, and regularly clean catch basins. Homeowners can do their part by avoiding the use of chemical-based pesticides and fertilizers, washing cars with biodegradable soaps or at a carwash facility, and properly disposing pet waste. Business owners should maintain their dumpster areas, keep parking lots clean, regularly inspect storage areas area for leaks, and establish spill prevention and cleanup procedures.

The Blackstone River Coalition, of which the BRWA is a partner, will host a series of conferences in October that will focus on best management practices and basic steps that business owners can take to minimize the impact that stormwater has on our watershed. Please look for additional details in the next newsletter and on our website at www.thebrwa.org or contact Dona Neely at 508-878-1728 or donaneely1@comcast.net for more information. This program is part of the Campaign for a Fishable/Swimmable Blackstone River by 2015.

President…from Page 1

Chestnut infestation on the West River through a combination of mechanical harvesting and hand pulling of these invasive weeds. This program is made possible by generous grants from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) and the New England Grassroots Environmental Foundation (NEGREF). Thanks to all members that have renewed their membership this year and welcome to all the new members that have joined the BRWA. All dues go to support our programs. If you are not currently a BRWA member, I invite you to join us in our mission to restore, protect, and enjoy the Blackstone River, its tributaries and the entire watershed. The BRWA hosts or participates in many activities such as our Annual Canoe/Kayak Race, river cleanups, water quality monitoring, environmental outreach education, invasive species control and storm water management. As a member, you will continue to receive our newsletter to keep you informed of environmental issues that affect the River and its watershed. All members and non-members are invited to attend our monthly board meetings at the River Bend Farm Visitor Center on the third Tuesday of each month from 7:00-9:00P. By joining the BRWA, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping to support vital and important programs in the watershed.

Membership Form - MAKING THE BLACKSTONE VALLEY A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE

√ Yes, I would like to join the BRWA in making the Blackstone Valley a better place to live by becoming a member today. Send to: 271 Oak St., Uxbridge, MA 01569-1250.

Name:		☐ New Member	☐ Renewal
Address:			
		$10	☐ Individual
Phone:		$25	☐ Family
Email:		$100	☐ Benefactor
I am interested in helping with:	Please check	$1,000	☐ Stream Steward
☐ Water Quality Monitoring	☐ Canoe Race	$2 ,500	☐ River Steward
☐ River Bank Clean up	☐ Stream Team	$5,000	☐ Watershed Steward
☐ Invasive Species	☐ Other	$15.00	☐ Trout Pin - Fishable/Swimmable 2015 Campaign

☐ Please send only electronic Newsletters and updates

Schedule of 2006 BRWA summer programs and events

Visit *www.thebrwa.org* for more information and directions to the following events

July 8 8:30-11:30am
Manual harvesting of Asian Water Chestnuts on Rt. 16 in Uxbridge (Behind the Uxbridge Italian American Club)

July 18 7:00 pm
Board of Directors Meeting - River Bend Farm Visitor Center, 287 Oak St., Uxbridge, MA

August 1
Edible Plants Walk given by Russ Cohen of MassRiverways.
(Time and place to be posted at www.thebrwa.org)

BLACKSTONE RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION
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