

BLACKSTONE RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL / FRIENDS OF THE BLACKSTONE

WWW.BLACKSTONERIVER.ORG

SPRING 2009

Mission: To restore, enhance, and preserve the physical, historical, and cultural integrity of the Blackstone River, its watershed and its eco-system, through public advocacy, education, recreation, stewardship and the promotion of our unique Blackstone Valley resource.

FRANK MATTA, PRESIDENT
JOHN MARSLAND, VICE-PRESIDENT
SANDRA BELLIVEAU, TREASURER
ALICE CLEMENTE, SECRETARY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: RON BELLIVEAU, PETER CASSON,
ROBERT CHARPENTIER, DAVID COUTU, ROLAND GAUVIN,
FRANK GEARY, JUDY HADLEY, KEITH HAINLEY, KAREN
MATELESKA, DAVID NEWTON, RAYMOND PADO, JOE
PAILTHORPE, ARTHUR PLITT, PAUL ROSELLI

Dear Member/Supporter:

Another great year for our group, as always with considerable results supporting our mission on all fronts. Several years ago the Blackstone River Watershed Council was formed and later combined with the Friends of the Blackstone which this year is celebrating its 20th year of service to our community. We have been one combined group since 2005 and still remain a grassroots organization providing thousands of volunteer hours both on and in the Blackstone River and its many tributaries in nine northern Rhode Island communities.

The Blackstone is often described as the "Mighty" and "Hardest working river in the country". You as members and supporters are amongst the most dedicated workers and funders of our many initiatives of both work and recreation on this great earth and water resource in our communities.

We have done and continue to do:

- Major and minor clean-ups on a weekly basis through the year,
- Recreation canoe tours and small boat training,
- An Annual River race, a major regional event,
- Formal "Water quality monitoring" with certified trained volunteers from April to November,
- Collaboration support for local community fire & rescue,
- Collaboration with the Department of Transportation, the National Park Service and the Blackstone River Tourism Council for river bike path stewardship,
- River restoration, including improving and creation of new access points,
- Providing education on our River's history and opportunities,
- A Fish Passage project, years in the planning and fundraising, which will create 'fish ladders' on four dams from Pawtucket to Cumberland and is expected to physically get started later this year.

We will continue to be strong with thousands of dedicated volunteer hours and in-kind service every year. We are, however, in need of both new members and support contributions to assist in the growing service of our mission.

Thank you for all your support.
I hope to see you out on the river.

Frank Matta, President



BRWC/FOB Recertified

BRWC/FOB is pleased to announce that on February 13, 2008, it was re-designated by the Rhode Island Rivers Council as an official watershed council in the state of Rhode Island for a period of 5 years. This designation officially qualifies the Council to participate in grant awards, Rule 2, and any other activity requiring legal standing.

Sarah Marsland Honored with the John H. Chafee Heritage Award



From the age of three, Sarah Marsland has been seen with her father, John Marsland, volunteering with the Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone. Now a 5th-grader, Sarah has participated in countless clean-ups, races, canoe rentals, Rivers Day activities and a variety of public events, always lending her assistance and sharing her enthusiasm for the Blackstone River. This winter she has worked with her father spearheading and organizing the letter writing campaign in support of the Blackstone River Fish Ladder Project and she continues to be a role model for community involvement to her peers and to adults as well.

Sarah received the "2008 John H. Chafee Heritage Award" at the National Heritage Corridor's February 26, 2009 Annual Dinner & Awards Ceremony.

Rule 2

Rule 2, enacted by the state legislature, gives watershed councils legal standing to present testimony in all state and local administrative proceedings which may impact rivers and the quality and quantity of water in the watershed. Under this authority, BRWC/FOB submitted written comments in 2008 on a number of issues: the proposed Dowling Village development in North Smithfield; EPA's revisions to the Upper Blackstone Pollution Abatement permitting process; Thundermist hydro recertification and also the use of SEP funds in Woonsocket; Cumberland's Comprehensive Plan revisions; and revisions to the New England Fishery Management Council's management plan aimed at more stringent regulation of undesirable by-catch.

EPA Honors BRWC/FOB



On Earth Day, 2008, at historic Faneuil Hall in Boston, BRWC/FOB was recognized for its work in the restoration of the Blackstone River and for its progress toward the installation of fish passages in the river. The Council's water quality testing program and the many river clean-ups in the lower reaches of the river were singled out for recognition.

On that April day, Frank Matta, John Marsland, Sandra Belliveau, Alice Clemente, the Council's officers, and Frank Geary, the coordinator of the fish ladder project, were honored with the President's Volunteer Service Award. They accepted their awards on behalf of all those who have contributed so generously with their time and resources to the cause of restoring our river and its watershed.

The Quality of Our Waters

A clean Blackstone may well be in sight. A report published early in 2008 by the Blackstone River Coalition tells us so. *The Blackstone River—Clean by 2015*, the Coalition's excellent report on the water quality testing program that we help sponsor describes a volunteer effort of 78 people (the report covers 2007) monitoring 76 sites along the main stem and its tributaries. While encouraging, news of their findings is not entirely good.

The Blackstone River, with its headwaters in Worcester, MA, and its mouth in Pawtucket, RI, is recovering from centuries of industrial and human discharges. Known as the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution and called "America's Hardest Working River," the Blackstone's water quality has improved tremendously because of Clean Water Act regulations on point sources of pollution. Prior to 1970, few species of fish could survive in the river. Today nineteen species can be found in the mainstem, and 37 throughout the watershed.



However, the river still does not meet Class B water standards. Some of the matters of concern are water temperature and bacteria in some stretches of the river, phosphorus, nitrogen, and to a lesser degree, turbidity throughout. Among the causes of these problems are both point and non-point pollution: discharges from industrial processes, wastewater from sewage treatment plants, stormwater, and erosion, but also improperly maintained septic systems, illegal sewer connections, and even pet wastes and lawn fertilizer caught up in suburban runoff.

Streamflow, the amount of water in a river, is another concern, central as it is to aquatic habitats and to recreation. It is directly affected by the rampant development occurring in the towns along the river. The increase in impervious surfaces not only increases polluting runoff and erosion but prevents precipitation from seeping into the ground and recharging aquifers.

Sustained vigilance, improvements in stormwater management and even in land use are clearly in order. Our water quality testing program is an important part of the solution.

Fishing for Cars in Pawtucket

Early in 2008, BRWC/FOB was surprised by a phone call from the RI State Police. Divers from their unit and from the MA State Police had jointly searched the Blackstone at the Municipal Pier off School Street in Pawtucket. They had found some 27 cars in that short stretch of the river. Could the Council get them out? With years of river cleanups now under its belt and a reputation to uphold, BRWC/FOB rose to the occasion. Ron Belliveau coordinated the initiative and with the help of Tow Line Touring of North Providence, Robinson Crane Service from Lincoln and the Pawtucket Fire Department, on April 8, 5 cars (most of them stolen) were removed from the river. The "catch" was later disposed of by Bill's Auto Parts of Cumberland. More than 20 cars remain in the Blackstone to be dealt with another day, but BRWC/FOB's reputation as a cooperative partner and as a "go-to" organization for "technical assistance" was definitively sealed.



Stream Continuity Mapping

Under the direction of Roland Gauvin, the Council applied for and received a grant from the Rhode Island Rivers Council to extend a stream continuity study initiated in 2007 by the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Northern RI Trout Unlimited. Beginning with the Clear River and moving on to other Blackstone tributaries such as the Branch, Millers, Chepachet, West, Peters and Abbott Run rivers, the plan was to map the hundreds of culverts located in those watersheds. The goals of the project were to identify and produce a data base on such conditions as flow capacity, obstruction, maintenance issues, and aquatic and terrestrial wildlife and to identify intact corridors between river segments. All of this was to be accomplished by two teams of volunteers with the aid of GPS units, survey rods, measuring devices, and digital cameras, all acquired with funds provided by the grant. BRWC/FOB's contribution to the project was, as always, manpower.

Project Director Roland Gauvin and his assistants have made considerable headway in working through the watershed but the stream continuity project is still a work in progress. If you are interested in providing much needed assistance with this important work, please contact Roland Gauvin at ritreeman@cox.net.

River Access



Improved river access has for years been a goal of BRWC/FOB. An opportunity to realize this goal arose in May of 2008 when the Council signed a Cooperative Agreement with the National Heritage Corridor for the protection and cleaning of the river and "to provide opportunities that will be valuable and necessary to the planning, management, development and interpretation of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor." (source: CA document) Under the agreement, specific tasks would be identified and executed by BRWC/FOB, which would then be reimbursed for the previously agreed to expense. The first of the tasks thus identified was the Blackstone River Access Program Development. (cont.)

River Access (continued)

BRWC initiated its river access plan at the Manville Well Field Site in Lincoln. PARE Corporation was retained to carry out a two-phased project that would not only provide some of the desired access but facilitate another long-term goal, a much-needed Boat Storage Facility for the Council. Under Phase I, PARE “prepared a compiled existing conditions plan, coordinated with regulatory agencies and project stakeholders, prepared a conceptual development plan, prepared an opinion of probable costs to complete the construction” and filed a summary of their findings. The planned second phase “includes the formal design, permitting, and construction phase services for those elements of the Conceptual Design Plan that will be undertaken by the BRWC. Specifically, this phase will be limited to include public river access, accommodations for a canoe/kayak storage facility, and the design for additional parking facilities.” (source: PARE Corporation’s findings report).

As Phase I of the Manville Well Field Site project progressed, the Council broadened its view to include three additional river access points: the Albion Dam, Kelly House and John Street. Heritage Corporation has been assigned the task of developing plans and pursuing wetland permits for these sites, thus bringing the Council’s long-term goal close to fruition.

Letter-Writing Campaign

For some weeks now, Vice-President John Marsland has been spearheading a letter-writing campaign designed to raise funds for the fish ladder project. The stated purpose of this campaign is to solicit funds from Warren Buffet, but in fact it is a multi-purpose initiative in that it also seeks to educate students and their elders about the industrial history of the Blackstone and the long-standing effort to reverse the negative impacts of that history.

Cumberland’s school students and senior citizens were among the first to be shown the fish ladder video and then asked to write letters to Warren Buffet asking him to contribute to the fish ladder project, evoking the ties between Buffet’s company, Berkshire Hathaway, and the 19th-century Valley Falls Company out of which Berkshire Hathaway grew. The letters will be collected by BRWC/FOB and then sent with a cover letter to Warren Buffet requesting a major donation. Cumberland’s School Committee has signed on to the project and all others wishing to do so may contact John Marsland at canoeman60@yahoo.com. A template for the letter is available at www.blackstoneriver.org.

Congratulations to Paul D’Adamo Bill’s Auto Parts

Paul D’Adamo, President of Bill’s Auto Parts in Cumberland, has been named one of the 25 “most influential Auto Recyclers of 2008” along with “Top Teacher” by Locator UpFront. Locator is distributed to 3,000 recyclers nationwide.

Members of the Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone know very well that Paul is very deserving of this national award. Paul and Bill’s Auto Parts have assisted our organization in environmentally disposing of tons of trash, tires and debris for many years. Paul is a true environmental advocate. Great job, Paul!

Membership Contribution Not a Strength, Needs Growth

Many times during the year we are cash poor, not being able to fund projects. All year long and weekly we are cleaning, restoring or providing recreation along and about the river.

Contributions are not one of our strengths. In perspective, last year we collected approximately \$1,000 in annual dues/contributions for our daily operations excluding some event fundraising. Our volunteer and in-kind service, in contrast, has provided up to \$100,000 in donation of time and effort. Just recently, on earth day we collected tons of trash including heavy appliances and rusting car parts. These contributions of time and effort amounted to an astounding \$4,500 on just one Saturday morning.

Every organization has its strengths and weakness, above is one of each. Our membership goal moving forward is to grow in numbers from all nine of the communities we serve. Story told; please do what you can to help us grow in both membership contributions and recruiting new members. For membership form visit our website: www.blackstoneriver.org or call committee members John Marsland (401-334-2153) or Joe Pailthorpe (401-658-1766).

Fish Ladders along the Blackstone - an Update

The past year has been a truly noteworthy one for this BRWC/FOB-backed initiative spearheaded by Board member and Project Director, Frank Geary. Fish ladders/passages at the Main Street dam and the Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket, the Valley Falls dam on Broad Street, and possibly at Elizabeth Webbing, are well on their way to becoming a reality. A 120-page report, *NRCS Blackstone River Fish Passage Restoration Project final EA and FONSI*, that details all aspects of the project, is now available and can be accessed through the NRCS RI or the EA Engineering RI websites. The NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service), the project manager and primary funding source, will select the construction contractors, and EA Engineering of Warwick is doing the engineering and technical work. BRWC/FOB will have the opportunity to comment formally at different stages in the process. Construction at Main Street and the Old Slater Mill is slated to begin in August, 2009, with a BRWC/FOB-sponsored ground-breaking event to be announced.

Funding for this extensive project, with a total estimated cost of \$4.2 million, is being secured from various sources. The NRCS has committed \$2,029,025 in Federal funds. RI's Coastal Resources Management Council has contributed \$35,000, with another \$50,000 to come soon. At a ceremony at the State House on March 4, 2009, RIDEM awarded grants totaling \$765,000 for the Main Street and Slater Mill facilities (BRWC/FOB members had lobbied to get fish ladder projects listed as potential grantees of open space funds). BRWC/FOB has raised \$120,000 in required matching funds from private and public sources: \$100,000 of it from Charles Rosenfield, owner of the Pawtucket Hydro at the Main Street dam; smaller amounts from the towns of Cumberland and Lincoln and a growing number of individual contributors. And that does not include well over \$100,000 in in kind support services from The Nature Conservancy and from our own Council.

The wide-spread support of the project that this funding implies, on federal, state, and local levels, was evident on October 30, 2008, at the 10th anniversary celebration of the Blackstone River's designation as an American Heritage River. It was at this event, organized jointly by the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, the Rhode Island Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership and BRWC/FOB that the Council premiered its new video "Fish Ladders Along the Blackstone," produced by Chris Ratcliffe under the direction of Project Director Frank Geary, to the accompanying accolades of many of the partners in the fish ladder project. Senator Jack Reed lauded the project. Jan Reitsma, Executive Director of the Heritage Corridor, acknowledged the Council's leadership and praised all those dedicated volunteers who over the years have contributed their energy to ensuring that the river would be clean enough to sustain the anadromous fish that will one day use those ladders. Andrew Lipsky, biologist for the NRCS, followed suit and reiterated the agency's commitment to the project, as did Michael Sullivan, Director of Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management, and Stephen Perkins of EPA's New England office of ecosystem protection.

With this event and the new video, which can be seen on our website, BRWC/FOB launched the public phase of its fish ladder fund-raising campaign. Those wishing to contribute to the fund, help with fundraising activities, or otherwise become involved with this exciting project can contact Project Director Frank Geary at 401-333-2123.

Events – 2008 in Review

March – BRWC/FOB participated in the Land and Water Conservation Summit held each year at the University of Rhode Island.

April 4-6 – Fish ladder information table at the RI Saltwater Surfcasters show – 400 people signed a petition to support inclusion of fish ladders in state open space bond eligibility categories.

May 3 – Wellness Walkathon – 5-mile walkathon beginning at the Visitors Center on Route 295 and proceeding south on the bike path along the river – sponsored by the Blackstone Valley Corridor Keepers, Whole Foods Market and others – members participated in the walk and manned a BRWC/FOB information table.

May-June – Cumberland High School annual senior class Blackstone River canoe trip – BRWC/FOB president joined CHS physical education teachers and aquatic director in leading the group; firefighters from Cumberland Hill and Albion stood by along the route to render assistance. (cont.)

Events – 2008 in Review (continued)

June 7 – Riverfest, Woonsocket River Island Park – among other festivities, the annual canoe/kayak races from the park to the Manville Dam attracted 61 people competing in a number of categories. Results and pictures of the 2008 races are available on our website, www.blackstoneriver.org

June 21 – Rivers Day celebration, Central Falls Landing, co-sponsored with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council – BRWC/FOB's Environmental Excellence Award was presented to Paul D'Adamo of Bill's Auto Parts. Its Student Youth Volunteer Award was given to Emily Ratcliffe for her work on water testing at Miscoe Lake and Franklin Farm.

October 11-15 – Fish ladder information table at the 4th National Conference on Coastal Land Estuarine Habitat Restoration – the conference program also listed a field trip, dealing with the Blackstone River restoration, to the Old Slater Mill and the hydro facility at Pawtucket's Main Street dam.

Now you see it, Now you don't

A report by Keith Hainley



Central Falls Landing
March 29, 2009

Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone & Keep Blackstone Valley Beautiful have scheduled a cleanup of a new path upstream from the landing towards the Lonsdale Marsh.

It is cold and raining; not even the hard-core fishermen who come both days every weekend will venture out today. Saturday people have been on the river lately and the bike path parking lots have been full to overflowing. Today no one seems to be out.

7:30

BUT there is one truck in the parking lot.

Now another

The rain is light

A chain saw is started

The work has begun

8:00

Emily brings the coffee and donuts

Thanks to Dan's Dunkin Donuts

Ron & Sandra arrive and registration begins

The chain saw cuts an opening

9:00

Work has begun in earnest

Frank has brought Mellow Yellow

And builds a road to the

Trash cascade, which is the target



13 Volunteers from Cumberland and Central Falls
Pulling anything that is out of place

In anything from full rain gear to Hoodies

With hoes, rakes, hooks and gloved hands

They attack the hillside.

2:30

50 years of trash

40 yards of waste

Removed from the banks of the Blackstone

Opening ¼ mile of path.



JOIN THE RIVER-LUTION
BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

For more 2009 events, past and future, please see our website www.BlackstoneRiver.org. Volunteers and participants are needed at all the events and cleanups that BRWC/FOB undertakes throughout the year. To sign up and for additional information, please contact keithhainley@blackstoneriver.org.

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