

In the Mainstream

Newsletter for Members of the Norwalk River Watershed Association [NRWA]
New Canaan, Norwalk, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, Wilton, CT, and Lewisboro, NY

www.norwalkriver.org

Spring/Summer 2016

OYSTERS, WATER QUALITY AND YOUR BACKYARD

BY LOUISE WASHER

The way homeowners and businesses in the watershed manage their properties affects water quality, and since the Norwalk River drains into Norwalk Harbor, it also profoundly affects the health of sea life in the Sound, especially oysters and clams. Oysters and clams filter seawater in search of nutrients, which makes them vulnerable to toxins but also makes them a great asset to a healthy Sound. These interconnections are why Norm Bloom of Norm Bloom & Son oyster facility headquartered at Norwalk Harbor, has worked with clean water initiatives such as Harbor Watch and Long Island Sound Keeper for over 20 years. "Oyster farmers by trade are invested in protecting and enhancing environments where they raise oysters," says Bloom.

Family-owned Norm Bloom & Son has been "caring for, farming and harvesting" oysters in the Sound since the 1940s. It has use of 12,000 acres of land under the Sound where it meticulously manages the life cycles of hundreds of thousands of oysters a year. That process involves laying beds of shell for future oysters to cling to, moving young oysters to protected areas after they "set" on shell beds, harvesting the oysters, sorting and measuring them, and then returning those less than 3 inches long to the sea. Only the oysters big enough to go to market are bagged and shipped out.

At the same time, Bloom keeps a



Dick Harris, founder of Harbor Watch, and Norm Bloom of Bloom & Son oyster facility work together to help protect water quality

close watch on water quality in the harbor by constantly monitoring it. In fact, Harbor Watch operates a state-licensed water-testing lab onsite at Bloom & Son. Because oysters filter seawater, any high levels of e-coli or chemical toxins in the water threaten them. Many of the stresses on the Norwalk River Watershed stem from pesticides and fertilizers homeowners, office complexes and golf courses use, which wash into the waterways and make their way to the Sound, as do the truly toxic used cigarette butts people casually toss to the ground. Cigarette butts and other

--continued on page 2

STUDENTS HELP SHORE UP THE RIVER BANK WITH NATIVE PLANTS AT MERWIN MEADOWS PARK

Stable riverbanks and riparian buffers are vital to maintaining a healthy river. High school students from Builders Beyond Borders, a community service organization based in Norwalk, worked last fall with NRWA to remove invasives and plant native plants along eroding banks at Merwin Meadows. Their work has made a real difference.



OIL LEAK CONTAMINATES THE RIVER IN BRANCHVILLE

Fifty to 75 gallons of heating oil spilled into the river in late February from an underground tank behind the marble and granite business along Route 7 in Branchville. The CT Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection directed the tank removal and clean-up which involved using absorbent booms shown here. Underground oil tanks remain one of the leading causes of ground water contamination.

--Oysters continued

trash washes down rainwater drainage systems along with oil and gas residues from the streets and often feed directly into the River. One of Harbor Watch's jobs is to test the outfall from these drainage systems to find out which ones contain toxins at levels that exceed EPA safety levels, then track down the pollution sources and report them to the city, so it can correct the problem.

Two ways homeowners and businesses can help protect water quality are to include rain gardens in their landscape designs and to promote and protect healthy natural buffers along river and stream banks and wetlands. Water that is caught in a rain garden after falling from a roof, driveway, street or parking lot will percolate through the soil, which will filter out pollutants before it joins the ground water. Similarly, runoff that, instead of draining straight into wetlands or waterways, is allowed to enter healthy lush riparian borders along waterways will also slow down and percolate through the soil. More information on rain gardens and riparian buffers is available at norwalkriver.org.

Watershed residents all play a role in maintaining the quality of Connecticut's oysters--some of the best in the country.



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We gratefully acknowledge donors from March 1, 2015, through March 1, 2016. Contributions received after this date will be listed in the Spring/Summer 2017 newsletter.

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David Park—Management of Facebook Page & Trail Map Sales; Donations of a Portion of Sales from his Kayaking Guide Sold at norwalkriver.org.
St. Luke's School, New Canaan—Meeting Space
Wilton Library—Meeting space
REI Norwalk—Donations of hiking gear



Our annual Amphibian Walk is at Merwin Meadows in Wilton this year on April 3rd

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

NRWA programs highlight the importance and features of the river and its watershed and ways people can improve the region. Programs are free unless otherwise specified, but space may be limited and reservations are suggested. Call the leader listed or NRWA toll free at 877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463) for more information and reservations. Hikers should wear hiking shoes and bring water. See our events page at norwalkriver.org for updates and more information.

Sunday, April 3, 1PM. Amphibian Walk. Join us in search of frogs and salamanders! Dave Havens of NRWA will begin with a short introduction on amphibians and how to spot them, then lead a woodland walk along the Norwalk River to visit vernal ponds coming to life with salamanders, newts, frogs and toads. Discover some of the many species in our area, search for eggs and tadpoles, and learn about amphibian development. Meet at the hiking trail entrance off the parking lot at Merwin Meadows Park in Wilton. Tall, waterproof boots are suggested. All ages are welcome to this free event, which is co-sponsored by the Wilton Garden Club and NRWA. Contact us at info@norwalkriver.org or 1-877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463) for more information and to register.

Sunday, April 3, 1-3 PM. “Rites of Spring” Walk in Devil’s Den. This is the second in a series of four short walks sponsored by *Weston Walks* and led by Dr. Tom Failla that offer the chance to observe nature coming alive from deep winter slumber to full vibrancy in late spring. Tom, who has led hikes in Devil’s Den for fifteen years, is a Professor at Pace University and has a remarkable understanding of the Den’s ecology. The hike is casual and is rated as easy. Hikers will meet at the Pent Road parking lot. (Rain date April 10th). Info at westonbikeped.com.

Saturday, April 9. Keep Norwalk Beautiful Cleanup Day. Keep Norwalk Beautiful is sponsoring a spring litter cleanup in conjunction with the nationwide Great American Cleanup campaign. They will provide gloves, bags, and litter grabbers (while supplies last) to those who volunteer to help clean up the common areas and open spaces including parks, beaches, schools and streets. Public Works will pick up filled litter bags. April 9th is a target date, however, should another date work better for your neighborhood association, school, business or organization, they will accommodate your needs. For more info contact David Shockley at 203-854-7810 ext. 46782 or dshockley@norwalkct.org.



Saturday & Sunday, April 9&10. Rid Litter Days in Ridgefield. Help keep Ridgefield beautiful. Pick up litter in your neighborhood or anywhere else you see it. Encourage family and friends to help. Refuse bags and safety vests can be picked up at Parks and Rec or the Chamber of Commerce. Drop off points for filled refuse bags are: Farmingville Elementary School, East Ridge Middle School, Ridgefield High School, Fox Hill Lake Area.

Sunday, April 24, 10AM-12PM. Guided Birding Walk at Allen’s Meadows. Another in the fabulous walks series co-sponsored by Wilton’s Conservation Commission, Wilton Garden Club and NRWA. The walk is free and all are welcome, though for (just) this walk, dogs, even on leash, are not included. To register, call 203-210-5240 and leave a message with your contact infor-

mation and the number of persons who will attend.

Saturday, April 30, 1PM. Poetry Hike. Bring a poem to read, yours or a favorite. Ralph Adams will lead this fairly easy 3-4 mile hike for *Weston Walks*. Info at westonbikeped.com. Meet at the parking lot on Valley Forge/Newtown Turnpike.

Sunday, May 1, 11AM-4PM. Wilton Go Green Festival. Visit the NRWA table and help us celebrate green living. Event includes live music, healthy food, educational and fun activities. Held at the Town Green and Wilton Library, Wilton. For more info visit www.wiltongogreen.org.

Sunday, May 1, 1-3PM. Walk in Devil’s Den. This is the third “Rites of Spring” walk offered by *Weston Walks*. Meet at Pent Road entrance to Devil’s Den. Easy walk. (Rain date May 8). Info at westonbikeped.com

Friday, May 6, 12-6 PM & Saturday, May 7, 9AM-12PM. Wilton Garden Club Plant Sale. At the gazebo on the Green in Wilton Center.

Friday & Saturday, May 6 & 7, 9:00AM-3PM. Ridgefield Garden Club Plant Sale. Rain or shine! Annuals and Perennials: Master

Help Wanted

NRWA is looking for volunteers and a part time (10 hours/month) executive director to help with:

Publicity and Social Media--promoting our events, spearheading initiatives for building membership, managing our social media presence and website.

Writing--managing and writing grants and/or contributing to our newsletter and website content.

Advocacy/Research--contributing to our advocacy efforts, following legislation and development proposals in the watershed.

Business/Corporate Sponsorship Outreach--building our Responsible Business Network (more info at norwalkriver.org), attracting the support and membership of more businesses, especially those along the river.

Fundraising/Membership Management--upgrading our membership database system, fundraising approach and outreach to potential new members.

Events Management--helping with planning, organizing and overseeing our annual walks, lectures, and cleanups

Contact us at info@norwalkriver.org

Gardeners on hand to help select plants. Proceeds go to benefit Ridgefield community gardens and conservation projects. Ballard Park Greenhouse (Rear of Ballard Park).

Wednesday, May 25, 6:30PM. Water Quality Update: NRWA Annual Meeting at the New Harbor Watch Lab. Director Sarah Crosby will provide a tour of the beautiful new lab at Harbor Watch and demonstrate how the organization tests water samples from the Norwalk River. She will also report on the state of water quality in the River and the Sound as well as the changing fish populations in the Sound. All are welcome to this free event. Harbor Watch operates out of Earthplace, 10 Woodside Lane, Westport. More info at 877-NRWA-INFO; (877-679-2463) or info@norwalkriver.org.

Saturday, May 21, 11AM-3PM. The Connecticut Tree Festival. This 9th annual festival offers family-style activities such as a rope tree climb for kids and showcases a diverse line-up of environmentally-minded exhibitors (including NRWA). Rain or shine, free admission. Cranbury Park, 300 Grumman Ave, Norwalk. More information at norwalktreealliance.org.

Friday, June 3, 9AM-3:30PM. Historic 25th Annual Long Island Citizen's Summit: Citizen Science, Translating Science into Action for Long Island Sound. This historic event will focus on the very citizens who are taking action to protect the Sound! It will celebrate their efforts, roll out new innovative tools for understanding the Sound's health and dedicate an entire afternoon of workshops to citizen science monitoring, data analysis, and communicating

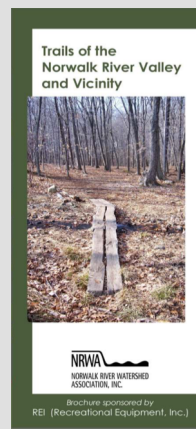
science with clarity and impact. At Stony Brook University. Register with Save the Sound at ctenvironment.org.

Saturday, June 4. Trail Repair Project at Weir Farm in Celebration of Trails Day. Sponsored by Weir Farm, NRWA, the Ridgefield Conservation Commission, and the Norwalk River Valley Trail Planning Committee. Wear sturdy walking shoes and bring water. Weir Farm is on Nod Hill Road in Wilton. Free but registration is required. Call 203-834-1896 ext. 28 for more information and to sign up.



Saturday, June 4. Trails Day Hike in Katherine Ordway Preserve. Cynthia Fowx will lead this 2-3 mile easy hike through the richly bio-diverse, 62-acre preserve that remains relatively unknown. The Katharine Ordway Preserve is located at 165 Goodhill Road, Weston. Check norwalkriver.org or westonbikeped.com for more information in the coming weeks.

**NORWALK RIVER
VALLEY
HIKING TRAIL
MAPS
&
KAYAKING
IN AND AROUND
THE
NORWALK ISLANDS**



*Available at
Norwalkriver.org*

Saturday, June 11, 5-7PM. Cocktails and Clams, Harbor Watch. In celebration of clean water and the work Harbor Watch does to protect Long Island Sound, join Harbor Watch for Cocktails & Clams dockside at Norm Bloom & Son's oyster processing facility. Unlimited raw bar straight off the fishing boat. Signature cocktails, wine & beer. Live music. Adults only. Please enter at 22 Cove Avenue in Norwalk. Tickets available at Earthplace.org.

Saturday, August 20, 10AM-12PM. Butterflies! Victor DeMasi, lepidopterist, research affiliate for Yale's Peabody Museum and NRWA Advisory Board member, has been studying butterflies and moths in an area along the Norwalk River since 1977. He will introduce area butterflies and moths, discuss their food and habitats and show his remarkable collection. Meet at 10 Simpaug Turnpike, Redding, a half-mile east of Rt. 7. Easy walk. For reservations, contact DeMasi at victormonarch@yahoo.com or 203-448-0106. (Rain date: Sunday, August 21)

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The Norwalk River Watershed Association, incorporated in 1996, is a not-for-profit membership organization whose mission is to improve the water quality and fish and wildlife habitats of the 40,000-acre Norwalk River watershed; to restore the riverbanks, meadows and forests through invasive plant abatement and promotion of native species; to encourage recreational use of the river, its trails and the surrounding open space; and to promote research, legislative advocacy, education, cooperation, and action on the part of the stakeholders in the seven watershed towns in CT (Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, New Canaan, Weston, and Norwalk) and NY (Lewisboro).

NATIVE PLANT OF THE MONTH: AMELANCHIER CANADENSIS

FOR WILDLIFE VALUE AND BEAUTY ADD SHADBLOWS TO YOUR GARDEN

BY ELIZABETH CRAIG

Shadblow, or Serviceberry, is one of the first small understory trees to bloom in the spring. It has frost-resistant flowers that are fragrant, white and showy and bloom before the leaves open. These flowers provide an important early season nectar source for butterflies and other beneficial insects. A Connecticut native, with tremendous wildlife value, shadblow was so named because it fruits in June when the shad (a northern fish) run. Researchers have documented at least 26 different types of wildlife that feed on its berries, starting in June when its fruit reaches maturity. The berries, red to dark-purple-black when ripe, are especially popular with songbirds, including bluebirds, robins, cardinals, orioles, waxwings and thrushes, in addition to chipmunks and squirrels.

A handsome landscape plant, that is low-maintenance, shadblow grows well in full sun or part shade. It reaches an average height of 6-15 feet, depending on the amount of sunlight and moisture it receives. Generally a shrubby tree, it will grow as a single-stemmed tree if shoots are removed. Shadblow shows a wide soil tolerance and can even grow in heavy clay soils. Able to thrive in suburban landscapes, its native habitat includes woodlands, grasslands and coastal riparian areas or wetlands. Leaf color ranges from light green in spring, to dark green in summer, and fall color is striking with shades of orange, gold, red and green.



Shadblow plantings are particularly effective against a dark or shaded woodland edge, which tends to highlight its form, flowers and radiant fall color. It is also effective along stream banks and ponds. Good companion plants include Eastern Redbud, Eastern Sweetshrub, violets and sedges.

(*NATIVE PLANT OF THE MONTH*, a new series by NRWA master gardeners, Jackie Algon and Elizabeth Craig, will also appear in the News Section at Norwalkriver.org)

Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days 2016



April 30-Weston. Dept Public Works,
78 Old Hyde Rd. (8:30am-12:30pm)

May 7-Greenwich. Island Beach Parking
Lot, Arch St. (8am-1pm)

June 4-Darien. Noroton Heights RR
Station, Hollow Tree Ridge Rd (9am-1pm)

July 16-Stamford. Rippowam Middle
School, 381 High Ridge Rd (9am-2pm)

August 27-Norwalk. Norwalk High
School, 23 Calvin Murphy Dr (8am-2)

September 17- New Canaan.
Wastewater Treatment Plant, 394 Main
Street (8am-2pm)

September 24-Westport. Yard Waste
Site, 180 Bayberry Lane (9am-2pm)

October 29-Wilton. Miller/Driscoll
School 214 Wolfpit Rd. (9am-3pm)

MEMBERSHIP FORM

☐ Enclosed is my tax-deductible, annual membership contribution of \$ _____.

I would prefer to receive the semi-annual newsletter, *In the Mainstream*,

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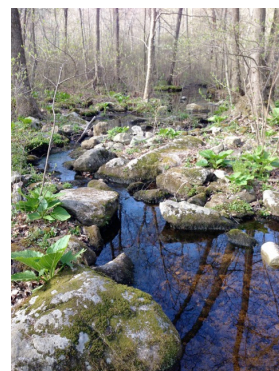
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Protect our surface water and ground water. Do NOT flush medicines down the drain or toilet. Instead, turn them in at your town's Drug Take-Back Day, your local pharmacy's take-back program or locked box located at your police station.

2016 ANNUAL MEETING MAY 25TH AT 6:30 PM
JOIN US FOR AN UPDATE ON WATER QUALITY
AND A TOUR OF THE LAB WHERE OUR WATER IS TESTED

This year NRWA will hold its Annual Meeting in the new lab at Harbor Watch in Westport and will feature an update on water quality from the organization's new director Sarah Crosby. Sarah took the helm as the director of Harbor Watch, which has been monitoring water quality in the Norwalk River since 1986, upon the retirement of founder Dick Harris in late 2014. NRWA supports and works with Harbor Watch on water quality initiatives and publishes its water quality reports online at norwalkriver.org.

Sarah is a marine ecologist with training in conservation science and extensive research experience in coastal and marine ecosystems. Under Crosby's direction, Harbor Watch has opened a new, larger lab at its headquarters at Earthplace in Westport and has expanded the number of watersheds it works in, reaching south to Greenwich and north to Danbury. "The larger lab has enabled us to increase the number of high school and college interns in our internship programs," says Crosby. Interns focusing on the rivers collect water samples from specific sites and test them in the lab. During the summer, a team of interns also trawl for fish in the harbor each week. The trawling is part of research that results in Harbor Watch's annual Report on Norwalk Harbor Juvenile Benthic Marine Fish. The report is available at norwalkriver.org and includes an overview of fish population levels since 1990.

Thanks to Harbor Watch, the Norwalk River is one of the few in the nation to have water quality data that reaches back as far as almost three decades. Crosby says she and her team are also increasing the organization's focus on track-down work, by "putting more boots on the ground" to identify sites with contaminated water and track down the sources of the pollution, so municipalities can take action to correct the problem. "The Norwalk River is our number one priority," she says, "and our partnership with public works, something Dick Harris worked hard to establish, is stronger than ever."

Sarah grew up locally and is excited to be back. She now lives in Cos Cob with her husband, Alex, and her dog, Daisy. NRWA welcomes her and thanks her for her dedication to the region's watersheds.

