

Fall 2016 Newsletter

Protect Our Waterways: Avoid Dumping Leaves Into Wetlands

By Elizabeth Craig

Residents and homeowners in the Norwalk River Watershed, especially those with wetland properties, play an important role in keeping our waterways clean and Long Island Sound healthy. Some 75 percent of all wetlands are privately owned in the USA, making landowners important participants in wetlands management and protection. Choosing not to dump leaves or other yard debris into wetland areas and along riverbanks is a critical step towards preserving water quality.

Even though leaf litter is 'natural', organic and biodegradable, in excess it can kill native wetland vegetation and allow invasive plant species to take hold. In our waterways, excessive amounts of leaf litter deplete oxygen, causing fish kills. These leaves are actually valuable and can be easily composted upland from wetlands and used to mulch and to create more fertile soil on your property.

Healthy wetlands are beautiful, especially in fall. They act as natural sponges helping control drainage and floodwaters during periods of heavy rainfall and slowly releasing water during periods of



Fall in a New England red maple swamp.

draught. These important functions become impaired when wetlands are clogged with leaves and debris.

Does your lawn grow to the edge of your wetland or to the edge of your wetland buffer? Consider expanding your buffer zone by planting natives in these areas. They enhance the beauty of your property, improve water quality and offer benefits to native birds and butterflies.

NRWA's International Coastal Cleanup 2016 A Huge Success! Over 50 Volunteers Removed Close to 100 Garbage Bags With Over 1600 Pounds of Trash From the Norwalk River



Volunteers from Woodcock, NRWA and Earthplace pictured here helped pick up trash Sept. 10th.

Curbside Compost Makes Composting Easy

Food waste is the single largest component of solid waste in Connecticut according to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Composting food scraps reduces the amount of waste in our landfills and eliminates the need to incinerate them--a process that uses energy, creates harmful emissions and results in ash, which still must be disposed of in landfills. Compost can also eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers on lawns and gardens. The phosphorus and nitrogen found in commercial fertilizers makes its way into waterways where they cause algae blooms and threaten water quality.

Curbside Compost, a new Ridgefield-based business, makes composting easy by providing customers with a fresh container and weekly pick-up of food scraps including meat and bones, which are difficult to compost at home. Customers can also

order the finished, compost by the sack or yard. As co-founder Nick Skeadas puts it, "By making it easy for people to compost, we reduce their carbon footprint while simultaneously creating a useful, organic product." Find out more at curbcompost.org.



Nick and Erica Skeadas of Curbside Compost.

Farewell And Thank You NRWA President Kristen Begor



NRWA bids farewell to board president of 5 years and long-time member Kristen Begor (far left with fellow board members) who has relocated to New Hampshire with her family. Kristin, a trained hydro-geologist, used her knowledge of watershed issues to lead NRWA's efforts to improve local water quality and protect our shared natural habitat. Kristen also brought NRWA into the digital age, overseeing the launch of a new website and e-newsletter. Thank you, Kristin, for your vision, energy, patient diplomacy, warmth, sense of humor and most of all your friendship.

New Watershed Trail Maps Coming Soon

REI, the outdoor gear and clothing co-op, has awarded NRWA a \$5000 grant to create a new hiking trail map of the Watershed and vicinity. The map will highlight completed and future sections of the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT) system that will eventually stretch 38 miles from Calf Pasture Beach in Norwalk to Danbury along the Norwalk River as well as other trails across the seven watershed towns.

REI and NRWA will also partner with the town of Wilton to host two volunteer trail stewardship events. See Events at Norwalkriver.org for details.

NRWA offers special thanks to Highstead Foundation of Redding and conservation associate Mary Buchanan who spent countless volunteer hours creating the new map before heading to graduate school in geography this fall at UCONN.



Mary Buchanan of Highstead (right) working with NRWA's Louise Washer.

Featured Native Plant: Winterberry

By Jackie Algon



Winterberry, a deciduous native shrub is commonly found at the edge of woods and swamps. A lovely addition to the garden, it prospers under cultivation as well as in the wild, growing 6' – 10' tall with an oval shape, often forming large clumps. While the foliage is not especially showy in autumn, it is offset by large numbers of bright orange or red glossy berries that are a treat to birds and that persist into the winter. These make Winterberry an excellent alternative to Japanese barberry, the invasive shrub known to harbor the white-footed mouse which can carry the deer tick that causes Lyme Disease. A male and at least one female planted in proximity are required for pollination and berries, so ask the nursery for both! Winterberry grows well in full sun to part shade, though it will bear more fruit with more sun. It can tolerate poorly drained soils, though it prefers moist, acidic soil conditions.

FALL EVENTS

NRWA and Woodcock Nature Center have launched a Community Conservation Series pairing expert lectures with volunteer action.

Saturday, October 8

9:30AM- 12:30 PM

Volunteer Action: *Invasive Plant Removal & Riverbank Restoration at Merwin Meadows, Wilton*

Information/registration
info@norwalkriver.org or
877-NRWA-INFO

Tuesday, October 18, 7:00 PM

Expert Lecture: *Gardeners, Keepers of Our Natural Heritage*

Wilton Library
registration: Wiltonlibrary.org

Monday, November 7, 7:00 PM

Expert Lecture: *Hiking in Fairfield County, The Places You'll Go and Things You'll See!*

Ridgefield Library
registration: info@norwalkriver.org

Saturday, November 12

**8:45 AM-1:00 PM Volunteer Action:
Trail Maintenance**

Details will be posted soon on
norwalkriver.org

For a full listing of events and to join online, visit norwalkriver.org

Membership Form

Becoming a member helps NRWA continue to protect local water quality, hiking trails and natural habitats.

Riparian Society		Membership	
Steward	\$1,000+	Supporter	\$50-\$99
Protector	\$500-\$999	Friend	\$30-\$49
Patron	\$100-\$499	Other	\$_____

☐ My company has a matching gift program. (company name)

☐ Enclosed is my tax deductible Annual Membership gift of \$_____.

Please make check payable to NRWA, Inc. and mail to NRWA, Inc. P.O. Box 197, Georgetown, CT 06829

Name_____ Phone_____

Address_____ City_____ State_____ Zip_____

I would like to receive updates and events info. My email is _____

News Briefs

DOT Releases Impact Study for

Bridge Overhaul in Norwalk Harbor On Tuesday, September 6 the CT Department of Transportation released the impact study for the planned \$30 million overhaul of the Yankee Doodle Bridge that carries I-95 over the Norwalk Harbor. The release triggers a 45-day comment period for local residents and stakeholders to weigh in on the plan. NRWA and the Norwalk Harbor Commission are concerned that plan fails to address the problem of storm water runoff that drains directly from the bridge into the harbor carrying contaminants from cars, trucks and the roadway. The DOT will hold a public hearing on the report at 6 p.m. Oct. 6 at Norwalk City Hall, 125 East Ave. Please visit the News page at norwalkriver.org for more information.



US Senator Chris Murphy Releases Long Island

Sound Investment Plan After meeting with NRWA and other conservation organizations, US Senator Chris Murphy announced the release of his Long Island Sound Investment Plan. The plan calls for

\$860 million of federal funding to protect and improve Long Island Sound. Because wastewater treatment plants have already been improved, new initiatives would target inland sources of pollution including crumbling infrastructure, leaky sewer pipes, fertilizer and road run-off. To find out more, visit murphy.senate.gov.

Volunteers helping clean up Oyster Shell Park, where the Norwalk River meets the Sound, as part of NRWA's International Coastal Cleanup.

The Norwalk River Watershed Association works to improve the water quality and fish and wildlife habitats of the 40,000-acre Norwalk River Watershed including Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, Weston, Norwalk, New Canaan & Lewisboro.

