

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 2015

DULL AS DIRT? HERE'S WHY YOUR SOIL IS ANYTHING BUT...

BY ELISABETH CRAIG

The United Nations has declared 2015 the International Year of the Soils. Generally, worldwide there is a very low awareness of the importance of soil. The UN hopes to get people to pay more attention to this key resource since healthy soils are essential to life on earth, ensuring food security and basic ecosystem services. Here in the United States there is a tendency to take soil, along with other natural resources such as clean air and water, for granted due to their historical abundance.

Without carbon and critical microbes, soil is just dirt. Healthy soil is teeming with life. The 18th century founder of modern geology, James Hutton, saw soil as the living bridge between rock and life, with soil as the source of all life where worms mix dead animals with fallen leaves and minerals from rocks to build soil fertility. This living bridge, he said, needed to be maintained by returning organic matter to the soil.

At least a quarter of the world's biodiversity lives underground, from the comparatively 'giant' earthworm to smaller organisms such as fungi and bacteria. Billions of micro-organisms such as bacteria, fungi and protozoans live in the soil, as well as thousands of insects, mites and worms. More organisms are in one tablespoon of healthy soil than there are people on the planet! There is a growing awareness in the scientific community of the importance of soil



—Photo Courtesy of Cornell University

carbon (organic material in the soil) and that soil is more than just a medium for plant growth. Soil is a huge carbon reservoir. The soil on Earth is its largest terrestrial pool of organic carbon and is now understood as essential for mitigating and adapting to climate change. Organic material in the soil holds vast amounts of carbon dioxide and helps regulate the release of greenhouse gases and regulate temperatures.

For a healthy watershed and clean water, healthy soils are key. Soils with more organic matter are better able to store and filter water and can improve resilience to floods and droughts. Basically, a watershed is a

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NRWA IS PROUD TO TAKE PART IN THE HUDSON TO HOUSATONIC CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

The Hudson to Housatonic (H2H) Conservation Initiative is a new interstate collaboration of more than two dozen local and regional conservation organizations and municipal partners across southwestern Connecticut, Westchester and southeastern Putnam Counties in New York. H2H partners will engage landowners identified as pivotal in the battle to protect imperiled streams, drinking water reservoirs, and plant and wildlife habitat. The initiative is funded by a two-year US Forest Service grant.

Participating organizations and agencies will collaborate with landowners in 13 focal areas straddling town or state lines

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Snow Shoe Hike in Wilton's Cherry Lane Park Draws A Big Crowd

Sponsored by the Wilton Conservation Commission, Wilton Garden Club, Wilton Public Library, NRWA, and Wilton Go Green, this walk is part of an on-going series.

Check our events listing or
Norwalkriver.org for
information on upcoming walks.



This article was contributed by a volunteer from Wilton High School. We welcome student submissions of research, photography and illustrations.

A FLOOD TO REMEMBER: MEMORIES FROM THE FLOOD OF 1955

BY JEROMY DIGIACOMO

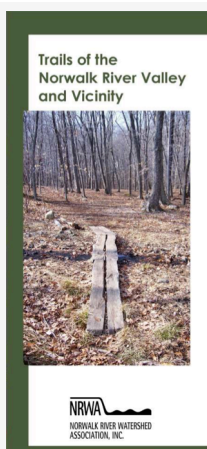
The Flood of 1955 devastated the center of Norwalk unlike any storm since 1938. During the summer of '55 two hurricanes, Connie and Diane, wreaked havoc in just over one week, pouring more than twenty inches of rain into the waterlogged soil of Norwalk (NOAA). Saturated with rainwater, the ground could not hold back the deluge that would soon hit Norwalk (Dolly Curtis Interviews). On the weekend of October 14th, between twelve and fourteen inches of rain inundated the Norwalk River and watershed area. Rainwater surged and spewed through bridges and overpasses, it snuck around buildings and roadways, and it raced through porches and patios. President Eisenhower declared Connecticut a disaster area (CT State Library). On March 19, 1956, Governor Ribicoff revealed the following flood statistics: "91 persons dead, 12 missing and presumed dead. 86,000 persons unemployed. More than 1,100 families left homeless. Nearly 20,000 families suffered flood damage. Damages estimated at almost half a billion dollars" (CT Library).

Read Jeromy's full article and find out more about the history of the watershed at Norwalkriver.org.

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We gratefully acknowledge donors from March 1, 2014, through March 1, 2015. Contributions received after this date will be listed in the Spring/Summer 2016 newsletter.

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GIFTS OF SERVICES

Jeromy DiGiacomo—Research Volunteer
Linda Olsen—Website Redesign and Maintenance
David Park—Mgmt Facebook & Trail Map Sales
St. Luke's School, New Canaan—Meeting Space
Wilton Library—meeting space
REI Norwalk—Donations of binoculars, hiking kits



Volunteers from Earthplace in Westport and Norwalk's Andy Garfunkel help NRWA clean up Oyster Shell Park.

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, directions and reservations. Hikers should always wear hiking shoes and bring water.

Friday, April 10, 8:30AM-3:30PM. Long Island Sound Citizens Summit: Coming Back from the Brink: Nitrogen and the Sound's Health and Economy. For decades, nitrogen pollution has wreaked havoc on the Sound's ecosystem. In response, CT and NY, with approval from the EPA, created a 15-year plan to slash nitrogen. This year's Summit will take stock of progress and identify priorities for the future. Join us to review milestones and delve into the environmental, health, and economic impacts nitrogen has on our communities and future plans to solve this pressing environmental hazard. Harbor Club, Webster Bank Arena 600 Main St., Bridgeport. To register and for information contact bchamberlin-martin@savethesound.org.

Saturday, April 11. 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 cleanup the common areas and open spaces in Norwalk including parks, beaches, schools and streets. Public Works will pick up filled litter bags. This is a target date, however, should another date work better for your neighborhood association, school, business, or organization, they will accommodate your needs. To sign up or for more info contact David Shockley, dshockley@norwalkct.org or 854-7810 ext. 46782.

Sunday, April 12, 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 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 1st parking lot on the right, behind the ball field at St. Luke's School, 377 North Wilton Road, New Canaan. Tall, waterproof boots are suggested. All ages are welcome to this free event. Contact us at info@norwalkriver.org or 1-877- NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463) for reservations and more information.

Sunday, April 19, 1 PM. Walk at Merwin Meadows. Dean Keister, Vice President, Trout Unlimited will lead a walk focusing on how the pond at Merwin Meadows is stocked with trout each year. Sponsored by the Wilton Conservation Commission, Wilton Garden Club, Wilton Public Library, Wilton Go Green and



Thanks to volunteers from Builders Beyond Borders, Build On and Earthplace for helping us clean up Oyster Shell Park.

NRWA. The walk is free and all are welcome. To register call 203-210-5240 and leave a message with the name of the event you wish to attend, the number of persons, and your contact information.

Saturday, May 2, 8:30 AM – 11:30 AM. Community Cleanup Day for a Better South Norwalk. Meet at Ryan Park, behind 98 South Main St. in South Norwalk. Groups will be formed to clean the park area as well as designated area neighborhoods in need. Refreshments will be provided. For more info, contact David Shockley, dshockley@norwalkct.org or 854-7810 ext. 46782.

Sunday, May 3, 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.

Friday & Saturday, May 8 & 9, 9:00AM - 3PM. Ridgefield Garden Club Plant Sale. Rain or shine! Annuals and Perennials:

Master Gardeners on hand to help you select plants. Proceeds from the sale are used to benefit community gardens and conservation projects throughout Ridgefield. Ballard Park Greenhouse (Rear of Ballard Park). Parking by Ballard Green Senior Housing and CVS.

Friday, May 8, 12PM - 6 PM & Saturday, May 9, 9AM – 12PM. Wilton Garden Club Plant Sale. At the gazebo on the Green in Wilton Center.

Saturday, May 16, 11AM-3PM. The Connecticut Tree Festival. This 8th 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 info at norwalktreealliance.org.

Sunday, May 17, 12 PM. Discover Bradley Park. Join us for a walk through the park led by Susan Diloreto, Wilton Conservation Commissioner and Leslie Frear, Wilton Garden Club member. Sponsored by the Wilton Conservation Commission, Wilton Garden Club, Wilton Public Library, Wilton Go Green and NRWA. The walk is free and all are welcome. To register call 203-210-5240 and leave a message with the event you wish to attend and your contact information.

Tuesday, May 19, 6:30 PM. NRWA Annual Meeting Followed by a Presentation on Landscaping to Protect Water Quality at 7. Dr. Michael Dietz, Program Director

Interested in Volunteering?

River Rangers, River Study Adult Training Coordinator, Hike Leaders, Kayak/Canoe Leaders, Trail Workers, Board Members, Grant Writers, Environmental or Website Writers, Graphic Designers, Gardeners, Scientists...these are just some of the volunteer positions we would like to fill. The more help we have, the more we can do. You can make the difference! Let us know your interests, expertise, and where you would like to help. Contact info@norwalkriver.org.

of CT NEMO at UCONN, will discuss low impact development (LID) and the importance of protecting our water. NEMO (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officers) provides information, education and assistance to local land use boards and commissions as well as individual homeowners on how they can accommodate growth while protecting their natural resources and community character. Sponsored by the Wilton Conservation Commission, Wilton Garden Club, Wilton Public Library, NRWA, and Wilton Go Green. Held in the Brubeck Room at Wilton Library.

Sunday, June 7, 2PM. Marsh and Woodland Walk at Woodcock Nature Center To Celebrate National Trails Day. National Trails Day and CT Trails Day weekend is June 6-7 this year. Join NRWA and Woodcock Nature Center for a guided walk and discussion of marsh and woodland habitats. The walk passes through a reed marsh that allows views of many aquatic life forms, as well as birds and through a wooded section of old-growth beech and maple. Surrounded by vernal pools and streams, the path offers exciting glimpses into those habitats. The trail is dotted with an assortment of understory plants which are hugely important for a healthy forest and which offer a home to several small critter species. Plus we will see quite a few stone walls, which tell us a story about the history of the woods. Hike leaves from Woodcock Nature Center, 54 Deer Run Rd, Wilton. Bring cameras and boots. To register or for more info contact NRWA at info@norwalkriver.org or 877-NRWA-INFO.

Saturday, June 6, 10 AM-12 PM. Hike at Weir Farm to Celebrate Trails Day. Weir Farm Lead Gardener Jill Anderson will guide this informative three-mile hike. She will discuss the natural history of the area and how people historically used the land. The trail passes through old fields, wetlands, mountain laurel groves, and towering rocky ledges. Sponsored by Weir Farm, NRWA, the Ridgefield Conservation Commission, and the Norwalk River Valley Trail Planning Committee. Wear sturdy walking shoes and bring water. Free but registration is required. Call 203-834-1896 ext. 28.

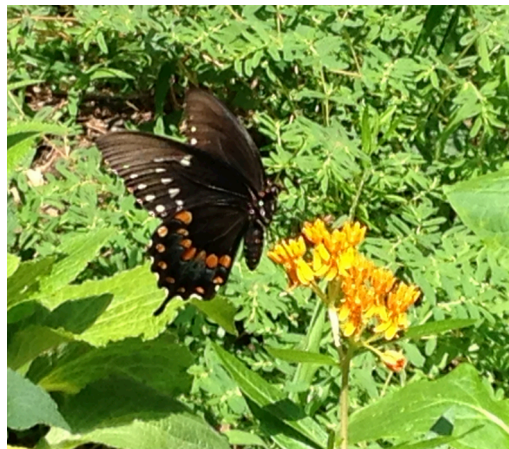


Photo courtesy of Louise Washer

Saturday, August 22, 10 AM -12 PM. Butterflies! (Rain date: Sunday, August 23) 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 203-448-0106 or victormonarch@yahoo.com.

--H2H continued

containing land formations likely to adapt to climate change in the future. Targeted landowners will learn about their land and gain a better understanding of their vital role in sustaining the natural resources critical to supporting people and wildlife.

H2H partners recognize their work will contribute to a more connected open space network in support of local and regional conservation visions, including *Wildlands and Woodlands*, which led to the formation of one of H2H's key partners, Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership (FCRCP), of which NRWA is a participant. As Emily Bateson, Director of Conservation at Highstead Foundation, a regional H2H leader organization, puts it, "The wooded landscapes of New England and New York have recovered over the last 150 years from an era of extensive agricultural expansion, and today we count on them to protect our water, clean our air, shelter wildlife, provide jobs and healthy recreation, and reduce the impacts of global warming. But the seminal 2010 report, *Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the New England Landscape*, documented that we are now losing those woods on a net annual basis to poorly planned development. H2H is a vital collaboration to help reverse that trend, and to sustain the natural landscapes that in turn sustain us, now and for future generations."

For information, contact Jes Siart at Highstead, (203)938-8809.

Officers of NRWA Board of Directors

Kristen Begor, President (Wilton); Kitsey Snow, Treasurer (Ridgefield); Louise Washer, Vice President (Norwalk); Elizabeth Craig, Secretary (Wilton)

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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).

precipitation collector. All water that falls on the watershed can do one of two things: it can run off the landscape or soak into the soil. If water soaks into the soil, it slowly sinks down into the aquifer where it recharges surface springs, lakes and streams. If the rainwater strikes an impervious surface, such as compacted soil, pavement or a building and cannot infiltrate the ground, it can cause storm water run-off, flooding and erosion. These impervious surfaces such as parking lots, roads and developments create a 'fast lane' for rainfall, increasing the velocity of flow, causing erosion and funneling water carrying contaminants into storm drains.

People are often surprised to hear storm water runoff does not go to a wastewater treatment plant. Storm water flows directly into our streams, lakes and Long Island Sound. This runoff is called non-point pollution, and it may contain excess fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides from residential areas and agricultural lands, oil, grease and toxic chemicals from urban development, sediment (from improperly managed construction sites and eroding stream banks), salt from roadways, bacteria and excess nutrients from pet waste and faulty septic systems.

INTERESTED IN MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING YOUR SOIL QUALITY?

You can improve your soil function by maintaining a suitable habitat for the many creatures that comprise the soil food web. Here's how:

- *Disturb the soil as little as possible.
- *Grow as many different species of native plants as is practical. Keep and protect existing native trees, bushes and shrubs on your property.
- *Keep soil covered all year and keep living plants in the soil as often as possible.
- *Test your soil. For instructions call one of the CT Agricultural Experiment Stations or visit ct.gov/caes/soiltesting.
- *Eliminate or reduce your use of fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides and de-icers.
- *Leave grass clippings on your lawn to recycle naturally.
- *Plant lawn alternatives like rain gardens and no-mow lawn mixtures.
- *Use crushed rock, pervious pavers or other alternatives to impervious paving that allow rainwater to pass through.
- *Add organic amendments to garden soil: leaves, sawdust, bark mulch, rotted manure, grass, wheat straw or compost.

Recommended reading: "Dirt the Erosion of Civilizations" by David R. Montgomery, winner of the MacArthur Award.

Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days 2015



April 25- Weston. Dpt Public Works
78 Old Hyde Rd. (8:30am-12:30pm)

May 9- Greenwich. Island Beach
Parking Lot, Arch St. (8am-1pm)

June 6- Darien. Noroton Heights RR
Station (9am-1pm)

July 18 - Stamford. Rippowam
Middle School (9am-2pm)

September 12-Norwalk.
Norwalk High School (8am-2pm)

September 19- New Canaan.
Wastewater Treatment Plant,
394 Main St. (8am-2pm)

October 3- Westport. Yard Waste
Site, 180 Bayberry Lane (9am-2pm)

October 31- Wilton.
Miller/Driscoll School (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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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.

HIGH WATER MARKS: LINDA OLSEN

How do you adequately thank someone who not only does a great "job" that she is challenged with but makes the task her "mission" or better yet, her "passion"? NRWA recently asked Linda Olson to redesign the NRWA website that was cumbersome to move around, out-of-date in many sections, and just not very user-friendly. Linda not only redesigned the website by giving it a whole new look and feel but streamlined it in a such a way that the site is a pleasure to visit and easy to navigate. The information is current, the layout and colors inviting, and the photos representative of the work we do and up-to-date. The site contains information on what you can do in your own backyard to help protect water quality and wildlife habitats as well as information on water quality in the area, the history of the watershed, outdoor events and more. A resident of Norwalk, Linda has become a member of NRWA, saying she now appreciates the NRWA mission "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)." Thank you Linda Olson for moving us forward and making us look good in doing so!



*Volunteer Linda Olson of Norwalk updated and redesigned the NRWA website last year. Thank you Linda! Check it out at **norwalkriver.org**.*