

in the mainstream

Norwalk River Watershed Association
Spring 2020 Newsletter

How the Coronavirus Reminds Us to Be Good River Stewards

Soap and water, it turns out, are two of our most powerful weapons in the war against the coronavirus. Water... clean, fresh water. In normal times, it's easy to take it for granted, at least if you live where we do. In times like these, however, its importance is hard to overlook. The reciprocal nature of our relationship comes into even clearer focus – protect the quality of our water supply, and it will help protect us.

Writing this message on World Water Day (March 22nd) amidst the escalating coronavirus crisis, we were inspired by the words of journalist and author Alok Jha*:

“Perhaps it is strange that something so everyday and familiar remains so hard to describe or understand. But this is also the beauty of water.... Its multifaceted, ever-shifting life reveals a story that will connect you, via one strange molecule, to everyone and everything else and the rest of the universe.

Hold a glass of water to the light now and look at this colorless, featureless, tasteless but



ultimately remarkable material. Without it, none of us would be here and our world would not exist.”

What's particularly notable, beyond the eloquent expression of water's preciousness, is the idea that it serves as a link between us and everything else. We're all in this together, connected by, among other things, air and water. Water has the power to help us wash away plagues. And if, together, we continue our work to conserve it

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NRWA and Pollinator Pathway Events

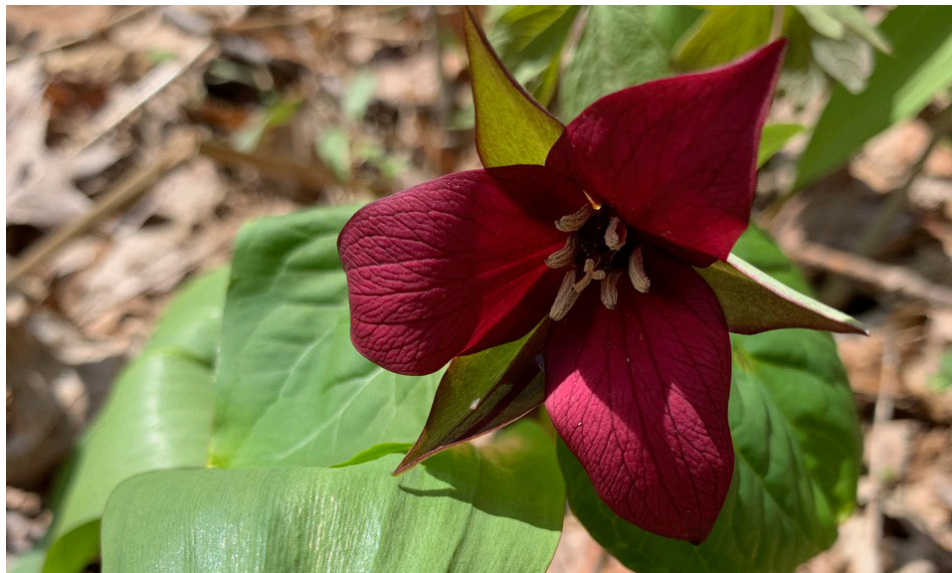
To protect the health and safety of our members and volunteers, we are postponing all NRWA and Pollinator Pathway events in Norwalk, Wilton and Ridgefield until health officials have determined it is safe to assemble once again. At the time of writing, we plan to hold our Annual Meeting in September rather than our usual May date. As we continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation over the coming weeks, we will provide updates at norwalkriver.org and on our Facebook page.

Coming plans in Norwalk include resuming habitat restoration work at Oyster Shell Park, Woodward Avenue Park, along the “missing link” of the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT), and at a new site, Andrews Field. In Wilton, we will be weeding and planting along the NRVT, restoring an area at Allen's Meadow, and working with the Wilton Land Conservation Trust on protected land along the Norwalk River. In Ridgefield, we will start a project at

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How the Coronavirus Reminds Us...

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and safeguard its quality, it will continue to do so.

Anyone who reads or watches the news, however, is reminded on a daily basis that many, many thousands of people in the world are not in our fortunate position... in slums and refugee camps and homes in our own country where water has been shut off. As the The New York Times reported on March 26th, "Daily life in a refugee camp is an ideal incubator for infectious disease. Many lack running

water and indoor sanitation. People often stand in line for hours to get water, which is insufficient for frequent showers, much less vigilant hand washing."

So let us take this crisis as an occasion to appreciate what we have and recommit to doing whatever we can to protect it. As you wash your hands throughout the coming days, give some thought to the many reasons to be thankful for the access we have to clean, fresh water. And then perhaps consider what you can do to help

NRWA and Pollinator Pathway Events

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McKeon Farm to plant for an increase in the numbers and diversity of pollinators. We have hired a landscape designer and entomologist team to design and lead the planting and the accompanying three-year study—bug counts by scientists—to determine if the restored habitat is making a difference. For all of these projects we will need you, our volunteers, to make them happen.

protect our watershed even from the safety of your home.

In this issue, we suggest some concrete steps you can take right now to protect our beautiful river and the watershed it nurtures. We also share some photographs we hope will inspire you to get out there and enjoy it! And it is our hope that by the time you get this, we'll be well on the road to being able to meet together once again.

* See britishscienceassociation.org. And check out Alok Jha's beautiful "The Water Book" (Headline, 2015).

Membership Form

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

Riparian Society

Steward	\$1000+
Protector	\$500 – \$999
Patron	\$100 – \$499

Membership

Supporter	\$50 – \$99
Friend	\$30 – \$49
Other	\$_____

☐ My company has a matching gift program
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Donate Online at NorwalkRiver.org

Or mail your tax-deductible Annual Membership gift of \$_____ to
NRWA, Inc. PO Box 7114, Wilton, CT 06897. Please make check payable to NRWA, Inc.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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

Protect Our Watershed from PFAS, the Forever Chemicals

Although they've been lurking in our environment for decades, PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) have only recently started to catch the attention of the American public. These dangerous chemicals are found in a shocking number of common products, such as nonstick cookware, food packaging, stain-resistant furniture, and water-resistant clothing.

Known as “forever chemicals” because they take so long to break down, they are also very good at migrating from consumer products and packaging into the air we breathe, the water we drink, and into our bodies. Because they last “forever,” they accumulate over time in crops, livestock, fish, game and inside of us. In fact, a 2017 study found that they were present in 97% of human blood samples.

The June 8, 2019 spill of over 40,000 gallons of PFAS-contaminated firefighting foam at Bradley International Airport and into the Farmington River brought statewide attention to these toxic chemical substances. In response, Governor Lamont set up a PFAS task force, and last November it released its final report, which contained a number of legislative opportunities that we hope to see passed this year.

The current pause in the 2020 session of the Connecticut General Assembly brought about by the coronavirus provides an opportunity to reach out to your state legislators to urge their support



for the task force's recommendations to restrict and monitor toxic PFAS chemicals in order to protect drinking water, human health and the environment. Call or email your state senators and representatives to ask them to fight to:

- Ban the use of PFAS chemicals in fire-fighting foam, where not required by the Federal Government (Pass SB 297).
- Limit their use in food packaging and food service wear (Pass HB 5291).
- Fund and expand monitoring of drinking water sources and other high risk sites for PFAS (Pass HB 5288).

- Set a health-protective maximum contaminant level (MCL) for the entire class of PFAS chemicals in our drinking water at one part per trillion, in line with the recommendations being made in other states.

Now's the time to act!
Visit norwalkriver.org for more information about PFAS and to find out how to contact your state legislators.

And see the back cover to learn about other NRWA legislative priorities for this year and how you can lend your support.

Thank You to Our Generous Donors

The NRWA board extends our sincere best wishes for your health and for that of your families. We thank you for your continued support in these challenging times. And as long as health officials deem it to be safe, we urge you to get out and enjoy our beautiful watershed!

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ASML, *teams of volunteers*

restoring the riverbank

FactSet, *teams of volunteers restoring the riverbank*

Gene Smith, Paige Lyons, Kathleen Flynn, *Graphic Design*

Harry Spear, Native Nursery, *plant restoration consulting*

Rich Whitehead, Norwalk Tree Advisory, *tree planting instruction*

Nancy McClelland, *Oyster Shell Park Restoration Captain*

Lauri Mirra, Woodward Avenue Park *Restoration Captain*

St. Luke's School, New Canaan YMCA, *Meeting Space*

Woodcock Nature Center, *Event Space*

Special Thanks to Our Grant Donors

Anne S. Richardson Foundation of Ridgefield
CT Ornithological Association
Global Preservation Society of Weston
Hartford Audubon Society
Eversource
FactSet of Norwalk
One Tree Planted
REI of Norwalk
Ridgefield Thrift Shop

Pollinator Pathway Update

Not Just Native... Local!

The Pathway project that we helped start here in our watershed has grown to over 85 towns across CT and NY and has helped spawn **The Ecotype Project**, a collaborative effort to create a source of wild native seed from this ecoregion. Planters Choice Wholesale Nursery and Gilbertie's Garden Center in Westport, along with several organic farms, Western CT State University and some high schools including Wilton High, are working with CT NOFA to grow local seed collected by botanists from Highstead Foundation in Redding. The goal is to supply homeowners and restoration projects along the Pollinator Pathway with local ecotype plants, adapted to survival in our region and best suited for supporting our local wildlife.



Some of the scientists, farmers, nurserymen, and volunteers working to create The Ecotype Project at The Hickories Farm in Ridgefield, posing with some New York ironweed grown from our local Ecotype Project seed.



NRWA Chosen to Help Launch TerraCorps Program in CT

NRWA is proud to announce that we have been chosen to co-host a **TerraCorps** member with our partner the Wilton Land Conservation Trust. Using the AmeriCorps model, TerraCorps partners with nonprofit community-based organizations who host TerraCorps Members, often recent college or graduate school graduates, in 11-month service terms (August-July). Our member will help with riverbank, hiking trail, park, and open space habitat restoration in the watershed towns and will help expand and coordinate the Pollinator Pathway as it grows across the region. This is the first year that TerraCorps will operate in CT, and we are honored to be chosen as a service site.

Take Action — Support These NRWA Policy Priorities Now

In addition to the PFAS-related priorities we outlined on page three, here are some other issues we are working on to improve and protect the quality of our local water supply. Join us in this effort by calling or emailing your state legislators today to:

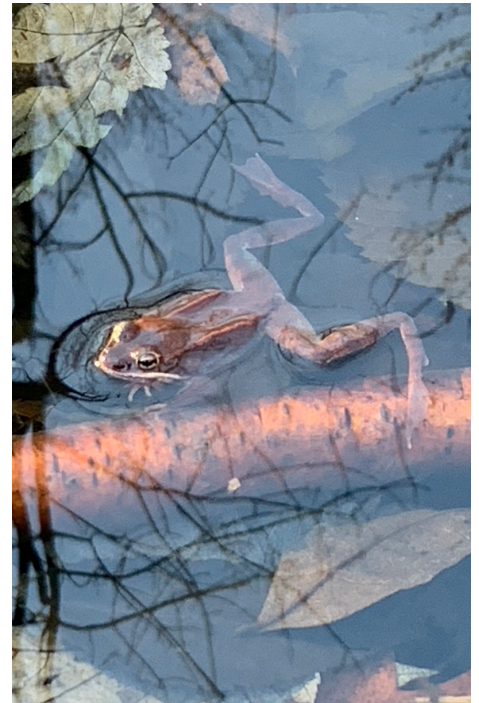
Keep Plastic Out of Our Rivers and Long Island Sound

- **Update the Decades-Old Bottle Bill** (Pass HB 5340). We can keep millions of bottles and cans out of our parks, beaches, and streets every year at no cost to taxpayers by adding recyclable juice, sports, energy drinks, and tea containers to our current bottle bill. We also need to increase the container deposit from five to ten cents to help boost Connecticut's bottle redemption rate — the lowest in the country.
- **Limit the Use of Polystyrene** (Pass SB 99). Anyone who has joined us at our annual river cleanup at Oyster Shell Park has seen the millions of bits of styro-foam, mainly from discarded food packaging, that cover the banks.

Pass Pesticide Legislation to Protect People & Pollinators

- **Ban Toxic Chlorpyrifos in CT** (Support SB 301). After years of study, the EPA determined that there are no safe levels of exposure and was set to ban all uses of this pesticide in 2015. However, our current administration reversed the decision. Let's get the state to act!

Visit norwalkriver.org for more information and to learn how to take action.



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