



The Rhode Island Rivers Council
 c/o RI Water Resources Board
 One Capitol Hill
 Providence, RI 02908
 www.ririvers.org



Minutes of August 13, 2014 Meeting - 4pm
 Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association
 203 Arcadia Road
 Hope Valley, RI

ATTENDANCE:

- A. Members Present:
 Veronica Berounsky, Chair
 James Cole
 Walter Galloway
 Judith Hadley
 Guy Lefebvre
 Lisa McGreavy, Secretary

- B. Guests in Attendance:
 Helen Drew, President, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association
 David D. Smith, EcoRI.org
 Denise Poyer, Program Director, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association
 Richard Grant, President, Narrow River Preservation Association

1. Call to Order: Dr. Berounsky called the meeting to order at 4:14 pm.

2. Review and approval of June 11, 2014 meeting minutes: Mr. Galloway moved to approve the minutes as amended. Mr. Cole seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Drew welcomed attendees to the newly refurbished WPWA headquarters and expressed her appreciation for the incredible efforts of the WPWA staff and volunteers in getting people out on the water to canoe and kayak and spoke about the importance of opening rivers to improve fish passage. Ms. Drew requested the RIRC's assistance in working with the RIDOT to design and install signs along state roadways at watershed boundary and/or river and stream crossings as a way to build awareness of watersheds and rivers in the community. People first need to know where the rivers are located and what they are called before they can care about them. Ms. Poyer added that she had the opportunity to raise the issue at a recent paddle with the Director of RIDOT and others. Dr. Berounsky also added that RIRC member Mr. Cole has initiated a project to install signs at trail crossings/canoe launches throughout the state and Mr. Cole offered to collaborate with Ms. Drew on the project. Mr. Lefebvre noted that he had success working with RIDOT in the past to install signage for the Pawtuxet River.

3. Speaker Series: Denise Poyer, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association: *Wood-Pawcatuck "Wild and Scenic" Process*

Ms. Poyer began her presentation with an introduction to the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed (WPW) noting that the watershed is comprised of 300 square miles, 14 towns in 2 states, and



covers a quarter of the landmass in Rhode Island. The WPW contains many small wadable streams which are considered the most vulnerable habitat in the watershed. Most rivers and streams run north to south except for the Pawcatuck River which runs east-west. The Charlestown moraine blocked rivers from connecting with the coastline and in this glacial process created many freshwater wetlands including the Great Swamp which is particularly prized for tropical plants and vast stands of American Holly. During the Industrial Revolution, many farmers moved closer to urban manufacturing areas leaving their farms to revert back to woodlands which accounts for the heavily wooded landscape in the watershed today. The WPA contains five management areas and approximately 15 % of the WPW is under some type of land protection. This combined with the wooded landscape has been vital in maintaining the water quality of WPW's many sole source aquifers.

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) was formed in 1983 by a group of people who wanted to be proactive in their protection of local rivers during a time when many rivers were deteriorating from industrial contamination. The group recognized early on that it is always easier to protect rivers than to have to repair them. Today the Wood River is known to have the highest biological diversity of any river in New England.

Wild and Scenic:

The current regulations in Rhode Island do well to support public access to rivers and have strong protections in place with a 200 foot riverbank setback compared with Connecticut's 100 foot setback. The Wild and Scenic federal designation would offer tremendous additional benefits to the Wood River system.

The WPWA and partners have been working towards federal Wild and Scenic designation for 3 ½ years and have been very successful in building support from local town residents, state and federal agencies. In April 2012, Ms. Poyer testified at a US House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands in support for H.R. 3388 (Langevin): Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Protection Act/ Amending the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate segments of the Wood, Pawcatuck, Beaver and Queens Rivers. See Ms. Poyer's testimony at <http://www.wpwa.org/documents/WPWA%20Testimony.pdf>

Ms. Poyer presented a Power Point presentation which is also available on the WPWA website at: <http://www.wpwa.org/wildandscenic.htm> - excerpted below:

Wild & Scenic Rivers:

- Nationwide 209 Wild and Scenic Rivers*
- Eight in New England*
- None in Rhode Island (to date)*

What W&S Designation Does:

- Preservation of Outstanding Resource Values (ORV) becomes critical factor for all river-related projects that require federal permits.*
- Creates coalition of agencies, non-profits, towns, & National Park Service to implement a locally developed river management plan.*
- Provides access to federal funding for implementing the plan and supporting the coalition.*
- Prohibits new dams or hydroelectric development.*

What W&S Designation Does not do:

*Will not stop development. Designation only effects federally permitted or funded projects that would impact the river's outstanding values.
Will not rezone private land or change property rights. Land use controls on private land are solely a matter of state and local jurisdiction.
Does not require landowners to provide access to their land.*

The Committee will ask RI Delegates to submit a bill to Congress that directs the National Parks Service (NPS) conduct a study that will determine if the named Rivers meet the Wild and Scenic criteria.

When the bill passes:

*NPS will appropriate money to conduct three year study.
A Study Committee will form to include each town and other stakeholders.
Study will look for Outstanding Resource Values for each river.
Study will develop management plan for each river.
NPS will make recommendations based on study.*

If NPS recommends designation:

Study Committee will ask RI & CT Delegates to submit another bill asking Congress to designate the recommended rivers as Wild and Scenic.

The Wild & Scenic River study will answer two questions:

*What is special about the Rivers? (ORV - Outstanding Resource Values)
How will we protect "what's special" about the river for future generations? (River Stewardship/Conservation Plan)*

What does the Study involve?

*Gathering background data.
Creating GIS maps for analyzing data.
Determining Outstanding Values.
Developing management plan for each river.
Conducting ongoing meetings with towns, state and federal agencies, non-profits, and other stakeholders.
Creating education & outreach material.*

Benefits of Study:

*Outstanding resource values will be identified for protection.
Management plans will be heavily influenced by local and regional needs.
Study will be funded by appropriations from NPS budget.*

Benefits to the Town:

*Helps protect outstanding cultural and natural resources, including water quality.
Draws attention to designated rivers and their resources.
Can be an important selling point for the promotion of economic development, tourism, or recreational use, but only if this is a management plan objective.
Provides funds to manage the natural resources of designated rivers.
Rivers compete more favorably for federal and other grants relating to water resource projects.
May increase property values near the river.
May open up other avenues of funding for open space acquisitions near rivers.*

Provides towns with options for stricter regulations regarding development near rivers.

Other Benefits:

Wild & Scenic status is permanent.

Provides managers with the tools or mechanisms to maintain free-flowing condition of rivers.

Develops an interagency/regional approach to managing the watershed.

Protects the rivers for future generations.

Potential down side:

Will add an extra layer of review to all federally funded projects and permits.

May increase the time taken to get permit approvals.

May increase use of the rivers to the point of adverse impact.

Increases the ability of federal agencies to more easily purchase property.

May increase restrictions via zoning adopted by local governments to protect river values.

Note –local governments do not have to adopt new regulations, but if they want to this gives them extra security and back up to enforce them.

Progress to date:

Reported (Amended) by the Committee on Natural Resources. H. Rept. May 17, 2013

Passed/agreed to in House: On motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill, as amended Agreed to by voice vote June 12, 2013

Received in Senate June 12, 2013

S. 349 Introduced into the US Senate February 14, 2013

Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Ordered to be reported without amendment favorably May 16, 2013

Committee on the Judiciary. Ordered to be reported with an amendment in the nature of a substitute favorably June 13, 2013.

Reconnaissance Survey requested by Congressman Langevin from the National Parks Survey June, 2013.

Reconnaissance Survey Final Report released June, 2014 (See WRWA website)

Next Step: Approval by Senate – by December 2014

A lively discussion followed the presentation. Mr. Lefebvre noted that the gubernatorial candidates recently said in a debate that they would reopen the RI Visitor Center on Route 95 (in the heart of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed!) and this presents an opportunity to advocate for rivers with the new gubernatorial administration.

4. Reports by RIRC Representatives on State Committees:

a. Narragansett Bay Estuary Program - Walter Galloway

Mr. Galloway reported that the NBEP has posted an open call for nominations to join a new Science Advisory Committee and is in process of hiring an Environmental Analyst /Watershed Coordinator to work with watersheds in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. The deadline to submit applications is August 15. For more information, see the NBEP website at www.nbep.org

b. State Guide Plan Advisory Committee – none

c. Bays, Rivers & Watersheds Coordination Team – Veronica Berounsky

Dr. Berounsky reported that she is awaiting documentation to initiate the RI Bays, Rivers & Watersheds Coordination Team (BRWCT) grant to RIRC entitled "Stormwater Projects for RI Rivers Designated Watershed Councils." The granting process has been slightly delayed and a revised grant scope timeline will need to be submitted to the BRWCT. Once the grant agreement is in place, the RIRC will begin scheduling a series of workshops with designated councils to vet ideas for stormwater related projects. The grant scope includes implementation of 4 or 5 projects this year and the remaining projects to take place next year.

5. News of activities in Local Watershed Councils

Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone by Ms. Hadley:

Ms. Hadley displayed the banner that was designed and purchased with the FY14 RIRC legislative grant funds and distributed copies of the accompanying rack card. A clothing donation drive to benefit the BRWC will take place August 16 through 23 at the Providence, North Attleboro, and Woonsocket Savers stores. Remember to mention that you are donating for the WRWC when dropping clothes off. EPA meetings on the proposed reuse plan of the Proposed Cleanup Plan for Peterson/Puritan Superfund Site in Cumberland and Lincoln R.I. have been scheduled and public comments will be accepted until September 8.

For more information see:

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/1331AC9B044D9C3785257D26006A2218>

Ten Mile River Watershed Council:

Ms. McGreavy reported that information on the designation process is being forward to the council.

Kickemuit River Watershed Council:

Dr. Berounsky reported that KRWC would be presenting the RIRC grant funded fish ladder model at an upcoming meeting this fall. Work continues on addressing a leaking sewer pipe adjacent to the Kickemuit River.

Friends of the Moshassuck:

Dr. Berounsky reported that Gregg Gerritt would be presenting his RIRC grant funded wildlife video at an upcoming meeting this fall.

Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association:

Mr. Galloway and Ms. Poyer raised an issue that they feel would be appropriate for the RIRC to address as it potentially impacts watershed group activities. It is in regards to a recent update to the 2014 DEM RI Freshwater Fishing Abstract which states that any organized fishing and boating event composed of a minimum of 6 persons and/or three boats is prohibited from being conducted on any fresh waters of the state regardless of access, or methods of propulsion without the prior issuance of a written permit from the Department. Mr. Galloway will lead a subcommittee to review the matter and report to the council with recommendations. Jim Cole offered to serve on that subcommittee.

Narrow River Preservation Association:

Dr. Berounsky reported that the Pettaquamscutt Full Moon Paddle - now in its 7th year - was a great success with 60 people attending the event. Kudos to Narrow River Kayak for providing refreshments. The Middlebridge series continues on Saturday with the first Art On The River event organized by NRPA President and accomplished painter Richard Grant



who added that the programs help get the word out about the Narrow River and get people out on the river. For more information, see the NRPA website at <http://www.narrowriver.org>. The Narragansett Land Trust and partners have purchased a 45 acre parcel known as the Benson Estate which is located along the eastern shore of the Narrow River. Public trails are planned. A \$4.5 million US Fish & Wildlife grant was received for dredging sections of the Narrow River from Middle Bridge to Sprague Bridge in order to improve wildlife habitat. The project will also add ten more water quality sampling sites along the river specifically to monitor for nutrients and bacteria and locate potential sources. The RI Foundation is now managing endowments for the NRPA.

Pawtuxet River Water Authority:

Mr. Galloway commented that the Pawtuxet River signs that Mr. Lefebvre and others worked to have installed along the roadways are very effective and the RIRC efforts to expand signage in the state will be well worth the effort.

Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council:

Ms. Poyer reported that she assisted the WRWC on an EPA-funded Urban Rivers grant to educate and train volunteers on fish monitoring using electric fish shocker equipment in the Woonasquatucket, Moshassuck, and Ten Mile Rivers. The grant was used to purchase the equipment for the WRWC volunteers who have been collecting baseline data on presence and abundance of fish in the rivers. The next event is scheduled for August 20 in Attleboro. Mr. Galloway and others commented on the wonderful programs being coordinated by the WRWC including a bike part donation and restoration effort, several planned paddles throughout the year, and art projects. He recommended joining the WRWC mailing list for notification of upcoming events.

6. Committee Reports:

Mr. Cole and Mr. Smith reported on the great success of their Paddle Across Rhode Island experience, the highlight of which was the rising 30 yards away of an American Eagle on the Pawtuxet River at Belmont Park. This was Mr. Cole's first sighting of an American Eagle despite being the author of *Paddling Connecticut and Rhode Island* see www.greenherongraphics.com/jimcolepaddling/ and his many years of experience as a canoeist in far more remote areas than the Pawtuxet. Mr. Horbert will be presenting a slide show of the trip at the September 10 RIRC meeting.

7. Officer Reports: Treasurer - Ms. McGreavy distributed the monthly financial report.

8. Other Business: None

9. Chair's Report: Dr. Berounsky reported that final reports for the FY14 legislative grants that were due on June 30 will be posted on the RIRC website at www.ririvers.org. The Department of Administration has notified us that the RIRC will be level-funded at \$15,150 this year of which \$15,000 will be made available for designated watershed group legislative FY2015 grants. A request for proposals will be sent out soon. Three watershed groups were notified that they are up for their 5-year re-designations and materials are due September 5 for the November 12 public hearing. These include the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, Salt Ponds Coalition, and Buckeye Brook Coalition. An email was sent out asking if there are any watershed groups who may be interested in applying for designation. Ms. Marks responded that there may not be enough interest at this time to start a separate watershed group for the Branch River. Mr. Cole offered to contact Ms. Marks to share information on the RI Canoe and

Kayak Association activities in the Branch River. Informational materials are being forwarded to the Ten Mile Watershed Association. The RIRC's next meeting on September 10 may be held at an alternative location – TBA.

10. Adjournment: There being no further business, Mr. Cole moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Dr. Berounsky. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 pm.