
NARROW RIVER NOTES

Newsletter of the Narrow River Preservation Association

Summer 2002

WATERSHED COUNCIL DESIGNATION

On Saturday June 15, 2002, as part of the Annual River's Day celebration, the Rhode Island Rivers Council recognized the Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) as an official Watershed Council after approving NRPA's River Management and Protection Plan. The Rhode Island Rivers Council recognizes only one local Watershed Council in each of the eighteen Rhode Island watersheds.

A watershed council is charged by the Rhode Island Rivers Council to carry out state policies to improve, protect and preserve rivers and their watersheds for the environmental, economic and social



Tony Lachowicz received NRPA's Watershed Council Designation from Jan Reitsma (left) of DEM and Meg Kerr (right) of RI Rivers Council.

health of the watershed communities. With public input, the Rhode Island Rivers Council has helped create the

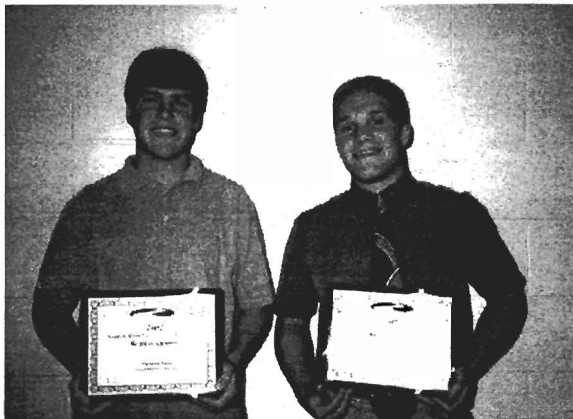
state's first Rhode Island Rivers Policy and Classification Plan and is now working with legislators, agencies, local government and community members to develop and implement a package of policies to clean, monitor and protect the state's rivers and their watersheds.

The main vehicles to implement and monitor the policies within each watershed area are the Watershed Councils which work in tandem with the Rhode Island Rivers Council. This designation will also allow NRPA to become eligible for State funding which the General Assembly provides to the Rivers Council. —Jeremy Doak

Annual Meeting: September 9, 2002

Join us at 7 p.m. at the Coastal Institute, on the University of Rhode Island's Bay Campus.

2002 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



2002 Scholarship Winners from left to right; Christian Nunes of South Kingstown, James Bruneau of North Kingstown, and not pictured Drew Lorenc of Narragansett.

NRPA is pleased to announce the winners of its 2002 scholarships. Drew Lorenc (Narragansett High School), Christian Nunes (South Kingstown High School) and James Bruneau (North Kingstown High School) each received a \$500 scholarship.

Scholarship applicants are judged on four criteria: their participation in environmentally-oriented activities through

out their high school career, a science teacher recommendation, the relevancy of an original essay about the impact of human activity on the Narrow (Pettaquamscutt) River Watershed and their academic achievement in science courses.

These students were each active environmentally during their high school

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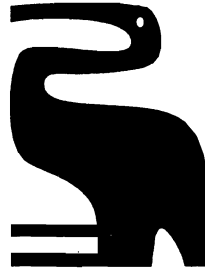
MEMBERSHIP

It is time again for NRPA's annual membership drive. During the past year we have been able to streamline our database, making it easier to track membership from fiscal year to fiscal year. NRPA's fiscal year begins on September 1 and runs through the following August 31. For your convenience we have coded the address label on the envelope which contained this newsletter with your last year of contribution. If the date on your label reads 2002, you are paid up for this year and do not have to pay your annual dues until next year. If the label reads 2001 or earlier, we would appreciate your payment to keep your membership current. We have also provided a pledge envelope so that you may mail us your check.

About 20 percent of our annual income comes from membership dues. These contributions are essential in supporting many of NRPA's programs. Your tax-deductible contribution to NRPA is greatly appreciated.

—Jeremy Doak

The President's Cove



The Narrow River needs you, whether you are Watershed or simply interested in a healthy and safe environment. You, and the NRPA, can make a great team working together to preserve and protect Narrow River. We at NRPA devote our spare time to improving the River for everyone, but the River needs your help too. Please consider serving on our Board of Directors or helping with our other volunteer opportunities (described below).

We are actively recruiting interested volunteers to serve on our **Board of Directors**. Each Director serves for two years. Board meetings are held once a month (usually the first Tuesday) from 7:00 to about 10:00 p.m. at the URI Bay Campus. As a Board member, you have full voting rights on all NRPA activities and can choose from a variety of standing committees according to your particular interests. Right now, we have a particular need for **residents of North Kingstown** to serve on the Board.

If you cannot make the commitment to be a Board member, there are plenty of other opportunities to make a positive contribution. NRPA is organizing a **volunteer force** to work with NRPA Board members on special events and to participate on one of our many committees. By committing only a limited number of hours, you will be able to make real and long lasting changes for the betterment of the River. As a volunteer, you have the opportunity to take part in any or all of the continuing programs and special events that NRPA sponsors each and every year, including:

- **Watershed Action Team:** Surveying and monitoring parts of the Watershed for signs of pollution. Great for neighborhood activists!
- **Road Race:** Help organize the Narrow River Run, held every May.
- **Kayak Raffle:** Sell raffle tickets at local events—like art festivals, fairs, etc.—throughout the summer or sell them to friends and co-workers.
- **Rivers Day:** Organize a special fun day each June to raise awareness about River issues.
- **Water Quality Testing:** Work with a team of volunteers to test water quality from May to October
- **Storm Drain Marking:** Place stickers or paint stencils, which say "Don't Dump—Drains to River," on storm drains in the Watershed
- **River Clean Ups:** Usually held in June, but cleanups can be held anywhere, any time of year. Adopt-A-Spot near you!

To learn more about how to become a River Volunteer, or to find out more about any of the programs that NRPA sponsors, please visit our web site at www.narrowriver.org. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, contact a Board member (listed in the box on the right of side of this page) or call the office at (401) 783-6277.

—Richard Grant



5th graders from the Narragansett Pier School, marking storm drains near Sprague Bridge

KAYAK RAFFLE

NRPA is raffling off a kayak donated by the *Kayak Centre of Wickford*.. Tickets are only \$2 each or 3 for \$5

ALL PROCEEDS SUPPORT PROGRAMS THAT DIRECTLY BENEFIT NARROW RIVER

The drawing will take place on September 9, 2002 at NRPA's Annual Meeting, held on URI's Bay Campus. You do not need to be present to win. The winner will be contacted promptly after the drawing.

6239

NRPA is part of the United Way Workplace Campaign. This is our donor option number

If you plan to make a United Way donation, please consider designating a portion of your gift to NRPA.

NARROW RIVER PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

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Narrow River Notes

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Editors

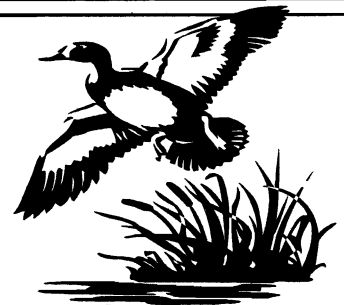
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THE CANADA GOOSE—NATURE OR NUISANCE?

Rhode Island DEM's study of Narrow River water quality showed high levels of fecal coliform bacteria and pointed the finger at wildlife and waterfowl, primarily Canada geese, as one of the primary sources. Fecal coliforms are measured as indicators of possible disease-causing germs from human sewage but the bacteria are present in the intestines of all warm-blooded animals (birds and mammals). There is no known human health hazard from "goose poop" (except for walking into the house with it on your shoes and getting caught). There is also no simple or inexpensive way to tell human from wildlife (or pet) sources of the bacteria, using present testing methods.

Geese are almost entirely herbivorous, and plant material is very low in nutritional value. Much of it is cellulose, which animals cannot digest. Animals that live on a diet of grass and leaves have two "choices." One is to have a specialized fermentation chamber in the gut filled with microorganisms which



can digest the cellulose (the "cow" solution). The other is to have a very long gut and push large quantities of food through it (the "horse" solution). Geese use the horse method, and they are relatively big birds, so they can produce a lot of fecal coliform pollution.

Is this a new problem or is it something that has always been with us? In fact, Canada geese have only been considered as a "nuisance" in many locations for about the last twenty years. Like so many other environmental issues, this is another case where trying to fix one problem caused by human impacts on the natural environment has led to a different problem.

Although you'd never guess it from a canoe trip down the River today, 100 years ago Canada geese were very rare in Rhode Island. Professional hunters, shooting without any legal restrictions to supply markets and restaurants, threatened many waterfowl and shorebird populations with extinction. Wetland habitats were also being destroyed at a rapid rate. The few Canada geese that may have been seen in Rhode Island were migrants—here for short stops during the spring and fall while flying between nesting grounds in Canada and wintering grounds in the marshes around Chesapeake Bay and further south.

Canada geese were rare across the entire continent. There are eleven different races or subspecies of Canada goose in North America, ranging in size from the 3-4 pound "cackling" race to the "giant" race that averages 12-13 pounds and can get as large as 24

pounds. The Atlantic race which occurs along the east coast is intermediate in size, averaging 7-8 pounds. Giant Canada geese lived in the eastern Great Plains and were unique in being largely non-migratory—remaining in the same habitats year-round. They were thought to have been hunted to complete extinction by the early 20th century, until a few small local populations were discovered in the early 1960s.

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson signed into law the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which gave the federal government the power to regulate hunting of wild birds. Hunting seasons and limits were established for some species, others were totally protected. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) started restocking programs—raising birds in captivity and releasing them back into the wild. After the discovery of surviving giant Canada geese in the 60's, USFWS started an effort to restore those populations. They quickly discovered that the giants were much easier to raise than the other races, with the result that many areas were restocked with giant Canada geese instead of the race that was native to the area. By the 1980's, the phenomenon of the "urban goose" had become obvious. The stocked geese took up residence in city parks, neighborhood ponds, golf courses and anywhere there was grass and water. And they stayed the whole year, without migrating. In many locations they are now considered nuisances—polluting waterways and fouling lawns.

The Humane Society of the U.S. has taken on the issue of the "urban" or "nuisance" goose. They recognize the problem, but are opposed to any solutions that involve killing the geese. On the HSUS home page, you can find an article called "Resolving Conflicts with Canada Geese" (www.hsus.org/ace/12099), with many tips on how to discourage geese from an area. At the top of list is: don't feed them, and discourage other people from feeding them. Bread and popcorn and "cheesy-poofs" aren't very good for them anyway. Some of the methods listed are things that NRPA would hesitate to recommend (e.

(Continued on page 4)

SCHOLARSHIPS

(Continued from page 1)

careers. For two years, Drew Lorenc participated in Narragansett High School's National Ocean Science Bowl. He also was a member of the Environthon team and LEAF, the high school's environmental group. Christian Nunes participated in Students for Social and Environmental Justice for four years and in his school's Environthon and Science Olympiad teams for two and three years, respectively. For two years, James Bruneau participated on North Kingstown High School's Environthon team and was a member of his school's environmental club.

College Scholarships are a component of NRPA's Environmental Youth Achievement Program. The program was created to: 1) recognize environmentally-oriented activities conducted in the Watershed by young people from kindergarten through high school and 2) promote academic achievement of young people in the sciences.

—Melissa Hughes

NRPA SEEKS BAN ON JET SKIS IN NARROW RIVER

The Board of Directors of NRPA voted at a special meeting held on January 22, 2002 to take steps to ban personal watercraft on Narrow River. The Board adopted the following resolution:

"The Board of Directors of the Narrow River Preservation Association, acting on behalf of their membership, feels that the use of vessels which use inboard motors powering water jet pumps as their primary source of motive power (personal watercraft commonly called Jet Skis, which is the name of one specific brand) on Narrow River and in Pettaquamscutt Cove is incompatible with the preservation of the environment of this water body and its adjoining Watershed area and that their use or operation on this water body should therefore be banned."

NRPA has no legal authority to ban personal watercraft (PWCs). Only the three Watershed towns have the authority to pass ordinances regulating watercraft of all types, including conventional boats as well as personal watercraft. Before the towns could act to pass these ordinances, they were required to get special enabling authority from the Rhode Island General Assembly. Last winter, NRPA wrote letters to all three Towns asking them to request the General Assembly to grant the Towns the authority, to control

and, if necessary, ban personal watercraft on the River. All three Town Councils agreed, and NRPA worked with the Senators and Representatives from all three towns to get this bill passed. Both Narragansett and South Kingstown were successful in their efforts, but for reasons related to legislative technicalities, North Kingstown was not given this authority.

NRPA has requested that all three Towns sit down to discuss a common approach to regulation. We are hopeful that a general agreement on a regulatory strategy will be reached this summer and that bans will be imposed as soon as possible in both the Narragansett and South Kingstown portions of the River. North Kingstown has agreed to become involved in discussions and NRPA hopes they will seek the necessary enabling legislation during the 2003 session of the General Assembly.

Why NRPA opposes the use of PWCs in the River

The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council has declared the entire Narrow River Watershed a "Special Management Area." This document, first adopted in 1986 and later updated in 1998, recognized that the Narrow River was subject to considerable development pressures and that the "disturbance or alteration of just one component of the ecosystem can have far-reaching effects, often unexpected and occasionally irreversible." Although there is no prohibition of motorized vessels on the River, the document noted "Jet Skis and boat propellers can damage eelgrass beds and contribute to erosion of the shoreline by increasing wave action in the Narrow River."

NRPA feels that the following factors associated with PWCs can contribute to the overall degradation of the River:

- Excessive water pollution caused by release of unused motor oil, gasoline and gasoline additives, such as MBTE. With PWCs, up to 1/3 of fuel used is

released unburned into the water, which can affect the growth of estuarine organisms. This pollution is most pronounced with 2-stroke engines running continuously at high speeds

- Excessive air pollution— some of the unburned elements are released into the air instead of the water.
- Increased turbulence and turbidity caused by speeding watercraft is damaging to aquatic life.
- Wakes from rapidly moving watercraft increases natural erosion of mud banks held together by salt marsh grasses and damage submerge eelgrass beds. These areas are breeding and rearing habitats for many forms of estuarine life.
- Surface feeding fish can be injured or killed by outboard propellers and by jet tunnels on PWC.
- Nesting birds/animals are surprised and scared away from nesting areas by rapidly approaching and noisy vessels.
- In the US Fish & Wildlife Service's draft management plan for the John H. Chafee Wildlife Refuge, they have recommended the implementation of a "no wake zone" in the lower Narrow River and Pettaquamscutt Cove.

Within the past two years, the National Park Service banned the use of PWCs in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and Cape Cod National Seashore. In a related matter last winter, the US Fish & Wildlife Service called for a "no wake zone" in the lower Narrow River and Pettaquamscutt Cove, a measure also endorsed by the Audubon society of Rhode Island. This part of the River contains particularly sensitive habitat for waterfowl and needs to be managed as a "quiet zone."

What You Can Do

NRPA would like to hear from its membership on this issue. Please let us know if you favor a ban on Jet Skis in the River. Your support will be critical later this year when the Town Councils hold public hearings on adoption of ordinances. Write, call or e-mail your opinion to us at: NRPA, PO Box 8, Saunderson, RI 02874; Phone: (401) 783-6277; E-Mail: nrpa@netsense.net; Website: www.narrowriver.org.

CANADA GOOSE

(Continued from page 3)

g., chemical repellents), while others are probably illegal in our Watershed (fireworks or special noise-maker cartridges for shotguns and pistols). However, there are plenty of other methods to scare away geese, some as simple as turning on the sprinkler, tying your dog in the yard on a very long rope, or putting out flags, scary balloons, or dead-goose decoys. The article also includes names and addresses of suppliers for these and the other items recommended.

(For a detailed review of the history and status of giant Canada geese in the U.S., by Fish & Wildlife Service biologists, see www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/1999/gcanada/gcanada.htm)

—Robert Kenney



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—Richard Grant, President NRPA