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# NARROW RIVER NOTES

Newsletter of the Narrow River Preservation Association

Fall 2002

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## A NEW MIDDLE BRIDGE IS ON ITS WAY

On Monday, October 7, 2002, State officials conducted a groundbreaking ceremony for a new 170-foot bridge over the Narrow River. Joined by Governor Lincoln Almond were the Town Council Presidents from South Kingstown and Narragansett as well as the General Assembly delegation from the area.

At a ceremony held in front of the field office on the South Kingstown approach to the Bridge, Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) Director William D. Ankner, Ph.D. announced that a new Middle Bridge, carrying Middlebridge Road over the Narrow River, is on its way. Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) President Richard B. Grant spoke about NRPA's efforts to get state and town officials to agree upon building a span wider than the current 106-foot opening. As early as 1995, NRPA had lobbied for a wider span in order to permit increased water flow under the bridge and to improve the safety of the various types of watercraft using the River.

"For fifty years, Middle Bridge has



*Attending the October 7<sup>th</sup> groundbreaking for the new Middle Bridge are (from left) RIDOT Director William D. Ankner, Narragansett Council President T. Brian Handrigan, South Kingstown Council President Jim O'Neill, NRPA President Richard Grant, Governor Lincoln C. Almond, Senator Patrick T. "Tim" McDonald and Representative Donald J. Lally, Jr.*

stood tall, connecting South Kingstown and Narragansett," said Governor Lincoln Almond. "Four years ago, I asked Bill Ankner and the Department of Transportation to build a 170-foot structure that would meet the needs of both towns. With today's groundbreaking, we begin a new era in bridging the gap between

these beautiful communities."

Echoing Almond's sentiments, Ankner said, "I'm pleased to announce that RIDOT will soon deliver upon the Governor's promise for a new Middle Bridge. Not only will we replace a structure, but we will also include other ancillary features, such as sidewalks and shoulders, to increase vehicular

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## JET SKI MEETING POSTPONED

The long-awaited meeting, requested by NRPA and scheduled among all three Watershed Town Councils to discuss the proposed ban of Jet Skis on Narrow River, has been postponed. NRPA had requested a meeting earlier this year to get the three Councils together to discuss a possible ban on personal watercraft (PWC), known by such trade names as Jet Ski™ or WaveRunner™. NRPA has favored a ban because of the adverse environmental impacts these watercraft have on the River.

The meeting was originally scheduled for September 17<sup>th</sup> but, because of difficulties scheduling a suitable

room, the meeting was rescheduled to October 23<sup>rd</sup> at Narragansett Town Hall. In a letter dated September 17, 2002 to NRPA's Executive Director, Tony Lachowicz, Narragansett Town Manager Maury Loontjens wrote, "Please be advised that the Narragansett Town Council voted last night to reschedule the October 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting until after the November election. Although the Council is still committed to a discussion of personal watercraft regulations, it is felt that a post election meeting would be more beneficial since the 'new' Councils would be seated."

The Towns of Narragansett, South Kingstown and North Kingstown each requested permission through the RI General Assembly to develop and enforce town ordinances that will allow a ban to be imposed at the local level. The proposed ban will cover all of Narrow River and Pettaquamscutt Cove. This enabling legislation was approved for Narragansett and South Kingstown in the 2002 session of the General Assembly. We are hopeful that North Kingstown will receive similar legislation in 2003.

The meeting among the three Town Councils was to be a joint work ses-

*(Continued on page 4)*

# The President's Cove



NRPA would like to thank all the people involved in making our 32nd Annual Meeting such a success. The meeting was held on Monday, September 9, 2002, at the Coastal Institute Building Auditorium on URI's Narragansett Bay Campus.

The evening featured a presentation by Charlie Vandemoer from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Manager of the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex, Mr. Vandemoer led a discussion on his organization's plans to expand the John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge at Pettaquamscutt Cove, located in the southern portion of the Narrow River Watershed. His talk covered recent plans to acquire a 10.5-acre parcel of land where Wiley's Restaurant and Narrow River Kayaks are now located. In his role as Refuge Manager, Mr. Vandemoer is responsible for all five Refuges in Rhode Island, including Block Island NWR in New Shoreham, Ninigret NWR in Charlestown, Sachuest Point NWR in Middletown and Trustom Pond NWR in South Kingstown.

Other meeting highlights included discussions on land conservation and open space protection, NRPA's review and oversight of land development projects, Middle Bridge replacement status, our all-volunteer River Watch water-quality monitoring program and our environmental education programs. Articles in this newsletter will provide more detail.

The meeting concluded on a high note as guest speaker Charlie Vandemoer accepted NRPA's W.E.R. LaFarge Memorial Award on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in recognition of their contributions to protection of the River and its Watershed. The award is named for W.E.R. LaFarge, a long-time "Friend of the River," who worked tirelessly as President of the NRPA Board of Directors for more than fifteen years. The award is given each year to a person or group that exemplifies LaFarge's caring for the River. A poet and writer by vocation, his love for the River always flowed through his work. Finally, the drawing of the winning raffle ticket closed the meeting and Sandy Taylor of North Kingstown took home the kayak.

—Richard Grant

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We welcome your support

Narrow River Preservation Association

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Mail to: NRPA - P.O. Box 8 - Saunderstown, RI 02874

*The Narrow River Preservation Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.  
 The mission of NRPA is to preserve the quality of the communities and natural environment within the Narrow River Watershed.*

# 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.

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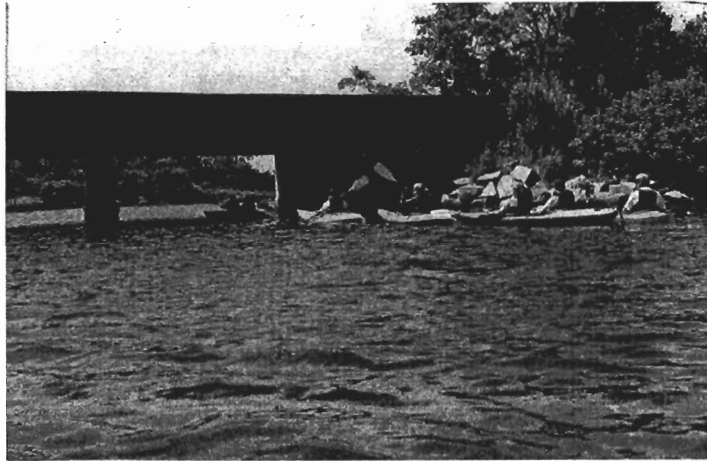
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## JOURNALISTS JOURNEY FROM NEAR AND FAR TO NARROW RIVER TO LEARN ABOUT WATER QUALITY

Did you happen to see a large group of people with notebooks assembled early on the morning of Monday, June 24, by Sprague Bridge? You might have seen them looking up and down the River, examining maps, listening to Chris Turner from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) talking about DEM's bacteria sampling, and listening to Veronica Berounsky from NRPA—also a marine ecologist at the Graduate School of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island (GSO-URI)—talking about the science and natural history of the River and its Watershed. Or maybe you saw about fifteen kayaks being paddled down Narrow River and stopping to collect water samples later that morning and, if you peeked into one of the laboratories at the GSO-URI that afternoon, you would have seen these same people peering into microscopes, looking at bacteria cultures. These were the thirteen journalists in broadcast, print and electronic media who had been awarded fellowships by the Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting to attend the fourth annual week-long marine and environmental science workshop at GSO-URI which was titled "Coastal Impacts: Marine and Environmental Science for Journalists."

There were both American and international journalists in attendance. Journalists came from as close as South County and other parts of Rhode Island: Annie Sherman of *South County Newspapers*, Wakefield, RI; Jennette Barnes of the *Warwick Beacon*, Warwick, RI; and Jean Plunkett of *The Providence Journal*, Providence, RI. The journalists from other parts of the United States were: Susan Cover, *Springfield News-Sun*, Springfield, OH; Molly Kavanaugh, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Elyria, OH; Jake Miller, freelance, Jamaica Plain, MA; Scott Miller, KING TV, Seattle, WA; Aaron Nicodemus, *The Standard-Times*, New Bedford, MA; Alex Nussbaum, *The Record*, Hackensack, NJ; and Smita Paul, multimedia freelance, New York, NY. Journalists from other countries included: Tracey Davanna, freelance, Belfast, Ire-



*Journalists kayaking on Narrow River*

land; Pagnawath Kuhn, Business News and National Television, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and David Wiwchar, *Ha-Shilth-Sa Newspaper*, Port Alberni, BC.

As they have in past years, the journalists spent their first field day on and around the Narrow River learning about water quality. For each day of the six-day workshop, the journalists explored a different ecosystem in the area. This gave them an opportunity to learn about the basic science underlying the news in their communities, thus helping them to improve the accuracy and clarity of science-based news reporting. The workshop included basic research in the field and lab with scien-

tists; lectures that examined the intersection of science, policy, and politics; and a public lecture and debate series about science and journalism.

The Metcalf Institute for Marine and Environmental Reporting was established in 1997 with funding from the A.H. Belo Corporation, The Providence Journal Foundation and the Washington Post's Philip L. Graham Fund, with additional funding from the Telaka Foundation in 1998. The Metcalf Institute was named in honor of the late publisher of *The Providence Journal*, Michael P. Metcalf ([www.gso.uri.edu/metcalf](http://www.gso.uri.edu/metcalf)).

—Veronica M. Berounsky

## NRPA SAYS THANK YOU TO 2002 RIVER WATCH VOLUNTEERS

As the eleventh year of NRPA's River Watch program comes to a close, we would like to thank the volunteers who continue to make this program a success.

Twenty-six individuals participated in this year's program. The 2002 Narrow River volunteers included Muriel Benjamin, Zachary Benjamin, Jessica Brown, Jennifer Carey, Sue Davis, Earnest Flewwellin, Nancy Flewwellin, Eric Gauger, Melissa Hughes, Taiyo Johnson, Barry Martasian, Kevin McCarthy,

Madge McCarthy, Harriet Powell, Harry Quan, Sarah Quan, Robert Schelleng, Barbara Smith, Bruce Smith, Heidi Travers, Peter Travers, Betty Vanderbilt, Peter Vanderbilt, Sue Van Ness, Fraser Vaughn and Julie West.

River Watch has been instrumental in providing a better understanding of the health of the River. The dedication and many hours spent by the volunteers in monitoring the Narrow River are greatly appreciated.

—Annette DeSilva

## NARROW RIVER LAND TRUST

In the year 2002 the Narrow River Land Trust (NRLT) closed on two new properties. One was 55 acres and the other was 13, making a grand total of 537 acres now under protection of NRLT.

The 55-acre parcel was bought with funds from the RI Open Space Grant, the federal North American Wetlands Conservation Act and Open Space funds from the Town of South Kingstown. The land has a combination of freshwater wetlands, fields and forest. It includes a historic graphite mine, a number of old foundations and a historic cemetery.

The 13-acre parcel was bought entirely with funds from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. It is comprised almost entirely of coastal wetland.

The Land Trust has also been involved this year in using a grant from the federal Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program to restore some of the open fields of the DEPCO property bordering Tower Hill Road. The land has been brush cut and mowed. We are waiting to see what species naturally colonize the field, but we may seed it with either cold- or warm-season grasses.

With the help of Jeff Nield, the South County Watersheds Coordinator at DEM, the Land Trust finally has a digitized map of the Watershed showing all the protected properties. It has taken years to complete this map because of the lack of (geographic information systems) data showing protected lands. Jeff has been working ardently on the South County Regional Greenspace Project, and the map is one valuable result of that project.

— Julia Randall Sharpe

## JET SKI MEETING POSTPONED

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sion to discuss the pros and cons of such a ban and to finalize the ordinance proposed by NRPA. NRPA had requested time to speak about our concerns and encourage the three Towns to act jointly to enact restrictions common to all three Towns. Before any ban or restriction could be imposed, each Town would have to hold public hearings at which any citizen would be able to comment and/or submit opinions, in writing, for or against a ban.

### Petition Drive Under Way

In the meantime, NRPA has circulated a petition to all of its members. Approximately 900 letters were sent in September urging members to sign the petition and return it to the NRPA office. In turn, NRPA will send copies of the petition to all current Town Council members in the three Towns as well as to candidates for local and state office. NRPA feels that interested citizens should call and/or write to their Council Members to express opinions and make them part of "the record." Copies of this petition are available at the NRPA office and can be e-mailed or faxed to those who are interested.

### Effect on Boating

Some of our members have raised questions about how a ban on PWCs will affect boating. The draft ordinance that we have submitted to the Towns specifically excludes any further regulations on boats. Our concern is *only* with personal watercraft such as a Jet Ski™. The term "personal watercraft" is legally defined in state law as follows: "A vessel which uses an inboard motor powering a water jet pump as its primary source of motive power and which is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling on the vessel, rather than the conven-

tional method of sitting or standing inside the vessel." In order to avoid any misunderstanding, the Board of Directors recently clarified their position on a ban to specifically exclude any ban on boats, however powered, and also to exclude any ban on water skiers, canoes or kayaks.

### Why We Favor a Ban

NRPA's position is briefly summarized below. If you agree with our position in favor of the banning of personal watercraft from Narrow River and Pettaquamscutt Cove, we encourage you to sign our petition. Better yet, send a letter to your Town Council and remind them of how destructive such craft can be to the environment of the River.

NRPA favors a ban on PWCs because:

- PWCs cause excessive water pollution as a result of the release from their engines of unused motor oil, gasoline and dangerous gasoline additives, such as MBTE. Up to 1/3 of the fuel used is released unburned into the water. This can affect the growth of estuarine organisms. This is most pronounced with 2-stroke engines running continuously at high speeds. Recent EPA bulletins support this fact.

- PWCs cause excessive air pollution. Some of the unburned fuel is released from the engines, unburned, into the air as well as the water. Also supported in EPA bulletins.

- Although there is only one documented case of a serious accident involving PWCs on the Narrow River, other public records indicate that increasing use of PWCs could create public safety concerns. Compared with other motor driven boats, the US Coast Guard cites a disproportionately high incidence of PWC accidents, compared with their level of registration.

- Nesting birds/animals are surprised

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# FUTURE PLANS FOR THE CHAFEE REFUGE

The keynote speaker at the 2002 NRPA Annual meeting in September was Charlie Vandemoer, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), who spoke about the Service's future plans for the John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) at Pettaquamscutt Cove. Charlie is the manager of the Rhode Island Complex of five Refuges. The Chafee Refuge includes the southern end of the Narrow River Watershed plus lands around the upper end of Point Judith Pond.

The Pettaquamscutt Cove NWR was established in 1988 when Congress passed a bill, introduced by the late Senator Chafee, that designated 600 acres for acquisition. Senator Chafee was presented with NRPA's "Friend of the River" award in recognition of his conservation contribution. The Refuge boundaries were expanded in 1996 and again in 1999. Also in 1999, the Refuge was renamed in Senator Chafee's memory. Completing the circle, this year the Fish and Wildlife Service was presented with our "Friend of the River" award, recognizing their continuing protection efforts.

The Chafee Refuge boundary currently encompasses 1,342 acres, but only about a quarter of it (329 acres) is owned by the federal government. The process of adding property to the Refuge requires three steps. First, and already done, is establishing the acquisition boundary—the total area that FWS is authorized to include in the Refuge. Step two is Congressional appropriation of funds, which is a major hurdle in the densely populated Northeast where land prices are extremely high. The final step is to identify property owners who are willing to sell.

The newest addition to the Ref-



uge will be the 10.5-acre Eddy property at the Narragansett end of Middle Bridge, the present location of Wiley's Restaurant and Narrow River Kayaks. The purchase is expected to be completed early in 2003. Wiley's and the rental tenants may have to move elsewhere, but they will receive financial and logistic relocation assistance from FWS. As much as possible, the Service hopes to convert the existing buildings and facilities to Refuge use.

The Service completed a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Rhode Island Refuge Complex in the spring of 2002. Copies of the plan for the Chafee Refuge can be downloaded from the Service's online library at [http://library.fws.gov/CCPs/johnhchafee02\\_final.pdf](http://library.fws.gov/CCPs/johnhchafee02_final.pdf) (go to [http://library.fws.gov/ccps\\_region.htm](http://library.fws.gov/ccps_region.htm) to find the plans for the other four Rhode Island Refuges), or you can pick up a copy at the Complex headquarters at 3769D Old Post Road in Charlestown. The plan was developed with extensive public involvement. It describes goals and objectives, explains the reasoning for various management options and outlines future plans for Refuge management.

The main goals and purposes for the Chafee Refuge include: conservation, management and enhancement of waterfowl, fish, and wildlife populations; maintenance and restoration of natural ecological communities and ecosystems; and providing opportunities for wildlife-

oriented research, environmental education and recreation. Specific ecological goals include enhancement of black duck and other waterfowl populations, control of non-native invasive species (e.g. *Phragmites* reeds, mute swan), and protection of marsh habitats. However, it is FWS' plans for public access and use of the Refuge that seem to have drawn the most interest. These plans include (though nothing has been finalized at present):

- opening the Refuge for waterfowl hunting in 2003;
- evaluating the potential for deer hunting in 2003 or 2004;
- increasing fishing access (presently only by boat), including a possible trail access to the shore and a wheelchair-accessible platform;
- interpretative programs;
- joint environmental education programs with various partner organizations, including NRPA;
- an interpretive canoe and kayak trail along the shore;
- interpretive kiosks, overlooks or trails at such locations as the South County Bike Path, South County Museum, Bridgepoint Commons and Middle Bridge;
- possibilities specifically for the Middle Bridge facility include:
  - access to the River for non-motorized watercraft,
  - continued availability of kayak and canoe rentals,
  - environmental education, including permanent displays and programs,
  - increased enforcement presence, possibly by providing space for Town or State harbor patrols,
  - providing space for conservation and education partners, perhaps eventually including a new location for the NRPA office.

—Robert D. Kenney

# NEW MIDDLE BRIDGE

*(Continued from page 1)*  
and pedestrian safety."

Another feature of the new bridge is that it will now be able to accommodate a greater weight, allowing it to carry buses and emergency vehicles that it hadn't been able to carry before. The bridge's design is one of a dual steel, open rail system, similar to that of the Jamestown Bridge. This design will enhance the aesthetics of the bridge while providing greater visibility of the surrounding waterway.

During construction, boat traffic will be uninterrupted except for a brief period when pilings will be driven. For more information, call the DOT field office located at Middle Bridge at 789-1774 or the RIDOT Community Affairs office at 222-1362 Ext. 4015.

The project, under a \$2.9 million contract with R.P. Iannuccillo & Sons, is expected to be completed in one construction season, or approximately one year.

—Tony Lachowicz

# WATERSHED ACTION TEAM MEETING

7 p.m., Wednesday, October 30<sup>th</sup>  
Mettatuxet Yacht Club

If you have any questions, call  
Tony Lachowicz, Executive Director, NRPA  
(401) 783-6277

# JET SKI MEETING POSTPONED

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and scared away from nesting and feeding areas by rapidly approaching and noisy vessels such as PWCs.

- Increased water turbulence and turbidity caused by speeding watercraft is damaging to aquatic life.

- Wakes from rapidly moving watercraft increase natural erosion of salt marsh spartina grass mud banks. These areas are important breeding and rearing habitats for many forms of estuarine life.

- The National Park Service has banned the use of PWCs in the Dela-

ware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Cape Cod National Seashore and many other areas under their jurisdiction.

- The US Fish & Wildlife Service's management plan for the John H. Chafee Wildlife Refuge has recommended adoption of a "no wake zone" in the lower Narrow River and Pettaquamscutt Cove.

- The Audubon Society of Rhode Island, owners of 25 acres of Riverfront property, has requested that the Towns manage speed of watercraft and prohibit PWCs from Pettaquamscutt Cove.

—Tony Lachowicz



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