


NARROW RIVER NOTES

Newsletter of the Narrow River Preservation Association

Winter 2003

THE FATE OF PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ON NARROW RIVER

The fate of Narrow River Preservation Association's (NRPA's) campaign to ban Personal Watercraft (PWCs) on Narrow River is now in the hands of the three Watershed Town Councils. However, you can still help to effect the ban. On December 11, 2002, Town officials from Narragansett, North Kingstown and South Kingstown met with NRPA at a joint work session to discuss whether a ban on PWCs should be enacted. NRPA has been arguing for years that this type of watercraft, sometimes referred to by the trade name Jet Ski™, is very harmful to the fragile River ecology.

Richard Grant, NRPA President, started the meeting by summarizing many of NRPA's past accomplishments and current activities, all of which are designed to preserve the quality of the River. "We have a long history of River stewardship and are not a one-issue organization," he stated. Board member Rob Leeson read a long statement summarizing many factual studies on the subject and detailing why NRPA objects to PWCs using the River. The objections included safety issues, the impacts from excessive noise, effects on wildlife, and air and water pollution. "We're terribly afraid if something is not done soon, all of our work will be for naught," said Leeson.

Dr. Jon Boothroyd, another NRPA Board member and a Professor of Geology at the University of Rhode Island, showed a map of the River. He argued that if the current state boating law—which prohibits any vessel from exceeding headway speed of about 5MPH—was enforced, there would be fewer safety

problems and less environmental damage created by PWCs. The law requires PWCs to slow to headway speed when within 200 feet of swimmers, divers, the shoreline or moored vessels. He

IT'S A FACT

According to the RI Department of Environmental Management, there are currently 42,410 registered boats in Rhode Island. Of these, 2,679 (6%) are personal watercraft and, of these, 48 are registered in the Town of Narragansett, 4 in South Kingstown and 34 in North Kingstown. Although we have no way of knowing exactly how many PWCs use Narrow River, these numbers provide us with a fair idea of the pool of PWC operators who may be within an hour's drive of the River. Since only 3% of all registered PWC owners are "local," it would seem that PWC owners from outside our area may well be the ones who seem to be disturbing the ecology and peace along our River.

noted that, in the shallow portions of the River, most other types of motor-powered watercraft need to speed up in order to plane across the water, especially at low tide. This is especially harmful to wildlife and the marsh grass in the Pettaquamscutt Cove area and near salt marshes where many nesting areas of aquatic birds are found. It also creates a dangerous situation for humans using the River.

NRPA has provided each Town Council with a two-volume report that documents much of the technical evidence describing the negative impacts of PWCs. NRPA Executive Director Tony Lachowicz presented a petition in support of the ban which had been signed by about 500 people. He also submitted copies of a report entitled "Hostile Waters," prepared by the American Canoe Association. These reports are all available at the NRPA office.

The idea of a ban was not without its detractors, however. The Personal Watercraft Industry Association in Washington, D.C., a trade group representing all manufacturers of PWCs, sent Christian Gullot, Manager of Legislative & State Affairs for the Association, up from Washington to attend the meeting and plead their case. Although admitting he had never been on the River, he called the ban "misguided and unfair public policy" and urged the Town Councils to study the issues and establish a fair and workable compromise. Several PWC users and Watershed residents spoke, voicing their opposition to a ban, while others spoke in favor of either an outright ban or much stricter regulations on PWCs.

South Kingstown Harbormaster Barry Ennis noted that his harbor police have a difficult job policing the River at all hours during the busy summer season. He did not feel that a ban was necessary at this time because he has increased patrol activity in the River. He recently released statistics that show the harbor police made 50 safety checks of PWCs on Narrow River in 2002, up

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The President's Cove



As President of NRPA, my main role is to make sure we are aware of and involved with every activity that could affect the environment of the Narrow River Watershed. While our Executive Director, committee chairs and board members are working diligently on making NRPA's land-use, water-quality and educational programs work, further effort is required from time to time. Our fundraising efforts and the River Watch monitoring program are only successful because of the hard work of our members. Now we are asking for your help again—on the issue of regulation of personal watercraft (PWCs or Jet Skis™) by the three Watershed Towns. There are many things you can do (see page 1 article), but the most important thing is to make your voice heard.

At the joint work session in December, South Kingstown harbormaster Barry Ennis stated that there was no large problem with PWCs, since there have been very few complaints from the public about violations. He also said that a recent boater education campaign has taken care of any problems. Anyone who has spent a day on the River, or close by, during a busy summer weekend may find that hard to believe. We know that it isn't easy to call the authorities and complain about our fellow residents, but it needs to be done if we are to convince the harbormasters and town councilors that current regulations and their enforcement are not adequate. We hear the complaints at the NRPA office and pass them on, but it doesn't have the same impact. So, if you have a complaint about PWCs or other boats operating too close to shore, swimmers, or other boats; wake-jumping; harassing kayakers and rowers; disturbing wildlife and waterfowl; causing erosion to the salt marsh edges; making excessive noise; etc.—call the harbormaster in the appropriate town (North Kingstown: 885-1000, South Kingstown: 789-1000, Narragansett: 789-4000). The PWC problem is not going to go away on its own.

Perhaps even more important, but more difficult for many people, we are asking you to make your voices heard in public. At the joint work session in December—along with the NRPA board members who presented the organization's position, a paid lobbyist for the PWC manufacturers, Harbormaster Ennis and Chafee Refuge Manager Charlie Vandemoer—about a dozen residents stood up and spoke their minds. They were nearly evenly split between for and against either a ban or much stricter regulations. NRPA also presented our petition signed by nearly 500 people in favor of a ban. Unfortunately, at that meeting it seemed that five or six people talking (for a minute or two each) counted as much as the signatures of 500 people.

The Town Councils in all three Towns will need to hold public hearings on any proposed PWC regulations. Stay informed about when those hearings will take place (look for announcements in the newspapers, here in *Narrow River Notes*, or on the NRPA web site). Show up at the meetings. Raise your hand when someone asks for those in favor of a ban on PWCs. Most importantly, get up and talk. Even if you only say two or three sentences, your opinion will have a big impact—just as much as mine or that Washington lobbyist's.

— Richard B. Grant

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

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PLEASE JOIN US OR RENEW!

*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.*

PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ON NARROW RIVER

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from 23 in 2001 and 9 in 2000. His patrol activity report indicated that 27% of all warnings issued by the police on Narrow River in 2002 were issued to operators of PWCs. During 2001, 72% of the warnings issued to *all* types of watercraft were issued to operators of PWCs. By contrast, current state records show that PWCs amount to only about 6% of all powerboats registered in RI.

What Now?

The Town Councils took no action at the December 11 meeting, preferring to take the matter under advisement. NRPA urges its members and friends of the environment to continue to pressure public officials to take immediate action. Please call or write your Town Council (with copies to NRPA), asking them to move ahead with the proposed ban.

NRPA feels that if this issue is allowed to fade away quietly, it could be years (if ever) before the issue is settled. We have written each Town Council, asking them to refer this matter to their Town Solicitor for a review of the legal issues and, if they agree with the need for a ban, to prepare a draft ordinance for public hearing. NRPA has also requested that the Conservation Commission in each of the Towns be given the opportunity to review the issue and provide the Council with an advisory recommendation. NRPA has offered its assistance and is willing to meet with the Solicitors, Conservation Commissions or any other municipal officials or agencies to address questions.

—Rob Leeson

2002 RIVER WATCH RESULTS

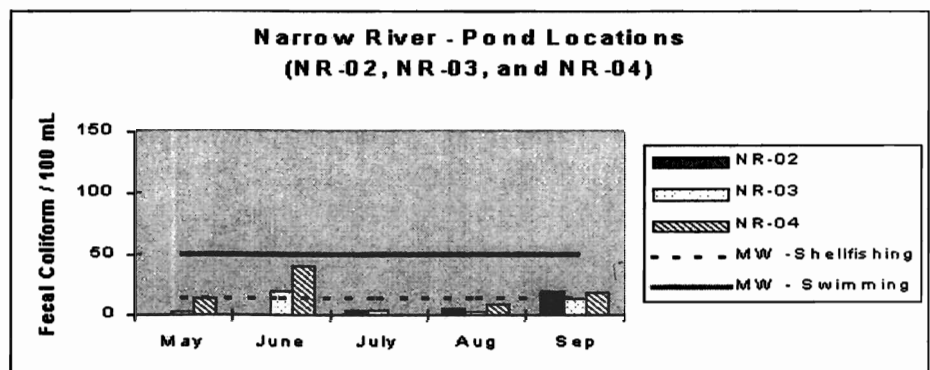
In 2002, the Narrow River Watch program completed eleven years of water quality monitoring. Measurements of temperature, dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll and salinity were made. Water samples were also collected for the analysis of bacteria levels, nitrogen and phosphorous. The URI Watershed Watch (URIWW) office has compiled the 2002 data and has provided NRPA with preliminary results. This article summarizes the fecal coliform data that were collected in 2002.

Tests for fecal coliform bacteria are made to indicate whether or not waters are safe for shellfishing or swimming. While not harmful themselves, these bacteria show the presence of fecal pollution that might include other microorganisms that could cause human diseases. In 2002, Narrow River monitors collected water samples in sterile bottles, for the analysis of fecal coliform, five times during the monitoring season. The 12 River sampling locations are listed in Table 1. The volunteers delivered the samples directly to the URIWW lab for a determination of the "most probable number" (MPN) for fecal coliform bacterial in 100 ml of water. In fresh water, the MPN must be below 200 for safe recreational contact or swimming. In marine water, if the MPN is 14 or greater, shellfishing is unsafe; while an MPN of 50 or more indicates that the water is unsafe for swimming. River locations NR-1, NR-11, and NR-12 use the fresh water standards and locations NR-2 through NR-10 use the marine water standards. It should be noted that DEM has closed Narrow River for shellfish harvesting.

Table 1: Narrow River Monitoring Locations

NR-01 – Gilbert Stuart Stream	NR-07 – End of the Narrows
NR-02 – Upper Pond	NR-08 – Middle Bridge
NR-03 – Lower Pond A	NR-09 – Pettaquamscutt Cove
NR-04 – Lower Pond B	NR-10 – Sprague Bridge
NR-05 – Lacey Bridge	NR-11 – Mettatuxet Brook
NR-06 – Mettatuxet Beach	NR-12 – Mumford Brook

The 2002 Narrow River fecal coliform data are provided in the accompanying charts. Each chart shows the maximum allowable levels for shellfishing (bold lines) or swimming (dashed lines), with marine-water limits labeled 'MW.' With the exception of the two brook locations (NR-11 and NR-12), fecal coliform levels were low at all locations for samples collected in May.



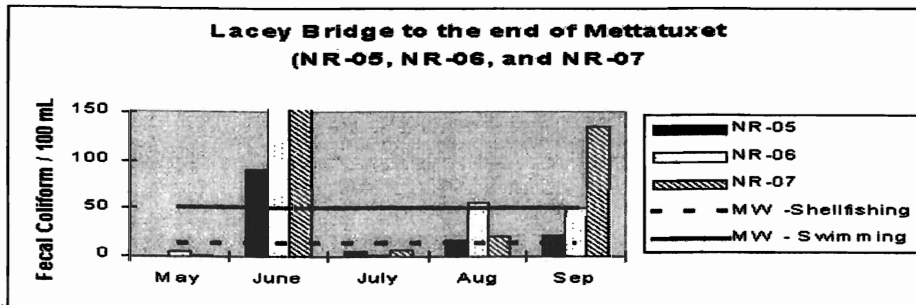
Fecal coliform levels for the Narrow River pond locations did not exceed the standard for safe swimming on any of the five sampling dates. The stan-

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2002 RIVER WATCH RESULTS

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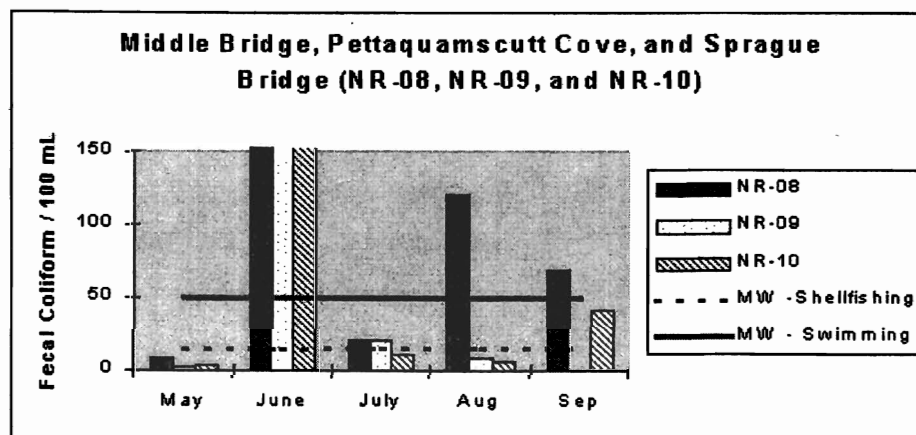
standard for shellfishing was exceeded in June and again in September.



On the May and July sampling dates, fecal coliform levels did not exceed the standards for shellfishing or swimming at any of the three stations in the middle section of the River. With the exception of the June sampling, the Lacey Bridge site (NR-05) did not exceed the level for safe swimming. The site exceeded the shellfishing standard in August and September.

The Mettatumet Beach site (NR-06) greatly exceeded the safe swimming standard during the month of June and exceeded or equaled it in both August and September. This site has been of concern to NRPA, the Town of Narragansett and the residents of Mettatumet. RIDEM's TMDL study also identified this site as a problem. The Town of Narragansett, in conjunction with the Southern RI Conservation District plans to construct a stormwater control structure at Mettatumet Beach.

The site at the southern end of Mettatumet, where the River begins to widen (NR-07), greatly exceeded the safe swimming level in June and September and exceeded the shellfishing level in August. This area is in close proximity to Mettatumet Brook (NR-11) which had very high fecal coliform levels. It will continue to be closely watched.

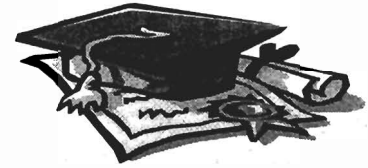


In the lower section of the River, June fecal coliform levels were off the chart (literally!) at all three locations. Fecal coliform levels also exceeded the safe swimming standard at Middle Bridge (NR-08) during August and September, and exceeded the shellfishing standard in July.

Levels at the Pettaquamscutt Cove site (NR-09) did not exceed the shellfishing standard on the August sampling date but did exceed the standard in

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SCHOLARSHIPS



NRPA is pleased to announce that we are now accepting applications for our 2002-2003 scholarships. This represents the ninth consecutive year that NRPA is offering these scholarships. They are available to seniors who: 1) will graduate in 2003 from a high school in the Watershed or 2) live in the Watershed and will graduate from any high school in 2003. High schools in the Watershed include Narragansett High School, North Kingstown High School, The Prout School and South Kingstown High School.

The NRPA Board has approved the availability of four \$500.00 scholarships for the 2002-2003 school year. All applications must be completed and received by NRPA by April 4, 2003. Criteria include: participation in environmentally-oriented activities in and/or out of school; references from a science teacher and another adult; academic achievement in science and math courses and submission of a well-written, original and grammatically correct essay on the environmentally-related topic stipulated in the application.

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

Applications are available from Guidance Offices of high schools in the Watershed, from the NRPA office or from the NRPA web site: www.narrowriver.org.

—Melissa Hughes

AWESOME TEACHERS

If you know someone who teaches in the North Kingstown, South Kingstown or Narragansett School Department, the spring semester brings a unique opportunity to learn the Active Watershed Education (AWESome!) Curriculum. NRPA is sponsoring an eight-week, three-credit, graduate level course entitled Watershed Science for Educators. The course will be taught by Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association Education Director, Denise Burgess, and will focus specifically on the Narrow River Watershed.

The goal of this course is to provide teachers with the basic scientific information and interactive lessons they'll need to set the stage for further investigation with their students. Each participant will receive a watershed curriculum guide, groundwater and wetland activity books, Geographic Information System watershed maps, posters and other resources. Materials have been designed for use by grades 4 through 6; however, educators at all levels are invited to participate and adapt materials to suit their needs. You don't have to be a science teacher to learn to incorporate watersheds into your lesson plans.

Beginning the week of February 24, 2003 teachers will attend eight three-hour after school classes and two field trips. All costs for the course, including materials and handouts, will be covered by NRPA with education grants. If participants wish, they may receive graduate level credits through the URI Feinstein College of Continuing Education by paying a registration fee of \$90. For more information or to register contact Denise Burgess at 401-539-9017 or Tony Lachowicz, NRPA Executive Director, at 401-783-6277, or email nrpa@netsense.net. Funding for this program was partially provided through a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation.

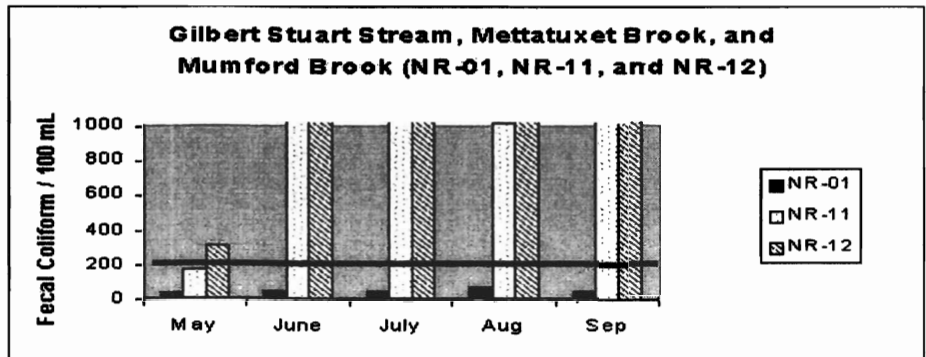
—Denise Burgess

2002 RIVER WATCH RESULTS

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July. A sample was not collected in September.

With the exception of the June sample, the Sprague Bridge (NR-10) fecal coliform levels did not exceed the swimming standard in any other month, but did exceed the shellfishing standard in September.



Gilbert Stuart Stream fecal coliform levels were low during each of the five sampling dates. This is encouraging. In past years this location had experienced high levels. After some investigation, the source at Gilbert Stuart Stream was isolated to an outhouse in the vicinity of the stream; this outhouse was closed in 2001. We hope the low fecal coliform levels seen in 2002 will continue in future years.

With the exception of the May sampling date, the fecal coliform levels at the two Brook locations (NR-11 and NR-12) were extremely high (off the chart). Both sites are areas of concern. Mumford Brook (NR-12) exceeded the safe swimming standard on all dates. RIDEM's TMDL study also identified this site as a problem, and NRPA has notified DEM of the fecal coliform levels that are being observed. NRPA has also decided to extend sampling year round at Mumford Brook, on a monthly basis, as the weather allows.

The 2002 fecal coliform data tell us a lot about the health of the Narrow River. It is clear that actions need to be taken to help improve the quality of the River's water. Some of these improvements are already underway (Circuit Drive and Mettatuxet stormwater control improvements). Continued monitoring is essential in telling us if these improvements are effective. Monitoring is also needed to continue assessment of changes or trends in water quality and to identify any sites of concern. Thanks to the dedication and hard work of the River Watch volunteers, we are developing a good water quality database.

—Annette DeSilva

RIVER WATCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

NRPA is looking for volunteers to join their River Watch program. This year, the program enters its twelfth season of water quality monitoring and, to continue the success of the River Watch program, additional water quality monitors are needed. Of particular need are volunteers to

monitor the deepwater sites in the northern end of the River (pond locations); however, anyone with an interest in the program is encouraged to join.

No previous experience in water quality monitoring is required. All new volunteers receive both classroom and

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NARROW RIVER 10K RUN/5K RUN/5K WALK APPLICATION

Check one: 10K Run
 5K Run
 5K Walk

I hereby for myself, my heirs, executors and administrators, waive and release any and all rights and claims for damages I may have against the sponsors, coordinating groups, and any individuals associated with the event, their representatives, successors and assigns, and will hold them harmless from any and all injuries suffered in connection with this event. I attest that I am physically fit to compete in this 10K/5K event.

Name _____

Sex _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____

(your signature)

Entry Fee: \$15 before May 3, 2003
\$20 May 3–May 10 (day of race)
 Make checks payable to NRPA

**Please fill out all information, sign the form and mail it with your entry fee to:
 Narrow River Preservation Association, Box 8, Saunderstown, RI 02874**

RIVER WATCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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field training from the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch personnel. Volunteers are provided with a manual and all necessary equipment. The monitoring season extends from May through September and consists of biweekly measurements of temperature, algae concentration, salinity, water clarity and dissolved oxygen. Each volun-

teer is assigned a River location for monitoring. Some locations can be monitored from the shore and other locations require a boat or canoe.

Participating in the River Watch program is a great way to spend more time on the River, while at the same time providing a much-needed service

to NRPA.

Classroom training courses will be offered in March with field training planned for April. Volunteers need only attend one classroom training session and one field training session. To volunteer for the River Watch program, please contact NRPA at 783-6277 or nrpa@netsense.net.

—Annette DeSilva



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