

WATERSHED

A Newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

Volume 35-2

Fall 2018

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Every Beginning has an Ending...



Denise Poyer

Every Beginning Has an Ending...Fortunately, the story of Denise Poyer's career at WPWA has a very happy ending. It is with great pride and a healthy dose of lament that I bring you the news that Denise will be retiring at the end of December. There is simply no possible way to replace Denise. But fortunately WPWA has found another intelligent and passionate woman willing to take on the challenge of filling Denise's waders.

For a quarter of a century, Denise Poyer has been at the heart of all of WPWA's education programs. But Denise is more than a naturalist and an educator, she's conducted numerous scientific studies, and recently developed a bi-state flood management plan. All of her work has had an immeasurable impact on the health of this beautiful watershed. Without a doubt, the brightest feather in her watershed cap is securing a National Park Service Wild & Scenic Rivers designation for the rivers of your watershed. The protection and funding that this program will provide to your rivers for generations to come has been WPWA's founding goal since our inception in 1983. [Read more...](#)

Every Ending Marks a New Beginning



Kassi Archambault

Denise Poyer could never leave her post at WPWA without ensuring there would be someone special to blaze a new trail of watershed accomplishments. So she tasked the board of directors and select watershed friends with finding a candidate that would meet her high standards and expectations. While we did find a few tremendously qualified candidates, it was ultimately Denise that secured the next steward of the watershed.

We are so very pleased to introduce you to Cassandra "Kassi" Archambault, WPWA's Wild & Scenic Rivers Coordinator! ... [Read more...](#)

Please make a donation to our Annual Fund Drive today to support your beautiful watershed!

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Your donation will ensure that our programs and advocacy continue for next year, and beyond.

Thank you!

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Chariho Students Dive In

Over one hundred Chariho Middle School students used the Wood River as a living laboratory this October.... [Read more...](#)



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Pawcatuck River Nutrient Inputs Will Be Investigated



A leading cause of impairment to water quality in the Pawcatuck River comes from a range of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus... [Read more...](#)



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Pawcatuck River a Main Focus at RIDEM Symposium

The Division of Fish & Wildlife convened its first Diadromous Fish Passage Symposium on October 25th, 2018... [Read more...](#)



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On a Quest for Bugs

Wow, what a day we had last Thursday on the science field trip to the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association.... [Read more...](#)



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OPINION: How Green is "Green Energy"??

The shift to "green" sources of electricity is commendable--but what about right here in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed?... [Read more...](#)



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rivers of your watershed. The protection and funding that this program will provide to your rivers for generations to come has been WPWA's founding goal since our inception in 1983.

For the last three years Denise has worked tirelessly to bring all the watershed towns together to pursue this milestone federal designation. The multidisciplinary committee she formed has successfully drafted and published the "[Wood-Pawcatuck Wild & Scenic Rivers Stewardship Plan](#)" and secured its endorsement by all the affected towns, states, and federal and non governmental agencies. With this support the congressional delegates of RI and CT have drafted the necessary [legislation](#) to adopt the rivers into the national Wild & Scenic Rivers program. All that remains is the introduction, debate and approval of the bill in the US Congress and we have full confidence that delegates will achieve this in 2019.

Everyone who knows Denise understands how meaningful this achievement is. And we are so very proud and thankful for all of her accomplishments on behalf of the awe inspiring natural places of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. There is no question that the watershed would look quite a bit different had it not been touched by Denise. On behalf of the thousands of schoolchildren, hundreds of teachers, countless fish and wildlife and all the people that Denise has influenced.... We Thank You!! And wish you all the best hiking the mountains of your retirement. [Return to Top](#)



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Every Ending Marks a New Beginning



Denise Poyer could never leave her post at WPWA without ensuring there would be someone special to blaze a new trail of watershed accomplishments. So she tasked the board of directors and select watershed friends with finding a candidate that would meet her high standards and expectations. While we did find a few tremendously qualified candidates, it was ultimately Denise that secured the next steward of the watershed.

We are so very pleased to introduce you to Cassandra "Kassi" Archambault, WPWA's Wild & Scenic Rivers Coordinator! Kassi will retool our education programs to help promote the Wild & Scenic values recognized by the prestigious National Park Service Wild & Scenic Rivers designation. She will also serve as the liaison between WPWA and the now forming Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council. The Council members

will be appointed by the watershed towns to ensure the recommendations of the stewardship plan are implemented utilizing the annual funding provided by the National Park Service.

Kassi has already established herself as a sound watershed science educator through her position as Education Director for the [Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council](#). She will join the WPWA family in early December spending the month learning all she can from Denise. Thankfully Kassi will also have a few months to get settled before the busy Spring 2019 fishing, paddling and hiking season begins.

When not hard at work cultivating the next generation of watershed stewards, Kassi is definitely not relaxing. She can be found working her ranch that is hidden in the woods of West Greenwich. Not far from where she grew up, or from one of her favorite places in the watershed, the Falls River, a tributary of the Wood River.

Please join me in welcoming Kassi by stopping by WPWA this winter to meet this energetic new member of the WPWA family. If you're too snowed in, then be sure to join Kassi when you awake from your winter hibernation on one of the paddles and hikes that she will be leading in 2019. Welcome to the watershed Kassi! We hope the footprints that you leave in this beautiful watershed will be appreciated and followed by many generations to come. [Return to Top](#)

Watershed Happenings

Click on the event name for more information.

[Westerly Land Trust: All Ages Hike at Grills Preserve](#)
November 25

[U.S. Geological Survey Presentations on Online Real-Time Flood-Inundation Maps for the Lower Pawcatuck River in Westerly, RI and North Stonington and Stonington, CT](#)

An overview of flood-inundation mapping and this study, followed by about a 10-15 minute demonstration of the online mapper, and then a 10-15 minute period for questions.

Thurs. Nov. 29 at 1:30 pm
Westerly Education Center
Room 201
23 Friendship St.
Westerly, RI 02891
401-584-4931

[Thursday Hike at Grills Preserve, Westerly](#)
November 29

[Audubon Society of RI: Owl Prowl at Fisherville Brook](#)
November 30, 2018

[Westerly Land Trust: Thursday Hike at Don Henne Preserve, Babcock Ridge Preserve and Erismam Woodlands, North Stonington, CT](#)
December 6

[Audubon Society of RI: Owl Prowl at Marion Eppey Refuge](#)
December 6, 2018

[U.S. Geological Survey Presentations on](#)

Chariho Students Dive In

Despite gray clouds and constant threats of rain, over one hundred

Chariho Middle School students from John Labriola's seventh grade science classes used the Wood River as a living laboratory this October. Using WPWA kayaks and the expertise of Project Coordinator, Denise Poyer, five classes over five days were able to cover a good portion of the Wood River, from above Frying Pan Pond on the upper Wood to the boat ramp at Alton Pond. Besides providing the kayaks, WPWA also provided a generous grant to cover the cost of busing the students to and from the river. And of course several WPWA volunteers were on hand to help keep everyone safe on the water.



Even though it seemed like a really fun outing, the Chariho students were actually fully engaged in scientific methods. During the kayaking session the students were required to observe the banks of the river and note any type of human or animal influence. Some students spotted a small dam made of chewed sticks in the marshy area upstream of the WPWA campus. Other students noted bushes that had been stripped of their berries. Several types of birds and a couple of turtles were also sighted. On some sections of the river the signs of human influence in the form of lawns, docks, streets, and bridges were very evident. The impacts of dams were noted by the way they changed the course of the water, creating ponds behind them.

After comparing natural and man-made features of the Wood Rivers, students were divided into groups to monitor water quality. Some students donned waders and took nets to capture macroinvertebrates – small animals without backbones such as insects, mollusks, and crayfish. Since these animals live in the river all year long, the amount and variety of macros can give some indication about how clean the water is. They also ran chemical analysis to determine dissolved oxygen, acidity and nutrients. The students will use the data they collected during their daylong exploration of the Wood River to understand how habitats are changed by human influences. [Return to Top](#)

Pawcatuck River Nutrient Inputs Will Be Investigated



A leading cause of impairment to water quality in the Pawcatuck River, especially in Little Narragansett Bay, comes from a range of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus. Nutrients find their way into the water through rain runoff which makes the sources hard to track (non-point source pollution). Not hard to track are the environmentally permitted discharges of nutrients (point source pollution) from industry and waste water treatment plants on both sides of the lower Pawcatuck River. The ultimate goal of reducing and managing nutrient

inputs into the river is to improve water quality for the benefit of wildlife and plant life, as well as the people who live, work, and play in the river.

For decades, WPWA and our volunteers have conducted water quality monitoring throughout the watershed with the help of University of Rhode Island's (URI's) Watershed Watch program. Thanks to a recent grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the enormous amount of historical sample data will finally be analyzed and used to create a nutrient tracking computer model for the Pawcatuck River.

The EPA's Southeast New England Coastal Watershed Restoration Program recently awarded a grant of \$484,000 to CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CTDEEP) and the RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) to focus on the problem of nutrient loading into the Pawcatuck River estuary. Excessive nutrients can cause toxic algal blooms

Online Real-Time Flood-Inundation Maps for the Lower Pawcatuck River in Westerly, RI and North Stonington and Stonington, CT

An overview of flood-inundation mapping and this study, followed by about a 10-15 minute demonstration of the online mapper, and then a 10-15 minute period for questions.

Mon. Dec. 10 at 7:00 pm
Westerly Education Center
Room 201
23 Friendship St.
Westerly, RI 02891
401-584-4931

Westerly Land Trust: Thursday Hike at Sprague Forest Preserve, Charlestown

December 13

Westerly Land Trust: All Ages Hike at Glacier Park

December 19

Westerly Land Trust: Thursday Hike at Francis Carter Memorial Preserve, Charlestown

December 20

Westerly Land Trust: Thursday Hike at Crandall Family Preserve, Westerly

December 27

Audubon Society of RI: Winter Big Day

Fisherville Brook Wildlife Refuge
January 3, 2019

Audubon Society of RI: Owling at Fisherville Brook

January 25, 2019

Westerly Land Trust: All Ages Hike at Crandall Family Preserve

January 27, 2019

Related News

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October 25, 2018

By TIM FAULKNER/ecoRI News staff

Hopkinton Town Council to Determine Fate of What Would be Rhode Island's Largest Solar Project

October 08, 2018

By TIM FAULKNER/ecoRI News staff

Chaos in Exeter: Council Embraces Utility-Scale Solar Despite Planning Objections

September 18, 2018

By FRANK DIGREGORIO

Reintroduced Natural Enemies Take Fight to Pests

September 05, 2018

By TODD McLEISH/ecoRI News contributor

which rob oxygen from the water and also contaminate shellfish. This bi-state collaborative project aims to develop a watershed model that will help better identify sources of nutrient loading and outline ways reduce the input of nutrients that end up in Little Narragansett Bay.

CTDEEP and RIDEM will create the nutrient model because it is the best way to analyze and track water quality problems now and in the future. Models allow researchers to explore nutrient reduction scenarios and find out which strategies would work the best to attain water quality improvement goals. The two agencies also plan to engage with the Wild and Scenic Stewardship Council because improving water quality is a primary Council objective. The findings from this project may also help provide justification for the Council, WPWA, and others to secure funding to institute water quality improvement projects.

There are two major tasks included in this project. First, CTDEEP and RIDEM will develop HSPF (Hydrologic Simulation Program-FORTRAN) model. The HSPF model has been widely used throughout the country to track and improve water quality. It is a complex and dynamic model that can address soil, groundwater and surface water processes, storm events as well as impacts from point and nonpoint sources of pollution.

Second, increased water quality monitoring will be conducted in the estuary and in the upland watershed of the Pawcatuck River and its tributaries to supplement currently available data. RIDEM and CTDEEP will utilize the decades of water quality data collected by WPWA and others. For one year they will also collect new data at over 30 monitoring sites during a wide range of river flows to improve the calibration of the model. The project plans to utilize many of the stations already established and monitored by WPWA along with a few new ones that reflect land use.

A project of this scale and importance would not have been possible without the decades of consistent funding provided by WPWA to support water quality monitoring throughout the watershed. Nor would it have been possible without the tireless efforts of volunteers that collect the samples from your rivers, or the hard work, at cut rate prices, provided by the EPA-certified lab at URI's Watershed Watch. It truly takes an entire community working hard together to amass over 30 years of consistent water quality data.

The collective effort is often thankless and very expensive. But nearly all the thanks should go to you, WPWA's members, for providing decades of critical financial support. The hundreds of thousands of dollars that you have invested in monitoring water quality is now on the cusp of making a tangible improvement to the health of the watershed. Keep up the great support by sponsoring a water quality monitoring site today! [Return to Top](#)

Pawcatuck River a Main Focus at RIDEM Symposium

At the urging of RI Department of Environmental Management's director, Janet Coit, the Division of Fish & Wildlife convened its first Diadromous Fish Passage Symposium on October 25th, 2018. The gathering of interstate professionals served to update the Director and the attendees on their collective progress toward restoring and improving migratory fish access to your freshwater rivers and ponds.

Among the select presenters was WPWA's Chris Fox who recently received a regional Environmental Merit Award from the US Environmental Protection Agency for restoring migratory fish access to the upper Pawcatuck River and Worden Pond. The award came thanks to his nomination by Director Coit for restoring fish passage to historic spawning grounds that were severed in the 1700's with the construction of several dams.



RIDEM Director Janet Coit addresses the attendees. Photo: Michael Stultz

You Don't Need to be an Expert to Protect Wildlife

May 29, 2015

By ecoRI News staff

R.I. Keeps Close Eye On Its Resident Geese Population

July 12, 2018

By TODD McLEISH/ecoRI News contributor

Human Waste Continues to Impair Rhode Island Waters

June 21, 2018

By FRANK CARINI/ecoRI News staff

Two-State Support for Wild and Scenic Designation for Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed's Seven Rivers

May 07, 2018

By ecoRI News staff

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Chris Fox describes the projects that reunited fish with their spawning grounds.
Photo: Michael Stultz

Fox highlighted the dam projects that WPWA administrated to reconnected species like river herring and shad to RI's largest natural freshwater body. This historic three dam project was unique in many ways. In 2010 the lower Shannock Falls dam was the first Rhode Island dam to receive a permit to be removed. The next upstream dam at Horseshoe Falls was fitted with the state's tallest Denil Fish Ladder and featured the world's first self sufficient eelway. A short distance upstream, the Kenyon Mill Dam was replaced with a naturelike fishway that allows fish to naturally "step" their way over the dam. These are the three primary construction methods to attain fish passage on dammed rivers.

Scott Comings, Associate State Director of the Nature Conservancy (TNC) also gave a presentation on his successful efforts to improve and maximize migratory fish passage at three dams on the lower Pawcatuck River. Comings noted that projects like these could not be accomplished without the strong partnerships that exist between nongovernmental

agencies like TNC and WPWA who partner with local, state and federal agencies for technical and financial support. Director Coit and all the attendees were astounded by the magnitude of restoration that had occurred on the Pawcatuck River over the short span of just eight years.

These efficient and historic restoration successes have elevated the recognition of the Pawcatuck River to an international scale. The Pawcatuck River passage projects have received numerous awards, inspired several research projects, and been the focus of a few masters and PhD programs.

The Symposium also served as a networking opportunity and culminated in a group discussion of what further work needs to be done on RI and CT rivers to continue to support and enhance fish passage. It was noted that there still remains one dam on the Pawcatuck River that is hampering the passage of herring. The USGS stream flow monitoring station at the Jay Cronan fishing access area on Rt. 91 in Charlestown and Richmond, RI features a low concrete dam that spans the river and is difficult for fish to get over. Thanks to hard evidence now being collected through a fish tagging and tracking project, agencies like the US Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA, URI, and the USGS will have the statistical documentation needed to improve passage there through a future in-water construction project.

For decades the Pawcatuck River has been one of the most intensely studied rivers in New England. All this research and monitoring throughout the years has led to these massive restoration projects, watershed wide planning efforts, and near future National Park Service Wild & Scenic River status.

This intensity of focus and protection is the direct result of WPWA member support. Since 1983 it has been you, our members, through your financial and volunteer support that fuel WPWA's efforts to keep the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed in the spotlight as one of the nation's most protected resources. Please keep that support alive by encouraging your friends to become members of the region's leading watershed organization. [Return to Top](#)

On a Quest for Bugs

As reported in the Quest Montessori Middle School Student Newsletter 10/26/2018

Wow, what a day we had last Thursday on the science field trip to the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association. The middle school students very much enjoyed the kayaking experience. It was educational too, because we looked for signs of human impact and things that have happened naturally, which we recorded in our field journals. Afterwards we had lunch while we engaged in a conversation about everyone's crazy uncles and the nicknames they call us.



Determining dissolved oxygen

Then we headed downstream to catch macroinvertebrates. We found mayflies, stoneflies, crayfish, whirligig beetles, amphipods and isopods. These macroinvertebrates indicate good water quality. When we were done by the river, we brought our findings back to the lodge, and identified them as well as learned about their impact in the Wood Pawcatuck Watershed. We also did a dissolved oxygen test and the water was FULL of dissolved oxygen, which is a good thing. The more the merrier! To top it off there was the musical bus ride home full of singing to our favorite tunes. [Return to Top](#)



Quest Montessori School students on the water.

OPINION: How Green is “Green Energy”??

The shift from fossil fuel based electricity to “green” sources is commendable and will have a positive impact on the air quality and overall global environment. But what about right here in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed? We live in a relatively undeveloped natural environment that many take for granted. With the introduction of hydropower, wind power, and especially solar power, your watershed is at risk of being degraded and overdeveloped.

It is important to remember that all “green energy” does come at some cost to the environment. Hydropower can cause increases in water temperatures, disrupt the movement of fish and alter wildlife and plant habitat. Wind turbines can negatively impact bird migrations and when placed in the ocean, disrupt the gathering and migration of mammals and fish. Industrial scale solar arrays often change the local habitat by clear cutting trees and after installation are often surrounded by fencing that interrupts wildlife movements.

Solar energy development is gaining traction and it seems as though every day there is a new array being proposed somewhere in this 320 square mile watershed. Many of you have asked, why isn't WPWA out in front of all these development projects? The answer is quite simple, but not readily apparent. As an organization with very limited staff and financial resources, it is impossible for us to assess, comment on, and follow the hundreds of solar proposals now under review or development.

To fairly and evenly assess and comment on every project in the watershed would require that WPWA develop an entire division within the organization populated by professional scientists, planners, and engineers. Collectively, this group would cost our members thousands of dollars per hour to perhaps only occasionally dissuade a town council away from the lure of new solar tax revenue.

So what is WPWA doing instead? Our limited resources can be the most effective through the advocacy for solar ordinances within the watershed towns and at the state levels. But this process takes time and requires your patience. So what can be done in the meantime? That's where you our members come in. You are the eyes and the ears of the watershed.

If you learn of a new solar array being considered in your town, please make your voice heard. And don't wait until it is proposed in your back yard. Attend planning, zoning, and town council meetings to learn about the project and ask important questions. Will a forest be leveled? Or will the project be built on an already disturbed area like a former landfill? Sometimes these green projects truly are green because they put abandoned but already developed areas to use. But all too often they are not.

The single loudest voice of opposition to a project is you the taxpayer. If you are upset or concerned about a green development project in your town, get involved. Learn the facts of the project and, if there seems to be a negative net benefit to the environment, voice your concern and opposition to your elected officials. Inform all your friends and ask them to get involved. And if your voices fall on deaf ears, you'll know who NOT to vote for during the next elections.

Meanwhile WPWA will continue to work with the towns and states to institute regulations and also create incentives for projects that clean up contaminated land.

We all look forward to the day when green energy projects are truly green, and we will reach that goal by working together. WPWA will be doing its part and we hope you will as well.

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