

# **WESTFIELD RIVER NOTES**

## **VOL. 5, ISSUE 1**

### **FEBRUARY-MARCH 2008**

Dear Westfield River Watershed Neighbors,

Let's "Go WILD" on the Westfield River!!! In October, we will celebrate not only the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, but also the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Westfield River's Wild & Scenic designation. Our lead article highlights this momentous occasion and how the Wild & Scenic designation continues to guide and protect the special features and pristine river valleys of the Westfield River Watershed.



Photo credit: Jeff Penn, Overlooking the Westfield River Valley

I hope you will be able to join us at the upcoming **14<sup>th</sup> Annual Westfield River Symposium** to be held on **Saturday, April 5<sup>th</sup>** at Scanlon Banquet Hall at **Westfield State College**. We will be hosting the "**The Year to Go Wild on the Westfield River**" session. Come wish the Westfield River "*Happy Anniversary*" and hear about the exciting projects and activities happening along the Wild & Scenic reaches of the Westfield River. The presentation will include an historical overview of the Wild & Scenic designation, findings from the Walkin the Watershed Stream Team Surveys, and updates on the Westfield River's participation in the Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers program.

As in the case of the Westfield River Wild & Scenic designation, we rely on the participation, enthusiasm and knowledge of our friends and neighbors to help protect the unique resources of the Westfield River. In 2007, over 65 of you joined Stream Teams and participated in our ***Walkin the Watershed Surveys***. During the month of March, we will bring these Stream Teams together to review survey highlights and to plan for projects and follow-up surveys this upcoming year. Find more information and meeting details under our **Project Update** section of the newsletter. We value your knowledge and ideas and hope you will be able to join us for one of these Stream Team gatherings.

~Robert Thompson, Chair  
Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee

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## THE WESTFIELD RIVER AND NATIONAL WILD & SCENIC RIVERS ACT: 15 AND 40 WILD & SCENIC ANNIVERSARIES

*“The affluent society has built well in terms of economic progress, but has neglected the protection of the very water we drink as well as the values of fish and wildlife, scenic, and outdoor recreation resources. Although often measureless in commercial terms, these values must be preserved by a program that will guarantee America some semblance of her great heritage of beautiful rivers.”*

Senator Frank Church from Idaho,  
Arguing for passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968)

In 1968, Congress passed the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act to safeguard the special character and heritage of our nation’s rivers. For years, unchecked dam building and river habitat destruction had been occurring on rivers and streams throughout the country. Through the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System, *“certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations (Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, 1968)”*.

Forty years later, over 11,400 miles of 168 rivers in 38 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have been protected under the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System. This represents only one-quarter of one percent of the total 3.5 million river miles in the United States. By comparison, currently over 600,000 miles of river lie behind 60,000-80,000 dams.

The Westfield River became Massachusetts’ first National Wild & Scenic River when forty-three miles were designated on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1993. Fifteen years later, the designation has expanded to encompass over 78 miles of the Westfield River’s three major tributaries and headwater streams.

As a state-administered Wild & Scenic River, the Westfield River is unique in that the management of the National Wild & Scenic designation is accomplished through locally-based and state protection. Since a mix of public and private lands border the designated reaches of the Westfield River, state and federal agencies, landowners, business owners, and other community members share responsibility for the Wild & Scenic River designation and management.

The importance of local river stewards is evident in the recent participation of over 65 Stream Team volunteers who surveyed over 70 miles of the Westfield River. Using protocols developed by the Riverways Adopt-A-Stream Program, volunteers documented and assessed the Westfield River’s outstandingly remarkable scenic, geological, historical, recreational and ecological resources. Survey findings have been compiled into Shoreline Survey Reports and Executive Summaries, as well as large format maps which depict the problems, assets and priorities for action identified by the volunteers. These will be incorporated into the *Westfield River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Plan*.

As the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Westfield River designation and the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act approaches, the Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee is gearing up to celebrate this momentous occasion. We hope that you will also help in wishing the Wild & Scenic River Anniversary a “Happy Anniversary.” To begin, join us or our partner organizations on one of their upcoming events (see Upcoming Events, Page 5-6).

## **WILD & SCENIC QUESTION OF THE MONTH:**

### **QUESTION: WHAT IS WHITE-NOSE BAT SYNDROME? SHOULD I BE CONCERNED IF I SEE BATS FLYING AROUND THIS WINTER?**

**ANSWER:** Recent articles in the paper have highlighted the suspicious White-Nose Bat Syndrome being reported in caves and old mines throughout the northeast. This mystery syndrome – where bats appear to have a white fungus on their noses and sometimes other parts of their bodies – is baffling scientists and appears to be affecting thousands of bats in New England.

The mystery began last year when 8,000-11,000 bats – or more than ½ of the wintering bat population – died in several cave hibernacula in New York. One population plummeted from 1,300 to only 38. With recent surveys of caves and old mines in Western Massachusetts, the White-Nose Syndrome appears to be spreading and has already been detected in two caves in the Westfield River watershed.

In Massachusetts, there are 9 known bat species with populations likely ranging in the hundreds of thousands. Five of those species hibernate in caves and mines, primarily in the Western Massachusetts region. The syndrome appears to be affecting all hibernating bat species – including the Endangered Indiana bat, as well as Little brown bats, northern long-eared, and the eastern pipstrelle.

Bats located near old abandoned emery mines in the Westfield River valley were observed flying around during daylight hours, at a time when they should be hibernating. Wildlife experts also found a large number of bats clustered near the entrance of the mines, instead of hibernating deeper in the mines where temperatures and humidity are higher.

Scientists are still trying to determine if the white fungus causes the deaths or is a symptom caused by illness or virus, bacteria or other pathogen. Researchers report bats with the syndrome appear to have depleted fat reserves months before they normally emerge from hibernation, possibly resulting in starvation and death. Pathology tests also indicated some of the bats appear to have pneumonia like symptoms.

Hibernating bats are particularly susceptible to disease because they congregate in large numbers – sometimes forming tight clusters of 300 per square foot in caves and old mines. When these bats begin to migrate, sometimes hundreds of miles, to their summer range, impacts of the disease may spread and have significant implications for the species throughout the Northeast.

Some experts predict hundreds of thousands of bats could be wiped out in the Northeast region this winter. Ecologically, this could have a significant impact as bats consume large masses of insects – the equivalent of their body weight in one day – and also play a significant role in pollination of plants and crops.

Although there is no evidence that the syndrome poses any health risks to humans, people may inadvertently help spread the disease. Hiker, photographers, spelunkers and anyone else are asked to avoid all contact with bats and to not enter any cave, mines or known bat hibernacula. If you do see any bats flying around or find a carcass, you should take the following precautions:

- (1) Do not handle the bats.
- (2) If the bats appear to be still alive, take a few photographs of the potentially affected bats.
- (3) Report your sighting by contacting MassWildlife at (508) 389-6300 or email [mass.wildlife@state.ma.us](mailto:mass.wildlife@state.ma.us)

For more information, visit: [http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white\\_nose.html](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html)

## PROJECT UPDATE: WALKIN THE WATERSHED STREAM TEAM GATHERINGS!



Image donated by Michael Wolski, Local Hilltown Artist,  
[www.michaelwolski.com](http://www.michaelwolski.com)

# **WALKIN' THE WATERSHED –** *Stream Teams to Gather to Review Survey Findings, Plan Projects for 2008*

The Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee and Massachusetts Riverways Adopt-A-Stream Program will meet with Stream Team volunteers next month to present results of recent volunteer surveys of approximately 70 miles of the East, West, and Middle Branches and several headwater tributaries of the Westfield River.

More than 65 volunteers took part in extensive shoreline surveys of the Westfield River in 2007, documenting scenic, historical, geological, recreational and ecological features. Next month's gatherings will feature photos, maps, shoreline survey reports and executive summaries from the 2007 work, as well as discussion of projects and activities planned for the upcoming year.

“Stream Team” members have already integrated 2007 results into ongoing programs and activities, including selection of eight sampling sites for a new water quality monitoring program to be launched this year. In addition, another “Walk in the Watershed” shoreline survey round is planned for this spring. The Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee invites the public to attend the following Stream Team gatherings to learn about these programs and explore ways to get involved:

**East Branch: Monday, March 3, 6:30-8:30 pm,**  
Cummington Community House, Main Street, Cummington

**West Branch: Thursday, March 6, 6:30-8:30 pm,**  
Chester Railroad Station, 10 Prospect Street, Chester

**Middle Branch: Tuesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 6:30-8:30 pm,**  
Worthington Historical Society, Intersection of Rte 143 & Rte 112

Although an evening has been set aside for each branch, information for all three branches will be available at each meeting. For more information, contact (413) 268-3129, ext 2 or [WalkintheWatershed@hotmail.com](mailto:WalkintheWatershed@hotmail.com).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### WESTFIELD RIVER WILD & SCENIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

#### ***STREAM TEAM GATHERINGS:***

Stream Team volunteers will review photos, maps, shoreline survey reports and executive summaries from the 2007 Walkin the Watershed surveys, as well as discussion of projects and activities planned for the upcoming year. All are invited to attend. Refreshments will be served.

**East Branch Stream Team Gathering: Monday, March 3, 6:30-8:30 pm,** Cummington Community House, Main Street, Cummington

**West Branch Stream Team Gathering: Thursday, March 6, 6:30-8:30 pm,** Chester Railroad Station, 10 Prospect Street, Chester

**Middle Branch Stream Team Gathering: Tuesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 6:30-8:30 pm,** Worthington Historical Society, Intersection of Rte 143 & Rte 112

***WILD & SCENIC MONTHLY MEETING:*** Thursday, March 20<sup>th</sup> from 6:30-8:30pm at a location to be determined.

Our monthly meetings are held, on a rotating basis, in one of the Wild & Scenic Communities. All our meetings are open to the public and everyone is welcome. Meeting agendas are available a week before the scheduled meeting date. Contact (413) 268-3129 or river\_banks@hotmail.com for more details.

### EVENTS SPONSORED BY WESTFIELD RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION:

**1955 Flood Documentary DVD:** The Little Black Dog Gallery, in partnership with WRWA (the Westfield River Watershed Association), will sell DVD's of *Five Feet and Rising: The Flood of '55*. This 28-minute documentary produced by Jack Hayward of Hayward Communications and co-produced by Mark Saint Jean of Westfield State College in cooperation with WRWA, recounts the devastating Westfield River floods of August 1955. The film includes a number of interviews with Westfield residents recalling their experiences of the 1955 event - the largest recorded flood in Westfield's history. The Little Black Dog Gallery, located at 16 Union St. in Westfield, is open from 10 - 5 on Monday through Saturday and from noon to 5 on Sunday. Non-profit organizations can obtain free copies of the DVD by contacting Kathy Meyer at 568-4252.

**Westfield River Exhibit:** WRWA partnered with The Pilgrim Candle Marketplace in Westfield in the creation of an exciting new Westfield River exhibit, which was unveiled on November 24, 2007 and is available for viewing during The Pilgrim Candle Marketplace's business hours of **M-F 10-5 and weekends from 12-5**. The Pilgrim Candle Marketplace renovated unused space and developed it into a large exhibit highlighting the history of the area, celebrating the Westfield River in all its wild and scenic glory, and depicting the Great River Bridge Project in its various stages of construction. The display is divided into the Past, Present and Future. The Past features historic photos and drawings of the river and Westfield. The Present includes a large poster on the Westfield River highlighting its Wild and Scenic features. The Future includes architectural drawings and models of the Great River Bridge. WRWA funded the printing of the Present poster, which is a reprint of a display posted in a kiosk on Route 20 in Huntington.

**Sat, Apr 5 - 14th Annual River Symposium: *What's up in your Watershed?*** Held at Scanlon Banquet Hall, Westfield State College. For a listing of workshops, presenters, and exhibitors, visit: <http://www.westfieldriver.org/symposia/symposium14.html>

## **EVENTS SPONSORED BY THE HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE:**

To register for HCI-sponsored events or for more information about any of the events listed, contact HCI at 413/268-8219 or email [highlands@ttor.org](mailto:highlands@ttor.org)

**Private Land Conservation Consultations with an Attorney: *Saturday, April 5<sup>th</sup> / Cummington Community House / 25 minute appointments from 9AM-2PM / \$15 per appointment, pre-registration required, open to landowners in Franklin, Hampshire, Hampden, and Berkshire Counties who own at least 10 acres. Call 413.268.8219 to register. Sponsored by the Trustees of Reservations' Highland Communities Initiative and the Berkshire Pioneer RC&D Council***

Are you interested in making sure your land remains intact and in the family? Land conservation is an important tool to make sure that your land remains in its natural state forever, and has many tax and estate planning implications. If you are serious about considering the benefits of permanently conserving your land, take advantage of this opportunity for a private 1-on-1 consultation about your land and its future. Participants will be asked to prepare for these sessions by reading introductory materials and summarizing information about their land.

**Stone by Stone: A History of New England's Stone Walls with Robert Thorson: *Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup> / 1 – 3:30PM / Free and open to all | Chesterfield Town Hall, Chesterfield***

Can old stone walls speak? They do for Prof. Robert Thorson. Come and learn what they have to say about the history of New England and its past inhabitants.

**Conservation by Design: A Practical Strategy for Preserving Town-wide Open Space Networks with Randall Arendt: *Monday, April 28<sup>th</sup> / 7 – 9PM / Free and open to all | Conway Town Hall, Conway 413.269.8219***

New development need not hurt the environment, if it's done right. The visionary landscape planner Randall Arendt has been proving that point for years, and he wants to convince you too!

***We would love to hear about your events and activities in the Westfield River Watershed. Contact [Westfield\\_River\\_Notes@hotmail.com](mailto:Westfield_River_Notes@hotmail.com) to list your events.***

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### **Membership of the Committee**

Town of Becket Bill Toomey, Mercedes Gallagher alternate (Treasurer)  
Town of Chester Robert Thompson (Chair), Dave Pierce alternate  
Town of Chesterfield Matt Barron, Denise Cormier alternate  
Town of Cummington Mark Malinak, Judy Moore alternate  
Town of Huntington Jeff Penn (Vice-Chair), Karen Vowerk alternate  
Town of Middlefield Carl Lafreniere, John Richardson alternate  
Town of Savoy VACANT  
Town of Washington VACANT  
Town of Windsor Jim Caffrey (Secretary), Deborah Balmuth alternate  
Town of Worthington Helen Sharron Pollard, Jim Dodge alternate  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts Joan Kimball, Jennifer Howard alternate  
National Park Service Liz Lacy, Jamie Fosburgh alternate  
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Chris Curtis, Anne Capra alternate  
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission VACANT  
Trustees of Reservations Jocelyn Forbush, Wendy Sweetser alternate  
Westfield River Watershed Association VACANT

**Please feel free to pass this along to other friends of the Westfield River. To subscribe to Westfield RiverNotes send an email to [Westfield\\_RiverNotes@hotmail.com](mailto:Westfield_RiverNotes@hotmail.com).**