



Mystic Messenger

A Publication of the Mystic River Watershed Association

What's New with the Belmont Uplands?

Sue Bass, Belmont Citizens Forum

The Belmont Uplands at Alewife is a classic fight over 15 acres of wetlands and forest abutting the MDC's Alewife Reservation, which provides refuge for the reservation's wildlife. The land was long owned by the Arthur D. Little consulting firm. But shortly before ADL's bankruptcy, O'Neill Properties of Pennsylvania bought all the ADL land in Belmont and Cambridge, and in 2000 O'Neill sold most of the ADL land to the Bulfinch Companies of Needham for a \$40 million profit. O'Neill – no relation to the late Tip O'Neill – would now like to build on about seven forested acres in Belmont.

Tempted by the promise of ample tax revenue, Belmont rezoned the land from residential in May 2002 to allow O'Neill to build a 245,000-square-foot office or R&D complex. Soon afterward, the market for R&D collapsed. Now O'Neill is asking Belmont to rezone the land again, this time for 250 residential units, promising to make 25 percent of them affordable. After initial resistance, the Selectmen now appear likely to support the change. A Town Meeting has been tentatively scheduled for Nov. 17th.

Meanwhile, the developer filed with the Belmont Conservation Commission for an Order of Conditions to build the R&D/Office project, perhaps in an effort to extend the life of its old wetlands and flood plain delineation, granted in June 2000. Such delineations normally expire after three years. Already, the development is a tight fit on the property. Under the 2000 delineation, about a quarter of the 4.4 acres of impervious surface would be in the wetlands buffer zone. Conservationists suggest that a new delineation might find that the wetland is larger than previously thought and the buildable land is even smaller.

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Mystic River Watershed Association

20 Academy Street, Suite 203

Arlington, MA 02476

Phone: 781-316-3438

On the Web at:

www.mysticriver.org

The **Mystic Messenger** is a publication of the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA), a community-based, private nonprofit, Section 501(c)(3) organization, established in 1970 to protect and restore the natural resources of the Mystic River watershed.

MyRWA Staff

- Nancy Hammett, Executive Director
E-mail: nancy@mysticriver.org
- Julie Horowitz, Director,
Mystic Monitoring Network (MMN)
E-mail: julie@mysticriver.org
- Janet Kovner,
Director of Stewardship and Outreach
E-mail: janet@mysticriver.org

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Letter from the Executive Director

The fall has arrived and the pace has picked up, as it always does this time of year. Teachers have prepared lesson plans, professors have distributed their course curriculum, and MyRWA has a packed schedule of activities for the fall and winter. We thought that this would be a good time to give you an overview of our "curriculum" for the coming months. Previous issues of the newsletter have described specific projects in some detail – for example, the Alewife Brook water quality classification and the EPA Aberjona risk assessments (Summer 2003) and the EJAM and EMPACT projects (Spring 2003). This issue describes another important topic – the Belmont Uplands proposed development (see Sue Bass' lead article) -- and then provides brief updates on a wide range of projects.

These specific projects are only part of what MyRWA does, of course. Our on-going outreach and education efforts include this spring's Herring Run, Fingerling Fling, clean-ups, and other events, and we are getting ready for our Winter Speakers series. And our Mystic Monitoring Network provides the data we need to assess water quality, track trends, and advocate for cleaner water. This newsletter also includes a report by Julie Horowitz, our new MMN Director, on what our monitoring involves and what we do with the data. We are so grateful to the dedicated volunteers who help us collect this important data every month!

We hope this issue gives you a sense of the wide range of activities your membership dues and volunteer work help to support. We are continuing to face serious financial difficulties, with the widespread cutbacks in state, foundation, and corporate funding. We are confident that the funding picture will improve when the economy rebounds, but need extra help until that happens. We don't want to scale back our activities just when so many of our past investments are bearing fruit and when so many issues of importance to the watershed need attention. If you have not yet renewed your membership, please do so right away. Urge your friends and neighbors to become members, and consider making an additional gift to MyRWA if you can.

Finally, special thanks to two people -- Lisa Waters and Board member John Morris. Lisa has done a complete and much needed redesign of MyRWA's website. We still have lots to do to fill in the blanks, but her design work has given us a great template. Please check it out and give us your comments. John came to the rescue when our computer server melted down in August. He donated a new and much better server, set it up for us, and helped us get back to business with minimal delay. Thanks, John!

See you at the Annual Meeting on October 23rd - - watch your mail for an invitation!

Nancy Hammett

The MMN Water Quality Data: What We Collect and What We Do With It

Julie Horowitz, Mystic Monitoring Network

The Mystic Monitoring Network has reached an exciting milestone. Our baseline monitoring program is now three years old and the *Hot Spot* monitoring program is nearly two years old. Over this time, we have collected a lot of information about the watershed, helping us better understand the overall health of this ecosystem as well as providing specific knowledge of locations and sources of high bacterial concentrations.

So what do these data tell us? Where do they lead us? And what do we plan to do with the data? Our baseline data, water quality information collected at the same ten sites every month, provide a way to check the pulse of the system. For example, a decrease in dissolved oxygen concentration compared to typical trends at a site may reflect a change occurring in the system. We test for nutrients, pH, dissolved oxygen, temperature, bacterial concentrations, total suspended solids, and conductivity, as basic indicators of the water's health. Three years of data help us understand patterns over time and differentiate between seasonal variability and more fundamental changes in the ecosystem.



Betty Radwanski and Julie Horowitz, monitoring at Mill Brook, Arlington.

When baseline monitoring identifies an area of water quality concern in the watershed, of which there are many, we use our *Hot Spot* monitoring to investigate sources of the contamination. Over the last two years, *Hot Spot* monitoring has been used to test pipe outfalls for bacterial concentrations in Mill Brook, Meetinghouse Brook, Alewife Brook, Aberjona River, Malden River, the Mystic River and many other locations. The data collected from *Hot Spot* monitoring are analyzed to identify specific "hot spots" with high bacteria levels, as well as to track trends in bacterial concentrations along the centerline of a creek or river. Where our *Hot Spot* monitoring

results identify possible sources of sewage contamination, we share our reports with the relevant municipalities, the MA Department of Environmental Protection, and other stakeholders. This is a critical step in bringing enforcement attention to sources of sewage contamination.

For example, we have conducted extensive *Hot Spot* sampling of Alewife Brook during both dry weather and rainstorms. These data are crucial to help us evaluate and comment on the possible downgrading of the water quality classification from B to B_{CSO}. As municipalities begin implementing Stormwater Phase II permits, they are required to monitor stormdrains, identify and remove illegal connections, and initiate community outreach to reduce the effects of stormwater. Our monitoring results will play an instrumental role here as well.

This summer, the focus of our *Hot Spot* monitoring shifted to the saltwater portion of the watershed. None of our current baseline sampling sites are in the saltwater portion of the Mystic, but our *Hot Spot* monitoring has identified many areas of concern in the Lower Mystic River, and along Chelsea Creek, Mill Creek, the Island End River and the Little Mystic Channel. We are currently continuing our *Hot Spot* monitoring at these locations and are hoping to obtain funding to add saltwater sampling to our baseline monitoring.

There are always new and exciting developments in the Mystic Monitoring Network, none of which would be possible without the many committed volunteer monitors. And there is always need for more volunteers. In addition to monitoring, there are many supportive roles for volunteers in the program. If you are interested in getting involved, contact Julie Horowitz, julie@mysticriver.org or 781-316-3438.

MyRWA Project Updates

The Aberjona Study Coalition, Inc.

The Aberjona Study Coalition, Inc. (ASC), which received a double Technical Assistant Grant (TAG) from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has chosen Cambridge Environmental, Inc. as its technical assistant and advisor to interpret the EPA reports on the Aberjona Watershed. ASC represents over 225,000 residents along the watershed from Woburn, Winchester, Wilmington, Medford and Arlington. MyRWA is one of ASC's member groups and co-wrote the proposal to receive the TAG from the EPA. With Cambridge Environmental's assistance, ASC will undertake the next task of reviewing EPA's Phase I and Phase II Risk Assessment reports that focus on areas along the Aberjona River. Public comments on these reports are due on or before October 14, 2003. In addition, Cambridge Environmental will assist ASC with reviewing, interpreting, and commenting on upcoming EPA reports pertaining to any proposed remediation of contaminated sites, and will give public presentations of their reviews. If you have any questions or would like to get involved, you can contact ASC at 781-935-2438 or by email at info@aberjonastudy.org. For information on times and locations of meetings, please visit the ASC website at www.aberjonastudy.org.

Mystic River Watershed Assessment and Action Plan

A draft of the Mystic River Watershed Assessment and Action Plan is nearing completion, and will be discussed and distributed for comments at the September 30th "reunion" of the Mystic Watershed Team. (The team was disbanded when the state's Watershed Initiative ended. The state's Riverways Program is hosting this gathering of the team, to encourage continued meetings on an informal basis.) The plan will also be the subject of a presentation at MyRWA's next Policy Committee meeting (tentatively scheduled for October 14th – check our website to confirm), as well as the upcoming *Third Annual Mystic Watershed Research Symposium* (coming in December – watch for details.)

Phase II Stormwater Plans

The watershed's cities and towns have recently submitted their Phase II stormwater management plans to the state DEP and to EPA, as required to obtain their NPDES stormwater permits. These plans describe actions that the municipalities will take during the next five years to reduce the runoff of pollutants in stormwater to rivers and lakes. They are required to reduce the discharge of pollutants to the "maximum extent possible," to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs), and to set measurable goals for 6 minimum control measures: (1) public education and outreach, (2) public participation/involvement, (3) illicit discharge detection and elimination, (4) construction site runoff control, (5) post-construction runoff control, and (6) pollution prevention/good housekeeping. MyRWA is offering outreach and education services to municipalities to support their stormwater programs, on a fee basis, and will be monitoring progress on these plans to ensure that the local stormwater programs are effective. Please support your local DPW as it works to reduce stormwater pollution, which is one of the major sources of pollution in our watershed.

Water Quality Variance for Alewife Brook

The Water Quality Variance for Alewife Brook will now expire next June, and DEP is in the process of deciding whether to downgrade the water quality classification for the Alewife to allow for continuing Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs). MyRWA's Water Quality Committee has been reviewing the relevant reports and data on this complex subject, and developing our position on the appropriate next regulatory steps for the Alewife. We will be making a presentation on our water quality monitoring results at the September 23rd public information meeting on the variance, and will be submitting comments on the MWRA's Final Variance Report and on the water quality classification. Comments are due October 1st.

MyRWA Project Updates, Cont'd

River Use Project

This past summer, MyRWA began a river use survey along the Mystic River to document recreational uses such as fishing, swimming and boating. The initial screening survey has provided an overview of recreational uses, and has confirmed our concerns that people are swimming in and consuming fish caught in contaminated portions of the river. The second phase of the survey is providing more information on people's views about the quality of recreation and on their awareness of potential health risks when water quality is poor. This survey will help guide our future work to promote safe recreational uses and public access to the river.

EMPACT Project

The EMPACT project is completing its second season of water quality monitoring. Check out the website (www.mysticriveronline.org) to read about water quality and view the data for specific monitoring sites. The project team is working to complete the predictive model that will allow us to alert the public when bacteria levels at different locations exceed state standards for swimming or boating. These advisories will begin next spring, when the EMPACT monitoring resumes.

Environmental Justice Across the Mystic (EJAM) Project

The Environmental Justice Across the Mystic (EJAM) project is reaching its final stage this November, with the summit scheduled for Saturday November 15th. This exciting event will include a review of what we have learned from the three forums held in different parts of the watershed, major speakers, and a discussion about actions we can take to resolve the problems that beset our environmental justice communities. There is also one more chance to attend the EJ training, scheduled for October 30th. See MyRWA's website for more information on these events.

Membership Drive

Last spring, the MyRWA Board of Directors began an ambitious program to increase membership and expand our base of support. Board members have been actively soliciting membership from individual contacts as well as inviting new members to join us at many of the events that we sponsor. This was felt to be a critical step, particularly in these tight fiscal times, as federal and state monies have dried up. We are delighted to report that membership has increased by about 10% since this drive was initiated, and we are hoping for further increases in the fall. Please lend your support by joining (if you are not already a member) and by inviting others to join.

Get Connected . . .

- ◆ **Visit our website:** www.mysticriver.org
- ◆ **Join our listserv and discussion forum.** It's a great way to learn about activities, issues and developments in the watershed. Send a blank message to: mystic-river-subscribe@topica.com
- ◆ **Call our office** (781-316-3438) to find other ways to get connected.

Thanks for continuing support to:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- National Park Service, Rivers and Trails
- Department of Environmental Protection
- Massachusetts Environmental Trust
- Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
- Altria
- Tufts / Mystic Watershed Collaborative
- Anonymous funders
- Organizational and individual donors
- All the photographers contributing to this issue

Our 4th Annual Winter Speaker Series begins on December 16th. Don't miss our first talk!

Why Save the Fells? A Rich Past & Present. Dec 16th, 7pm. Medford Public Library. Join Mike Ryan, President of the Friends of the Fells, for a slide lecture depicting this great landscape and the pioneers who endeavored to save it for posterity. And discover too what steps are being taken today in the contemporary movement to save the Fells.

Thanks to the Middlesex Fells movement of the 1800s we are today still able to ramble over "...a great tract of country, all stony hills and tablelands...of wonderful picturesqueness, and wild rugged beauty." (Sylvester Baxter, Malden MA, 12/6/1879). The wildness of the Fells captured the spirit of early reformers and helped launch the nation's first regional park system. But today their great accomplishment - the Middlesex Fells - has been threatened as never before by commercial development.



Historic Postcard of Spot Pond in the heart of the Fells. Postcard from the collection of John Hanafin.

This Winter Speaker Series is sponsored by the Mystic River Watershed Association. All talks are free and open to the public. (Voluntary donations are welcome.)

For a complete listing of our 2003-2004 Winter Speaker Series, contact 781-316-3438 or janet@mysticriver.org Or visit our website: www.mysticriver.org

Activities in the Watershed

Saturday, October 11th, 9:30 am - 2:30 pm. Friends of The Mystic River FALL CLEANUP.

Join us to clean up the 4 miles of river shoreline in Medford. Refreshments and materials provided. (In the event of heavy rain, Sunday, October 12th, noon - 4pm). Meet at the parking lot where Route 16 crosses the river, just east of Winthrop St. (Route 38) near the band shell in Medford. To get involved, help sponsor or for directions: please contact Mary at Mystic02155@hotmail.com or 781-391-2604. *Sponsors: Friends of the Mystic River: Organizing cleanups since 1995. Coastal Zone Management: COASTSWEEP, annual state-wide beach cleanup.*

Tuesday, Oct 21st, 7:30-9pm. Public Forum on The Belmont Uplands: Wildlife, Wetlands, Forests, and Development Adjacent to Alewife Reservation.

All Saints Episcopal Church, Brewster Hall, Corner of Common and Clark Streets in Belmont. Speakers include: Peter Alden, editor of the National Audubon Society Field Guide to New England; Chuck Katuska, Forester, Board of Mass Assoc. of Conservation Commissions; Cynthia Jensen, Ph.D., Conservation Biologist/Ecologist, Bioengineering Inc., Consultant for Alewife Reservation Master Plan; David Morimoto, Ph.D., Program Director, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Ecologist, Lesley University; & Robert France, Ph.D., Assoc. Professor, Harvard School of Design, author of Water Sensitive Planning and Design. *Sponsored by the Belmont Citizens Forum and the Friends of Alewife Reservation (FAR).* Contacts: Jim Graves, Belmont Citizens Forum, 781-993-5551 and Ellen Mass, Friends of Alewife Reservation, (FAR), 617-547-1944.

Sunday, October 26th, 9:30am-noon. Fall Walk at Arlington's Great Meadows (East Lexington).

Meet at the East Village nursing home parking lot at 9:30am. Walk leaders: Betty Wright and Andrea Golden. Walk focus will be determined by participants' interests. Old shoes are recommended for wet areas. For directions, information about this and other walks, please check the website at www.foagm.org/ *Sponsored by Friends of Arlington's Great Meadows (FoAGM)* "A Guide to the Great Meadows" is available at www.lexingtonma.org/clc/pdfFiles.htm

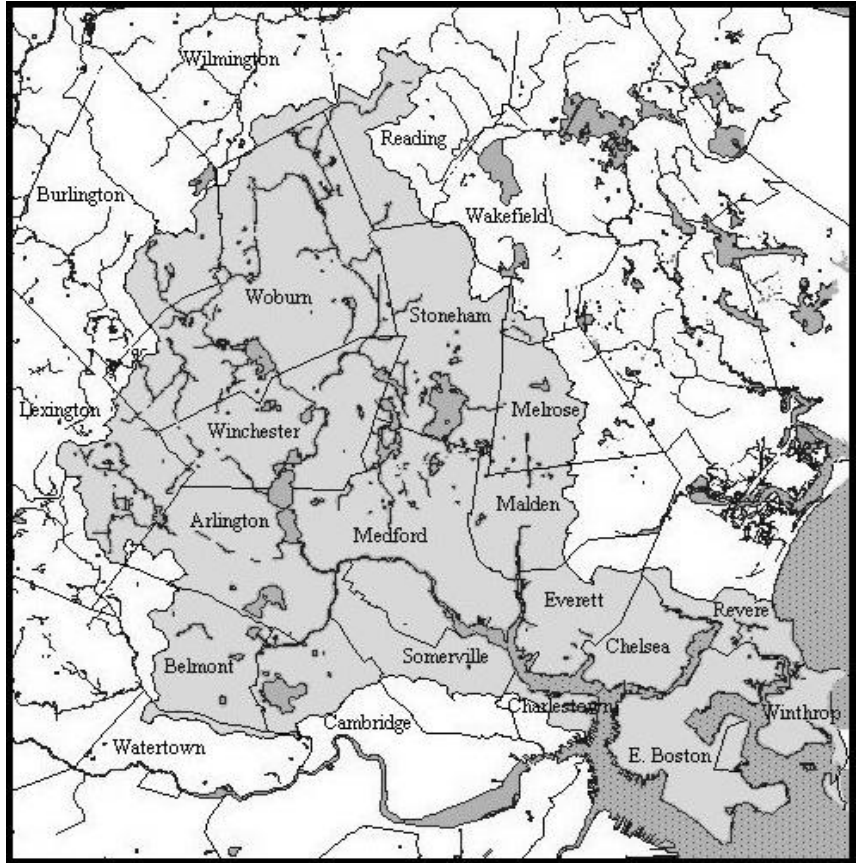
Visit our website at www.mysticriver.org for a complete list of Activities in the Watershed. We update it regularly.

MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED

The Mystic River Watershed Association depends on the support of its members to achieve its goal of restoring, preserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Please consider a tax-deductible membership, if you have not already done so.

Thank you for your support!



Won't you help us? Join the MyRWA today! or, Please renew your support!

YES! I'd like to support the MyRWA in its work to protect, conserve and restore the natural resources of the Mystic River watershed. Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership contribution:

\$25 Individual
 \$45 Family
 \$60 Non-Profit
 \$75 Supporter
 \$100 Corporate
 \$_____ Other

I'd like to volunteer. Please send me information.

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone (_____) _____ E-mail _____

Please mail your tax-deductible donation, payable to MyRWA,

**To: MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION
 20 ACADEMY STREET, SUITE 203
 ARLINGTON, MA 02476**

MyRWA ANNUAL MEETING

Join us for a report on MyRWA's 2003 activities and plans for the coming year; a talk on *Smart Growth in Urban Watersheds* by the region's head planner, Marc Draisen, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC); and time to socialize with your watershed neighbors.

Date: Thursday, October 23rd, 6:30pm.

Place: Council on Aging Senior Center, Tufts Administration Building, 167 Holland St, Somerville (near Davis Square)

6:30 Refreshments.

7:00 MyRWA's Year in Review.

7:30 Marc Draisen, *Smart Growth in Urban Watersheds*.

8:30 Brief Business Meeting and Board Elections.

Our annual meeting is free and open to the public.

For information / directions: 781-316-3438, janet@mysticriver.org

Belmont Uplands (Continued from page 1)

When the Belmont ConCom denied the Order of Conditions, O'Neill appealed to the state Department of Environmental Protection. The Belmont Citizens Forum has filed to intervene in the appeal in support of the ConCom, and O'Neill has even opposed that participation. So far the DEP has made no ruling.

And at the same time, O'Neill has filed its Final Environmental Impact Report under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act for the R&D/Office project.

So what is O'Neill planning to build? The developer explains that, in case Belmont refuses to rezone the land for housing, it must proceed with the R&D approvals to be ready when the market improves.



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Arlington, MA 02476

PUBLICIZE YOUR WATERSHED EVENT IN OUR WINTER NEWSLETTER. ANNOUNCEMENTS DUE BY DEC 15th