

Mystic Messenger



Mystic River Watershed Association

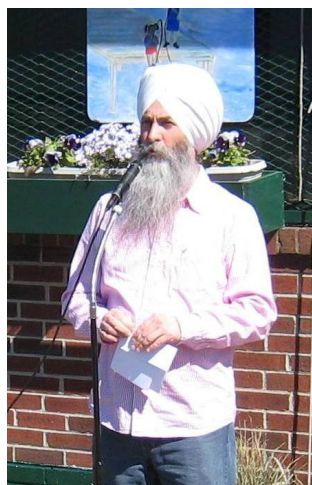
Fall 2009

MyRWA's Annual Meeting is October 29!

Please plan to attend our **2009 Annual Meeting on Thursday, October 29th** at **The Bank New York Mellon** offices, located at 135 Santilli Highway in Everett, MA. Refreshments will be served at 6:00pm and the meeting will start promptly at 7:00.

We are honored to welcome to the meeting our guest speaker, Kathy Abbott (see related article). In addition to her address, MyRWA's *President of the Board of Directors* John Reinhardt and *Executive Director* EkOngKar Singh Khalsa will update us on the current condition of the Watershed and MyRWA's accomplishments over the last year. Last but not least, we will vote for the 2010 slate of nominees for our Board of Directors. Current members are eligible to vote; a membership renewal table will be available.

From the Desk of the Executive Director



Early on in my first year as the Executive Director, I suggested to the Board of Directors that MyRWA was undertaking a level of work more suitable for an organization three or four times its size. The Board and I discussed the simple fact that any organization that wants to succeed must have sufficient strength and depth to accomplish its objectives.

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Kathy Abbott to Speak

MyRWA is pleased to announce that our guest speaker for this year's Annual Meeting will be **Kathy Abbott**. Ms. Abbott serves as Executive Vice President of *The Trustees of Reservation*, which is the nation's oldest regional land trust and nonprofit conservation organization. Kathy will address issues pertaining to **Environmental Advocacy**.



As the Executive Vice President of *The Trustees of Reservations*, Kathy Abbott guides the planning, integration, and implementation of all mission-driven efforts for *The Trustees of Reservations* as the leader of the Conservation Group. This includes Education and Engagement, Land Conservation, Field Operations (in 6 Regions), Planning and Stewardship, and Advocacy. The Executive Vice President is the central partner with the President in leading and managing the organization, and represents the President as needed. A deeply committed conservationist and visionary leader, Kathy brings over 27 years of related experience in government, education and non-profit environmental leadership to her position at *The Trustees*. Kathy looks forward to helping *The Trustees* lead by example in 21st century community conservation issues statewide. *For more information about Kathy Abbott and the Annual Meeting, including directions, please view www.mysticriver.org.*

Mystic River Watershed Association

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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 Mystic River, its tributaries and watershed lands for the benefit of present and future generations.

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Greetings from a New Board Member

by Gene Lee

I'm honored to have been asked to serve as a member of the Board of Directors for MyRWA. I first came to know MyRWA as a consultant to the Board with its membership development needs. In my short time working with the Board and staff, I have been impressed by the members' knowledge of the Watershed's needs, their commitment to restoring a clean and safe Watershed, and the ability to do so much with so few resources. I don't have the depth of knowledge of water quality and environmental issues that many of my Board colleagues have, but I am eager to learn as much as I can as quickly as possible. My previous nonprofit Board of Directors experience, knowledge of nonprofit organizations, and management experience are key

contributions that I will make to help strengthen and grow MyRWA.

My background is focused on education and youth development. I taught middle school and high school English in Kansas City, MO, directed and managed several educational programs for children and youth around Boston,



and most recently was a consultant focusing on improving organizational practices for nonprofits. Although I've been a resident of the Watershed since moving to Massachusetts after graduate school, I was unaware of the beauty of the Mystic River Watershed. Working with MyRWA as a consultant introduced me to many new things in and around the Watershed. Having grown up in Southern California near the beach, I'm naturally drawn to water. Additionally, as the father of a newborn, I can't wait to bring my daughter to the Watershed's ponds and lakes, such as Fresh Pond, Spy Pond, Spot Pond, and the Mystic Lakes.

*We ask our members to please let us know of any businesses, organizations or governmental entities that would be interested in contributing to our efforts to keep our watershed clean and accessible for all. To discuss **Charitable Giving** options please contact EK Khalsa (ek@mysticriver.org or 781-316-3438).*

Invasive Water Chestnut in the Watershed

By

Maria Simoneau, Outreach Committee Chair

A common problem in bodies of water, much like on land, is invasive species. Invasive species are native and non-native plants or animals that propagate readily, often over-taking other less resilient species by stealing nutrients and/or other resources.

Parts of the Mystic River Watershed are currently struggling with a non-native or “exotic” invasive, the Water Chestnut (*Trapa natans*). Native to Asia, Europe and Africa, the water chestnut was introduced in 1897 by a gardener as an ornamental in Fresh Pond in Cambridge. It is present in eleven northeastern states and, according to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), is prevalent in the Charles and Concord Rivers. In Medford, parts of the Mystic River are barely passable due to water chestnuts that are working hard to extend their habitat from shore to shore. These floating-leaved plants form dense, continuous mats over the water surface of lakes, ponds and slow-moving waters. The mats in turn impede boating, fishing, and swimming, and crowd out native plants. Decomposition of large quantities of water chestnuts may result in lower dissolved oxygen levels, which can lead to fish kills.

The attractive floating water chestnut consists of waxy green leaves formed as a rosette that reach over twelve inches in diameter. The plant is rooted by feathery, string-like stems that extend up to 16 feet long. The water chestnut produces a large, hard seed with spikes. One seed can result in ten to fifteen rosettes, and each rosette may produce as many as twenty new seeds. Seeds typically germinate within two years, but some are capable of germinating up to twelve years later. With such high rates of germination, the growth can be explosive, and the extended shelf life of the seed makes their clean-up a multi-year commitment.

The plant has been on the state’s Prohibited Plant List as of 2006. Eradication efforts in the Watershed

have been ongoing for many years, including in the Blair and Yates Ponds in Cambridge, the Little River in Belmont and Cambridge, the Little Pond in Belmont, the Arlington Reservoir, Alewife Brook and Spy Pond in Arlington, the Mystic River in Medford, and elsewhere. Volunteers, including Bruce Tsiknas and Ken Krause of Friends of the Mystic, Roger Frymire, and others, have worked with local and state officials to organize removal of the plants by hand. Many areas including Little Pond, Little River, Yates Pond, Alewife Brook and Spy Pond are now free of water chestnuts since these vigilant water stewards have hand-pulled the plants year after year, assuring and tracking their demise.

However, the spread of the chestnuts now appears beyond the abilities of the hand-pullers in the Arlington Reservoir and the Mystic River in Medford. MyRWA, Friends of the Mystic and other environmental

organizations, town/city officials and volunteers are re-doubling

efforts to address the problem and are researching mechanical harvesting options and potential sources of much-needed funding. Such efforts are futile, however, if left unmonitored and followed-up, as evidenced in the Arlington Reservoir.

In addition to pulling up existing plants, boaters are encouraged exercise caution in not spreading the seeds: much of their spread can be eliminated by inspecting boats, trailers, and fishing gear that may inadvertently carry the seeds far and wide. Anyone interested in assisting with the water chestnut removal can contact MyRWA’s Outreach Coordinator, Beth Meserve (beth@mysticriver.org). Volunteers are most needed in May as plants can be removed before seeds begin to grow. Additional hand-pulling can be effective through July. Please report additional water chestnut sightings to MyRWA’s Water Quality Monitoring Director, Patrick Herron (patrick@mysticriver.org) and to the DCR.



Diagram: US Fish and Wildlife Service

Return of the Mystic Terns

by Michael Fager

In 2008, MyRWA reported the discovery of two nesting colonies of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) on the Mystic River. Both of the colonies were successful in raising and fledging chicks. MyRWA is happy to report that the terns returned to both colonies this year. At the Alford Street Bridge in Boston, nine terns nested and were successful in fledging their chicks. On the Rt. 28 Bridge in Somerville, the same pair of terns returned this year to lay three eggs, of which two hatched and one fledged. The terns have left the Mystic River Watershed and are now staging in Plymouth and Chatham, preparing for their fall migration to South America. MyRWA anxiously awaits their return next spring.



Common Tern.
Image from Birdfinders.

Mystic River Highlighted on Chronicle HD

On July 28, Chronicle HD's "Into the Mystic" show highlighted MyRWA, complete with several interviews, as well as the oftentimes overlooked value and beauty of the Mystic River Watershed. See mysticriver.org to view the show!

From the Desk of the Executive Director

(continued from page 1)

There are times when it is clear that the goals of an organization require additional professional skills and resources in order to be accomplished. Certainly, any one of us who have played on a sports team struggling with one player short of a full roster has learned this lesson!

I am happy to report that in the past eighteen months our association has progressed much closer towards a suitable capacity of resources to meet its challenging ambitions.

By expanding its staff with highly accomplished and energized professionals, through improved corporate communication and coordination, and through strategic collaborations with like-minded allies, MyRWA now boasts a greatly enhanced ability to advocate for positive change in the Mystic River Watershed.

With the addition of Beth Meserve as Outreach Coordinator, a key role has been fulfilled and expanded. Beth has already proven her worth by undertaking a series of important initiatives (including the publishing of this newsletter!) to spread word of MyRWA's work and successes. Beth's efforts will keep our members and supporters better informed of our progress and of important issues as they arise. Her innate enthusiasm will no doubt inspire a higher level of engagement from all of us as we work towards expanding and improving our advocacy for the Watershed.

Recently, MyRWA joined with a number of community organizations and several powerful environmental allies (including the Conservation Law Foundation and the Charles River Watershed Association) to develop new strategies for advocacy and grassroots action in the Mystic River Watershed. These collaborations will help accelerate the work of our Association. I will keep you posted as to our progress.

We are fortunate that many more policy makers and major Watershed stakeholders recognize that it is no longer appropriate to balance their books on the back of the long-suffering Mystic River Watershed. To illustrate I will mention one incident as an example of many conversations that I have had in the past several months. During a recent tour of the Watershed, one major stakeholder looked out at the river and said to me, "EK, I know that the Mystic River has been the long-ignored stepchild of the Boston Harbor rivers, but we intend to change that now." MyRWA is working hard to ensure that this intention is fulfilled.

Since its founding in 1972, MyRWA has accomplished a great deal despite its modest capacity. Much of this success has been accomplished through the dedicated efforts of hundreds of volunteers. This multi-faceted volunteer effort continues every day.

Despite the many economic challenges that all of us presently face, there remains important need for support for improvements in our Watershed.

We know that many of our members and Watershed families face challenging times. In spite of these challenges, contributions continue to flow to this good cause. Please know that your contributions—large and small—are sincerely appreciated and highly valued.

We intend to build upon the MyRWA legacy and complete the work that was begun more than 35 years ago: to restore the Mystic River Watershed to a clean and healthy state.

We are indeed very lucky to have such a dedicated crew of staff, volunteers, and allies. A sincere thanks to all for your continued support and for your countless contributions of time, money, and energy made on MyRWA's behalf.

-EkOngKar Singh Khalsa

MyRWA Hires Two New Staff Members

Greetings from Patrick Herron

I am excited to join MyRWA as its Water Quality Monitoring Director. Having started only in June, I am in the middle of a steep learning curve on the issues that confront the Watershed. However, I am grateful for my experienced guides in this process--Mary Beth Dechant and Jenny Birnbaum--who have both served as Water Quality Monitoring Directors for MyRWA.



By now, many of you know that Mary Beth has moved to the Midwest and will be sorely missed. I am attempting to fill the rubber boots that she left behind. Some of the projects I am engaged in include the Baseline, Hot-spot, and Cyanobacteria monitoring programs, review of NPDES permits, outreach efforts coordinated by Beth Meserve, and exploring the ever-challenging management of the invasive water chestnut (see related article!). I'm also very grateful for the skilled guidance of Roger Frymire on all of these projects, and for my great luck in having two talented interns, Sarah Erskine and Emily Starck.

A few words about my background: I received my PhD in Plant Ecology from the University of Connecticut in 2007 and completed postdoctoral fellowships at the Rowland Institute at Harvard University and the Marine Biological Laboratories at Woods Hole. My research has touched upon invasive and parasitic plants, nutrient cycling, and the development of microbial biosensors.

The Mystic River and associated water bodies hold great potential for the residents in the area. I hope many of you will engage in helping MyRWA monitor and improve our water quality. Please contact me at Patrick@mysticriver.org if you are interested in monitoring, if there are water quality issues that worry you, if you have ideas for programming, or just want to introduce yourself.

- Patrick

Greetings from Beth Meserve

Hello from MyRWA's new Outreach Coordinator! I'm thrilled to have joined the MyRWA team this past June and am excited to further MyRWA's mission through educational workshops, outreach events, and membership development. My first introduction to the Mystic River Watershed occurred while I was completing my undergraduate degree at Tufts University in Environmental Studies and Anthropology, where I was involved with the Massachusetts Water Watch Association. Having graduated from Antioch University New England this past May with an M.S. in Environmental Studies (focusing in Environmental Education), I'm eager to help connect the citizens of the Watershed with their surroundings. Prior to attending Antioch, I served as a park ranger for the National Park Service at various locations across the country.



I'm excited to be back in the Watershed and continue MyRWA's efforts to restore this valuable resource. I've already enjoyed leading youth workshops and attending local fairs. Please contact me at beth@mysticriver.org if you are interested in supporting outreach endeavors including educational events, public relations, river cleanups, and fundraising.

- Beth

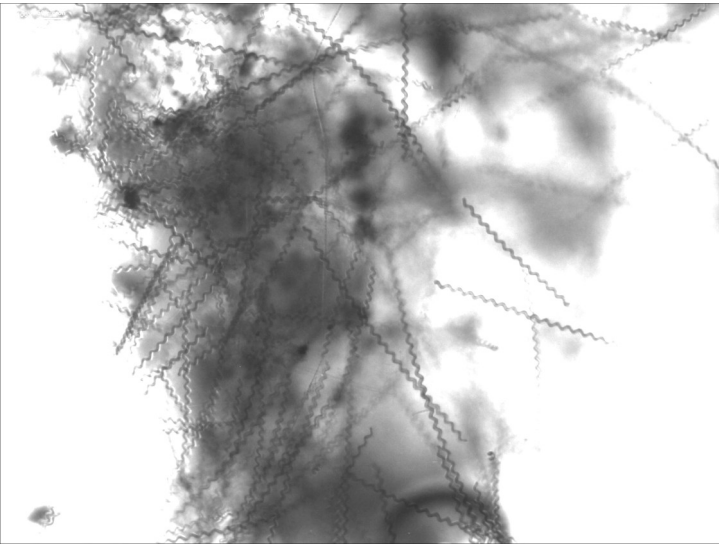


MyRWA staff participated in a kayak excursion along the Mystic River with employees of Whole Foods Market in Medford. Kayaks were generously provided by Charles River Canoe & Kayak. July 2009.

Summer of Cyano

By Emily Starck

The kids have now packed their bags for school instead of the beach—summer has drawn to a close, and so, too, has this season’s Cyanobacteria Monitoring Program. This past summer, a team of four—consisting of MyRWA staff member, Patrick Herron; Volunteer Extraordinaire, Roger Frymire; and two student interns, Sarah Erskine and Emily Starck—invested significant time monitoring cyanobacteria levels in our Watershed. Although Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) is one of the oldest life forms, it is also one of the newest sources of concern for recreational bodies of water. Consequently, higher priority has been placed on MyRWA’s Cyanobacteria Monitoring Program in order to supply additional information and support awareness.



Cyanobacteria collected by Emily Starck and Sarah Erskine depicts one of the more interesting species of Spirulina. Photo by Roger Frymire.

Cyanobacteria can be hazardous to people and pets, causing a range of symptoms including skin and eye irritation, rashes, and more rarely liver and stomach issues. Over the past few years there have been reports of dogs suffering serious harm and even death from ingesting pond water contaminated with high levels of cyanobacteria! Fortunately, only about 20% of the total number people who ingest the bacteria develop any symptoms, and the severity of their reactions depends on both the type of cyanotoxin and the concentration.

To monitor the extent of the problem in our area, MyRWA collected water samples from 5 to 7

water bodies in our Watershed each week during this past summer. The samples were tested for levels of cyanobacteria pigment, phycocyanin, and cell densities. The resulting data helped us to track trends and alert the municipal and state Departments of Public Health (DPH) authorities about any bacteria levels that exceeded DPH’s safety guidelines.

We found high levels of cyanobacteria at Horn Pond and Spy Pond, which were then treated with copper sulfate to lower cyanobacteria cell counts. Happily, these treatments temporarily reduced populations of cyanobacteria to swimmable levels according to the DPH’s guidelines. Meanwhile, Wedge Pond at Borggaard Beach had cyanobacteria levels that were consistently twice that which the DPH deems safe for swimming and, unfortunately, the beach had to be closed for several weeks until the cell counts lowered.

Plans for next year include updating the MyRWA website (mysticriver.org) to improve public access to information on cyanobacteria, and once again keeping a watchful eye on our Watershed’s cyanobacteria levels, to ensure safe swimming and providing you with the information you need.



Interns Emily Starck and Sarah Erskine, participating in an outreach event with Tufts University students, August 2009.

VOLUNTEER!

MyRWA is seeking volunteers to help with outreach events and water quality monitoring. For more information and to become a volunteer, please visit mysticriver.org or call 781-316-3438.



MyRWA Expands Work in Chelsea and East Boston

In June and July, MyRWA successfully implemented three educational workshops for over 30 youth in Chelsea and East Boston. These hands-on workshops were organized through Chelsea Green Space, the Lewis Latimer Society, and the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH), with the goal of engaging youth in water quality issues and testing methods, as well as their local ecology. Each workshop enabled youth to test for ammonium, dissolved oxygen, pH, salinity, and conductivity as well as make observations about the weather, water, and surrounding site. Through these experiential workshops, the youth not only learned about their surroundings, but also explored

Also this summer, MyRWA held two *Citizen Scientist Training Workshops* in Chelsea and East Boston, further engaging residents within the lower Mystic River Watershed. Workshop attendees were trained in water quality monitoring methods and concepts, enabling them to join MyRWA's *Baseline Monitoring Program*. MyRWA would like to thank the Boston Foundation for funding these opportunities, as well as our partnering organizations.



their role in helping clean the Mystic River Watershed.



To the left, three youth engage in water quality monitoring. Above, participants take samples at a Citizen Scientist Training Workshop.

Support the Mystic River Watershed Association. Together, we'll get the job done!

YES! I'd like to help MyRWA protect, conserve, and restore the natural resources of the Mystic River Watershed.

Name (please print clearly): _____

Street Address: _____ Apartment/Suite No.: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Please give as generously as you can. Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership contribution:

Watershed Benefactor	\$3,000	River Advocate	\$100
Watershed Guardian	\$1,000	River Friend	\$60
River Steward	\$500	River Sponsor	\$35
River Patron	\$250	Other Donation Amount	\$_____

Make checks or money orders payable to "Mystic River Watershed Association," and mail to:
MyRWA, 20 Academy Street, Suite 306, Arlington, MA 02476

Yes! I'd like to volunteer for MyRWA. Please contact me.

MyRWA would like to exchange mailing lists with other environmental nonprofits from time-to-time. If you don't want to participate, please check below:

Do not share my contact information with other organizations.

Thank you for your support!



Mystic River Watershed Association
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Save the Date! Upcoming Events

Saturday, October 3

9:30am to 2pm. Meet at the parking lot near the Condon Band Shell off of Route 16 in Medford.

15th Annual Mystic River Fall Cleanup with the *Friends of the Mystic River*.

4pm to 8pm, Assembly Square, Somerville. Fireworks at 8pm.

Riverfest 2009, Sponsored by Federal Realty Investment Trust and the City of Somerville.

Sunday, October 4

1pm to 4pm. Meet at the intersection of the Mystic Valley Parkway and Harvard Avenue in Medford.

Drop of Hope Mystic River Cleanup in partnership with *Roots & Shoots* and *Earthwatch*.

Tuesday, October 6, Tuesday, November 10 & Tuesday, December 1

7pm to 9pm. Lincoln Filene Center, Rabb Room, Tufts University, Medford.

MyRWA Committee Meetings (monthly meetings at which the Policy, Outreach, and Water Quality committees discuss relevant activities and issues within the Watershed. All are welcome!)

Thursday, October 29

7pm* to 8:30pm. BNY Mellon, 135 Santilli Highway in Everett, MA. *Refreshments served at 6pm.

ANNUAL MEETING with guest speaker **Kathy Abbott**, Executive Vice President of *The Trustees of Reservations*, will speak about **Environmental Advocacy**. Join MyRWA members and friends at this free event!

*For more details, please visit www.mysticriver.org
or contact Beth at 781-316-3438 or beth@mysticriver.org*