

In the Mainstream

Newsletter for Members of the Norwalk River Watershed Association [NRWA]
New Canaan, Norwalk, Redding, Ridgefield, Weston, Wilton, CT, and Lewisboro, NY

www.norwalkriver.org

Fall 2013

GOOD NEWS FROM NORWALK HARBOR: FLOUNDER POPULATION RECOVERS

By Elizabeth Craig

A resurgence in winter flounder has been documented for 2013 by Dick Harris and Peter Fraboni of Harbor Watch, a Westport-based organization that monitors water quality in the Norwalk River Watershed and aquatic life in Norwalk Harbor. Study crews counted over 400 winter flounder in just five 2013 cruises versus a 2012 count of only 130 winter flounder after 25 cruises. This year's surprising abundance of flounder--and healthy, plump ones with fins--may be due to cool March 2013 water temperatures during the flounder's spawning season and improvements in sewage treatment plants, according to Harbor Watch.

Residents and homeowners in the Norwalk River Watershed, especially those living along river or stream banks, continue to play an important role in keeping Norwalk harbor and the Sound healthy, so here is your friendly fall reminder not to dump leaves into the River or storm drains and wetlands. While this leaf litter is 'natural,' organic and biodegradable, in excessive amounts, as it decomposes, it uses up most of the dissolved oxygen in deeper water and makes the bottom water uninhabitable for fish and other animals. Leaves and yard waste blown into the river and wetlands form a black goeey paste known to boaters as "black mayonnaise." When black mayo forms and becomes thick enough, it destroys spawning areas of bottom dwelling (benthic) fish such as flounder. Unlike many fish that spend their time



Photograph courtesy of NOAA

Fall leaves raked or blown into the Norwalk River settle on the floor of Norwalk Harbor forming "black mayonnaise," which threatens the winter flounders' spawning grounds.

swimming, benthic fish are very dense and have negative buoyancy, which allows them to lie effortlessly on the ocean floor or bury themselves, like flounders and sole who can remain hidden in sand because of their flat body shape.

Leaf litter makes the best mulch. By removing nutrient rich leaves and other organic matter from your yard as 'waste,' you are losing a valuable commodity. Consider simple composting instead. This fall try putting your garden beds to sleep for the winter with a blanket of leaves. Clear out any blackened stems and foliage of annual flowers and vegetables to prevent the possibility of their harboring disease pathogens and insect eggs, and then layer your beds with leaves. You can also use a light layer of finely chopped leaves to fertilize your lawn. Leaf litter is known to gardeners as "Black Gold." Used in your

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PESTICIDE AND HERBICIDE USE IN CONNECTICUT

By Kristen Begor

We use billions of pounds of pesticides and herbicides globally as a weapon against weeds and to kill the bugs that infect our crops and spread diseases. These compounds keep our lawns weedless and green while holding diseases like malaria in check, but they also coat our produce and end up in our waterways. And many of them are carcinogenic and have been linked to depression, birth defects, ADHD, Diabetes, and even Parkinson's.



Photograph courtesy of Monarch Watch

Millions of miles of roads, utility lines, railroad corridors and other types of rights-of-way (ROWs) in the US are treated with herbicides (pesticides used to kill unwanted

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NRWA And REI Norwalk Plant Nine Native Connecticut Trees Between Union Park and Mathews Park in Norwalk

The trees were planted in June with a generous grant from REI Norwalk and in partnership with the Norwalk Tree Alliance, the Norwalk River Valley Trail Steering Committee and the City of Norwalk. The trees will help shade the Norwalk River Valley Trail between Union Park and Mathews Park and were planted by Almstead Tree and Shrub Care.

garden to enrich the soil, it is black gold, but dumped into the river, these same leaves settle on the harbor's bottom and become the notorious 'Black Mayonnaise,' destroying important fish habitat.

In the garden, besides providing needed nutrients, leaf litter can regulate soil temperatures. Once the soil is frozen, mulch keeps the ground frozen, allowing you to avoid the destructive freeze and thaw cycle occurring recently in New England due to changing weather patterns. Healthy woodland soil is built from layers of dead leaves, and the beneficial insects that live there are the primary food for many warblers and thrushes. You can help make your garden a haven for birds by mulching your beds with leaves.

After blowing their leaves, many people will then head to the store to buy fertilizer to replace the nutrients they have just throw away, mulch to protect the plant roots they have just exposed, and hoses to water the plants that have dried out after exposure. By reducing or eliminating synthetic fertilizer use on your property, you can save money and also help improve water quality in our watershed since synthetic fertilizers tend to release nitrogen too quickly, and nitrogen run-off in heavy rains contaminates the River and Sound. If you have a landscaping company providing lawn and garden maintenance, be clear that they are not to dump leaves and yard debris into wetlands and waterways. Consider inviting your neighbors to join you in managing your adjoining properties.

Kudos to Dick Harris and Peter Fraboni of Harbor Watch working with local student volunteers for conducting flounder studies and water quality testing since the early 1990s.

plants). Increasing public concern over the use of dangerous and inadequately tested pesticides has resulted in an increasing effort over the last decade to pass state laws and local policies requiring notification of pesticide use, restrictions on application procedures and implementation of less toxic approaches to vegetation management. However, ROW management is governed by many different levels of government, including state laws or administrative procedures, policies of local government entities, and voluntary agreements. As a result, the level of protection varies and tends to be deficient in protecting the public from the potential exposure to pesticide applications.

Many states such as Connecticut have addressed the issue of ROW herbicide applications by notifying the public of the application, enabling people to better protect themselves from pesticide exposure. Connecticut requires that any electric, telephone or telecommunication company that provides for the application of pesticides within a ROW maintained by the company must notify owners, occupants or tenants of buildings or dwellings abutting the ROW at least 48 hours in advance. If the company provides for the application of pesticides to any utility pole, after it has been installed, it is required to post a notification sign on each pole. If the company provides for the application of pesticides in connection with tree or brush removal from private property, the company must get consent from the occupant before proceeding. However, ROW applications by the State, municipalities,

pesticide application businesses, public service companies or railroad companies are exempt from the notification requirements. The General Statutes also prohibit the aerial application of pesticidal dusts within 100 feet of a public highway and the aerial application of broad-spectrum chemical pesticides for nonagricultural purposes. Several towns in Connecticut (Roxbury, Branford, Essex, and Plainville) have successfully passed regulations to regulate applications of pesticides and fertilizer.

Planting native vegetation and using mechanical, biological and nontoxic vegetation control methods are effective in reducing and eliminating pesticide/herbicide applications. Creating and encouraging stable, low-maintenance vegetation is a more permanent vegetation management strategy. The establishment of desirable plant species that can out-compete undesirable species requires little maintenance and meets the requirements for ROW management. Although native vegetation may take more time to establish itself, native flower and grass species are better adapted to local climate and stress than those introduced from Europe and Asia. Native plant species are especially effective in providing increased erosion control, aesthetics, wildlife habitat and biodiversity. Numerous states have established roadside wildflower programs for these reasons.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

- Enclosed is my tax-deductible, annual membership contribution of \$ _____.
- I would prefer to receive the semi-annual newsletter, *In the Mainstream*, via:
- The name and address written below, or
 - The email address listed below.

Riparian Society

Steward \$1000 and up
 Protector \$500-\$999
 Patron \$100-\$499

Basic Membership

Supporter \$50-\$99
 Donor \$30-\$49
 Other \$ _____

Yes, my company has a Matching Gift Program. Company Name _____

**Please make check payable to: NRWA, Inc., and mail to the
 Norwalk River Watershed Association, Inc., P.O. Box 197, Georgetown, CT 06829**

Name _____ Tel. _____ Email _____

Address _____
 Street Town State Zip



Oyster Shell Park cleanup. Photograph by David Park.

**Or you can donate on-line
 using PayPal through our
 website!
www.norwalkriver.org**

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

NRWA programs highlight the importance and features of the Norwalk River and its watershed and ways people collectively and individually can improve the region. Programs are free, unless specified, but space may be limited; reservations are suggested. Call the leader listed or NRWA at **877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463)** for information, directions, and reservations.

Saturday, September 7, 9AM–1 PM. International Coastal Cleanup Day Events. International Coastal Cleanup Day (officially September 21) is sponsored by the Ocean Conservancy and organized locally by the CT Fund for the Environment's Save the Sound program which lists fall cleanup sites, including one on the Norwalk Islands September 7, at ctenvironment.org.



Saturday, September 7, 9-10AM. Guided Walk Through Bradley Park, Wilton. Explore this beautiful town park on the highland edge of Wilton Center guided by two Wilton conservation commissioners, Donna Merrill and Susan DiLoreto. Bradley Park features a boardwalk trail that allows walkers into the heart of a red maple swamp. A variety of ferns and shrubs, including tall cinnamon ferns, fragrant sweet pepperbush and showy swamp azalea may be observed. Meet at the Park's main entrance at the end of Oak Ledge Lane. There's plenty of parking. Bring your camera! All walks are easy, open to all ages and free. Friendly dogs on leash are welcome, too. Rain date: Sunday the 8th at 10 am. For more information call: (203) 761-9846 or (203) 762-7287.

Household Hazardous Waste Collection: Norwalk Sept 7 (Norwalk High, 8AM-2PM); New Canaan Sept 21 (Wastewater Treatment Plant, 8AM-2PM); Wilton Oct 26 (Miller/Driscoll School, 9AM-3PM).

Saturday September 14, 10AM-4PM & Sunday September 15, 11-4PM. Live Green Connecticut. Celebrate and learn to 'Live Green' at this two-day family festival for all ages, at Taylor Farm Park located at 45 Calf Pasture Beach Road in Norwalk. Enjoy delicious food, live music, eco-friendly shopping, environmental speakers and exhibits! 'Green' Dogs Welcome....on a leash of course. For more information, visit livegreenct.com.

Monday, September 23, Monday, 9:15AM–10:45AM. River Study - Adult Training, Ridgefield. The public is invited to attend. The Ecology Lecture will include three presentations: 1. Water Cycle 2. Parts of a Watershed 3. Fall Concepts of the River Study Walk: The Reason for the Seasons, The 5 ways Animals deal with winter; Seed dispersal; Habitats of the River Site (Woodland, Meadow, Ectone, Riverbank, Marsh/Swamp); Succession (How land reclaims itself from an abandoned field to a Climax Forest); & Food Chains. Veteran's Park School Auditorium in Ridgefield. No reservations needed. Contact Donna Roscoe at donna@roscoe.cc.

Saturday September 28 & Sunday September 29, 11AM – 5 PM. Audubon Greenwich's HawkWatch Festival & Green Bazaar. Come celebrate the annual hawk migration over Audubon Greenwich's "Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch." There will be live birds of prey shows, games and activities for all ages, eco-friendly business exhibits, great food and music. Rain or shine. For more info, visit greenwich.audubon.org.

September 29, Sunday 9AM-11AM. Norwalk's Between the Libraries Family 5K Run/Walk. The course consists of a mostly flat 5K race from the Main Library down the Norwalk River Valley Trail, through Matthews Park, looping through South Norwalk to the South Norwalk Branch Library and back. Prizes will be given to the top three men and women in each age group. At 8:55 a 50-yard kid's fun run will start - no registration required and all kids will win a prize. Enter raffles to win gift certificates to restaurants and participate in health wellness activities. Bring the Hoopla will be hula hooping with kids and grown ups! Register at norwalklib.org.

Saturday October 12, 19, 26 & November 3, 9:30 AM-2:00 PM. Earthplace Stream Exploration and Monitoring Workshop for High School Students, teachers & Adults. This 4-week workshop will explore how the health of a stream or river is measured and why we all should be concerned. Hands-on water testing will be highlighted. Participants may wish to become volunteers with the Harbor Watch Water Quality Monitoring Program. Volunteers are actively engaged in monitoring efforts that are helping to assess the water quality of some of our local watersheds like the Saugatuck and Norwalk River watersheds. This workshop is also ideal for teachers who would like to introduce the topic of aquatic biology into the classroom or anyone who is interested in water quality. The four-session course fee is \$75 for Earthplace members and students, and \$100 for non-members. The fee includes handout materials and refreshments. For registration, call 203-227-7253. Earthplace is located at 10 Woodside Lane, Westport

Saturday Evening 5:30 PM, Late Fall (check NorwalkRiver.org for dates). Owl Prowl at Woodcock Nature Center. NRWA's David Havens will open with a discussion of area owls and their habitat, featuring a few permanent Woodcock residents, then lead a prowling through the trees in search of these graceful nocturnal hunters. The event is free and all ages are welcome. Woodcock is at 54 Deer Run, Wilton. For dates, more information, and reservations call 877-NRWA-INFO (877-679-2463).

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Norwalk River Watershed Association, Inc.
The Norwalk River Watershed Association, incorporated in 1996, is a not-for-profit membership organization whose mission is to improve the water quality and aesthetic value of the 40,000-acre Norwalk River watershed; to encourage recreational use of the existing trails and open space; and to promote research, education, cooperation, and action on the part of the stakeholders in the seven watershed towns in CT (Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, New Canaan, Weston, and Norwalk) and NY (Lewisboro).

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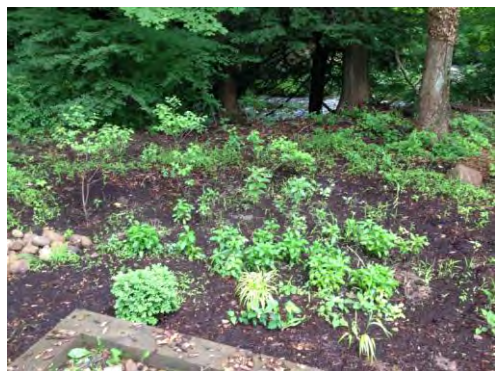
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877-NRWA-INFO
 (877-679-2463) Toll Free

Protect our surface water and ground water. Do NOT flush medicines down the drain or toilet. Instead, turn them in at your town's Drug Take-Back Day, your local pharmacy's take-back program or locked box located at your police station.

HIGH WATER MARKS: MICHAEL DIETZ AND UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT'S NEMO

NRWA in partnership with the University of Connecticut's NEMO program has helped install a model rain garden at the Wilton Play Shop on Lover's Lane in Wilton. Last Spring, Michael Dietz, CT NEMO Program Director, led a two-day short course in Wilton for landscapers, designers, maintenance care providers, homeowners and volunteers interested in learning how to install a rain garden.



The newly planted model rain garden behind the Wilton Play Shop catches and filters stormwater from a gutter downspout before it reaches the Norwalk River.

Rain gardens are vegetated areas designed and built to catch and help filter contaminants from storm-water runoff from roofs, parking lots and other impervious surfaces before it reaches rivers and other waterways. NEMO (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials) was created in the early 1990's to provide information, education and assistance to local land use boards and commissions on how they can accommodate growth while protecting their natural resources and community character. Homeowners and municipalities in Connecticut are increasingly using rain gardens to reduce the impact of stormwater on local waterways and the Long Island Sound. For more information on rain gardens, stop by and visit the one behind the Wilton Play Shop on Lover's Lane and visit NEMO's website at nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens.

