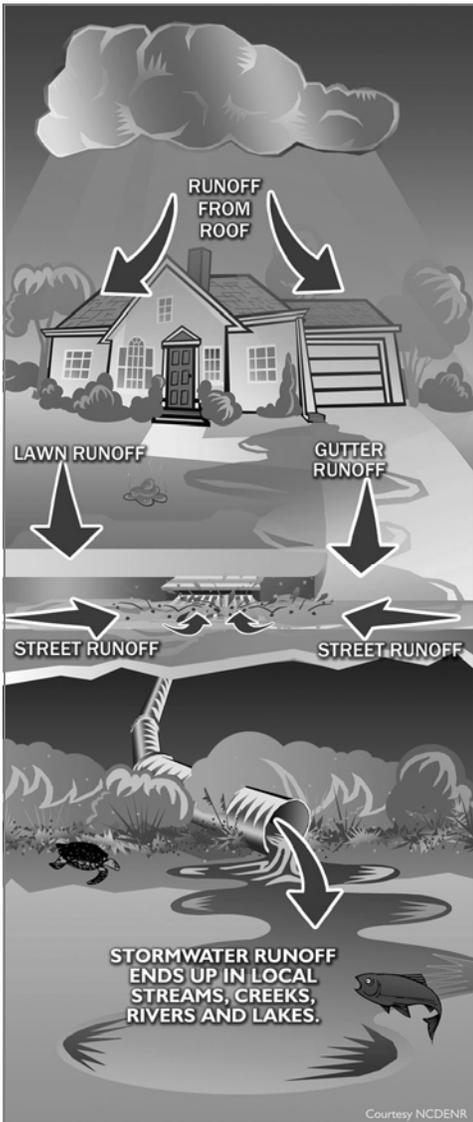


onservation Times

Newsletter of the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc.

January 2011

A Tale of Two Rain Barrels—*Promoting Water & Watershed Conservation*



When rain falls in undeveloped areas, most of the water soaks into the ground. Natural vegetation such as trees, shrubs and tall grasses slows the flow of rainwater and filters pollutants. However, in developed areas where most of the natural vegetation is gone, rain hits hard surfaces like roofs and roads, and then runs off quickly downhill. The excess water picks up pollutants—oil, sediment, bacteria, pesticides and fertilizers—from parking lots, streets and lawns, and carries them into rivers, lakes and oceans. This runoff can also cause flooding.

So what do rain barrels have to do with all of this? By collecting and storing rainwater from rooftops, gutters and downspouts for later use, they reduce the amount of runoff, helping keep our streams, rivers, lakes and oceans clean; reduce erosion and flooding on your property; and they also help prevent flooding in downstream areas. This stored water can be used to water gardens and lawns, wash cars and windows, and for other outdoor uses, saving money and energy by reducing tap water use. While used most commonly by homeowners, rain barrels can also be used on commercial properties.



Last year, Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District collaborated with the City of Middletown on a demonstration project with the goal of promoting rain barrels as inexpensive, easy to use and maintain “green” practices that conserve water and watersheds. Two very public locations, Russell Library and Kidcity Children’s Museum, were selected to install rain barrels and educational signs. Each is a prominent destination drawing a diverse clientele from Middletown and the region.

Rain barrels were purchased through the City’s spring 2010 community distribution program. District and City staff worked

with Russell Library and Kidcity to plan for the location of rain barrels and develop signs to fit each venue. The final component is an educational brochure, to be given out at each site. This project, funded in part with a grant from The Rockfall Foundation, is intended to serve as a model that we can replicate in other municipalities in our District.

You can’t miss the Kidcity rain barrel and sign, located by the main entrance at the back parking lot!! This whimsical, colorful, eye-catching sign was created by Kidcity Artistic Director Scott Kessel. The Russell Library sign takes more of an instructive approach, as is appropriate for the location. Due to delays in production, it won’t be installed until spring. The rain barrel and sign will be located by the downspout to the left of the main entrance.



For more information about rain barrels contact the District office, or visit www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal.



District Convenes Local Committee to Guide Action on Coginchaug Plan

Action on a plan to improve Coginchaug River water quality is underway, with the District at the helm. In September 2010, a committee representing local, state and federal interests met for the first time to launch the effort. The committee's charge is to guide implementation of a plan completed in 2008 by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, chockfull of recommended management practices to be implemented throughout the watershed (e.g. street sweeping and catch basin cleanout), as well as site-specific fixes (e.g. areas that would benefit from stream buffers, exclusion of farm animals from streams, or pet waste disposal facilities).

With its many recommendations, implementation of the Coginchaug plan is a daunting task. Due to our history of work with the watershed communities, we were asked by the Department of Environmental Protection to coordinate protection and restoration efforts, and awarded a grant. This project will extend at least one more year.

Convening a local Implementation Committee is the first of several activities on tap for this year. Others include producing a more "user-friendly" guided summary of the full watershed plan to promote implementation; prioritizing restoration/improvement projects; and implementing an on-the-ground pollution reduction measure.

The District is excited to be an integral part of this effort to improve the health of the Coginchaug River. We look forward to working with the dedicated members of the Implementation Committee, and thank them for their contributions to date!

This project is funded in part by a US EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 Grant administered by the CT DEP.



A Coginchaug River cleanup held at Veteran's Park in Middletown yielded an impressive dump truck full of trash. The winner for the most unusual item hauled out of the river? A steering wheel and column! Cosponsored with the Middletown Regional Vocational Agriculture Center, the cleanup was held in October as part of the CT River Watershed Council's Source to Sea Cleanup. Thanks to all who pitched in!

Open Space Management Strategy Developed for Great Cedars West

The unique Great Cedars Conservation Area West in Old Saybrook was the most recent subject of the District's active open space planning and management program. In late 2010, we completed an invasive species and habitat management plan for this 300-acre property, characterized by mature hardwood forests and palustrine wetlands common to the area. The site also hosts an Atlantic white cedar swamp, an uncommon resource.

Unfortunately, the integrity and natural beauty of Great Cedars West is somewhat marred by invasive plants. At the request of the town Conservation Commission, District staff, with assistance from wetlands scientist Penelope Sharp, conducted field evaluations and recommended land management and invasive plant control strategies to improve the health of the property's natural communities, all summarized in a written report for the town.

According to Town Planner Christine Nelson, now the town is "on to the most important part: implementation!" And in fact, the plan is already being used by the Boy Scouts to develop Eagle Scout projects.

Funding for this project was provided by the Town of Old Saybrook.



Atlantic White Cedar
USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Efforts to Restore Salt Island Overlook Coastal Forest Progressing

Score one for the good guys! Restoring the coastal forest is closer to a reality at the Salt Island Overlook Preserve in Westbrook, where invasive plants once had a stranglehold.

This 7-acre site, purchased by the town to protect coastal resources and for public education, is considered one of the few remaining parcels in Westbrook with the potential for public viewing/access of Long Island Sound. In 2007, the District completed a natural resources assessment of the property with management recommendations, including tackling the aggressive exotic plants that had taken over.

Activities to control invasive plants were initiated in 2009, with the District called in to monitor plant die-off and re-growth, and establishment of native populations. The District continued to monitor the success of treatments in twice yearly surveys in 2010.

We are pleased to report that results show a striking decline in invasive species, with an increase in diversity of native plants. Treatments are slated to continue, and plans are in the works to replant the area with native species, construct a trail, develop educational signage, and build a parking lot. With such great progress and a committed Conservation Commission, we have high hopes that the property will soon be a wonderful asset for the community.

This ongoing project is funded by the Town of Westbrook.

CRCCD's 63rd Annual Meeting Hosted by McKinney National Wildlife Refuge



(TOP) View of the marsh from the overlook; (BOTTOM) Refuge Manager Richard Potvin (l) leads a walk on the trail.

Did you know Connecticut has a National Wildlife Refuge? It's true!! The District's 2010 annual meeting brought us to Westbrook, where participants enjoyed a visit to the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge Salt Meadow Unit, CT's first, and now one of ten separate units along the coast that make up the refuge. With 400 acres of salt marsh, forest, grassland, and shrubland, it was established to protect feeding, nesting and resting habitat for migratory birds; encourage natural diversity of fish and wildlife; and provide environmental education for the public.

Following the business meeting staff gave a slide show of conservation highlights from our past year, and we presented Conservation Awards to our winners (see list below). Then, Refuge Manager Richard Potvin regaled the group with stories about the history of the refuge and ongoing management work there. After a brief refreshment break, featuring delicious handmade Cato Corner Farm cheese donated generously by owners and master cheese-makers Elizabeth MacAlister and Mark Gillman, we enjoyed a guided walk of the refuge's cultural and natural features.

It was a picture perfect warm and sunny fall day—a beautiful day for a hike through the woods to a stunning marsh overlook. Our thanks to Richard Potvin for hosting the meeting and introducing us to the refuge, and for his very informative and entertaining presentation.

Keeping the Connecticut Clean

This abridged version of Michael McCune's MiddletownPatch article is reprinted here with his permission. The original can be viewed at <http://middletown-ct.patch.com/articles/keeping-the-connecticut-clean#c>.

As homework assignments go, this was one tall order: Clean up the Connecticut River. Still, the teens attending the December Russell Library "Green Children" program bent to the task. They listened as Erica Larner, the District's Natural Resource Specialist, told them the Connecticut is New England's longest river, meandering through four states during a 410-mile journey, and home to a vast array of wildlife.

By the time it empties into Long Island Sound, Larner said, the river has collected enough water to provide 70 percent of the estuary's fresh water. But exactly how fresh is it? Trash, sewage and rainwater carrying a toxic mix of pollutants—lawn chemicals, acid rain, pet poop, detergents, oil, gasoline, road salt and sand—threaten the river's water quality and wildlife, Larner said. And cleaning that water isn't so easy.

To prove her point, Larner filled three jars of water with her own (sanitized) versions of those pollutants and challenged students to undo the damage. They got clean jars, funnels, filters, sponges, sand, sieves and 20 minutes. After screening, filtering and re-filtering, the samples were clear of visible chunks or trash, but still a light shade of green. Tests revealed the water was too acidic to support most plants and other life.



The take-home message was two-fold: Removing pollutants from water is "nearly impossible," and the best way to keep the Connecticut clean is to reduce the use of pollutants.

"Who wants to swim in this?" she said, holding up a jar of neon-green water.

Congratulations 2010 Conservation Award Winners!

Environmental Professional

Kipen Kolesinskas, State Soil Scientist & Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program Manager, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Environmental Organization

The Rockfall Foundation

Media/Communications

CT Environmental Headlines, Christopher Zurcher

Cooperator

Cato Corner Farm, Elizabeth MacAlister & Mark Gillman

Teacher

Kim Antol, Rocky Hill High School

Special Merit

Mark & Mindy Yuknat, CT River Expeditions

Suellen Kozey McCuin, CT Council on Soil & Water Conservation

Certificates of Appreciation

Gary Crump & Gloria Priam, Priam Vineyards

Bridget Riordan, Chamard Vineyards

David Richards, Clinton Nurseries

Mark & Mindy Yuknat, CT River Expeditions

Matthew Rubin, Old Saybrook Shopping Center

Pierre Bennerup, Sunny Border Nurseries

Rob Merritt, R2 Graphics

Thomas D. Comer, CPA, Comer and Company, LLC



District News & Events

WELCOME ERICA LARNER!



Erica in the field, collecting soil samples

Erica Larner, the District's Natural Resource Specialist, began working with us almost a year ago, in March 2010. She started her career as a Roving Conservation Coordinator for Barnstable, Provincetown and Bourne, MA, advising their conservation/wetlands commissions, applicants and other town departments, and has over five years of experience helping clients obtain various wetlands and endangered species permits, delineating and documenting wetlands, managing open space, evaluating site plans and applications, and conducting construction and mitigation oversight and monitoring. Erica has a B.S. in Biology from UMass Amherst, with additional training in wetlands. She moved to Connecticut from Cape Cod with her family.

With her background Erica was able to jump right in, and she has been very busy with a full plate of projects and requests for technical assistance from municipalities and private landowners. If you haven't already crossed paths with Erica, stop by to say "Hi" next time you're in Middletown. And if you need help with a natural resource problem on your property, like a drainage or erosion concern, give her a call!

BEAUTIFUL SCENERY, TASTY FOOD & WINE, FUN PEOPLE, DAZZLING BIRDS—6TH ANNUAL RIVER CRUISE FUNDRAISER ANOTHER BIG SUCCESS!!

It's hard to believe we've been holding our Tree Swallow Cruise and Wine Tasting to benefit the Connecticut River Watch Program for six years now! This year's cruise went off without a hitch, with our biggest group ever. Special thanks to our sponsors for their generous contributions:

RiverQuest owners Mark and Mindy Yuknat; David Richards of Clinton Nurseries; Priam Vineyards' Gary Crump and Gloria Priam; Bridget Riordan of Chamard Vineyards; and new this year, Christiana and Jamie Jones of Jones Winery. Our delicious repast came from The Riverhouse at Goodspeed Landing. Thanks also to our many repeat and new supporters who joined us on the cruise and contributed to the fun!



20TH ANNUAL SHRUB AND SEEDLING SALE: April 15, 16 & 17, 2011 Old Saybrook Shopping Center, Boston Post Rd. & Elm St., Old Saybrook

Help us celebrate our 20th year—BUY PLANTS!!! The first 200 orders we receive by March 4, 2011 will be entered in a drawing for one of three great prizes: a Great American Rain Barrel, a CT River Sunset Cruise for 2 on the *RiverQuest*, and a copy of *The Organic Lawn Care Manual* by Paul Tukey.



Check out our great selection of Connecticut native shrubs, tree seedlings, grasses, ferns and flowering perennials, including many edibles suitable for landscaping!! For a brochure and order form phone us at (860) 346-3282, or go to www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal.

Quantities of some selections are limited, so don't miss out—*reserve your plants by sending*

in your order form on or before March 25, 2011. And don't forget about our great prize giveaway!

January 2011

The Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the sound use and management of our natural resources through technical assistance and education.

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The District serves the towns of Berlin, Chester, Clinton, Colchester, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Hebron, Killingworth, Lyme, Madison, Marlborough, Middlefield, Middletown, New Britain, Newington, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, Rocky Hill, Salem and Westbrook.

The Board of Directors holds public meetings every fourth Wednesday, 7:00 PM, at the deKoven House Community Center in Middletown. All programs and services are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.

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Photos: Jim Costello