

onservation Times

Newsletter of the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc.

January 2007

Project Green Lawn: Healthy Lawns for Healthy Communities

*The District collaborated with the City of Middletown on **Project Green Lawn**, a public awareness campaign to encourage residents and businesses to maintain healthy lawns free of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. We plan to promote the effort throughout the District, so if you are interested in initiating a similar campaign in your town, please contact us. Below is a summarized version of the educational brochure that was published for the campaign, which is available on the District website.*

Everybody wants a lush green lawn—but at what cost? Many people don't realize that lawns maintained with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides pose a serious health threat to people, pets and the environment. Lawns also decrease natural habitat vital to wildlife.

Why Chem-Free?

Lawn care chemicals—applied by homeowners or lawn care companies—contain potent toxins that kill organisms considered pests, such as dandelions and grubs. Scientific evidence shows that these chemicals also affect people, especially children, and pets. Exposure to certain lawn care pesticides has been associated with increased risks of a variety of health problems, including asthma, several types of child and adult cancers, and cancers in dogs.

The effects of harmful lawn care chemicals reach far beyond your family and yard. These chemicals can make their way into the environment through rain runoff, polluting streams and groundwater, and move through the food chain, becoming more concentrated.

Using herbicides and pesticides to tackle weeds and insects can actually be counter-productive to your lawn's health. These poisons also kill good organisms in the soil that help produce nutrients plants need to grow. This weakens the grass, fosters thatch and encourages disease.

How to Have a Healthy Lawn and Yard

Fortunately, you can have an attractive and healthy lawn without using harmful synthetic chemicals. You can make simple changes, like mowing higher (3"), leaving your grass clippings on the lawn, using organic fertilizers, aerating to reduce soil compaction, and de-thatching, to make your lawn healthier and more vigorous naturally.

You can also reduce the size of your lawn by growing a variety of other plants to promote a healthy, diverse



ecosystem in your yard. Grass, which requires lots of sun, water and good soil, is one of the highest maintenance plants we can grow. Instead, plant groupings of trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers that are compatible with existing environmental conditions; use ground covers that require less maintenance than grass; and, choose native plants adapted to our climate and conditions.

Finally, use safe alternatives to get rid of common pests. You can pull out dandelions at their weakest—when blooming; eliminate crabgrass by mowing high and using organic fertilizers; treat weeds in driveway or sidewalk cracks with white vinegar; and control grubs with alternatives like beneficial nematodes or Neem.

What More Can You Do?

Are you concerned about others who use lawn care chemicals in your neighborhood or community? You can register with the state for advance warning of nearby spraying at www.dep.state.ct.us/wst/pesticides. You can also talk to neighbors and friends about the harmful effects of using pesticides—both on private property and in public areas like playing fields. Together, by simply changing our behavior, we can make our yards, streams, and local environment better.

***Project Green Lawn** is a project of the City of Middletown Public Works Department, Recycling Advisory Committee and Conservation Commission, with support and assistance from the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District and the Jonah Center. Project Green Lawn was supported by a generous grant from The Rockfall Foundation, Middletown, CT. ♦*

Connecticut River Watch Program: *VIP Volunteers Keep Tabs on Local Mattabeset Streams*



Many water quality problems in our streams and rivers go undetected—and unfixed—simply because no one is there to catch them as they occur. Periodically, citizens contact us at the District with concerns about turbidity in nearby streams. Sometimes the problems are related to active construction projects; more

often the cause is unknown. If the source can be found, appropriate authorities can be notified and action taken to address the problem. In some cases District staff have been able to track down the source, but often these issues appear sporadically, for example during or after a rain-storm, and are not evident by the time staff can mobilize to the field.

To be more proactive at finding and reporting observable pollution problems and causes, the Connecticut River Watch Program initiated a new visual monitoring activity in 2006, the Visual Inspection Program (VIP). Volunteers “adopt” a site on local stream to monitor on a regular basis. When problems are observed, volunteers track them upstream to locate the sources, if possible, then report them immediately to the District and local authorities to ensure appropriate follow-up actions are taken.

According to Connecticut’s Department of Environmental Protection, which provided input in developing the VIP, periodic visual observation can result in some of the most valuable citizen monitoring data: with minimal effort, volunteers can collect very useful data about streams not monitored routinely due to limited agency resources.

In 2006 the VIP was piloted in five Mattabeset streams: Coles and Willow Brooks in Cromwell; Little Brook in Berlin and Rocky Hill; Belcher Brook in Berlin; and Spruce Brook in Berlin. These streams were chosen to

complement other District stream assessment activities, or to address local concerns about potential impacts from nearby construction projects.

Five volunteers participated in the pilot effort. Each volunteer adopted one or more sites on a pilot stream, and received training by District staff. After making an initial visit to record baseline conditions, volunteers made regular monthly inspections and visited the site after each rainstorm of more than one-half inch. Monitoring was initiated in July and continued through November.

Though no serious problems were uncovered in the pilot season, all involved believe the VIP has great potential and we plan to expand the program in 2007.

One VIP volunteer told us this inspiring story after the season was over: “. . .my 4 year old son Jake comes with me to the brook...and he now truly believes he is helping to protect our waterways . . .he gets mad when he sees trash, and says to me ‘Dad, we are fighting the bad guys’.”

To find out how you can “fight the bad guys” by becoming a VIP volunteer, phone us at (860) 346-3282. ♦

Student Intern helps District “Track Down” pollution sources

Have you ever wished for the super-volunteer? The one who works hard, never complains, and isn’t paid? Well this past summer the District had this wish granted. Tyler Raymond, a recent graduate of Xavier High School in Middletown joined District staff in a new field survey effort to identify pollution sources and restoration opportunities in two Mattabeset tributary streams. In unusually hot and humid weather, Tyler waded, walked, crept and crawled through thickets of invasive multi-flora rose and clouds of mosquitoes, to investigate each mile of Little Brook (Berlin, Newington, and Rocky Hill) and Coles Brook (Cromwell and Rocky Hill).

Thanks to Tyler’s unwavering assistance, the team identified a number of significant stream impairments as well as opportunities to address some of the most obvious and egregious pollution sources. We wish him the very best in his pursuit of a two-subject bachelor’s degree at Connecticut College. ♦



Tyler Raymond hard at work on the banks of Little Brook.

CT RIVER WATCH NEWS:

CRWP was featured in the Fall 2006 **Volunteer Monitor**, a national watershed monitoring newsletter. Check it out at <http://www.epa.gov/owow/monitoring/volunteer/issues.htm>.

CRWP ongoing activities include bioassessments in the Mattabeset, Eightmile, Hockanum and Blackledge (a tributary of the Salmon) watersheds, and water sampling in the Pequabuck watershed (a tributary of the Farmington). For more information about ongoing programs, upcoming activities, and how you can get involved, contact Jane at (860) 346-3282 or jane-brawerman@ct.nacdnet.org, or visit us on the web at www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal.

A New Look for Hatchery Brook

What do you do when you have to plant 195 shrubs, 650 flowering perennial plugs and 200 ground cover transplants, and install 45 cubic yards of wood chips? Recruit volunteers—and lots of them! In 2006, with the help of a veritable army of hard working volunteers, we created an additional 500 linear feet of vegetated buffer on the west side of Hatchery Brook, a tributary to the Mattabeset River in Berlin, CT. In 2004, our sister District, the North Central Conservation District, completed a 150 foot-long buffer just upstream from the project area. This newest buffer planting was designed to complement the previous project, and enhance water quality and habitat value of the riparian floodplain in this reach of the brook.

Native riparian plant species were selected to replace non-native invasive species that had taken hold, as well as lawn that was maintained to the edge of the brook. In addition to improving water quality and habitat value, the



buffer plantings will help stabilize the brook's banks and protect them from erosion.

Buffer designer Ruth Klue, staff member of the North



Central Conservation District, said "the selection of native flowering shrubs and perennials will add natural beauty and interest to the landscape while maintaining views and access to the stream." The Davises, whose property adjoins the buffer (which is on town-owned land), helped select the native species to be planted. Thinking practically, they asked for fruiting species, such as blueberries, as well as fragrant flowering species such as sweet pepperbush. Also planted were river birch, winterberry, dogwood, meadowsweet, blue flag iris, swamp milkweed, great blue lobelia, and monkey-flower.

Thanks to the many volunteers who helped prepare and plant the buffer, including (for the third consecutive year) a United Way "Day of Caring" group from Aetna in Middletown, a group from Walker Systems Support in Farmington, the Kensington Garden Club, District Board Members, District staff, friends, and family.

This project was funded by a grant from the Five-Star Restoration Program, which supports community-based wetland, riparian, and coastal habitat restoration projects that build diverse partnerships and foster local natural resource stewardship through education, outreach and training activities. ♦

District News & Upcoming Events

DISTRICT'S WATERSHED PROJECTS COORDINATOR STARTS DOWN NEW PATH

This August the District regretfully said goodbye and good luck to Paul Woodworth, Watershed Projects Coordinator at the District for almost five years. Paul began a master's degree at UConn in the Department of Geography this fall. We wish him the best of luck in pursuing his degree, and are hoping to see him paddling, hiking and biking around the District in the near future.



Paul gathering GPS data for an open space study.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION: TWO DISTRICT BOARD MEMBERS REACH MILESTONES

This year two board members were recognized for long-term service to the District. Michael Lutz has served for 10 years and is currently Treasurer. Cindy Fazendeiro has served for 20 years and is currently Secretary. A very special thanks to both of them—and all of our hard working board members—for their commitment and dedication.

2ND ANNUAL CRWP CRUISE A SUCCESS

Thanks to our many sponsors and cruise participants who contributed to the success of our 2nd Annual River Cruise and Wine-Tasting to benefit the Connecticut River Watch Program. We were graced with a gorgeous day, and a spectacular swallow show—according to *RiverQuest* captain Mark Yuknat and his wife Mindy, the best one they had seen yet! We were also treated to several bald eagles in the trees along the bank. Good food and wine, nice people, beautiful scenery—we couldn't have asked for more! Special thanks to Mark Yuknat, Gary Crump of Priam Vineyards, and Larry McCulloch of Chamard Vineyards, whose generous contributions were integral to the event's success.

RAIN GARDEN WORKSHOP

March 6, 2007, from 7 to 9 PM (snow date March 8, 2007)
UConn Extension Center, Rt. 154, Haddam, CT

Learn to design, plant and maintain your very own Rain Garden! Fun, easy, and aesthetically pleasing, a rain garden will make a difference in your yard, neighborhood, and local watershed. Contact the District at (860) 346-3282 and register today for this very exciting workshop!!!

16TH ANNUAL SHRUB AND SEEDLING SALE

April 20-22, 2007, Tanger Outlet Center, Westbrook

Looking for exquisite native plants? We are offering a wide variety of shrubs, grasses, ferns, flowering perennials, and tree seedlings native to Connecticut. For a brochure and order form phone us at (860) 346-3282, or visit us online at www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal.

Limited quantities of some plants are available, so don't be disappointed—send in your **pre-sale order by April 2, 2007.**



Foam Flower: USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database/Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. *Illustrated flora of the northern states and Canada*. Vol. 2: 224.

District Annual Meeting Explores Local Ag Issues

The Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District held its 59th Annual Meeting on October 25, 2006. To kick start the meeting, Executive Director Jane Brawerman gave a whirlwind slide tour of the year's projects and activities. Featured speaker Jiff Martin, Working Lands Alliance Project Director and American Farmland Trust New England Field Representative, then discussed Connecticut's Agricultural Renaissance. Jiff spoke about a new interest in eating locally, and trends taking hold like small "boutique" farms, sustainable farming ventures and farm-to-community programs.



Jiff Martin chatting at the Annual Meeting.

However, she cautioned that, while we have made progress in promoting agriculture here in the state, there is still much work to be done, especially in obtaining adequate funding for farmland protection. A special thanks to Jiff for her engaging presentation and enlightened perspective on how we can all help "keep it growing" in Connecticut. ♠

2006 Conservation Award Recipients—Congratulations!

Environmental Professional

Kevin Case, Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Study Coordinator (*former*)

Municipality of the Year

City of New Britain

Mort Gelston Service Award

Ruth Penfield, Berlin Land Trust and CRWP Volunteer

Teacher of the Year

Susan Michael, Coginchaug Regional H.S., Durham-Middlefield

Cooperator Award

Priam Vineyards, Colchester

Special Merit Award

The Bolton Conservation Commission

Special Merit Award

Tyler Raymond, District Summer Intern

Certificate of Appreciation

Larry McCulloch, Chamard Vineyards

Certificate of Appreciation

Mark and Mindy Yuknat, CT River Expeditions (*The RiverQuest*)

Certificate of Appreciation

Gary Crump and Gloria Priam, Priam Vineyards

Certificate of Appreciation

John Dolishny, General Manager, Tanger Outlet Center

Certificate of Appreciation

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



Tom O'Dell presenting awards to Clarence Corbin, City of New Britain (top), members of the Bolton Conservation Commission (middle) and Ruth Penfield (bottom).

January 2007

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.

Board of Supervisors

Thomas M. O'Dell, Westbrook, *Chair*
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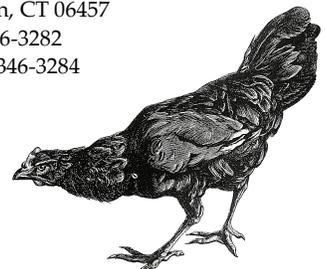
District Staff

Jane L. Brawerman
Executive Director
Wendy Goodfriend
Natural Resource Specialist
Barbara A. Davis
Office Administrator
Ken Geisler
Senior GIS Analyst

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 hold 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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