

NARROW RIVER NOTES

Narrow River Preservation Association: Preserving the Narrow River Watershed Since 1970 / April 2017

Annual River Herring Migration Gets Early Start

A mild winter has resulted in an early river herring (Buckie) migration for the second year in a row. Every spring, the alewives and blueback herring migrate from the ocean up Narrow River to Carr Pond above Gilbert Stewart for their annual spawning. Usually a mid-March through mid-May occurrence, this year several visitors to Gilbert Stuart Stream saw (and filmed) migrating fish as early as February 27. Video (including underwater footage) of the fish is available on the NRPA Facebook page: facebook.com/NarrowRiverPreservationAssociation.

River Herring is a collective term for the alewife and blueback herring. The migrating population is predominantly alewife (scientific name *Alosa pseudoharengus*), with a few blueback herring (*Alosa aestivalis*), who usually arrive later in the migration.

Locally, the river herring are known by a myriad of names, including bigeye herring, branch herring, freshwater herring, gaspereau, grayback, gray herring, kyak, sawbelly, and white herring.

(Continued on page 10)



River herring in Gilbert Stuart Stream
February 27, 2017
Photo by The Dented Bucket

NRPA Announces Upcoming Events

Late April - Early May - Salt Marsh Grass Seedling planting in restored marshes along Lower Narrow River

Exact schedule to be determined based on weather.

See page 6 for full story.

Middlebridge Marina, Middlebridge Road, Narragansett

May 20, Saturday - 30th Annual Narrow River Road Race

10K Run, 5K Run and 5K Walk along Narrow River

Details, maps and online registration at narrowriver.org.

Race check in starts at 8:30am, all races begin at 10am.

Narragansett Town Beach, North Pavilion

June 17, Saturday - What Lives in the River

A hands-on, all-ages introduction to fish, shellfish, crabs and other inhabitants of Narrow River.

Please preregister for this FREE event. 9:00am-11:00am

Middlebridge Marina, Middlebridge Road, Narragansett

June 24, Saturday - 12th Annual Turnaround Swim

Join us for this one mile, open water loop swim in the Narrow River.

Check in starts at 7:45am, swim begins at 9:00am.

Details, maps and online registration at narrowriver.org.

URI Boathouse, 166 Walmsley Lane, North Kingstown

July 21, Friday - 10th Annual Pettaquamscutt Paddle

Choose discounted 2 hour kayak rental from 9am-noon OR sunset paddle with refreshments and conversation starting at 5:00pm.

All proceeds to benefit NRPA. Rain date July 22.

Narrow River Kayaks, Middlebridge Road, Narragansett

August 5, Saturday - Art on the River

Join us for en plein air art along the shore of Narrow River with art supplies provided by NRPA. 9:00am - 11:00am

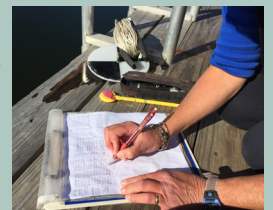
Middlebridge Marina, Middlebridge Road, Narragansett

Volunteer Now for NRPA's River Watch Program

No previous experience in water quality monitoring is required!

All new volunteers receive training from the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch.

See page 4 for details.



President's Cove

Words like budget cut and climate change rang clear as a bell to me at the 14th Annual Land & Water Conservation Summit at the URI Memorial Union. The RI Land & Water Summit has grown since its conception in 2004 to become the state's premier conservation event.

To be able to congregate with old friends, meet many new people and hear the latest news on environmental issues was a rewarding experience.

The menu included thirty-three workshops at which one could digest the topic and then ask a specific question pertaining to one's interest. The three workshops that I attended were informal and very informative. They were titled, Where is the Money? The 2017 Funders Panel, Leading Your Board to Excellence and Using Aerial Views of Rhode Island: From Satellites to Drones.

The main speaker was Dr. Eric Chivian who is Director of the Program on Preserving The National World and the Founder and Former Director of The Center of Health and the Global Environment and an Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He spoke about the need to increase public understanding of the potential human health consequences of global environmental change. He stressed translating the abstract, technical science of change into concrete personal, everyday language of human health that people can relate to and understand.

I thank the RI Land and Water Partnership for hosting the Land & Water Conservation Summit.

Best,

Richard Grant
NRPA President

View an aerial video of the Lower Narrow River Salt Marsh Restoration project on the NRPA Facebook page: facebook.com/NarrowRiverPreservationAssociation.

Thanks to videographer Ray Stachelek.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) works to preserve, protect, and restore the natural environment and the quality of life of all communities within the Narrow (Pettaquamscutt) River Estuary and Watershed.

www.narrowriver.org

NARROW RIVER PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

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NRPA is part of the United Way Workplace Campaign.

Our donor option number is 6239

If you plan to give to United Way, please consider designating a portion of your gift to NRPA.



NRPA is participating in the 2017 Rhode Island State Employees Charitable Appeal (SECA).

Our fund number is 6239.

Rhode Island Rivers Council



Introducing Sarah Gaines

In October 2016, Narrow River Preservation Association welcomed Sarah Gaines to its Board of Directors.

Sarah's family has been in South County for ten generations. She currently lives in the home her grandparents, Les and Johnny Stone, built on Tower Hill Road overlooking the watershed. Her father, Arthur Gaines, was the first Vice President for Scientific Affairs when NRPA was founded in 1970. Sarah has degrees in Earth Sciences from Princeton and the University of Cape Town. She has worked at various research institutions in Woods Hole, for the Corps of Engineers in San Francisco and, for the last decade, for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization in Paris.

Sarah is a Senior Fellow at the Coastal Institute at URI, founder of the Living Landscape Studio which focuses on global conservation, art and science projects, and works with the international group of the Coastal Resources Center at URI's Graduate School of Oceanography.

Sarah and her husband have recently returned to the watershed to raise their young family.

As a Board Member, Sarah is interested in environmental protection and the cultural landscape of the river. She is focused on educating and engaging local families in river activities.



Emily Kaczynski Wins NRPA Science Fair Award



NRPA Board Member **Chris Hubbard** presented **Emily Kaczynski**, South Kingstown High School ninth grader, with the 2017 Narrow River Preservation Association Science Fair Award. She presented her project, "Investigating Invasives: Asian Shore Crab Population" to the NRPA Board of Directors at their meeting on March 7th.

Using scientific methodology, Emily monitored the population of Asian Shore crabs and green crabs at one Rhode Island beach for six weeks this winter. Her results showed a large population of Asian Shore Crabs and no green crabs at all. Emily speculated that her results may be attributable partly to the winter weather conditions and partly due to Asian Shore crabs outcompeting the green crab population.

After the SKHS Science Fair, Emily presented her project at the Rhode Island State Science Fair, at which her project was judged one of the best in fair. Emily was awarded a \$1,000 renewable scholarship to URI and was chosen to attend the GENIUS Olympiad at the State University of New York this June.

Emily has asked NRPA Board Member Sarah Gaines to mentor her on a proposal to expand the project, which she has submitted for a grant from the Marjot Foundation.

NRPA also awarded Honorable Mentions to four of the nearly eighty students who participated in the SKHS fair in January.

Honorable Mentions went to:

- Caitlin Rodriguez – The Impact of Sunscreen Use on Our Environment
- Jacob Trovato - Erosion
- Jack McCarty – Microbeads and Plastics in the Oceans
- Kelsi Conlon – The Impact of Plastic Water Bottles

Volunteer Now for River Watch Program

Interested in becoming a volunteer water quality monitor?

Now is the time to sign up for NRPA's River Watch program. No previous experience in water quality monitoring is required. All new volunteers receive training from the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch (URI-WW) personnel. Manuals and all necessary monitoring equipment are provided.

The monitoring season runs from May until October. The program consists of biweekly measurements of temperature, algae concentration, salinity, water clarity, and dissolved oxygen. Each volunteer is assigned a river location for monitoring. Some locations can be monitored from the shore while other locations require a boat or canoe for monitoring.

Attendance at one field training session is required. (The training schedule is tentative and may change as we get closer to the season.)

FIELD TRAININGS:

**Saturdays, April 22 and April 29
at 9 am and repeated at 1 pm**

Pre-registration for field sessions is required. The training does not cost anything, but in order to be sure that there is adequate materials for everyone please register by contacting the URI Watershed Watch Office at: 401-874-4552 or 401-874-2905.

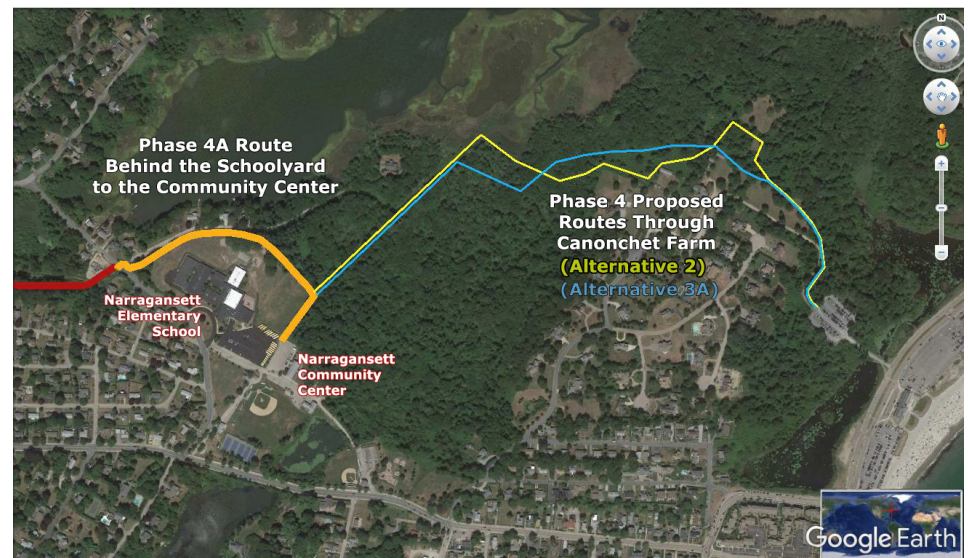
Information about water monitoring and new volunteer training is available at: <http://web.uri.edu/watershedwatch/uri-watershed-watch-new-volunteer-training-becoming-a-citizen-scientist/> and at narrowriver.org

Completion of the South County Bike Path Gets Boost with Green Economy Bond Grant

On Monday, March 13, 2017, Governor Gina Raimondo announced the award of a \$750,000 grant to the Town of Narragansett to build a portion of the final segment (Phase 4) of the William C. O'Neill South County Bike Path. A week later, Narragansett took the first step in the process when the Town Council members voted 5 to 0 to instruct town staff to draft a request for proposal for design services. The grant is part of the \$10 million allocated for bikeway completion and connections in the Green Economy Bond approved by Rhode Island voters in November 2016. Nine other projects will also receive Green Economy Bond funding, including a bike path connection between the University of Rhode Island and the South County Bike Path. The funding, which is administered by the R.I. Department of Environmental Management, will be available in July.

The funded project, dubbed Phase 4A, includes three components:

- Provide a safe crossing at Mumford Road where the South County Bike Path currently ends at Mumford Road in Narragansett.
- Construct the first 1,375 feet of the proposed off-road route through Canonchet Farm to the Narragansett Town Beach. This portion begins at Mumford Road and travels on town property behind the Narragansett Elementary School schoolyard and the adjacent athletic field to a point where the remainder of the Phase 4 route turns northeast to travel on the grade of the SeaView Railroad and through Canonchet Farm.
- Construct a 375-foot bike path along the east side of the athletic field to the Narragansett Community Center parking lot.



With the loop around the school property, bicyclists and walkers will have a safe entrance to the bike path, enjoy the convenience of public parking spaces and avoid the dangerous vehicular traffic in front of the Narragansett Elementary School. In the meantime, funding for the balance of Phase 4 remains in the 2017-2025 R.I. Transportation Improvement Program.

For maps and other resources, visit <http://www.narrowriver.org/BikePath>.

The Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*)

by Craig Wood, NRPA Board of Directors

The featured bird for this year's Road Race t-shirt is the Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*). The Willet is one of our most conspicuous breeding species in the Narrow River estuary. They are large, stocky shorebirds (pigeon-sized body on long legs) with distinctive black-and-white wing markings. Willets have a thick, straight bill considerably longer than the head. Willet plumage is mottled brown during breeding and plain gray in winter. When startled, they take flight with a piercing "pill-will-willet" call that gives them their name. Willets are often seen alone. They walk deliberately, pausing to probe for crabs, worms and other prey in sand and mudflats, or to pick at insects and mollusks.

There are two nesting populations (subspecies) of Willet in North America; the Eastern Willet nests in salt marshes, barrier beaches, and mangroves along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts from Newfoundland to northeastern Mexico. The Western Willet breeds in interior prairies from Alberta to Colorado. Eastern Willets winter in coastal eastern South America, whereas Western Willets winter on both coasts of North America south to Peru.

Interestingly, the Willet is a southern species that has extended its breeding range north in recent decades. Willets were first documented nesting in Rhode Island during 1987 and are now a locally com-

mon breeding species throughout the state. With an expanded breeding range, Willets are now also a common sight in Rhode Island during migration periods, especially during fall migration which occurs locally throughout July. Western Willets are sometimes observed in Rhode Island with flocks of Eastern Willets during fall migration.

elevation combating drowning and loss of habitat.

Cool Facts

- Although both parents incubate the eggs, only the male Willet spends the night on the nest.
- Willets and other shorebirds were once a popular food. By the early 1900s, Willets had almost vanished north of Virginia. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 banned market hunting and marked the start of the Willet's comeback to present numbers.
- Like Killdeer, Willets will pretend to be disabled by a broken wing in order to draw attention to themselves and lure predators away from their eggs or chicks.
- Because they find prey using the sensitive tips of their bills, and not just eyesight, Willets can feed both during the day and at night.
- Willet pairs often remain together for several years and return to the same nest sites.



Willetts, along with the salt marsh sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus*), nest in the higher portions of salt marsh bordering Narrow River. This "high marsh" habitat has been disappearing in salt marshes throughout the region. This phenomenon is thought to be the result of accelerated sea level rise. Restoring high marsh is a major objective of the on-going dredging and marsh building project which is placing dredged material on the surface of the marsh to raise the

Sources:

Rhode Island Wildlife Action Plan Species Profiles, Species of Greatest Conservation Need, accessed at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/swap/SGCNBirds.pdf>.

All About Birds, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, accessed at <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Willet/idallaboutbirds>

Many thanks to the photographer of the Willet in our logo, David Uliss.

Volunteers to Plant Saltmarsh Grass Seedlings in Restoration Effort

Narrow River Preservation Association is working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the next phase of the Narrow River salt marsh restoration project.

While the marsh has historically been underwater only at “spring” (new and full moon) tides, in recent years, due to sea level rise, the majority of the marsh is being flooded too frequently for the marsh grasses to thrive.

This winter, in partnership with the Nature Conservancy and the Coastal Resource Management Council, US Fish and Wildlife completed the dredging phase of the restoration project.

During this phase, using a method called thin layer deposition, crews dredged specific areas of the lower Narrow River and then dispersed the dredged material onto the surface of the marsh to raise the elevation. In areas where the elevation has been raised 3 inches or more, volunteers will soon plant marsh grass seedlings (plugs).

Marsh areas at the increased elevation will flood less frequently, which will hopefully increase the lifespan and resilience of the marsh to future sea level rise and other stressors.

Last fall, US Fish and Wildlife collected local seeds from three

different types of salt marsh grasses along Narrow River. Since then, a nursery has been growing the seedlings (plugs).

Around the first of May, 35,000 plugs will be ready to plant.

The salt marsh grasses to be planted are cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), saltmarsh hay (*Spartina patens*), and saltgrass (*Distichis spicata*).

The planting will occur over two or three days, with a morning and an afternoon shift each day. Volunteers will be able to choose which shifts they would like to work.

Volunteers are advised to dress for the weather. The work will be messy and rubber boots are encouraged.

Helpers of all ages are welcome and NRPA is working with school groups who plan to volunteer.

USF&WS will provide all of the needed tools and supplies as well as water and snacks.

The volunteer response at press time has been outstanding. Nearly 200 individuals and several groups have signed up to volunteer.

Many hands will make quick work of the 35,000 plugs.

Updates will be posted to narrowriver.org and the NRPA Facebook page.



Two of the grasses to be planted in May: cordgrass (left) and saltgrass



photo by PCove

Sedge Island Shack Educational Panel Planned

NRPA is collaborating with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to design and install an educational panel commemorating the little red shack on Sedge Island.

The 3 foot by 2 foot panel will include photos and artwork of the well-loved Narragansett icon as well as history and stories from those who loved the shack.

The proposed location of the panel is on the mainland overlooking the area where the shack stood for generations. Stone and concrete walls remain on Sedge Island and identify the former site of the house.

Despite repeated efforts to repair the shack and bolster it against the elements, the shack disintegrated and became a hazard. It was removed in November 2016 by USFWS.

A late spring installation is planned. Details will be published at narrowriver.org, on NRPA's facebook page and via email. Email nrpa@narrowriver.org to be added to our email list.

painting by Pati Sylvia





Fourth Graders Track Osprey Migration

Mrs. Wood's Fourth Grade class at Monsignor Clark School in Wakefield and Mrs. Prest's Fourth Grade class at Narragansett Elementary School recently examined the features of ospreys that make them so well adapted for catching fish. They also received a lesson on the osprey's spring migration from as far as the Amazon Rain Forest to New England nesting grounds.

With help of NRPA's Craig Wood, they are tracking the daily progress of two birds (Belle and Staddler) who have been outfitted with a signaling device

that transmits a radio signal of their exact position on their journey north from Brazil.

You can follow along at <http://www.ospreytrax.com/OspreyMain-Page.html>. Select 'Interactive Maps', then '2017', then 'Spring'. Although the map takes a little while to load, you will see a map like the one here. The map includes the movements of all nine currently tracked birds. Belle's track is in red and Staddler's movements are coded orange.

The map seen here is dated March 30, 2017. By noting the red line, one can see that Belle started her migration in the Amazon rain forest, made her way to Haiti, then Cuba, then Florida and up toward her known summer nesting ground in Martha's Vineyard.

The site's maps are interactive, you can click on any track to get date, time, latitude and longitude coordinates. Zoom in to see where a particular bird spent the night. Maps of the ospreys' movements in previous years allow you to compare routes between years.

Many osprey nest in the Narrow River estuary, but none of the current residents are tagged with transmitters.

NRPA Board Member Craig Wood with fourth graders at Narragansett Elementary School (left) and Monsignor Clarke School. The students are pictured with a juvenile osprey mount.



Screen shot from ospreytrax.com showing the locations of nine tracked osprey in Spring 2017.



Discover What Lives in the River on Saturday, June 17

9-11am at Middlebridge Marina, Narragansett
See and touch Narrow River's wildlife.

Free and open to the public

Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Please preregister at narrowriver.org



Hands-on seining with experts to catch river creatures

Guided walks along the intertidal zone and salt marsh to observe the inhabitants

River-water tanks and microscopes to examine river creatures and guidebooks to help identify them

Experts to discuss the importance of estuaries as nurseries for fish & shellfish, the fascinating migration of river herring, and the role of river plants in the food web.

Rhode Island Rivers Council Overview

by Veronica M. Berounsky, Ph.D.,
RIRC Chair and NRPA Board Vice
Chair

An organization to protect our RI flowing waters.

Water is so crucial to life as we know it that when scientists search for indications of life on other planets, they look for signs of water. Drinking water in the US comes either from surface waters, such as lakes and reservoirs, or wells that pump-up ground water. Surface waters and ground water are replenished by precipitation, which falls onto our lakes and rivers and the surrounding land, and seeps into the soil to the groundwater. When water is flowing, it is usually considered a "river", a general term that encompasses estuaries, streams, creeks, brooks, and some ponds. A "watershed" is the land area that drains into a river.

The RI Rivers Council (RIRC) is the only organization in the state that specifically oversees rivers and their watersheds statewide. The RIRC is a quasi-governmental organization created by RI General Law Chapter 46-28 in 1991 to coordinate, oversee, and review efforts to improve and preserve the quality of the state's rivers and other water bodies by 1., coordinating state policies to protect rivers and watersheds and by 2., empowering state-designated watershed councils as partners in river and watershed protection.

The RIRC is an associated function of the RI Water Resources Board, part of the Department of Administration. Please see the website: www.ririvers.org for more details.

The RIRC members bring diverse strengths to the council. Nine

public volunteer members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the senate and have backgrounds in conservation organization experience, science, environmental law, or planning experience; or communication, public outreach or education experience; or is a member of a chamber of commerce.

The six institutional members are heads of state agencies or their designees: from Department of Administration; Department of Environmental Management; Water Resources Board; Coastal Resources Management Council; Commerce Corporation; and League of Cities and Towns. There is no paid staff.

The RIRC also has ten Watershed Councils that have gone through the process to become the state-designated watershed council for a river and its watershed (see box on opposite page). These councils have legal standing to represent their watershed. Although there are presently only 10 watersheds in the RI Rivers Council, 71% of the state of RI is encompassed by these 10 watersheds.

What are RI Rivers Council funds used for?

Up until this past year when most community service grants were removed from the RI State budget, the RIRC received an annual community service grant of about \$15,000 from the RI General Assembly. Almost all of those funds were used to conduct a competitive grants program for our designated watershed councils, that is mandated in our founding legislation. Over the past 3 years RIRC was awarded approximately \$45,000 in grants and this was

leveraged or matched more than triplicate by the watershed councils for an amount of \$150,000. This provided a total of almost \$195,000 in monies for the \$45,450 given to the RIRC over the last 3 years. Those funds supported water quality monitoring, educational programs with students, outreach activities, and hands on projects such as tree plantings and fish passage rebuilding. Those projects and programs are in danger of ending without funding. The loss to the state would be substantial. We need to again receive legislative funds in the upcoming budget to support the RIRC and watershed council activities.

The RIRC was fortunate to apply for and receive a 2 year grant from the Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Coordination Team and this has been useful to have with the loss of legislative funds. About \$18,000 was used in the first year for stormwater projects in the watersheds. There is about \$22,000 left which will be available to the ten watershed councils for stormwater-related projects or water quality monitoring and the addition of stormwater information to their websites.

What are the goals of the RI Rivers Council?

One of the goals of the RIRC is to educate our RIRC members and designated watershed council representatives so they can better advise state agencies and municipalities concerning programs and measures to protect and improve river and watershed quality. To that end, the RIRC monthly meetings include presentations of pertinent topics. Recent presentations were on: the updated State Guide Plan

on Water Quality, regulation and restoration with the Coastal Resources Management Council, and investigation and enforcement of environmental regulatory violations.

Another goal of the RIRC is to foster public involvement in river planning and decision-making. To that end, RIRC exhibits at public education and outreach events such as the "Party for the Planet" at Roger Williams Park Zoo, "Environmental Awareness Day" at Narragansett Town Beach and the recent "Land and Water Summit" at the University of Rhode Island.

But our top goal for this year is to restore the stipulated legislative funding for our competitive grant program that is mandated in our founding legislation. In pursuit of this, RIRC officers, Veronica Berounsky, Chair and Rachel Calabro, Vice Chair, met with Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee and Lisa Vura-Weis, Governor Raimondo's Deputy Chief of Staff for Environmental Issues and Steve Kavanagh, Governor Raimondo's Deputy Legislative Director on December 22, 2016. The Governor's staff members explained that the community

grants funds, which is where our monies came from, have been re-distributed to other causes and that program is not coming back in the new budget. They were happy to hear that our grants program has good oversight and accountability and that our designation program identifies and promotes active watershed councils. The state budget was released on January 19 and there were no funds identified specifically for the RI Rivers Council, either through the Department of Administration (where our funding used to come from) or the Department of Environmental Management. The watershed councils of the RIRC are starting to identify the representatives of their watersheds. On the urging of Rep. McEntee, and with her spearheading the effort, the watershed councils along with RIRC will approach their legislators about consolidating a group of legislative grants into funding for the RIRC before the state budget is finalized in June.



State Designated Watershed Councils

Blackstone River Watershed Council / Friends of the Blackstone

Buckeye Brook Coalition

Kickemuit River Council

Friends of the Moshassuck

Narrow River Preservation Association

Pawtuxet River Authority and Watershed Council

Salt Ponds Coalition

Ten Mile River Watershed Council

Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association



30th Annual Narrow River Road Race

What: 10K Run, 5K Run, 5K Walk

When: Saturday, May 20 @ 10am

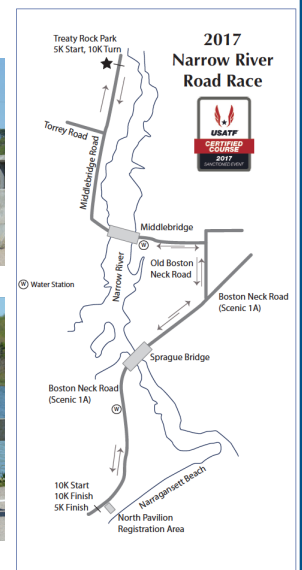
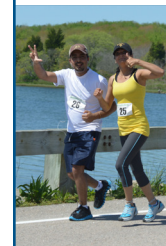
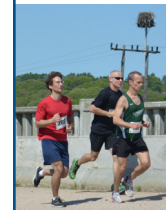
Where: Narragansett Town Beach, North Pavilion

How much: \$25 (before 5/18)

How: register online at narrow-river.org

Why: To enjoy the watershed and raise funds for NRPA's programs

Who: You and your family and friends!



River Herring Migration, cont.

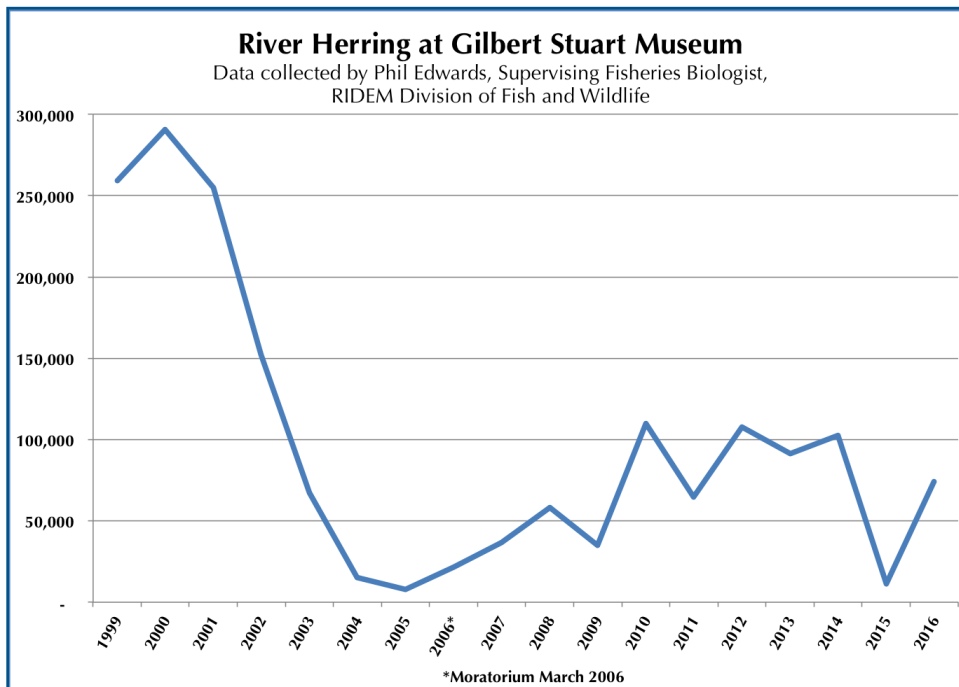
Perhaps most commonly, the river herring are called buckie, also spelled buckey. Both spellings are pronounced buck´-ee, and should not be confused with Buckeyes (pronounced buck´-eye) which are several tree species of the genus *Aesculus* and the namesake for Ohio State University sports teams.

Phil Edwards, Supervising Fisheries Biologist with the RI Department of Environmental Management Division of Fish and Wildlife, has been counting the migrating fish at Gilbert Stuart stream for years. The attached chart shows a steady decline in the population due to overfishing until a moratorium was declared in 2006. A recovery in herring numbers was seen between 2006 and 2014 from historic lows in 2005.

2015 was a poor year for the fish statewide, but there was a bounce back in 2016 and Phil and his colleagues are hopeful for another strong migration in 2017.

Alewife and blueback herring have a similar look. As adults, both are about 10 to 12 inches long and have a maximum weight of approximately half of a pound. The 'sawbelly' nickname is earned by the sharply angled bony scutes on the belly of each fish.

As adults, river herring live in salt



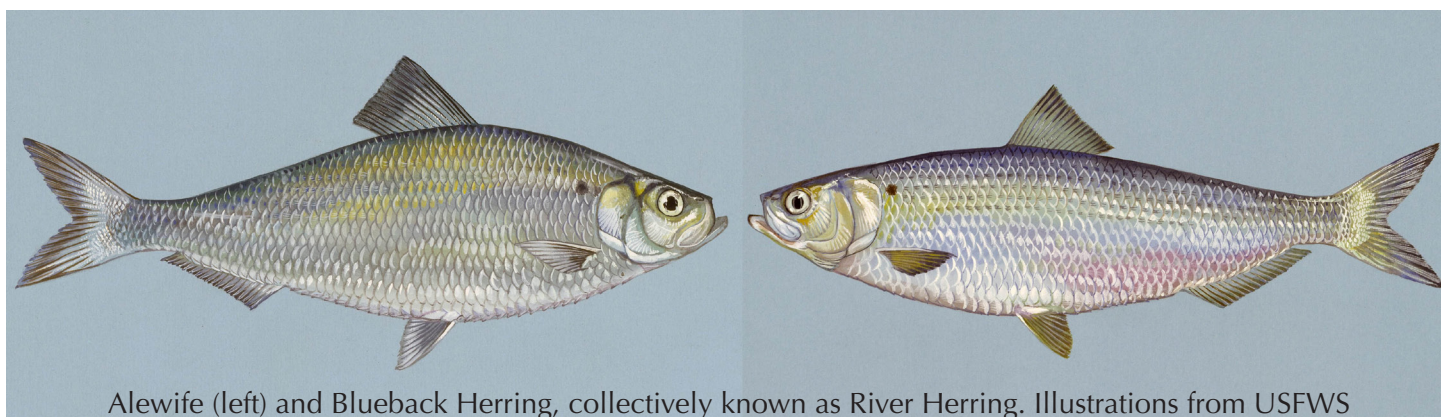
water and are prey for larger fishes, osprey, seals, otters and whales. The river provides access to the freshwater spawning areas, and the estuary plays a critical role for growing juveniles, who hatch in spring, then mature in the protected area until they move out to sea in the fall.

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum will offer an up close view of the migration at their Spring Fair and Fish on the Run event on April 23rd from 1-4pm. At the fair, the fish will be visible from the Museum's nature trails and bridges at the fish ladder as well as via underwater camera.

Currently, lower Gilbert Stuart stream is accessible from the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace Museum parking lot on Gilbert Stuart Road. Upper Gilbert Stuart stream and Carr Pond are closed until the Museum's Spring Fair, which is also the Museum's 2017 opening day.

In 2001, John Elder Dick (who has since passed away), provided a history of and reflection on the herring migration. (Editor's note: a few corrections have been made to John's original piece.)

Special thanks to Phil Edwards, Robert Kenney, and Charles Biddle for their contributions to this article.



Alewife (left) and Blueback Herring, collectively known as River Herring. Illustrations from USFWS

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY by John Elder Dick

Beginning in mid-April and continuing to mid-May the annual phenomenon of the “buckey” run occurs in the Narrow River. While not as plentiful as in previous years and centuries, at one time this annual run formed an important industry on our river. “Buckeyes” is the regional colloquialism for alewives or herring. Spring starts the spawning urge, when they enter the mouth of the River and proceed upwards to Buckeye Brook and Gilbert Stuart Stream to spawn.

These primitive and prolific fish, dating back some 150 million years have throughout history formed an important food and still do in many cultures. Schools in the millions covering square miles have been reported. They swim in precise formation, so tightly packed together that no fish can turn without hitting another!

In “Pettaquamscutt Perspectives” a collection of oral history of the area, C. Foster Browning told of their history and his fishing of them. He goes back to before the Revolution when teeming masses of them were caught, smoked, salted and shipped to hot climates – South America and the West Indies. There they were traded for dye wool. British blockade of shipping during the Revolution put a temporary stop to the trade. After the war it is recorded that about 1000 barrels of fish were shipped from our area. Foster tells us that in 1914 he got \$4.30 a barrel, good money then, 400 fish in a barrel. The business crashed when commercial dyes became available. Then buckeyes were caught only for smoking use and lobster bait. Using a seine, he then would catch smoke and sell some 12-18,000 a year. For many years in our area when the shad bloomed, buckeyes were at their height, and people looked forward to dinners of salted smoked buckeyes, rather like a good scotch kipper.

My own memories go back to friends of mine who lived in the old Carpenter homestead, a former stagecoach stop in Perryville. Bill had his own smoker, built from a refrigerator, where above smoking pans of maple and apple chips they slowly turned a golden color. Soon the call would come, “You coming down? They’re ready.” Down I’d go and around the huge table in that farm kitchen we’d gather and feast on smoked buckeyes, boiled pokeweed, sautéed fiddle head ferns and jonny-cakes. A South County feast for the Gods.

In more recent times Mark Hutchins, a retired math teacher from South Kingstown High School, reminisced with me about his days from 1969-1984 fishing for them. He fished the upper lakes selling the catch for lobster bait. Figuring 32 bushels to a ton, he would get 60 bushels a day at \$4 a bushel seining from the end of March to May. Mark said fishing was best with a southwest wind, which drove current and fish up the River. He said they were so prolific, that at Buckeye Brook some waded in with a golf club and chipped them out onto the shore.

Beginning in the 1980’s, the catch fell off, but he sees signs of their increasing again. Today, aside from those of us who relish a smoked buckey most of us enjoy immature herring as sardines, still a prolific industry. And by the way, when you open that can, believe it or not they are all hand sorted and packed. No machinery has ever been developed to do the job as well as flying fingers.

Take a trip up to Gilbert Stuart and enjoy this annual phenomenon. And remember, once upon a time this was a flourishing industry here on the shores of the Narrow River.

NRPA Lesa Meng College Scholarship Applications Due April 24

This spring, NRPA will award up to four \$1,000 college scholarships to students graduating from high schools in the watershed: Narragansett High School, North Kingstown High School, The Prout School and South Kingstown High School.

NRPA began awarding college scholarships in 1995 and has granted over \$48,000 to local high school seniors since its inception.

Scholarship applications are available at narrowriver.org, or at the Guidance Departments of all four high schools in the watershed.

The scholarship applications are judged on:

- Student’s environmentally oriented activities in and out of high school
- An original essay on mitigating an environmental problem or issue relevant to Narrow River
- Science teacher’s recommendation
- Academic achievement in math and science courses.

Completed applications must be submitted to the student’s guidance counselor (not to NRPA) by Monday, April 24, 2017.

Do we have your email address?

Stay up to date on events and activities in the Narrow River Watershed .
Send your email to nrpa@narrowriver.org to be subscribed to NRPA email updates

2017 NRPA Event Sponsors to Date

Many thanks to the generous organizations and individuals who are sponsoring NRPA events this year, including the Narrow River Road Race in May 20, the Narrow River Turnaround Swim on June 24 and the Pettaquamscutt Paddle on July 21.

Interested in becoming a sponsor? We welcome your tax-deductible donation! Sponsors are encouraged to submit their check or gift card by April 20 to be included in NRPA event materials and on our road race and swim T-shirts. Email nrpa@narrowriver.org for more information.



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Meet this year's Road Race featured bird, the Willet, on page 5.

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