An Invitation to Relax and Enjoy Our Watershed

Wynne Tranor-Kvenvold, NRWA Communications Manager

During this summer season, I’ve pondered how fortunate we are to live in an area where there is an abundance of beautiful places offering a vast variety of recreational opportunities right near home. In this issue, NRWA staff share their favorite local places to recreate. I love a paddle and picnic on the Nashua River on a lazy summer afternoon, blueberry picking at a local orchard, and exploring new trails. These inviting waters and quiet woodlands exist for our enjoyment because of decades of work by the NRWA and other organizations to protect local resources. Whether you have a few hours or a weekend, we invite you to explore our favorite spots or find some of your own, and enjoy the fruits of our communal labor to protect what we love.

Willard Brook State Forest in Townsend, MA

Al Futterman, NRWA Lands Programs Director

Willard Brook State Forest near the south side of Vinton Pond is my favorite place to hike. In 2006, after years of negotiations, the MA Dept. of Conservation Services purchased a 75-acre parcel with the close assistance of several conservation entities and private citizens. The NRWA played a vital role in the purchase of the tract, from raising funds to managing the demolition of existing structures. Protecting this parcel from development was vital to ensure wildlife habitat, drinking water quality, and an unspoiled recreational experience for campers in the adjacent state park. The newly created 4-mile long “Friends Trail” now connects Pearl Hill Pond to Damon Pond and the extensive state forest trail network.

Gone Fishin’ on the Squannacook River

Martha Morgan, NRWA Water Programs Director

The Squannacook River is a peaceful and relaxing destination for fishermen (and women!). Each spring and fall, it is stocked with brook and rainbow trout, which love to hide in its cool, shady pools and under its bountiful fallen logs. The Squannacook offers a multitude of access points, winding through Townsend, Groton, and Shirley, as well as put-ins for canoes and kayaks. My daughter Gwen says: “Nothing quite beats a lazy day along the Squannacook’s shady banks with a hook and a worm, especially with the reward of plentiful fish.” Indeed, an NRWA water monitor out collecting samples in July happened upon a fisherman who said he’d caught five shiners in less than an hour.

Dexter Drumlin in Lancaster, MA

Cara Sanford, NRWA AmeriCorps Regional Conservationist

One of my favorite places, the Dexter Drumlin owned by The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR), is close to my home. I love it because it’s easy to get to, provides fantastic views of my town, and is important grassland habitat for bobolinks. In my work as a Regional Conservationist, I see time and again how important neighborhood natural areas are to our communities. Everyone has a special place and very often it is in one’s backyard! The NRWA collaborates with TTOR and numerous other groups to protect and steward land. Whether it’s 1,400 acres protected by a Forest Legacy grant, 14 acres protected by a State LAND grant, or 140-acres protected by a private landowner, these special gems are so important to one’s quality of life. So, I walk to the “Drumlin”. I see the sweeping viewshed over the fields as they roll towards the North Nashua River and it takes my breath away every time.
I love hiking in J. Harry Rich State Forest in Groton. This forest has so much variety to offer, from old pine stands to the new life emerging after fires, from the riverbanks where the Nashua River flows along at a steady pace to the quiet and populated waters of Pepperell Pond. I love bringing groups of children there during NRWA programs. They explore the old trading post site where Native Americans and white settlers swapped goods or discover wonders like otter slides, beaver-chewed sticks, and animal tracks in the mud. And the history of the watershed can be read on the site of the former garbage dump, telling the story of a time when people believed the river could carry away all their waste. The J. Harry Rich State Forest is beautiful in all seasons.

Nashua River Rail Trail from Nashua, NH to Ayer, MA
Mark Archambault, NRWA Smart Growth Circuit Rider

One of the brightest recreational gems in the watershed is the Nashua River Rail Trail, running about 12 miles from the border in Nashua, NH to downtown Ayer, MA. The trail attracts bicyclists, runners, walkers, roller bladders, and even horseback riders. From Nashua to Groton, the trail is predominantly wooded with views of the Nashua River, a cool shaded place during warmer weather. From Groton to Ayer, the trail is open and sunny, passing extensive wetlands and fields. Follow the progress of the seasons through the varied habitats as reflected by the plants, birds, and wildlife along the corridor. Enjoy peaceful exercise away from heavy traffic and crowds. It’s well worth the trip.

Mt. Wachusett in Princeton, MA
Mary Marro, NRWA Environmental Education Director

My friend and I walk up the west side of Mt. Wachusett weekly. Weekdays are quiet and we have the pleasure of walking through stands of towering pines, thick Mountain Laurel, and old growth forests. And to top it all off, we get a view of the Nashua River watershed to the east. The NRWA helps to protect the mountain through representation on the Wachusett Mountain Advisory Committee. We begin the walk on Administration Road, a pedestrian road, walking quickly while chatting. We turn up the Lower Link trail to the Jack Frost trail, a steep trail, winding through old Hemlocks and rocky cliffs. Gets the heart pumping! A few more minutes and we are at the summit to view the watershed: Princeton, Westminster, Fitchburg, Leominster, and beyond.
Paddling on the Squannacook River in West Groton, MA

Stacey Chilcoat, NRWA River Classroom Director

Every time I put my canoe in the Squannacook River at the West Groton Water Dept., I discover something new on this spectacular Nashua River tributary. The Squannacook River above the Hollingsworth & Vose Company dam offers a great variety of habitat for plants and animals. Daily sightings of heron, turtles, osprey, swallows, and a multitude of emerging insects capture the imaginations of our River Classroom school groups as we paddle upstream. Some plants cover the water’s surface, others grow below and more emerge above the waterline leaving an image of beauty and diversity. This section is a very special place to paddle, one that will draw you back time and again.

Swimming in Mirror Lake Recreation Area in Devens, MA

Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, NRWA Executive Director

Swimming at Mirror Lake is delightful. The lake, a 29-acre “kettle pond” formed by a retreating glacier, continuously fills with fresh water from an aquifer beneath it. The area, part of 150+ acres under permanent Conservation Restrictions (CR) held by The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR), is open for hiking, swimming, non-motorized boating, and fishing (the lake is stocked with trout). During the summer, see www.magicmirrorlake.com for schedule and modest fees. For more than a decade, the NRWA has been an active member of the Devens Open Space and Recreation Advisory Committee, paying close attention to developments on Devens that might impact key natural resources. The NRWA was the primary consultant preparing the 2006-2011 Devens Open Space and Recreation Plan. Recently, a Mirror Lake Recreation Area Improvement Plan was done, and TTOR’s Mirror Lake and Eskers CR was expanded. With a sandy beach and a shoreline ringed by trees, Mirror Lake is indeed alluring on a hot summer day.

Peter E. Bertozzi Conservation Area in Groton, MA

Pam Gill, NRWA Development Associate

This property was given to the town of Groton in 1963 by the Groton Leatherboard Company and is held by the Conservation Commission. It’s one of my favorite places to go with friends, a sweet and peaceful spot and a delightful respite on a hot day. It’s easily accessible with level trails and is situated adjacent to the Squannacook River and the state Bertozzi Wildlife Management Area, and it’s part of the Squannacook River Greenway. The NRWA does water sampling at several locations along the river. One will find a bridle path, camping (with permit), fishing, hiking, hunting, picnicking, wildlife habitat, cross country skiing, and more.

Biodiversity

Elizabeth Harris, NRWA Office Manager

Summer means relaxing in the warm air, watching the leaves of the trees quiver and rustle in the breeze. I am intoxicated by the aroma, color, and texture of the flowers. The garden is bursting with life - birds, bugs, butterflies and bees are constantly in motion. The abundance and diversity of nature is astounding!
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November 11, 2011
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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Nashua Farmer’s Market in Nashua, NH
Kathryn Nelson, NRWA Water Monitoring Coordinator

On a Sunday, a favorite spot of mine is the Nashua Farmers Market, held on the Main Street bridge crossing the Nashua River in Downtown Nashua. It’s the place to go to enjoy locally-grown produce and wine, bread, jellies, cheese, yarn, and more all summer long! Beyond shopping, it’s the place to find out how the bee population is doing, how the spring rains affected strawberry crops, and where to see llamas. Vendors are connected to the land in a way that can be forgotten by city dwellers; it’s always good to remember where our food comes from. The NRWA monitors the river nearby, and I enjoy sharing river stories. The Association has been keeping an eye on water quality for many years and continues to make sure the river stays clean. It’s fantastic that Nashua is a community that appreciates both healthy rivers and food!

Getting the Buzz on Gardening
Gaynor Bigelbach, NRWA AmeriCorps Service Learning Coordinator

As the NRWA’s AmeriCorps Service Learning Coordinator, I’ve had the joy of introducing groups of young people in Shirley, Devens, and Lancaster to the micro-world of pollinator gardens, created predominantly from native plants that support a broad array of regional insects. Not only are the gardens beautiful, they soon teem with life, attracting butterflies, moths, and native bees. My young gardeners have quickly learned there can be astonishing diversity within one hundred square feet of garden. My home garden consists almost entirely of beds of pollinator-friendly plants. Early each morning, I walk through it, camera in hand, and try to capture images of the insects that visit. I’ve learned that I have healthy populations of Orchard Mason Bees, Carder Bees, Sweat Bees, and Digger Bees, and a task force of Lacewings, Soldier Beetles, and Ichneumonid wasps. From sunrise to dusk, they move across the garden in clearly defined shifts, making way for one another as the heat rises and subsides. Every day, they remind me to take a moment to stop and look closely, to find fascination in what unfolds before me.