Celebrate! 40th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act and 20th Anniversary of the NRWA’s Water Monitoring Program

“Can we afford clean water? Can we afford rivers and lakes and streams and oceans which continue to make life possible on this planet? Can we afford life itself?” These were the questions Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine asked his colleagues in urging an override of President Nixon’s veto of the Clean Water Act. On October 18, 1972, following a bi-partisan vote to pass the Act in both the House and the Senate, the Clean Water Act became law under President Nixon’s signature.

The 1972 Clean Water Act was one of the most important pieces of legislation ever passed to aid the restoration and protection of U.S. waterways. The Act was passed at a time when the rivers were the dumping ground for raw sewage and polluted discharge from industry, when rivers like the Cuyahoga in Ohio caught fire, and the Nashua was colored by paper dyes and choked by fiber. The Act regulated point source pollution from industry and municipalities, leading to the construction of waste water treatment plants that vastly reduced the pollutants reaching our rivers and streams.

Before the Clean Water Act was even passed, a group of citizens was already actively working to restore the Nashua River. What began as the Nashua River Clean-up Committee evolved into the Nashua River Watershed Association by fall of 1969. The stunning change from the biologically dead Nashua River of the 1960’s to the far healthier ecosystem of today was aided greatly by the Clean Water Act of 1972. Of course, there is still more to do as we work to address current issues of non-point source pollution and stormwater run-off.

The NRWA’s work to protect our waterways led the Association to create a Water Monitoring Program in 1992. Seven months of the year, volunteer monitors, trained by NRWA staff, take to the field and collect water samples at dozens of sites along our rivers and streams. Other volunteers then test the samples and record data on the health of these waterways. That data is shared with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services.*

Can we still afford clean water and clean rivers? We say, “Yes!” Celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Clean Water Act and the 20th anniversary of NRWA’s Water Monitoring Program, protecting water quality in 32 communities connected by water!

Healthy Watersheds Foster Healthy Economies

The Nashua River Watershed Association has always recognized the vital link between a healthy environment and a healthy economy. This connection is increasingly being realized by businesses, governmental entities, and individuals working together to grow our economy while simultaneously protecting our natural resources with a goal of creating sustainable communities.

“Healthy intact watersheds provide many ecosystem services that are necessary for our social and economic well-being,” states the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in their recent report The Economic Benefits of Protecting Healthy Watersheds (EPA 841-N-12-004 April 2012). The report concludes that the key benefits of a healthy watershed are that it:

- Minimizes vulnerability and damage from natural disasters
- Increases property values
- Sustains revenue-generating recreational and tourism opportunities
- Lowers drinking water treatment costs
- Avoids expensive restoration activities
- Provides critical ecosystem services (such as water and air filtration, nutrient cycling, and carbon storage) at a fraction of the cost for engineered services

The NRWA actively pursues the protection of key land parcels such as forestland that will protect drinking water supplies and riverside greenways that will filter polluted runoff before it reaches our rivers and streams. Our work to protect water quality ensures beautiful places where it is clean enough to paddle and fish. We further support recreation through efforts to create new hiking trails and rail trails, and by providing recreation information on our website. The Association’s new Outdoor Walking Wellness program encourages outdoor activity, fitness, and connection with nature.

By taking proactive steps today to protect our natural systems and the services they provide, we prevent future costs to restore them or replace them with engineered systems. Working together, we can be sure our watershed is a healthy place to live, work, and play, and that’s good for both the environment and our economy.

To read the full EPA report and other articles related to this topic, visit the News section on our website, www.NashuaRiverWatershed.org.

To receive a listing of NRWA upcoming programs and events, be sure to sign up for our monthly e-news at www.NashuaRiverWatershed.org.
Tomorrow’s Watershed Stewards

Children and young adults learn best by active participation. Our environmental education programs encourage all youth to become “citizen scientists” through observation, development of hypotheses, data collection, analysis, and sharing of information. It’s also important to give children free time to explore and interact with the river and the local landscape, allowing them the opportunity to connect with nature in a way that will last their lifetimes. These young people are our next generation of watershed stewards.

Fifth graders and their teacher, Richard Maynard (left), at Longsjo Middle School in Fitchburg participate in NRWA’s Wildlife Adaptations program. This is just one lesson that is part of NRWA’s year-long Scientist-in-Residence (SIR) program at Longsjo. This school year, NRWA is leading SIR programs at seven middle and elementary schools in Fitchburg & Clinton, MA and in Nashua, NH.

Visit our website, www.NashuaRiverWatershed.org, for a schedule of upcoming programs and events, or to learn more about NRWA Environmental Education for schools and youth groups.

Memberships make a difference! The programs you read about here, and more, are made possible through the support of our members and donors. Thank you! If you’re not a member, consider joining. Become a part of an Association with a four decade history of accomplishment. Our success is your success. Join online today at www.NashuaRiverWatershed.org.

Seventh graders Jack Smethurst and Matthew Gingras from Groton-Dunstable Regional Middle School collect chemical and physical data from the Squannacook River during their day of River Classroom®. With a focus on nutrient cycles, participants compare and contrast two distinct fresh water ecosystems within the river environment. This fall, eight schools participated in River Classroom, with 452 students in Habitat and Adaptations in the River Ecosystem and 215 students in Nutrient Cycles and the Fresh Water Ecosystem.

This fall, NRWA created a “Science Saturdays” program for 7 to 11 year olds. This group of young scientists is learning about the properties of carbon dioxide through a series of experiments, this one involving dry ice. They also discussed the role of carbon dioxide in the natural world, for example, the part it plays in photosynthesis. The program will be ongoing monthly into 2013. Youth will have the opportunity to learn about connections between weather, rivers, forests, wildlife, and more. New participants are welcome!
ArnHow Farm Protected: A Decade of Dedication

Since 2000, the NRWA has worked along with other interested parties to protect the ArnHow Farm in Fitchburg from development. This past June, the NRWA helped facilitate a deal wherein 81 acres of the Farm were transferred to the MA Department of Fish and Game’s MassWildlife Division. Funds used to protect the land came from the US Forest Service’s Forest Legacy Program through our Southern Monadnock Plateau Phase II (SMP II) project, which was a project of the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership along with the NRWA, North County Land Trust, and several other key partners including the Ashby Land Trust and the involved municipalities.

SMP II resulted in the permanent protection -- through purchase of fee-simple (transfer of property ownership) or Conservation Restriction (permanent limitation on development) -- of more than 2,000 acres in the communities of Ashburnham, Ashby, Fitchburg, Gardner, & Winchendon MA, and New Ipswich NH at a cost of $5.5 million, using $3.3 million in federal dollars matched by over $2 million in cost-share dollars. Nearly all of the more than a dozen property owners involved contributed approximately 25% bargain sales to accomplish the project. The many partners shepherded each of the complex deals through a labyrinth of grant requirements and the usual due diligence. The ArnHow Farm protected lands now owned by MassWildlife are immediately adjacent to another 58 acres also protected through SMP II, and just down the road from 77 additional acres protected through SMP Phase I. These in turn abut some 1,800 acres of premier open space, Fitchburg’s northern water supply watershed lands to which MassWildlife recently purchased the development rights, to assure their protection.

This swath of conservation land is a regionally-significant open space corridor forever preserved from development, thus assuring that their natural resources – be they water supply, wildlife, timber, cultural, scenic, recreational, or aesthetic – will remain for all future generations to enjoy and appropriately utilize. This project, a decade in the making, helps pave the way for a larger vision: a greenway extending from the downtown Fitchburg urban center to the top of Mount Watatic and beyond.