

Pawtuxet River Rag Spring 2020

The newsletter of [Friends of the Pawtuxet](#) and
the [West Bay Land Trust](#)

Given the threat to public health posed by the coronavirus, all dates and events in this newsletter are tentative. Assume that gatherings are cancelled for the foreseeable future. However, even if it is not possible to participate in a community clean-up, feel free to pick a spot—either one of those listed below or another near a pond, lake, wetland, river or recreational area—and remove trash and invasive plants. It is most effective to do so before trees and bushes have their leaves.

STAYING HEALTHY

Please heed the advice of the CDC and the Rhode Island Department of Health on slowing the transmission of COVID-19. Beyond that, be aware that stress, anxiety, despair, and boredom can lead to over-consumption of alcohol, recreational drugs and food. One way to combat unhealthy behaviors is to get outside and walk in your neighborhood, a park, or one of our city or state's natural areas. It's low-risk, healthy, and free.

PAWTUXET RIVER CLEAN-UP: SATURDAY APRIL 11

There will be a Friends of the Pawtuxet/Save the Bay-sponsored Pawtuxet River Cleanup at Fay Memorial Field on Saturday, April 11 from 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Meet at Fay Memorial Field, 75 Dallas Ave, Cranston. For more information and [signup](#), visit Save the Bay's site.

STILLHOUSE COVE CLEAN-UP: SATURDAY APRIL 18

Sponsored by the Edgewood Waterfront Preservation Association/Pawtuxet Village Association, the annual [Stillhouse Cove](#) and area clean-up will take place April 18 from 9 a.m.-11 a.m. The cleanup will comprise ditch work, trash and invasive plant removal, garden work with the Edgewood Garden Club, and maintenance activities including storm-drain clearing and sidewalk sweeping. All ages are welcome (parental supervision for children required). All supplies will be provided including water, gloves, trash bags, bug spray, sunscreen, and tools. Please wear appropriate footwear - no flip-flops. Parking is not allowed along Narragansett Boulevard, but is permitted on side streets.

CRANSTON BIKE PATH CLEAN-UP: SUNDAY APRIL 19

The second annual Earth Day Bike Path Clean Up is hosted by Ward 3 City Councilor John Donegan. Meet at 10 a.m. at the parking lot on Trainor St, next to the Bain Track. The goal is to clean up any trash around the park, and along the bike path between Gansett and Dyer Ave. Please bring gloves. Contact John Donegan at (401) 644-2403 with questions.

MESHANTICUT LAKE CLEAN-UP: SUNDAY APRIL 19

A Meshanticut Lake Clean-Up will be hosted by Ward 5 City Councilor Chris Paplauskas and City-Wide Councilor Steve Stycos. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Cranston West end of the lake. Some volunteers will clean up the old growth forested area near Phenix and Metropolitan Avenue, not far from the Police Academy (opposite side of Phenix as Cranston High School West). This is the area where a [cell tower](#) was proposed, and ultimately rejected. Rain date is April 26. Contact Chris Paplauskas (401) 996-9196 with questions.

FREE TREES TO GOOD HOMES!



Cranston's tree planting program has red oak and tulip trees available to plant in front yards this spring. The trees are free, 5-10 feet tall, and planted by a nursery. This year the city-financed program expects to plant its 200th tree. The non-profit Rhode Island Tree Council administers the program, which is returning for its sixth year in 2020. Visit the [RI Tree Council](#) (ritree.org) information.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Cranston's only community garden, the Edgewood Community Garden at Cherry Woods, is located behind Edgewood Highland Elementary School on Pawtuxet Avenue. The garden is run by the West Bay Land Trust and the cost for a 4 X 16-foot plot is \$25. New gardeners are welcome, but spots go quickly. Contact Lisa Gibb at lisagibb2@verizon.net for more information.

PAWTUXET VILLAGE FARMERS MARKET

The market is located at 60 Rhodes Place and is open Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon starting May 2. Vendors include The Local Catch (fish), Baffoni's Poultry, Beans and Buns, Le Favorite Bakery, plus fruits and vegetables from Pak Express, Blue Skys Farm, gC Farms, Pawtuxet Mushroom Co., Sanctuary Herbs and Barden Family Orchard. More may be added.

GREEN CALENDAR

Wednesday April 22: Earth Day.

Friday April 24: [Arbor Day](#).

Saturday May 2: [Pawtuxet Village Farmers Market](#) opens. The market is open every Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon until late October. More info on the Facebook page and webpage.

Saturday May 9: [RI Wild Plant Society](#) Native Plant Sale at Casey Farm. Additional sales on June 6 at URI East Farm (this is the big sale), and in late August in Cranston.

Saturday May 16 10 a.m.: Plant Identification Walk. Kate Aubin and Steve Stycos will lead a plant identification walk for kids of all ages starting from the lower Rhodes on the Pawtuxet parking lot. Emphasis will be on kids hunting for different plants, not walk leaders talking. More info at sstycos26@gmail.com.

Saturday June 13: Farmer's Market moves to William Hall Library parking lot, 1825 Broad Street, due to the Gaspee Day Parade. If you drive, avoid Park Avenue and Pawtuxet Village. Farmers appreciate Gaspee Day customers because attendance is lower than usual.

Friday June 19: Firefly walk at 8:45 PM, meet at the lower Rhodes on the Pawtuxet parking lot. A half-hour walk to see the firefly mating ritual. Bug repellent, long sleeves and long pants recommended. Please do not bring jars, nets, dogs or noisy electronics. For updates, timplehnert@live.com.

Saturday September 19: International Coastal Clean-Up Day. Check [Save the Bay](#)'s site for local clean-up locations.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

Cranston's "Plastic Bag Reduction" ordinance amendment will be effective July 1, 2020. The ban prohibits disposable plastic bags at retail check-out, with exceptions for plastic sleeves used to protect dry cleaned items and "plastic barrier" bags used for newspapers, plants, and food (fruits, vegetables, meat, fish and baked goods).

Did you know that Cranston is roughly 30 square miles, just under 1.5 of which are water?

INVASIVES AT MESHANTICUT LAKE

In response to a large turnout at last spring's meeting at Cranston High School West, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is making a major effort to control the invasive Sacred Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*). The plant has taken over more than 1.5 acres of Meshanticut Lake's surface.

The DEM applied herbicides this March to treat the plant, and may apply additional treatments in June when the leaves are out, but before the lotus plants drop their seed pods. Signs will be posted around the pond, as required by DEM regulations, listing the treatment date and boating and fishing restrictions. The herbicide is expected to reduce, but not eliminate, the lotus growth. Lotus seeds, already deposited at the bottom of the lake, will grow for years to come. More herbicide treatments may be required in the future. People with concerns about the treatment should contact the [DEM Division of Agriculture Pesticide Program](#). DEM also plans to stock the pond with trout before opening day for fishing (April 11, 2020). DEM says the herbicides only work on plant matter, and are applied at concentrations that do not affect fish or invertebrates.



Last summer, the DEM organized an effort to weaken the lotus plants by cutting off their leaves. Over the course of four days in July and August, 74 volunteers in canoes and kayaks removed one and a half dumpsters of lotus leaves. Unfortunately, the effort cleared only 15 percent of the targeted area. A volunteer has signed up to take the URI Watershed Watch training, and will start regular water quality monitoring at the lake.

ROGER WILLIAMS PARK CONSERVANCY

The [Roger Williams Park Conservancy](#) serves as a steward for the long-term sustainability of Roger Williams Park and its enjoyment by the community. Created in 2016 by the Rhode Island Foundation, the Conservancy works with the City of Providence Parks Department to offer community programs, raise resources, coordinate marketing efforts, and plan for the long-term sustainability of the Park and its enjoyment by the community.

CRANSTON SOLAR FACILITY UPDATE

In October 2019, Cranston adopted a "Ground-Mounted Solar Farm Installation Moratorium." This moratorium was the result of citizen activists, notably WBLT President Doug Doe, opposing large-scale solar installations in

western Cranston. These projects include the 67-acre 53,000-panel "Gold Meadow Farm" off Lippitt Avenue, a 46-acre facility on Hope Road, and a 30-acre site on Natick Avenue, among others. The moratorium reverses a 2015 decision by Mayor Fung and the then City Council to permit such developments. The moratorium allows for standard roof-mounted solar panels, but will prevent further ground-mounted solar developments which require clear-cutting of trees and other vegetation, extensive land-grading and topsoil removal, and the installation of fences.

SALTER GROVE

A new nature trail project will be completed thanks to a \$25,000 grant from the Vivian J. Palmieri Charitable Trust, with any remaining funds allocated for landscaping. Recent upgrades at Salter Grove have included DEM-funded causeway repair, a new playground, and labels for some of the over 100 species of flowering plants and other flora found on the 12-acre site. Marina Wong and [Friends of Salter Grove](#) have spearheaded these cataloguing and educational efforts. Still to come is a "smart" outdoor classroom which will have information on the area's natural history, and data on the 124 species of bird which have been so far identified. Salter Grove is located about a mile south of Pawtuxet Village off Narragansett Boulevard at Landon Avenue.

DRASTIC DROP IN PAWTUXET RIVER POLLUTANTS

For many years John Dineen of Cranston has been testing the Pawtuxet's water quality at a site near Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. This data is reported to URI's [Watershed Watch Program](#), a state-wide volunteer monitoring program which provides current (and historical) information on the water quality of surface water resources throughout Rhode Island, including lakes, ponds, reservoirs, rivers, streams and the marine environment.

The following is a recent report from Elizabeth Herron, URI Watershed Watch Program Director, on the state of the Pawtuxet at the monitoring site:

We've seen a significant, and important reduction in total phosphorus (TP) at the Pawtuxet River site near Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. Phosphorus is the driving nutrient in freshwater systems; in rivers, values above 100 parts per billion (ppb or ug/l) are considered elevated and can lead to harmful levels of algae or plant growth. In 2011 and 2012, the TP values were close to 100 ppb, and peaked in 2013 at about 122 ppb. Since then we've seen a steady decline, with an annual TP average of only 26 ppb in 2019.

The 2011 removal of the dam may have contributed to the decline as

water and other organic materials aren't getting trapped and concentrating behind the dam anymore. Importantly, the total nitrogen (TN) values have not increased during this period, and have actually declined a bit. Total nitrogen is considered the limiting nutrient in marine systems and with Pawtuxet Cove just downstream, the TN concentration has an important impact on the Bay. While the TN concentrations remain in the elevated nutrient range indicative of the urban areas that drain into the Pawtuxet River, they are declining slightly.

Efforts in the watershed, and especially in Roger Williams Park, to reduce and treat stormwater could be important in helping reduce TN loads to the river, and ultimately to the Bay. Bacteria levels are also declining, with 4 out of 6 sampling events in 2017, 3 out of 5 in 2018, and only 1 of 6 in 2019 exceeding the swimming contact standard. Those low values in 2019 were really interesting because that was a wet summer, when we would have expected higher bacteria levels. The stormwater control systems that reduce nutrients also reduce bacteria, so we may be seeing improvements in bacteria from those efforts too.

Overall, for a highly urbanized river system, the Pawtuxet River near Rhodes is in pretty good condition, and seems to be responding well to removal of the dam. As efforts in the watershed to further reduce nutrient loading continue, the river should show more signs of improvement. The bacteria levels seen over the last several years may not support swimming in the river yet, but they do suggest that kayaking or canoeing the river is okay (with the usual appropriate safety practices like personal floatation devices, flat plans, etc.).

Do you know that Arbor Day is celebrated on the last Friday in April? The holiday was first observed in 1872 in Nebraska City, Nebraska as a result of efforts by pioneer settler Julius Sterling Morton and his wife Caroline, transplanted Detroiters who found their new home sorely lacking in trees.

SEVERUS FOUNDATION DONATION

Friends of the Pawtuxet received a \$500 donation from the Severus Foundation, thanks to Ty Davis. FOP will use the funds to contribute to the America the Beautiful (ATB) grant to publicize the city tree-planting program. These ATB grants provide funding for urban forestry projects, and have been used by FOP for mailings to Cranston homeowners regarding the tree program, as well as booths at festivals, farmers' markets, and other events.

DONATIONS

___ Yes, I'd like to help. My contribution to Friends of the Pawtuxet is enclosed.

___ Yes, I'd like to purchase a tree to be planted on public land in the memory of _____. Enclosed is \$150. Please make check payable to the West Bay Land Trust, and attach a brief description of the person for inclusion in a future newsletter.

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____

Please mail this form & your contribution to Friends of the Pawtuxet, 37 Ferncrest Ave., Cranston, RI 02905. Contributions to the WBLT and to Friends of the Pawtuxet are tax deductible.

Newsletter compiled by Tim Lehnert with contributions from Steve Stycos, Elizabeth Herron, and others. If you have any events or other items you'd like to see listed in 2021, please contact Tim at timlehnert@live.com.