

The newsletter of Friends of the Pawtuxet and the West Bay Land Trust

PAWTUXET RIVER CLEAN-UP: SATURDAY APRIL 29

Join us from 9:30 am to noon for a clean-up along the Pawtuxet River Trail. Meet at the RI DEM Pawtuxet Supply Depot at 230 Warwick Ave., Cranston, 02905 (across from Stop & Shop). Please bring gloves, but we'll supply other materials, as well as water. This event is suitable for adults and supervised kids. Feel free to drop by for any amount of time you can spare for this scenic walk along the river. 2017 marks the 26th year of the clean-up!

NEW TRAIL TO DEBUT IN 2017

A new trail on conservation land in western Cranston will debut this year. In late 2016, volunteers from the West Bay Land Trust, the Cranston Conservation Commission and the Boy Scouts convened three times to clear logs, brush, and invasive plants from the trail. The trailhead can be found off Laten Knight Road near its junction with Beechwood Drive. The 1.5-mile path begins on an old dirt road and extends as far south as Hope Road; it then makes a loop through woods, around a corn field, and past a brook. The trail is not quite ready for prime time, as it still needs to be blazed.

The city conservation land is bordered by Audubon Society of Rhode Island land, so additional trails could be added in future. The WBLT recently received a \$2,140 grant from the Rhode Island DEM to build walkways and make trail signs. Contact Steve Stycos (SStycos@cranstonri.org) if you can operate a wood router and wish to volunteer to make trail signs.

2016 was the first full year for the Silver Hook Trail along the Pawtuxet River. In 2015, members of Troop 1 Gaspee Plateau cleared a trail from Dallas Avenue in Cranston to the footbridge behind the former DEM Supply Depot. In 2016, Troop 1 and Eagle Scout candidate Zachary Terceiro completed the trail project by installing wooden walkways over wet areas near Fay Field, putting up a stairway to stabilize the bank at the trail entrance on Dallas Avenue, and removing trash.

The short trail follows Silver Hook, a ribbon-like pond which was once part of an oxbow bend in the Pawtuxet River. To find it, walk along the river trail which begins in the parking lot behind Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. Stay along the river when the trail splits in the large field of tall grass. After crossing the second small footbridge, turn north, or right. The Silver Hook trail runs through oaks and sweet pepper bush, then red maples, green briars and a healthy stand of invasive Japanese knotweed. It ends on Dallas Avenue (which is parallel to and south of Park Avenue). By continuing east, or right, along Dallas Avenue walkers can loop back to Rhodes on the Pawtuxet by connecting to the paths which begin along the right-field foul lines of both Fay Field and Little Fay Field.

Walkers on the above-mentioned trails, and elsewhere, are asked to keep pets leashed as rambling dogs trample plants and disturb wildlife. Clean up after pets, and help keep trails clean by bringing a small bag to collect occasional litter.

Did you know that the 12.5-mile Pocasset River, which originates in Johnston and flows under Reservoir Avenue's Raymond M. Durfee Bridge before skirting the Budlong Pool, feeds into the Pawtuxet just east of Pontiac Avenue?

2016 CLEAN UPS

Last Spring, Friends of the Pawtuxet (FOP) and the West Bay Land Trust coordinated two Cranston clean-ups. In Pawtuxet, the annual river clean-up featured dedicated FOP neatniks on foot and in the water (in a boat, not swimming) retrieving plastic bags, Styrofoam cups and other refuse.

In Western Cranston, the West Bay Land Trust spearheaded a clean-up along Burlingame Road near its intersection with Hope Road and Lippett Avenue. Doug Doe has been cutting invasive plants in the cemetery in that area, and appealed to the Rhode Island Historical Cemetery Commission for help. The Commission is going to take the lead on the restoration of the cemetery on the Burlingame hay field property.

TREE PLANTING

In 2016, the City of Cranston's Neighborhood Tree Planting Program gave 25 trees to residents to be planted in areas visible to the public. The non-profit Rhode Island Tree Council administers the program,

which is back for its third year in 2017. Trees are furnished and installed between April 1 and May 30 at no cost to the home-owner. The trees are valued at \$250. Visit the City of Cranston homepage, or <https://ritree.org/articles/60-2016-cranston-neighborhood-planting-program>, for details. The program's deadline has been extended to April 27, but those interested should apply ASAP while trees still remain.

In 2016, in addition to the trees that were planted on behalf of homeowners, trees were planted at the city's request near Cranston Stadium, and at the Cranston Police firing range on Phenix Avenue. If you have a suggestion for a publicly-owned space that could use a tree, contact Steve Stycos (SStycos@cranstonri.org), or Jeff Baron of Constituent Affairs in the Cranston mayor's office.

In other tree news, the Cranston Conservation Commission gave a grant to the Rhode Island Tree Council for additional plantings, and to Park View Middle School (PVMS) for benches for their planned outdoor classroom. In both the spring and fall of 2016, PVMS students planted and mulched small trees in the grassy area in front of the school. Three larger trees were planted in the spring by the Rhode Island Tree Council. This area had previously been used as unauthorized overflow parking during games taking place at the fields across the street. The City of Cranston provided boulders around the perimeter of the space to discourage parking and protect the trees from harm. PVMS is planning to make this an outdoor classroom space which, in addition to the trees already planted, will include native grasses and pollinator-friendly plants.

Do you know where to find Polo, Willow, Pleasure, Edgewood, Cunliff, Roosevelt, Elm and Deep Spring Lakes? If you guessed Roger Williams Park, you are correct!

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Cranston's only community garden, the Edgewood Community Garden at Cherry Woods, is located behind Edgewood Highland Elementary School on Pawtuxet Avenue. It is run by the West Bay Land Trust, and 2016 saw the addition of a shed for storing tools and materials. All but two beds were used in 2016, and applications for the 2017 season are now open. The cost is \$20 for a 4 X 16-foot plot. New gardeners are welcome. Contact Lisa Gibb at lisagibb2@verizon.net for more information.

GREEN CALENDAR

Saturday April 29 9:30 to noon: Friends of the Pawtuxet river walk clean-up.

Saturday May 6 (9 am-12 pm): Pawtuxet Village Farmers Market Opens. The market is open every Saturday until late October and is located in the Rhodes on the Pawtuxet parking lot, Rhodes Place, Cranston. Further information is available at the Pawtuxet Village Farmers Market Facebook page, friendsofthepawtuxet.org and westbaylandtrust.org.

Monday May 8: Horseshoe Crab Walk. Save The Bay habitat restoration specialist Wenley Ferguson will lead a walk in Stillhouse Cove to explain cove restoration efforts and the annual horseshoe crab mating ritual. Meet at Stillhouse Cove (corner of Ocean Avenue and Narragansett Boulevard) at 6:30 pm. Rain date is Tuesday May 9 at 7 pm.

Saturday May 20: Pawtuxet River Plant Walk. Naturalist Sandy Jacobi will lead a plant walk along the Pawtuxet River trail. Meet at the market table at the Farmers Market at 10 am.

Saturday June 10: Farmer's Market moves to William Hall Library parking lot, 1825 Broad Street, Cranston, 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 16: Firefly walk at 8:45 PM, meet at the lower Rhodes on the Pawtuxet parking lot, Cranston. 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.

Saturday October 28: Last Farmers Market for 2017

Did you know that within the 332-acre John L. Curran Management Area in Western Cranston are the J.L. Curran Upper Reservoir (which the DEM stocks with trout) and the J.L. Curran Lower Reservoir? The two bodies of water are connected by Clarke Brook.

CRANSTON SOLAR FACILITY UPDATE

Despite opposition by the West Bay Land Trust and private citizens, on February 7, 2017 the Planning Commission approved a 10-megawatt solar array for 840 Hope Road in western Cranston. At first blush, a solar facility seems desirable; however, the location is an active farm in the middle of the Cranston Historic Farm Loop. Cranston farmland and other green space is rapidly disappearing, and another array requiring the clear-cutting of 60 acres on Lippitt Avenue is similarly being developed. A third site of 60-80 acres has been proposed for the same area.

The WBLT and Cranston Conservation Commission are advocating for a comprehensive solar and renewable energy ordinance that will allow for development of non-fossil fuel energy in the city, while at the same time preserving agricultural land and green spaces. Industrial-sized solar projects are now being sited on historic farmland in western Cranston. Without a clear and cogent alternative energy policy, there is little guidance for appropriately locating these facilities.

On March 7, 2017, the Planning Commission allowed the Hope Farm development to proceed. The Ordinance Committee will consider a solar power amendment to Cranston's Comprehensive Plan at its April 13, 2017 meeting. This amendment is being prepared by the Hope Road developers. The WBLT believes that the proposed ordinance should be rejected in favor of a comprehensive, environmentally sound plan that benefits home and other land owners.

In 2015, the Cranston City Council passed initial performance standards in response to the first Hope Farm Solar application. These were to provide a modicum of guidance until a full plan had been vetted. The standards, drafted by the WBLT and Councilman Steve Stycos, and backed by public hearing testimony from land trust members, set tough noise standards and require solar companies to post a bond to pay for removal of the solar facility when its useful life ends in 30 years. The standards also prohibit removal of top soil from the site, and allows top soil to be disturbed only to the extent necessary to build the project. In light of the above-mentioned Hope Road and Lippitt Avenue projects, these standards should be strengthened

The WBLT is calling on citizens, especially those in western Cranston, to be vigilant regarding such developments. It is important to attend City of Cranston meetings, and ask questions regarding future energy project siting proposals.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Thanks to our recent contributors: Padric Meagher, Linda Gagnier, Jim & Gail Kelleher, Jim & Bridget Gershman, Karen Rosenberg, William Gillen, Jim & Sorrel Devine, Karen Rizzo, the Severus Foundation, and Dennis & Kathleen Duffy. Jeff Tarakajian donated a tree planted in memory of Dr. Peter Tarakajian.

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 02905. Contributions to the West Bay Land Trust and to Friends of the Pawtuxet are tax deductible.

Did you know that Friends of the Pawtuxet and the West Bay Land Trust are members of the Environment Council of Rhode Island (ECRI)? The ECRI comprises over 60 Rhode Island organizations and its mission is to serve as a voice for policies and laws that protect and enhance the environment. The ECRI was founded in 1972 as the successor organization to the Rhode Island Wildlife Federation, which was established in 1938.