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The Ongoing Battle with Water Chestnuts

For the ninth year volunteers have pulled invasive water chestnut plants from the Lakes District of the Charles River. What began as a one day neighborhood weed pulling party, has grown to a 500 person, two month long annual event. Roughly 20 dumpsters or 50 tons of weeds were hand pulled this year.

Charles River Watershed Association recruited and organized the volunteers. Weed-pullers met at the Charles River Canoe and Kayak (CRCK) center on Commonwealth Avenue in Newton for a short orientation and a clothing check (to be sure everyone was wearing old clothing that could get very dirty). After gathering life jackets, paddles, gloves, baskets and bailers (to rid the canoe of water draining from the plants), the volunteers loaded into canoes donated by CRCK.

Volunteers were on the water for 3-4 hours, first enjoying a paddle down river to the target location before pulling plants for 1-2 hours. Each canoe would average 20 bushels of plants (over 300 pounds) per outing. Volunteers included individuals, families, corporate groups, scouts, and summer camp programs. It must be somewhat addictive since many individuals returned for multiple tours.



This year's effort was augmented by a \$15,000 Department of Conservation and Recreation matching grant, which enabled the state to contract for before and after studies, hire leaders for the volunteer groups, pay for dumpsters, and employ several individuals to hand-pull plants. Private donors including Cygnet Rowing enabled us to hire workers to assist volunteer groups in unloading weeds and to pay for additional hand-pulling. With an earlier start and a targeted effort, funding at this level would contain the spread of water chestnut and begin to clear

out weeds in some areas. Without funding to support mechanical harvesting (in excess of \$100,000 per year for 3-5 years), there does not appear to be an alternative solution.

The spread of water chestnut has been slowed, and with a coordinated effort the weeds can be contained but probably never eliminated. A subjective estimate is that since 2007 the water chestnut plants have increased by 50%. Without the volunteers' efforts the growth would have been much greater. At least we have significantly reduced the cost of future removal. In some areas the weeds have been virtually eliminated, providing a sense of progress. ■

➔ Larry Smith

President's Message



I hope you all had a wonderful summer and are now enjoying the brisk taste of Fall in the air. With the Fall come new projects, and I am very happy to report that the Planning Department has a new project: updating Newton's expired Open Space Plan. We are a member of the Open Space Advisory Committee, which had its first meeting September 7. The Committee will be meeting throughout autumn and winter at City Hall.

This is an important process, designed to identify our community's overall goals for passive and active open space. The Plan will set priorities for the City when making decisions about how to allocate resources, whether that means buying or protecting land for passive open space or for active recreation. Our Board will be discussing recommendations regarding open space priorities over the coming months and providing our guidance to the Advisory Committee. The Planning Department is seeking public input in many different ways, including a survey and public workshops on a variety of issues. Please check their website for details, which include the old Plan with revisions reflecting changes made and goals met and a schedule of all the upcoming public meetings. You are also welcome to let me or one of our board members know if you have any thoughts or information to share.

On a separate matter, over the summer we provided comment on two development projects in Newton—the Chestnut Hill Shopping Center and the Riverside development project. Both projects raise many issues but have one disappointing element in common. Both projects border on beautiful natural areas—Hammond Pond in one case and the Charles River in the other—and, in both cases, the natural area is hidden at the back of the development, behind a parking lot in one case and an MBTA train station in the other. We urged changes to the plans which would have improved the connections between the natural and developed areas in these projects. It would be so much better in many ways if more were done by the Board of Aldermen when granting special permits to protect the natural environment and to encourage people to mix their commercial experience with a bit of the natural world. ■

✉ *Jane Sender, President*

Creating a Measured Garden Plan



It pays to step back and review how you would like your garden to look. It's hard to give your garden a good, hard look and think of creative ways to make positive changes. The best way is to take a break and give your gardening some distance. There is no better time than winter, when there is plenty of time to leisurely plan changes. One thing that's important to do to prepare for winter planning is to have an accurate plan of your garden—similar to drawing up a floor plan for your living room before rearranging the furniture.

Begin by determining the size and shape of your property. You will need a clipboard, graph paper, tracing paper, a 20' measuring tape, a 100' measuring tape, and a long screwdriver. A scale ruler will also help. Sketch the shape of your property on your graph paper. (It doesn't need to be to scale.) Use the 100' tape measure to measure the outline of your property. Put the screwdriver point through the loop in the end of your 100' tape measure, press it into the ground at a corner of your property and walk to the other corner. If you run out of tape, add the 20' tape. Note all of your measurements. Do this for each side of your property.

If your property has an unusual shape, you may want to look it up online at the City of Newton Assessors' Database. There you can see the shape of your property, the street frontage measurement and the total lot size. You can also determine the direction that your house faces. If you are good with a protractor, you can figure out the angles at the corners of your property by printing out your property's plan from the database. Many lots do not have 90 degree corners.

Take a fresh sheet of graph paper and sketch the shape of your house. (Again, the sketch does not need to be to scale.) Measure around the outside of your house. Be sure to note where the doors, windows, porches, and other important features are located. I like to note how high the window sills are from the ground, too, because then you can plant the appropriate height plants beneath them without blocking the windows in the future.

To place your house correctly on your property, measure from the corners of your house to your property's edge. Press the screwdriver into the ground at the corner of your house. Now walk to the edge of your property. Look at your house. Line up the tape measure with your eyes. Move right or left until the side of your house disappears. When you can't see the side of your house, you will know that you have made a straight line. Go out in both directions from each corner of your house. Note all of these measurements on your graph paper.

Now you can begin to draw a scaled drawing of your lot and your house. If you have 8½" x 11" graph paper with four squares per inch, you will be able to draw a lot that has 100 feet of frontage if you count each square as equal to four feet. If your frontage is larger or you want to work in a larger scale, you can buy larger graph paper or tape several sheets together.

Now that you have your lot lines and house drawn on your graph paper, you can add many other elements, including garages, driveways, patios, walkways, and steps. These items don't move, so you can use this as your base plan. If you already have garden beds, you can measure them and add them to this plan as well, or you can use tracing paper to overlay your base plan and try out new designs.

It helps to note large plants like trees and shrubs on your plan. You can measure a tree or shrub location through triangulation. Measure the distance to the trunk of the tree or shrub from one corner of the house, then measure it again from a different corner of the house. These two lines will make a triangle on your plan, which will locate your plant. Measure the diameter of a tree at about 4½ feet from the ground; measure the drip line by walking away from the trunk until you can see where the leaves overhead stop. For shrubs, measure their location, width and height. Draw the trees and shrubs on your master plan.

Now you are ready to design. You can use tracing paper to try out new schemes, or you can make cutouts to scale and slide them around on your plan to try out new ideas. Creating a well-defined lawn shape often makes a dramatic change to a messy looking garden. Try drawing sharp rectangles, curves or circles to create a pleasing lawn shape. A crisply edged lawn can hide many flaws in a disorderly flowerbed.

You can project lines from important locations such as the corners of your home, the edges of your patio, or the views out your windows to help determine pleasing shapes in your garden. You can sketch in flower bed shapes on your master plan: once you have determined their shapes, you can create larger scaled drawings of these individual beds. You can while away snowy days studying your plans and dreaming of where you will put new plantings when spring arrives. ■

➔ *Beth Schroeder, bsw1@comcast.net*

An Easy and Inexpensive Way to Reduce the Carbon Footprint of Your Home



In Massachusetts, residential buildings produce over forty percent of the state's carbon emissions. In an effort to reduce those emissions, the state is partnering with gas and electric utilities to encourage citizens to make energy-saving changes to their homes. This program, called Mass Save, provides free home inspections, rebates, and loans to owners and tenants.

Who pays for this program? Every person in the state who is a customer of the sponsoring utilities contributes through a fee included in his or her monthly bill. Thus, 90% of Massachusetts residents pay into the fund, but, thus far, only 1% of eligible residents have made use of the service.

How can you take advantage of the program? The first step is a "No-Cost Mass Save Home Assessment," which is performed by an energy specialist. This assessment views a house as a whole system and analyzes the thermal shell of the house to determine whether there is enough insulation and whether there are other conditions that allow heat to leak out. It also assesses the efficiency of the building's mechanical systems. The inspection, which covers the whole house from the basement to the attic, usually takes one to two hours and is not dependent upon the type of fuel used to heat the house. As a bonus, the inspection team replaces all light bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps that are free to the resident. The initial assessment can be scheduled by calling Mass Save at 866-527.

At the end of the assessment, the inspector creates a report detailing prioritized energy efficiency recommendations, associated costs, savings, and how long it will take to recoup the costs. If the recommended work is performed by an approved Mass Save Participating Home Performance Contractor, the resident is eligible for an array of benefits. The program offers a rebate of 75% of all approved insulation installed, up to a cost of \$2,000. For example, if a resident were to choose to have a house sealed and to have insulation added, the value of those services could be in the range from \$2,440 to \$4,340. But the cost to the household would be reduced to somewhere between \$450 and \$1,700. In addition, the annual value of the fuel saved by the changes would be \$700, and the household's production of carbon would be reduced by 28%. Furthermore, there is a Heat Loan Program that offers seven-year, 0% interest loans of up to \$25,000 for qualified efficiency improvements, and there are rebates for heating and hot water equipment.

How can you learn who is certified to do the work? A list of the nine currently approved contractors can be found at www.masssave.com/residential/heating-and-cooling/get-the-facts/participating-home-performance-contractors. (The Mass Save site also contains lists of approved retailers for retailers of energy-efficient appliances and approved home builders.)

What if you'd rather work with a non-profit organization? At this time, there are no non-profit organizations participating in the Mass Save program. Non-profit organizations have been involved in energy-efficiency programs for low-income households (such as WAP, or the Weatherization Assistance Program, and HEARTWAP, which provides aid for repairing or replacing unsafe heating systems). Much of that work has been supported by recent federal stimulus funds.

In the past, EFI (Energy Federation Incorporated), which was founded in 1982, connected customers with weatherization programs funded by the Department of Energy, but they have evolved to become a distributor of energy-efficiency-related products. They believe that greater availability and awareness of these items is the largest roadblock to their increased usage. Another division of their business helps utility companies develop rebate programs for their customers and processes the rebates.

HEET (Home Energy Efficiency Team), a Cambridge non-profit organization, organizes parties to teach volunteers how to improve the energy efficiency of buildings. All Cambridge homeowners are eligible for volunteer labor to install the materials purchased by the owners. (The organization raises funds to provide the materials, for free, to low-income residents.) Energy Barnraisers is a similar group in Worcester.

What is available in Newton? In our city, there is a partnership between the nonprofit organization Green Decade and Next Step Living (a for-profit company) to promote the Mass Save program. In addition, Green Decade has Eco Teams that teach residents how to calculate their carbon footprint and to identify ways to reduce household emissions. For more information, call them at 866-867-8729

⇒ *Beth Wilkinson*

Sponsors



The Conservators wish to acknowledge the generous contributions of sponsors who helped on the occasion of our 50th anniversary in June. We are indebted for their contributions, which will help to defray land acquisition and other costs.

Gold Sponsors (\$500)

Charles River Canoe & Kayak
Crystal Lake Conservancy
Friends of the Houghton Garden
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Law Offices of Stephen J. Small, Esq. PC
The Village Bank

Thank You!

**Please note walks meet at different times. Some trips are weather dependent.
Contact trip leader if in doubt.**

Saturday October 1 — 8:00 am (Rain Date: Sunday, October 2)

Fall Birdwalk at Nahanton Park with Haynes Miller

Trip Leader: Haynes Miller (617-413-2419)

Nahanton Park offers a mix of woodlands, wetlands, edge habitat, and meadows along the Charles River, making it one of the best birding spots in Newton for fall migrants as well as resident species. Meet at the Nahanton Street entrance off of Nahanton St. between the JCC and the Charles. Parking is available inside the park. Bring binoculars if you have them. Beginners as well as experienced birders are welcome. Walking shoes are recommended. Co-sponsored by Friends of Nahanton Park and Newton Conservators. Rain Date: in case of steady rain. If in doubt call Haynes Miller.



PHOTO: DAN BRODY

Sunday October 9 — 2:00 pm

Webster Woods Walk

Trip Leader: Octo Barnett (617-969-6988)

Webster Conservation Area is a jewel of open space in Newton. There are over five miles of well worn paths through this urban forest. This area was once an open field used for raising sheep and farming. (You can still find the remnants of stone walls.) You and your children can enjoy both the acres of woodland and rock formations of many types—including caves and Cake Rock (a formation of rock over 15 feet high used for practicing rock climbing). You can also visit Bare Pond, a vernal pond which in the spring has tadpoles and salamanders, but is now dry.

In 1862, the *Atlantic Monthly* published an essay entitled “Walking” written by H.D. Thoreau. The first sentences of this essay could be used as an introduction to this walk. “I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society... I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of walking, that is, of taking walks—who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering”.

Join us in practicing Thoreau’s art of such sauntering. Park and meet at the end of Warren Street. (Warren Street is off Glen Ave. in Newton Centre. Glen Ave. is off Beacon St.)



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: DAN BRODY

Sunday October 16 — 2:00 pm

Aqueducts Bike Ride

Trip leader: Henry Finch (617-964-4488)

This very popular bike tour follows the Aqueduct Trail through Newton, Needham and Wellesley. While mostly leisurely, it is sometimes strenuous. The tour is for ages 12 and up. Children must be accompanied by an adult, and all riders must wear helmets and use bikes that are able to travel off road. The tour runs through established paths, pinewoods, meadows and hills. You will travel near backyards, and riders should be respectful of the privacy of homeowners. Meet in front of the Starbucks near the Waban MBTA Station.



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH



Sunday October 16 — 11 am – 5 pm

Green Solutions Expo

A Green Decade and Newton/Needham Chamber of Commerce Expo with solutions you need to reduce your carbon footprint. There will be over 60 exhibitors under a big tent next to Newton's Harvest Fair in Newton Centre. Get tips on how to live a more environmentally friendly and see exhibitors with green services, products and ideas.



Tuesday October 18 — 7 pm

Newton Community Farm Benefit Dinner

Join supporters of the Newton Community Farm at Lumiere in West Newton for an evening of fine dining, with a four-course dinner, wine pairings, and vegetarian options. Chef Mike Leviton uses local food sources and has been a generous supporter of the farm. Part of the cost (\$150 per person) is tax-deductible. Proceeds will support the farm.



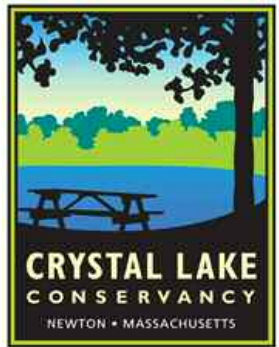
PHOTO: RICHARD DANCA

Saturday October 22 — 8:00 am (Rain Date: Sunday, October 23)

Fall Birdwalk at Nahanton Park with Pete Gilmore

Trip Leader, Pete Gilmore (617-610-2477)

Fall is an excellent time to look for birds. We'll explore the various habitats at Nahanton Park in search of resident and migrating birds. Meet at the Nahanton Street entrance next to the river. Parking is available inside the park. Bring binoculars if you have them. Beginners as well as experienced birders are welcome. Boots are recommended. Co-sponsored by Friends of Nahanton Park and Newton Conservators. In case of steady rain, rain date is Oct 23. If in doubt call the Trip Leader.



Monday October 24 — 7 pm

Crystal Lake Conservancy Annual Meeting

Larry Beals, limnologist, will be one of two guest speakers at the Crystal Lake Conservancy's annual meeting at the Newton Public Library. Mr. Beals has conducted water quality tests at the lake for two years. Laboratory results will be discussed, as will steps the community could take to address issues. The entire watershed was surveyed on foot over the course of the summer by a large group of volunteers. Understanding contaminants and possible solutions will be discussed. The second speaker will be Maria Rose, Newton's Environmental Engineer, who will present on City projects at Crystal Lake.

Sunday Nov 6 — 2:00 pm

Newton Aqueducts Hike

Trip Leader: Henry Finch (617-964-4488)

This is a very popular 4-6 mile hike through woods, meadows and fields along the Newton sections of the Sudbury and Cochituate aqueducts. Parts of the paths traverse close to backyards, so hikers do need to be respectful of private property. This is a steady but not fast hike. Participants should be in sufficiently good shape to keep up with the group. See the loop map. (There are cutoffs for those who wish to shorten the hike.)

Meet in front of the Starbucks coffee shop near the Waban MBTA station at 2:00 pm.



PHOTO: DAN BRODY

If you haven't renewed your membership already, now is the time.
And consider a gift for a conservation-minded friend.



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2011 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

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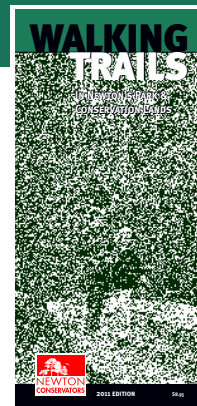
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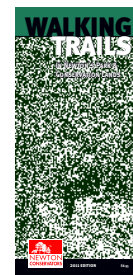
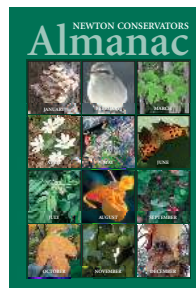
Please make checks payable to Newton Conservators, Inc.

Visit our website at www.newtonconservators.org if you wish to renew your membership online.



We have just published an updated and revised guide, *Walking Trails in Newton's Park and Conservation Lands*.

Wonderful autumn gift ideas!



Shop online at www.newtonconservators.org/books.htm to purchase Newton Conservators publications.
Discounts for members: *Almanac* is \$15.95 + shipping and the *Trail Guide* is \$7.95 + shipping.

MISSION Newton Conservators, Inc.

The Newton Conservators promotes the protection and preservation of natural areas, including parks, playgrounds, forests and streams, which are open or may be converted to open space for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton. It further aims to disseminate information about these and other environmental matters.

A primary goal is to foster the acquisition of land, buildings and other facilities to be used for the encouragement of scientific, educational, recreational, literary and other public pursuits that will promote good citizenship and the general welfare of the people of our community.

The Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 50 years ago in June 1961.

The Newton Conservators Newsletter® is published four times each year by the Newton Conservators, Inc., in June, September, December, and April. Deadlines for these issues are the first Friday of each month in which an issue is scheduled to be published.

We welcome material related to our mission from any source. Send proposed articles or letters by email in MS Word or rich text format to ericgreen@tiac.net. Digitized photographs, maps and diagrams are also welcome.

Editor:	Eric Reenstierna	617-530-0764
Design/LO	Patricia Robinson	617-964-4488
Production:	Bonnie Carter	617-969-0686

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PHOTO: DAN BRODY



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*It's autumn!
Take a walk and explore
Newton's colorful open spaces*