

NEWSLETTER

Preserving open space and connecting people to nature since 1961

NEWTONCONSERVATORS.ORG • WINTER 2023-2024

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Let the Charles River Run Free: The Case for Removing the Watertown Dam

By Julia Hopkins, Communication and Outreach Manager with Lisa Kumpf, River Science & Restoration Program Manager, Charles River Watershed Association

Watertown Dam is a highly visible site on a nationally iconic river; its existence has long been opposed by Indigenous people, it does not serve a purpose, and its presence negatively impacts the river. Removing the dam, restoring fish passage, and healing the river is a transformative, positive act in a time of great change and uncertainty. Learn more at crwa.org/dam-removal and at https://storymaps.arcgis.com/.

For over 400 years, the Charles River has been altered, controlled, and dammed to bend to the will of industry and profit.



Aerial photo of the Watertown Dam

The river we know today is not free but instead, is a river radically changed by the long history of human intervention. We dammed its waters to power industry, leaving a legacy of toxic pollution in our wake. We straightened its gentle meanders, buried its tributaries, and hardened its shores, constricting its natural flow. We drained and filled its wetlands to free up more land and let our parking lots sprawl right up to its banks. Now, we are facing the consequences. Today, our river and all who depend on it suffer from our attempt to control nature — polluted water quality from stormwater runoff, impeded fish passage by aging, defunct dams, invasive species growth, harmful cyanobacteria blooms, and biodiversity loss. Climate change is amplifying these impacts. We took away our river's natural resilience to adapt to the challenges of increased precipitation, stronger storms, drought, and extreme heat — and now all of us, but especially our most vulnerable, are at risk.



We are at a critical juncture — the time is now to reverse the antagonistic relationship we've built with the river by setting it free.

Quote from Robert Kearns, Climate Resilience Specialist

A River Interrupted

Before colonization, the Charles River flowed freely, and Indigenous ancestors relied on its vibrant population of migratory fish for food, water, and cultural survival. Each spring, the Charles River historically welcomed hundreds of thousands of migratory fish from the depths of the ocean to the river's numerous lakes, ponds, and



tributaries to spawn. American Shad, Blueback Herring, Alewives, Rainbow Smelt, White Perch, Striped Bass, and American Eel; diadromous fish species enjoyed

Schooling fish

clean, rich habitats with cool, flowing waters to begin their life.

In 1783, despite Massachusetts law requiring dam owners to provide ample fish passage, colonists raised Watertown Dam several feet to increase its power yield, completely blocking spring fish runs upstream to the Nipmuc people in Natick. Nipmuc ancestors residing in Natick actively petitioned the state legislature in opposition to the Watertown Dam, as it infringed on Indigenous rights to food sovereignty, stripping



the community of vital resources, cultural ways of life, and free-flowing water. However, their protest was to no avail. As dams were constructed on the Charles River, migratory fish lost a staggering two-thirds of their available habitat.

were stark and swift. By 1920, American Shad and Alewives, two of the most populous native migratory fish

The consequences

Alewives schooling

species, were declared extinct in the Charles River, and the possibility of their return was deemed remote in a study from the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Game. But American Shad and Alewives did not go extinct, thanks to the considerable cleanup of the Charles River, and ongoing restoration efforts.

Today, over 100 defunct dams continue to choke the Charles River and its tributaries in an affront to Indigenous peoples' rights and with stark consequences for water quality, aquatic life, public health, and climate resilience.

Migratory fish are still stopped short of insurmountable functionless dams. The rights of the Nipmuc, Massachusett and Wampanoag nations to food sovereignty and cultural survival are denied. Defunct dams disrupt natural hydrology — the slow-flowing water upstream faces rising temperatures, rapid evaporation, the accumulation of sediments and excess nutrients, and disastrously low dissolved oxygen levels; all of which contribute to invasive species growth, severe cyanobacteria blooms, biodiversity loss, habitat loss, and in extreme conditions, the death of all aquatic life. And above all, as climate change brings more frequent and intense heavy rainfall events, defunct dams were not designed for the intensity of today's storms, and our homes, roads, and critical infrastructure will flood in the event of catastrophic dam failure.



A River Resurgent

Let's set the Charles River free — by removing functionless barriers like the Watertown Dam and allowing nature to take its course, our river again has the opportunity to be a welcome place for all people, plants, and wildlife. Dam removal offers the opportunity to acknowledge the rights of present-day Nipmuc, Massachusett, and Wampanoag people, revive migratory fish populations, restore the river ecosystem, and build climate resilience across the watershed.

Across the state of Massachusetts, over 60 relic mill dams have been removed from our rivers, including Old Mill Dam in Bellingham, and many more are under consideration for



removal, including Watertown Dam, Charles River Dam in Natick, and Eagle Dam in Wrentham.



For some, dams are seen as iconic or historical structures, reminders of the area's industrial past. Their long-lasting presence in our rivers and streams has become familiar, and dam removal presents an unknown. Some wonder how wildlife they have witnessed near the dam could adapt to such a big change. But nature knows what to do, and nostalgia should not hold back our river's right to be free.

But what does dam removal actually look like? The Charles River's transformation will look a little bit like the renderings on page 2 — from the instant the functionless barrier is slowly and carefully removed by engineers, in collaboration with wildlife experts and with the help of streambank restoration, our river will be resurgent meandering more naturally through the newly created flood plain, buffered by a vibrant wetland ecosystem that helps us weather intense storms, and welcoming all manner of fish, birds, insects, and life. And the transformation will be swift — as the river's edges are exposed to sunlight, dormant seeds will blossom from the riverbed into lush native plants — milkweed, swamp hibiscus, sedges, marsh marigold, asters, goldenrod — providing habitat for birds and wildlife and scenic beauty for all to enjoy. With the dawn of spring, migratory fish will return from the ocean, instead of stopping short at a wall of concrete, and experience free passage to an abundance of clean, cool waters and tributaries to spawn for the first time unimpeded in over 400 years.

We will all be able to again enjoy the wonders of a wild, living river. \blacklozenge

The Community Way Forward — A Green Connector for Newton and Needham

By George Kirby, Upper Falls Greenway cofounder and board member, Bay Colony Rail Trail Association (BCRTA)

Thinking back over 12 years ago to the beginnings of what became the Upper Falls Greenway, our group

a bicycle/pedestrian way or as a combined pathway and busway. The consulting group GPI conducted the study

of dedicated volunteers understood that it would take time to make the old railroad rightof-way into a future bicycle and pedestrian trail. Over 12 years and many efforts later, we're continuing to walk, run, and bike the Greenway for



and included professionals with expertise in design and construction of both transportation corridors and bicvcle/ pedestrian trails. The study working group also included representation from municipal administrations, elected officials. and volunteers.

fresh air, exercise, and access to Needham Street shopping without having to drive. Together with the City of Newton and the Town of Needham, the first steps have been taken to bridge our Greenway to the proposed Community Way spanning the Charles River and Route 128/95.

Last year, a study initiated through a state grant of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) provided funds to conduct an initial feasibility assessment of the proposed Community Way. The grant terms provided for a two-pronged assessment of the corridor for use either as Josh Ostroff provided positive input and insight as Director of Transportation Planning for the City of Newton.

The results released this September included a survey of potential users in Newton and Needham that showed roughly a 2:1 preference for building a dedicated bicycle and pedestrian way (without carrying shuttle bus traffic). Although the study was limited to the area of the Community Way, the working group further noted that bicycle and pedestrian connectivity would be improved. Still, rapid shuttle bus access to nearby transportation



... The Community Way Forward — A Green Connector for Needham and Newton continued from page 3

hubs (Newton Highlands or Needham Heights MBTA) would pose significant operational, logistical, and financial challenges. The feasibility study surveyed the Charles River and Route 128/95 crossings and the Needham Heights to Webster street corridor, including estimated costs to design and construct the Community Way bridges and trail. Both the detailed final study report and the working group recommendations letter are available at: www.newtonma.gov/communityway

Many abandoned rail corridors have been converted into "rail trails" throughout the Commonwealth, encouraging "active" non-polluting recreation and transportation. The Minuteman Trail from Cambridge through Arlington, Lexington, and Bedford may be the most well-known. Many other wonderful trails include the Bruce Freeman from Concord to Lowell, the Nashua River Rail Trail from Aver to Nashua, NH, and the Cape Cod Rail Trail from Dennis to Wellfleet. The benefits increase as the trails connect to more areas of natural beauty, schools, community centers, and shopping, offering a car-free and safer way to walk and bike for all ages.

The Community Way would connect the Newton Upper Falls Greenway to the Needham Heights neighborhood, improving access to the Northland Development on Needham street and the proposed mixed-use redevelopment of the former Muzi Ford site. A future Needham route around the still active portion of the rail line could also



include shared widened sidewalks as well as a path along the right-ofway. Moreover, the Community Way is an essential link in the long-term vision described by the Bay Colony Rail Trail Association for a continuous, safe connection from Newton through Needham and

the Needham town forest to Redwing Bay on the Charles River and eventually to Dover and Medfield.

Since the proposed Community Way and bridges over the Charles River and Route 128/95 are primarily located in Needham, the City of Newton would likely be a supporting partner to move the project forward. As the discussions progress, the Needham Select Board and Town Administration must determine a path forward in collaboration with MassDOT and the MBTA (as owner of the right-of-way) on planning, scheduling, and design. The ability to move such a substantial project forward must include steps leading to state and federal funding for this project on the "TIP" (Transportation Improvement Program) long-term schedule, hopefully within the next several years. Given the extended state and federal funding time frame, the feasibility study cost estimate includes allowances for inflation and construction contingency. It would meet the most recent state and federal standards for generous path width and ADA compliance. Since the Community Way would connect more than one Massachusetts community, it should enhance the likelihood of qualifying for state funding.

As part of our volunteer efforts to advance the Upper Falls Greenway in Newton, over a year was devoted to community input, discussions, building support, and hosting walking tours of the proposed Greenway with local neighbors and community representatives. To become a long-term priority for the Town of Needham, the residents of Needham Heights will need to come together and speak out in support of the proposed Community Way. Staying focused for years seems like a long time, but it can and should be done! Here in Newton, we can enjoy the results of our efforts these 12 years later every day.



Project limits and bridge photos shown excerpted from the GPI study report

Let's look forward to extending our Upper Falls Greenway over the bridge on the Charles River and riding and strolling the Community Way forward to an even more beautiful, safe, and accessible future.

The Big Picture on Rail Trails:

- https://www.baycolonyrailtrail.org/
- Rails to Trails Conservancy (national), https://www.railstotrails.org/
- Craig Della Penna's newsletter on rail trail plans & progress in the Northeast (mostly southern New England), subscribe here or contact him at: craigdp413@gmail.com



History of Newton Parks, Playgrounds & Recreation: Winter Sports



Ice crew, Bulloughs Pond

The long serving Superintendent of Playgrounds, Ernst Hermann (1913-1939), brought his love for skating and winter sports with him from Germany. He routinely stretched eight to nine days of skating into 40-50 by retaining the natural "blue" or "black" ice and preventing snow, slush, and ice shavings from remaining on the ice surface.¹ He also perfected the maintenance of ice skating rinks¹ and designed an ice hockey rink, which allowed for easier ice cleaning and surface handling. People in Newton enjoyed far more days of skating because of his ice-cleaning methods and equipment than did the people in nearby communities.

In paying tribute to Herman's skill and knowledge in administering the skating program, Joseph Lee, Jr., the Father of the Playground Movement, said: "Dean Hermann could stay at home and by his temperature charts tell whether the ice was strong enough to take the tractor and the public." To demonstrate that mechanized equipment maintained ice cheaply and effectively, he devised several unique types.² Hermann wrote:

Nature, as a whole, gives us in this climate only about 8-10 days of skating in a good winter, but by proper care and maintenance this can be increased to an average of about 45 days per season. When we consider the enormous number of children, young people and adults who are thus enabled to spend 40-50 days out-doors during the winter months, we have added very materially to the physical and social health of our citizens. Owing to the fact that we have gradually developed a district type of ice maintenance, we have been called upon by many communities to help them with their skating problems. We gave, with permission from His Honor, Mayor Weeks, a demonstration of ice care in the lagoon on the Charles River north of Beacon Street in Boston.³ An ice hockey rink built with interlocking sections, but without a bolt either perpendicular to the ice or laterally in forming the wall, was an ingenious device Hermann developed. The rink was so constructed that it could be moved easily; the end boards were readily removed to facilitate cleaning the ice, and the bottom boards could be raised, thus reducing melting of the ice at the base of the rink.² In the 21st century, neighborhoods resurrected Hermann's idea of constructing small rinks for local use.⁴

Because of city-wide budget cuts following the passage of Proposition 2 ½ in 1980, Ware's (Pulsifer's) Cove on the Charles River in Auburndale Park became the only maintained area for skating.⁵ This caused a strong reaction from skaters on the south side of Newton, who met with the Commission in an unusual New Year's Day meeting at which it was decided to charge daily fees for skating at Crystal Lake and Bullough's Pond, even though skating would remain free at Ware's Cove.⁶ The following year a \$1.00 daily fee was charged at all areas.⁷



Toboggan Slide, Newton Centre

The Newton Centre Toboggan Slide of two runs, each six feet wide and 350 feet long, was erected in 1928 and was a winter attraction for the next 50 years.⁸ Later, an incident in which a woman broke her leg,⁹ a change in the state's liability law, and condemnation as unsafe by the Building Inspector caused its demolition in 1978.¹⁰ In its last year, there were 42 days of tobogganing,¹¹ yet no funds were available for its reconstruction.¹⁰ ◆

Note: For references, see next page.

- Michael J. Clarke, Newton Conservator board member



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Editor's Note: The Newton Conservators should care about the ocean and global warming because both have significant impacts on the natural resources and ecosystems that our organization is responsible for protecting. Preserving and protecting coastal and marine ecosystems can help to mitigate the effects of climate change by storing carbon and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. By addressing these issues, we can help to ensure the long-term health and resilience of the land and waters under our care.

The Brilliant Abyss



Helen Scales has written a beautiful and compelling book about the deepest areas in the world's oceans. She describes the many newly discovered life forms that populate these far-flung frontiers of human knowledge and the recent technology that makes the exploration of the deep possible.

Ms. Scales introduces us to the carbon pump, the massive sequestration of carbon into the depths of the oceans. She

writes with concern about the climactic effects of planned deep-sea mining. If the Gulf Stream fails to circulate up the coast of North America and down the coast of Europe, our climate, as well as that of Europe, would change drastically. Our weather patterns would change as would our own ambient flora and fauna. Ms. Scales' book provides a view of the world that many of us do not see.



First, let us review the dynamics of the circulation in the oceans. When sea ice forms in the Arctic, the nearby water becomes saltier, colder, and denser so this water sinks. It then flows south near the floor of the Atlantic to the Antarctic, where more of this denser water is introduced. These waters then circulate back into the Atlantic and the Pacific and are warmed as they approach the equator. In the Pacific area, the water circulates west past Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and farther westward towards the Atlantic. The Atlantic water also warms and rises near the equator. Here it flows north, crossing the equator and up the eastern coast of North America as the Gulf Stream.

The melting of arctic ice and the ice sheet in Greenland dilutes the salinity of the waters that sink in the Arctic. The deep water in the Antarctic is measurably warming. These and other factors have slowed the circulation of the Gulf Stream by 15%. What goes on in the deep oceans should be of concern to us.

The upwelling of these colder waters mentioned above provides rich nutrients from the bottom of the oceans, supporting blooms of plankton and the resulting web of life, including major fisheries. Less well known are the effects of dying plankton and waste elimination from the whole range of creatures that build on the plankton. This sends a continual rain of carbon to the ocean's floor. Estimates vary from 5 to 15 gigatons of carbon each year, producing the carbon pump. Disruption of the global circulation in the oceans will have large effects on the marine food chain as well as the climate: much more carbon would stay up in the atmosphere rather than rain down to a secure tomb bed at the bottom of the oceans.

In describing the life of the abyssal ocean waters, we enter relatively unknown territory. Scientists continue to discover new species in the deep oceans. Even less known to us are the relationships between these species and their relationship to global processes, such as the carbon pump.



Orange roughies

As an example, consider just one species, a fish called "orange roughy," widely distributed in southern Australian waters and commonly found on seafood menus during the 80's and 90's. It was originally named the "slimehead" due to its gooey body. The slime is a necessary defense mechanism that helps roughies to detect predators as well as to find food. However, its name was changed to make the fish a more attractive choice for diners.

The flesh of orange roughies is firm and not fishy. They used to be very common, congregating around seamounts, undersea mountains made by volcanic activity that support an incredible assortment of marine life. As it became a more popular choice for diners, large scale trawling for this fish became increasingly more lucrative for large deep-sea fisheries.

Orange roughies can live for 100 years but breed only every two years; they produce many fewer eggs than a surface fish like cod. The roughies are not now extinct, but their population is quite diminished; the orange roughie boom has gone bust. A once abundant species has been decimated by human greed. The seamounts where the roughies congregated in large numbers have been scraped clean of life. It is not understood yet why some seamounts are recovering while many others are not.

The life cycle of many deep-sea creatures has a much longer time span than life near, and on, the surface. Human greed seems unstoppable once in motion. Viewing orange roughies as a commercial resource to exploit was even more devastating than our exploits with whales and surface fish. Global fishery organizations are on the prowl for other deep-sea food resources.

In addition, nodules of stone that form on ancient sharks' teeth and small bones of sea life are scattered across the ocean floor. Large mining organizations apply for permits to trawl vast areas of the ocean floor to gather these nodules. They contain valuable metals in small amounts, so the scale of the trawling is huge; there also are minerals in the seamounts. The sort of mining that took off tops of mountains and dumped the slag into the next valley in Appalachia is now a proposed reality for seamounts; underwater life will be locally devastated. This would also be true for the hydrothermal vents that have minerals around them, but that are also extremely fertile for the start of underwater food chains. The environmental results of all this mining are unknown.



Helen Scales quotes from the introduction to Rachel Carson's 1961 book, *The Sea Around Us*. This quote refers to dumping in, and polluting the oceans but would serve us more broadly here. "The truth is that disposal proceeded far more rapidly than our knowledge justifies. To dispose first and investigate later is an invitation to disaster." We now have much more knowledge about throwing plastic into the oceans and about possible

climactic results of exploitative human greed. We, the public, need to raise our awareness concerning the threats to the deep oceans and support the science that can chart the effects of human activity in the deep sea. \blacklozenge

- Review by Pete Gilmore, Newton Conservator board member

Get Involved with the Conservators - Volunteers Needed

The Newton Conservators needs volunteers to help with various activities, including annual monitoring of the conservation restrictions we hold on City of Newton properties, pulling invasive plants, updating our inventory of plants and animals on Newton's public lands, and collecting new signups from interested Newton residents on our walks or at community events such as Village Days, the Harvest Fest, and others. You'll work alongside and be trained as needed by experienced Conservators' board members. If you're willing to volunteer for a couple hours, it would be most appreciated. To learn more about volunteer opportunities and contact us about them, go to **newtonconservators.org/volunteer**/

Thank you.



Ribbon-cutting Ceremony, Levingston Cove Newton Parks, Recreation & Culture

On the afternoon of November 15, 2023, Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Director of Parks and Open Space, Luis Perez Demorizi, Parks, Recreation & Culture Commissioner Nicole Banks, and other Newton officials gathered to celebrate the opening of the improvement and redesign of Levingston Cove. Levingston Cove is a portion of the Crystal Lake shoreline west of the bathhouse. It includes benches, a platform used for fishing, and an unofficial swimming area. In 1982, the cove was named in honor of Louise Levingston.

The Parks and Recreation Commission approved the improvements in May of 2018, with Newton Conservation Commission approving permits for the improvements in September 2021.

In October 2021, the City Council authorized spending \$1.4 million in Community Preservation Act funds for the "Levingston Cove Improvements Project." The project's goals were to "correct erosion damage, install new features to better deal with runoff, and construct new accessible walkways." (In February 2021, the Newton Conservators Board of Directors urged the City Council to approve the project.)

Construction began in November 2022 and was completed in November 2023. Read about this project in our winter of 2023, "Levingston Cove: Improving Recreational Offerings, Enhancing Wildlife Habitat," by Newton PRC's Director of Parks and Open Space, Luis Perez Demorizi. ◆

🦑 Dan Brody



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller introduces the gathering at the ribbon cutting.



Mayor Ruthanne Fuller cuts the opening day ribbon helped by Luis Demorizi, with Darryl Settles and his wife Lisa Owens, the parents of Preston Blair Settles, a devoted patron of Crystal Lake who died unexpectedly in 2022. Also present are Mike Poirier (in the power chair) and his grandson DJ.



Luis Perez Demorizi addresses the celebration attendees.



Commissioner Banks and the City Hall Strummers welcome attendees.



► Invasives Update ◄

The Newton Conservators' invasives team continues occasional field work over the winter, which is a good time to take down bittersweet vines and tackle woody shrubs. We also will use this time to review our activities and plan for future efforts. If you'd like to help and be added to our invasives email list, please let us know via email to invasives@newtonconservators.org.



Winter's here. Take a hike!

Shop online at newtonconservators.org/ publications/ to purchase Newton Conservators' publications. The Almanac is \$19.95 + shipping, and the Trail Guide is \$8.95 + shipping.

- Members receive a discount from these prices when purchasing online.
- New members receive a trail guide free with their first membership.



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.

Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 63 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 March. Deadlines for these issues are the second Friday of the month before the issue is 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 articles@newtonconservators.org. Digitized photographs, maps, and diagrams are also welcome.

Editor:	Ken Mallory
Design/Layout:	Suzette Barbier
Production:	Bonnie Carter

Thanks to the following contributors to this edition of the newsletter: Michael J. Clarke, Pete Gilmore, Julia Hopkins, Katherine Howard, George Kirby, and Lisa Kumpf.



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The falls at Hemlock Gorge



Support the Newton Conservators through your IRA

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Individuals $70\frac{1}{2}$ and older can make a tax-free gift to the Newton Conservators directly from their IRA. Please consider a gift to the Conservators from your 2023 or 2024 IRA distributions. The benefits to you include the reduction in income subject to tax, even if you don't itemize, and the amount donated counts toward the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD).

The benefits to the Conservators are immense and allow for us to continue to help preserve open space in Newton. Ask your IRA holder for a simple transfer letter or form. The Newton Conservators is a recognized 501(c)(3) organization.

— Thank you.

Newton Conservators, P.O. Box 590011, Newton, MA 02459



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Count me in! I want to help Newton Conservators preserve open spaces and connect people to nature in Newton. Please renew/ accept my tax-deductible membership at the level checked below:

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By joining or renewing, you agree to receive our informational emails , which always include the option to unsubscribe.
Our quarterly newsletter will be sent by email only unless you check here:
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□ I would like to learn more about volunteering with Newton Conservators.





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Nashville Warbler photo by Haynes Miller

Go Green! ...and all the other colors of the rainbow. You can view this newsletter at newtonconservators.org/newsletters. To elect not to receive a paper copy of the newsletter, email us at membership@newtonconservators.org.