



**NEWTON
CONSERVATORS**

SPRING ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

Preserving open space and connecting people to nature since 1961

NEWTONCONSERVATORS.ORG • SPRING 2026

2025-26 Officers, Directors and Advisors

Officers

Katherine Howard, *President*
Nyssa Patten, *Vice President*
Michael Clarke, *Secretary*
David Backer, *Co-Treasurer*
Larry Smith, *Co-Treasurer*

Board of Directors

Peter Barrer
Barbara Bates
Dan Brody
Henry Finch
Maurice Gilmore
Daniel Green
Bill Hagar
Chris Hepburn
Susan Lyon
Ken Mallory
Alan Noguee
Jon Regosin
Beth Wilkinson

Advisors

AnnaMaria Abernathy
Margaret Albright
Lisle Baker
Lee Breckenridge
Lalor Burdick
Lucy Caldwell-Stair
Bonnie Carter
Michael Collora
Kim Devore
Ann Dorfman
Margaret Doris
Ted Kuklinski
Alison Leary
William Leitch
Brooks Mathewson
Eric Olson
Richard Primack
Patricia Robinson
Jane Sender
William Shaevel
Bruce Wenning

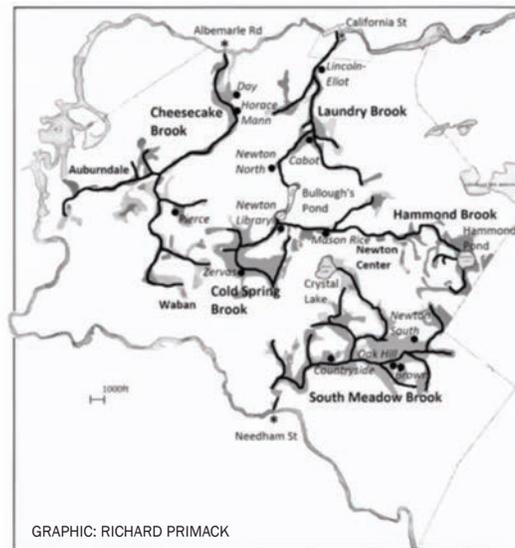
Investigating Newton's Streams: Fish Hiding in Plain Sight...

By Bob Mallard, *founding member and Executive Director for Native Fish Coalition*

Growing up in Newton Highlands in the 1960s and 1970s, I spent much of my time exploring Crystal Lake and the nearby streams, swamps, and ponds. Aquatic ecosystems and aquatic lifeforms fascinated me and continue to do so to this day. And fishing has been my primary pastime for as long as I

can remember. While Crystal Lake was my "home water," I also frequented Cold Spring Park, Newton Cemetery, Newton City Hall,

Waters of Newton



Modified 1892 drainage map showing the main brooks and associated wetlands.

Newton Center Playground, Bullough's Pond, and the occasional trip to Cheesecake Brook. I would ride my Stingray bicycle with an AM radio wired to the handlebars to these places every chance I had.

Cold Spring Park was home to what we called "the toad swamp," now known as Muskrat Pond,

a large unnamed swamp in the northeast corner, several small vernal pools, and Cold Spring Brook. The swamps and pools held



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

One of four ponds in Newton Cemetery and Arboretum

Continued on page 2



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Bullough's Pond

green frogs, bullfrogs, wood frogs, spring peepers, American toads, and painted turtles. And the stream had some unidentified fish.

The four ponds in Newton Cemetery were home to tadpoles and frogs as well as the most robust turtle population in the area. There were painted, musk, and snapping turtles. Although those ponds were closed to fishing, fish would sip bread meant for ducks off the surface of the murky water. Newton City Hall was similar to the cemetery, with three interconnected ponds and the same lifeforms. The area surrounding the ponds was mowed grass, not tree-lined as it is today. Like the cemetery, although fish were there, you were not allowed to fish for them.

Newton Center Playground was intersected by a section of walled but daylighted, or unburied, stream. While I did not know it at the time, this is Hammond Brook, which originates at Hammond Pond. There were some frogs and the occasional unidentified fish in the stream.

Bullough's Pond was surrounded by fences and lined with dense cattails. It was murky, weed-choked, and muddy. There were turtles, including some outsized snappers, frogs, snakes, and, while difficult to fish due to the weeds, the pond was home to carp and goldfish.

By the mid-1980s, I had moved away from Newton and relocated to Medford and Pepperell, Massachusetts, southern New Hampshire, and then central Maine where I have resided for the last 25 years. While I had fond memories of Newton, I stayed away for nearly 40 years.

nonprofit dedicated to protecting, preserving, and restoring wild native fish. NFC now boasts chapters in 21 states, from Maine to Arkansas and northwest to Wisconsin.



NFC undertook a project in Dover, Massachusetts, to assess the condition of Trout Brook and whether the wild native brook trout persisted. After completing the project, I reached out to Massachusetts NFC board member Jeff Moore, who went to Hyde Elementary School with me, and asked if he was interested in taking a look at Cold Spring Brook. Cold Spring Brook was believed to be fishless by everyone we spoke with. However, NFC, with help from Friends of Cold Spring Park, Newton Conservators, and MassWildlife,



PHOTO: JON GOLDBERG

Native Fish Coalition board member Jeff Moore displays an American eel from Cold Spring Brook.



After a career in software and 15 years owning and operating a fly-fishing shop in Maine, I helped found Native Fish Coalition (NFC), a



PHOTO: COURTESY JON MALLARD

White sucker from Cheesecake Brook

was able to confirm the presence of self-sustaining native golden shiners and catadromous American eels in Cold Spring Park.

Having worked with Charles River

Watershed Association (CRWA) on Trout Brook, NFC also offered to take a look at Cheesecake Brook to see if we could find any fish. This too, was believed to be fishless. With help from CRWA and MassWildlife, we were able to confirm the presence of native white suckers, pumpkinseed and redbreast sunfish, and American eels, as well as nonnative carp.



PHOTO: FRIENDS OF COLD SPRING PARK

Seining to catch freshwater fish

While Newton's streams are some of the most altered and, in some cases, degraded waters NFC has worked on, multiple species of wild native fish have found a way to persist. And American eels are travelling over 100 miles from their birthplace in the Sargasso Sea to live in these waters.



PHOTO: FRIENDS OF COLD SPRING PARK

Golden shiner in Cold Spring Park

NFC decided to take a look at Newton Cemetery and Arboretum to see which fish species were there. It is the next section of Cold Spring Brook downstream

from Cold Spring Park. NFC was able to confirm the presence of native golden shiners, yellow perch, and pumpkinseed sunfish. And cemetery employees have seen American eels as well.

Next, NFC took a look at the Newton City Hall ponds. This is where Cold Spring Brook and Hammond Brook end, and Laundry Brook begins. NFC was able to confirm the presence of native pumpkinseed sunfish, even though the ponds were drained and dredged just a year earlier.

NFC used visual inspection, angling, non-lethal angling, seining, and trapping, eDNA metabarcoding, and electro-fishing to survey these waters. While proof-of-presence, these techniques are not proof-of-absence, and there may be other species of fish present. The discovery of wild native fish in Cold Spring Park, Newton Cemetery and Arboretum, Newton City Hall, and Cheesecake Brook was an unexpected and pleasant surprise.

Newton's streams are subject to point and nonpoint pollution. In some cases, NFC has detected sewage odor, indicating that there is likely some intrusion from generations-old municipal sewer pipes. Much of the nonpoint pollution comes from stormwater runoff which carries petroleum, fertilizer, and other chemicals. Stormwater also increases salinity due to road sanding/salting, especially in the early spring. Sewage and fertilizer increase phosphorus.

The lack of instream structure and natural banks in most Newton streams greatly limits refuge for fish. Fish need structure to hide from predators. Canopy loss, another problem on many Newton streams, increases sun penetration, which warms the water. It also limits incidental terrestrial insect contributions, depriving fish of an important food source. Instream structure also increases flow, adds oxygen, and promotes scouring, creating a deep-water refuge. In some cases, dissolved oxygen is low due to accumulated decaying organic matter.

In addition to reducing pollution, phosphorus, and salination, increasing in-stream structure, natural banks, and canopy, improving fish passage, and increasing dissolved oxygen, there needs to be more focus on the fish themselves. We need to understand what is where, what is missing.

Bob Mallard is a founding member and Executive Director for Native Fish Coalition. He is a former fly shop owner and Registered Maine Fishing Guide. Bob has written five books and hundreds of articles on fly fishing, fisheries management, and native fish conservation. He can be reached at: NativeFishCoalition.org or Info@NativeFishCoalition.org ♦