The Rite of Spring - Stony Brook Herring Run

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT
Karen Malkus-Benjamin

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GREETINGS FROM THE MUD PUDDLE!

APRIL UPDATE

It's been a demanding winter for all on Cape Cod - including our ponds. Ponds will have to cope with large quantities of snow run off, and what that water carries with it. The effects of this winter will be felt in the ponds for some time.

Subtle changes in salinity and pH can have significant effects on the delicate ecosystem balances. Dealing with storm run off is an important pond protection strategy, that can reduce polluted water from reaching our ponds. Protecting shorelines with buffers and redirecting water to filter down through the upland soil can make a huge difference. Our upcoming workshop: Pond Friendly Landscaping, will look at some of these techniques. (See story below.)

In February, I attended the One Cape event in Hyannis. The focus of the conference was the updated 208 Water Quality Management Plan, which was last updated in 1978. A summary of the new 208 plan is available at: www.CapeCodCommission.org. This year, presentations centered around estuaries and marine water. Paul Niedzwiecki, Executive Director of the Cape Cod Commission, emphasized nitrogen as the principal "poison." He reminded the audience, that the main source of the nitrogen is coming from septic systems. "Although only four percent (4%) of the population of Massachusetts lives on Cape Cod, we possess twenty percent (20%) of the state's total of title V septic systems", he said. In general, septic systems are successful at removing pathogens, but they do little to remove nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus. Speakers, from the DEP and EPA acknowledged that Cape Cod is at a "tipping point," and it is important to view both the problem and solution as a regional watershed issue. (See story link here: http://capecod.wickedlocal.com/article/20150302/News/150309841)

Many pond groups were in attendance to discover how ponds would be included in the new 208 plan. The Cape Cod Commission staff validated the importance of ponds in the watershed approach. The great news is that in the coming year the next focus of the 208 planning work by the CCC will be ponds!

At the One Cape conference several videos were viewed - three from the new APCC series called Saving Paradise. (link here: http://www.apcc.org/videos/index.html) The videos share many interviews with long-time Cape Codders, who point to profound changes in water quality in their lifetime. One Mashpee pond resident noted "we need to change before the water will change." The message is clear - It is time to act!

Change is a big part of the solution to ensure healthy ponds and all Cape Cod waters. Moving forward, we will examine and suggest ways each of us can make a difference.

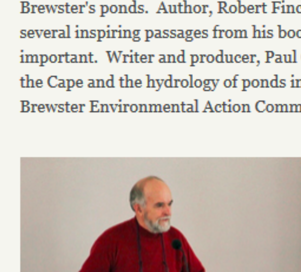
Wishing you a Happy Spring.

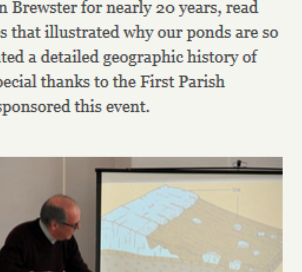
Karen Malkus-Benjamin *is the Coastal Health Resource Coordinator for the Barnstable Health Division - where her main focus is looking for sources of bacterial pollution in water resources, and developing remediation strategies. She also teaches part time at the Partnership School in Orleans.*
Click here for a full biography.

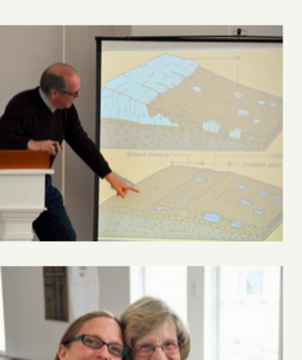
FIRST POND EDUCATION PROGRAM A HIT!

Karen Malkus-Benjamin introduces first program at First Parish Brewster

More than one-hundred people ventured out on a raw, early spring day to discover some surprising facts about past uses, and hear solutions concerning the problems facing Brewster's ponds. Author, Robert Finch, who lived in Brewster for nearly 20 years, read several inspiring passages from his books and articles that illustrated why our ponds are so important. Writer and producer, Paul Gasek, presented a detailed geographic history of the Cape and the hydrology of ponds in Brewster. Special thanks to the First Parish Brewster Environmental Action Committee who co-sponsored this event.







POND EDUCATION PROGRAM SERIES CONTINUES: Pond Friendly Landscaping by Konrad Schultz

May 16, 2015 - 10AM

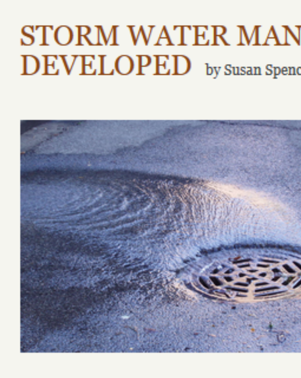
Brewster Ladies Library
1822 Main St, Brewster
(508) 896-3913

Speakers include Sue Phelan, Director of Green Cape, who will describe ways we can all reduce toxin use and improve pond and drinking water quality. Green Cape is a non-profit organization formed in 1998 whose goal is to protect the sole source aquifer of Cape Cod and the health of all creatures, human and otherwise, on Cape Cod. Visit www.greencape.com

Barbara Conolly, MA Certified Landscape Professional and owner of Gardens by Barbara Conolly, N. Falmouth, MA will present ideas about rain gardens and sustainable landscaping. Visit www.gardensbybarbaraconolly.com

Look for upcoming **Weed Watchers Program** in June where you can learn how to identify if your pond contains non-native invasive species and what you can do to prevent them.

STORM WATER MANAGEMENT BYLAWS BEING DEVELOPED by Susan Spencer



Everyone knows about the pollution that enters our waterways from toxic industrial dumping or wastewater that's not sufficiently treated. Those identifiable "point source" pollutants were a key catalyst for passing the Clean Water Act in 1972 and have been a focus of environmental regulation.

But another form of degradation, nonpoint source pollution, quietly threatens the quality of water all around us, including the once-pristine kettle ponds that abound on Cape Cod. And much of that pollution - oils deposits from cars, dog waste on the side of the road and excess fertilizer on lawns - is carried into ponds and streams with runoff after a rainstorm.

"A lot of people are becoming aware that they're seeing things happen in their ponds that didn't happen before, such as algae blooms and invasive vegetation," said Sue Leven, Brewster town planner.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has since 1987 regulated stormwater pollution more strongly. The agency issues permits that towns must comply with to manage stormwater runoff or face possible fines. The current draft permit, issued in 2014, requires towns to establish bylaws for development that include best practices for stormwater mitigation.

Leven has been working with the Comprehensive Water Planning Committee and engineering consultants from Horsely Witten Group over the past year to draft a stormwater management bylaw and accompanying stormwater regulations. She expects the final proposed bylaw will be on the fall 2015 town meeting warrant. The draft bylaw will be posted on the town website in late March. The Brewster Ponds Coalition board of directors will be involved in discussions and education as the proposal takes shape.

For many homeowners, the stormwater bylaw won't change anything, although it may give them some good ideas on how they can protect their watershed.

Owners of single- or two-family homes who plan to remodel or build above a certain size, currently proposed for 2,500 square feet, would have to document on their building permit what steps they are taking to reduce stormwater runoff.

Mitigating runoff doesn't have to be complicated and it can add to the beauty of a home. Rain gardens with native plants can collect rainwater from roofs or divert runoff from paved areas. Driveways and walkways can be designed with permeable surfaces such as seashells or lattice stone to filter stormwater. Drywells or rain barrels are a good way to collect roof runoff.

Leven said she plans to offer several opportunities for homeowners to learn about stormwater management before the proposed bylaw comes to town meeting, including having information at Conservation Day in July.

"I'm hoping the process will give people who aren't doing it information so that they can," she said.

CAN YOU NAME THIS POND? by Dawn Walnut

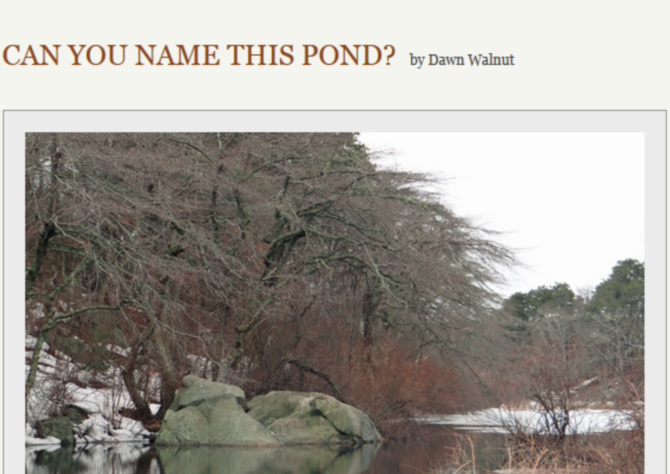


Photo courtesy of Dawn Walnut

This pond shares a watershed with six other ponds, and is hydro-connected to two of them. It has an outflow to the ocean, by way of a culvert and then a stream. The pond is atypical in that it is not as round and symmetrical as most kettle ponds, and it is also fairly shallow.

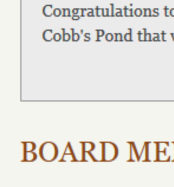
At one time, water rights from this pond were so hotly disputed that two prominent local families sued one another. The pond is located alongside the site of what was once Brewster's main thoroughfare, and where several businesses have come and gone, including a tavern, a paper mill, and a factory producing overalls, among others.

Since 2001, this has been one of the 29 ponds monitored by PALS (Ponds and Lake Stewards), who measure the pond twice each year for clarity, temperature and dissolved oxygen. In addition, the pond has been tested for phosphorus concentrations. Unfortunately, this pond today is classified as a pond with impaired health. It has a high concentration of both surface and sediment phosphorus, elevated concentrations of chlorophyll-a (an algae indicator), and decreased water clarity. Although not apparent from a cursory look, this pond needs help if we are to restore it to good health so that it can be enjoyed for generations.

Click here to submit your guess. Answer in the Summer newsletter.

Congratulations to Mark Farber and Margot Fitsch who correctly guessed that it was Cobb's Pond that was depicted in the Winter newsletter.

BOARD MEMBER PROFILE by Susan Spencer



For John Keith and his family, the connection to Brewster's ponds runs deep.

"I grew up swimming in the ponds, my kids grew up swimming in the ponds and my grandson swims in the ponds," said Keith, a part-time resident living on Elbow Pond and a lifelong visitor to the town where his father grew up.

Last summer, his 37-year-old daughter got married atop the bluff overlooking Elbow Pond.

Keith, a semi-retired engineer who works internationally on environmental issues, says that Brewster needs a plan that addresses long-term water quality concerns, particularly controlling nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen that promote algae blooms and growth of invasive species.

Limiting nutrients in water may be a daunting project, he said, "But for those of us that swim in the ponds, fish in the ponds, it's a must."

Also on the priority list are protecting the wildlife and natural habitat of ponds, protecting against invasive species such as Asian milfoil and controlling nuisance species, like watershed, that are growing more than they normally would.

Cape Cod's ponds may not look as bad yet as the green, algae-covered farm ponds in the Midwest or the turbid, slimy waters of the developing world. But Keith says that if we let things go on, we're heading in that direction.

"Our water quality is good to fairly good," Keith said. "The issue is prevention."

Besides his home in Brewster, Keith lives in Gardiner, N.Y.

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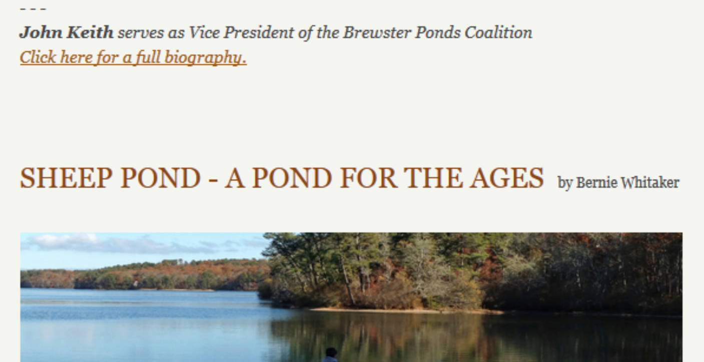
John Keith *serves as Vice President of the Brewster Ponds Coalition*
Click here for a full biography.

SHEEP POND - A POND FOR THE AGES by Bernie Whitaker



Sheep Pond   Photo courtesy of Ryan Burch

Of all the many freshwater kettle ponds in Brewster, Sheep Pond is among the most treasured, having both the clearest and the cleanest water of those tested. Sheep Pond was ranked one of the town's three high quality deep ponds, as reported by Camp Dresser McKee in its 2010 report to the Comprehensive Water Planning Committee. Still, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health has issued fish consumption warnings. Today the pond tests positive for mercury content.

The first European settlers are believed to have grazed their sheep here, leading to how the pond got its name. The Brewster Historical Society possesses a recovered fire truck spanner discovered here – perhaps evidence of the pond's use for filling the truck. Archaeologically, the area has been classified as "Secondary Sensitivity." Within 500 feet of the pond, prehistoric sites and artifacts might yet be discovered.

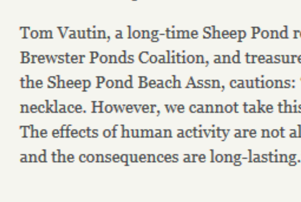
Both the pond and its wetlands are products of long-ago glacial activity, the pond surviving even as the ice retreated. The adjacent forest is thought to be 100 years old, and today some parts are suitable for hiking.

Sheep Pond offers easy public access at the Brewster town landing, where there is a sandy beach, paved parking, and a boat ramp (outboard motors are limited to three horsepower). There is also a wooden platform for wheelchairs and adjacent seating. During the summer season, a Brewster beach parking sticker is required. The pond is easy to find at the end of Fisherman's Landing Road, just off Rt. 124. It is also easy to get to by bike or walking from the Cape Cod Rail Trail.

Fishing in Sheep Pond requires a license, and the pond is stocked every spring and fall. There are enough varieties to satisfy the most zealous: Atlantic brood-stock salmon and "brownies", as well as brook, brown, and rainbow trout. Due to Sheep's large amount of cold water, the state considers it one of Massachusetts' best trout ponds. Sheep's clear water also makes very visible the small and large mouth bass, yellow perch, bullheads, and pickerel.

Today Sheep Pond is bordered by 88 acres called "Sheep Pond Woodlands," of which 3.5 acres are fresh-water wetlands. The pond comprises the southern edge of the Woodlands, and two vernal pools have been found in the area.

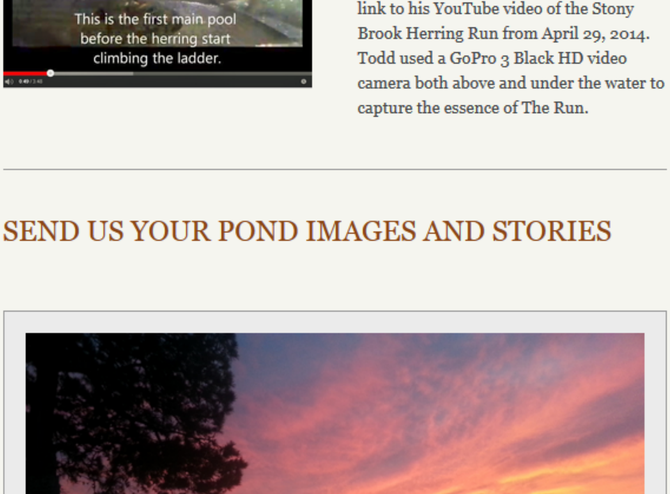
Tom Vautin, a long-time Sheep Pond resident, a PALS pond tester, a board member of the Brewster Ponds Coalition, and treasurer of one of the four neighboring pond associations: the Sheep Pond Beach Assn, cautions: "Sheep Pond is truly a gem in Brewster's freshwater necklace. However, we cannot take this -- or any of the ponds in our town -- for granted. The effects of human activity are not always observable on the surface, but they are real, and the consequences are long-lasting."



CLICK ON IMAGE TO SEE HERRING RUN

Special thanks to Todd Haskins of Schooner properties for contributing this link to his YouTube video of the Stony Brook Herring Run from April 29, 2014. Todd used a GoPro 3 Black HD video camera both above and under the water to capture the essence of The Run.

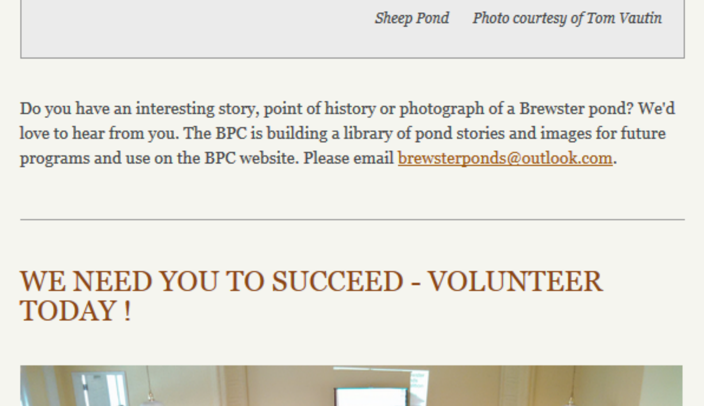
SEND US YOUR POND IMAGES AND STORIES



Sheep Pond   Photo courtesy of Tom Vautin

Do you have an interesting story, point of history or photograph of a Brewster pond? We'd love to hear from you. The BPC is building a library of pond stories and images for future programs and use on the BPC website. Please email brewsterponds@outlook.com.

WE NEED YOU TO SUCCEED - VOLUNTEER TODAY !



There is much work to be done and there are many ways for you to put your talent and time to great use with the Brewster Ponds Coalition. Committee members are needed now in all areas including:

Communications - Website, newsletters, brochures, video development and more.

Education - Creating and presenting pond education and awareness programs.

Fundraising and Grant Development - Researching funding sources for pond studies and remediation.

Membership and Outreach - developing the database of pond neighbors and associations and the membership base.

Contact us at 508-896-6655 or email brewsterponds@outlook.com

Brewster Ponds Coalition

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