

4-12 -13 SWMI is great, c'mon on in!

Did you hear that Halifax has been awarded a SWMI Grant? The letters refer to Sustainable Water Management Initiative. We fondly refer to it as the SWIMMY grant because the acronym looks like that but also because it brings to mind the image of water that is so clear and plentiful that you just want to jump in and go swimming!

That word "plentiful" is a key concept here. Do we have enough water for drinking? Are the aquifers getting recharged? Are the streams and rivers open for natural flow? Do those rivers and streams lead to the ponds and lakes so that eels and herring can get there for spawning?

A century ago, it made sense to many (but not all), to build dams in order to provide power for mills and factories. It was the Industrial Revolution and things were getting done in new ways and fast ways. Now, those mills are great for art studios but many are vacant. While we are in the midst of our own revolution of innovations and lightening fast turnover of what's hot, we are also examining what's not and looking to repair what we can.

It is time to get rid of the dams blocking natural water flow not only so that fish can return, even though that is a good reason, for it brings economic benefits in addition to biological ones. This removal of impediments will also allow water to flow in the natural direction. Allowing water to flow where it is supposed to go is critical to keeping water within its own watershed. That is one way to make sure that our underground aquifers are being recharged. Does it make sense to give our water away to another watershed?

Well, apparently, it seemed like a good idea to some (but not all) when legislators enacted legislation in 1964 to allow the City of Brockton to divert water from ponds in other towns and other watersheds over to their city. The time has finally arrived to re-visit that legislation and see what other ways exist of providing water for Brockton. So, it is doubly good news that the City of Brockton also received a grant for a Jones River and Silver Lake River Fish Passage and Water Supply Management Project. Halifax's grant is for Monponsett Ponds and Silver Lake Water Use Operations and Improvements.

After decades of talking, we are actually getting together and getting something done! There's no turning back now; just moving forward. Brockton is behind schedule at this point, not yet having even signed their contract with the State accepting this grant. (Sigh....) I am still confident that they will and the scrambling to meet deadlines will begin. And if they don't sign? Well, Halifax moves forward anyway. We have our official Notice To Proceed and we are proceeding!

We began last week by taking a tour of the Monponsett Ponds, The Stump Brook Dam, the Furnace Pond Diversion, and Silver Lake, concluding with the Forge Pond Dam in Kingston. We were joined by members of the Monponsett Watershed Association, Jones River Watershed Alliance and Princeton Hydro, our chosen engineering firm. It was important to have an in person look at the condition and placement of these dams, the water flow and the fact that water from one watershed actually ends up in another.

That tour took several hours, leaving just enough time to do some brainstorming before we heard the presentation at the Silver Lake Regional High School on the Forge Pond Dam Fish

Passage Improvement Feasibility Study and Preliminary Design. It was a fascinating presentation, even if only to hear a review of what fish need to get to where they want to go. They need enough water in the streams, not much, sometimes as little as six inches but if a stream is a stagnant trickle, as our Stump Brook so often is due to lack of flow, over, under or through the dam, then fish can't make it. Another way in which man-made structures impede fish movement is when water movement is narrowed through culverts and then rushes out the other end. The velocity of the water movement at that time can be so great that it is impossible for fish to swim into it.

Fish can be the sentinel species here telling us what we need to pay attention to. Let the water flow and let it recharge our own aquifers within our own watersheds. Water movement, in and of itself, can be a major improvement factor for reducing algal blooms in our stagnant water bodies. Princeton Hydro will let us know after they have had time to review the data.

While singing in my head, "And they swam and they swam right over the dam..." my hopes for the watershed were boosted when I spied a Brockton City Councillor and later, in walked Brian Creedon representing Brockton's Water Department. There must be such a thing as miracles, for there is one happening right now. This is a partnership and a project that is a long time in the making. Jump in and let the miracle begin!

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. You can see photos from the tour on the Halifax Board of Health facebook page. "Like us" and contact us at 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us