

5-2-14 Good News Week

Fishing for an angle? Angling for fish? I have good news for you all. Our local water bodies are being observed, studied and cared for and people are taking notice! On Thursday, April 17, 2014, the Patrick Administration submitted the following press release: Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Rick Sullivan announced that “eight new river and wetland restoration projects will be designated Priority Projects through the Department of Fish and Game’s (DFG) Division of Ecological Restoration (DER). Priority Projects can receive grants, contracted technical services funded by DER and program assistance.”

Guess what local town received the very much needed and very worthy honor of being designated as a Priority Project? Halifax did! To quote the press release: “A partnership with the Town of Halifax to examine the flow patterns and potential for ecological improvements to the Stump Brook and Monponsett Pond system.”

While Plympton was not specifically mentioned in the press release, Plympton is very much involved in this good news. It is a complicated issue, though, as most worthy life issues are. Plympton shares the southern tip of Silver Lake, a surface water supply for the City of Brockton. Silver Lake has been allowed by legislation to be used for supplying water to Brockton all the way back to the industrial revolution days of 1899. It was further “solidified”, if you will, by legislation of 1964, allowing a dam (very solid) to be built at the Stump Brook outlet to the West Monponsett Pond. Ever since, the Monponsett Ponds have been Tributaries to a Surface Water Supply, Silver Lake. Before that dam, nature drained water to the Taunton River via the Stump Brook.

Now, this is an emotionally draining issue of ponds, lakes and rivers not draining the way nature intended.

The 1964 legislation is interesting reading and its authors tried, to the best of their knowledge at the time, I suppose, to look out for everyone. For instance, the flow of the water had limits and requirements. The elevation of the ponds and lake had limits and requirements. Brockton was supposed to maintain the Monponsett Ponds for recreational use. There was even an advisory board set up to oversee the legislation. It existed for a while and then dissolved.

The water quality declined and people lost hope. That all changed a couple years ago when people united, with the efforts of the Halifax Board of Health, to form the Monponsett Watershed Association. Then, with so much to be researched and discussed, Halifax Board of Selectman requested the formation of the Monponsett Working Group, including involvement

with numerous local and state departments such as legislators, (Tom Calter, Josh Cutler, and Thomas Kennedy, in particular) Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Public Health, Department of Fish and Game, the Department of Ecological Restoration, Massachusetts Audubon and other watershed associations, such as the Jones River Watershed Alliance.

That 1964 advisory board has been re-formed, meeting for months now, and has two commissioners so far: Paul Collis from Halifax and Jack O'Leary from Plympton. We are grateful for their commitment! We await a response from the City of Brockton as to who is their representative. Time will tell. In the meantime, we have a quorum and we march on.

The press release on Priority Projects goes on to say, "Healthy rivers and wetlands protect communities from flooding, provide clean drinking water, and support critical habitats important to the Commonwealth's native fish and wildlife," said Secretary Sullivan. "These new habitat restoration projects will enhance environmental benefits while stimulating local job creation and economic activity."

"River and wetland restoration projects improve habitat for many species of fish, such as brook trout, blue-back herring, alewives, and rainbow smelt, that support recreational and commercial fisheries," said DFG Commissioner Mary Griffin. "In addition to enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, these projects also protect human health and safety by upgrading or removing aging bridges and dams that impair water quality and create flood hazards."

Our ponds and lakes and rivers will once again see herring returning to spawn, thanks to these restoration projects. I don't know how their instincts still guide them, when dams have obstructed them for decades or even a century, but they do.

Miracles never cease to amaze us and there are miracles happening all around us. I, for one, am thankful that miracles are recognized as a priority and seen as a possibility. Restored, connected water bodies are on both lists. If the fish can find their way home after all these years, can't we find a way to do the right things for our environment, for our water supply?

We can and we will.

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