

Trail Mix Special Rhode Island Blueways Alliance Edition



Bluewords:

When Rhode Island is green and yellow with daffodils and forsythia, Trail Mix goes blue!!!

The Rhode Island Blueways Alliance has collected a terrific calendar of educational paddles to fill spring evenings and weekends with outdoor exploration. Watershed organizations and outfitters from the northern Blackstone Valley to the Salt Ponds in the south are hosting paddling trips that showcase special waterways and share information about their unique ecology and history. Please join us!

Safety is RIBA's number one priority. Always WEAR a lifejacket when paddling (simply bringing it along is not enough!). When paddling in the spring, remember that the water can be very cold. Dress for immersion in either a wet suit or a dry suit. Stay close to shore on large lakes. Learn, and practice, self-rescue techniques such as kayak rolling or boat re-entry. Be attentive to weather conditions. Don't paddle alone. Be visible to powerboats. Be careful in fog. Carry an emergency kit. Know your limits. Be constantly aware of your surroundings. Take a course in safety, because what you don't know can hurt you.

continued on page 8

You never know what you might see while paddling this spring...

By Chuck Horbert

As we paddled up the river, I saw my wife turn around in her kayak and give me the "slow down and be quiet" signal. "Do you hear that?" she asked. And I did; the sound of splashing water, as if it was flowing down rapids. But I knew of no rapids on this river, and the sound seemed to be coming from the swamp to our right...not from the channel upstream. As we slowly paddled further upstream, we realized that the splashing sounds were now coming from both sides of the channel. That is when I first guessed what might be the cause.



Photo by Chuck Horbert

An impressive pile of branches might be a home

Sure enough, around the next bend, rising two feet above the water surface, was a large beaver dam. The

continued on page 2

Big changes on two Rhode Island rivers

By Bruce Hooke

Rivers are always changing. After a flood, visit a river you know well and you may be surprised at the gravel bars that have appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, or disappeared as if they never existed. Experienced river paddlers know this well and are especially alert for changes at the start of the paddling

season since winter storms and spring runoff are especially good at rearranging rivers. Trees down in and across the river are probably the most common change but rocks and even entire river channels can easily be moved, especially in larger floods.

continued on page 6

In this Issue:

- Paddle 2011 events 3
- Subscribe to Trail Mix. 7
- Paddle 2011 map 4
- Dear Captain Canoe 8

You never know

continued from page 1

beavers must have started right in the channel but, since water levels in the swamp on either side were not very much higher than in the river, they must have had to continuously extend the dam to either side and downriver as the dam got higher. We estimated that this particular dam was easily over 150 feet long.

Welcome to the new reality of paddling in Rhode Island. Twenty years ago, it was rare indeed to see any evidence of beaver on Rhode Island rivers. Now it is equally rare to canoe or kayak down any river, with the possible exception of the urban Blackstone River, without at least seeing beaver-chewed trees or branches alongside the channel. And it has become pretty common to have to paddle or carry over beaver dams that have been built across the channels.

Although it is not clear how long beaver had been gone from Rhode Island, they first started reappearing in the mid 1970's in the Moosup River watershed. By 1982, there were still less than a dozen colonies, all still located within the Moosup River watershed. Today they are found in nearly every major watershed in the

state, even that of the Blackstone River, although all of the 20+ active colonies in this watershed are found in the Branch, Chepachet, Clear and Nipmuc River sub-watersheds. Statewide, there are well over 100 active colonies, most tucked out of site in relatively inaccessible stream systems deep in the woods.

These semi-aquatic mammals are best known for their ability to build dams across rivers and streams, which they do to maintain and regulate consistent water levels. This in turn provides them access to food and protection from predators. Their ability to alter the landscape so dramatically also provides habitat for a number of other wildlife species as well. For this reason, they are often called a "keystone species."

Beavers are herbivores, eating a wide variety of non-woody aquatic plants, as well as the stems, leaves and bark of a number of shrubs and trees. They must constantly gnaw at hardwood trees to file down their teeth, which are constantly growing. While they will usually cut down small saplings, they have been known to successfully gnaw

down large mature trees as well. The next time you have to get around or through a tree fallen across a river, get



Photo by Jim Cole

Navigating over a beaver dam requires great balance

out and look at its base...it may not have been felled by the wind!

And from a paddler's perspective, while having to climb over a dam may be a minor inconvenience, the dams also provide deeper water and more consistent flow in many rivers that we paddle.

And that is in fact what my wife and I found that day. We climbed over the dam (they are usually quite sturdy, and will easily support your weight), and were able to paddle upstream much farther than we ever had been able to before. And about a half mile upstream, we came upon the beginnings of another dam. Happy to have enjoyed seeing evidence of an active colony, we turned around and headed back downstream.



In the stillness of a damed river, a beaver's tail splash is easily heard

Don't miss an issue of Trail Mix:

Calendar of Events for Paddle 2011: River Stories

The waterways of southern New England tell a rich story of human and natural events. This summer the RI Blueways Alliance (Blueways) will help celebrate some of these stories with a series of events by local watershed groups and outfitters. Most of these are easy paddles suitable to all levels. Everyone is invited to enjoy a couple of hours on the water and learn a little something about these beautiful natural and historic areas which are so close to home.

Things to remember:

- All events require advanced registration.
- Bring your own boat unless stated that rentals are available.
- All participants must wear life vests (PFDs) when on the water. PFDs must be worn in the manner intended by the manufacturer. Most groups do not allow self inflating life jackets.
- It's a good idea to bring snacks, water, sunscreen and insect repellent.
- For more details go to www.exploreri.org or contact the organizers of the events.

Salt Ponds Spring Paddle Green Hill Pond

1 Sat., June 4: The Salt Ponds Coalition (www.saltpondscoalition.org) invites everyone to paddle Green Pond on the South Kingstown/Charlestown border and learn how this much loved pond became so degraded. Local experts will discuss many topics concerning the pond, including environmental issues, local history, and steps being taken to improve the water quality. This event is free, but donations to the Abby Auckerman Scholarship Fund are appreciated. Meet at the Ram Island Road parking lot, off Matunuck Schoolhouse Road, Charlestown at 8:30 a.m. Return by noon. Contact Mark Bullinger, 401.322.3068 or mbullinger@gmail.com.

Native Historical Use of the River

2 Sat., June 4: This two-part event, sponsored by both the Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum (www.tomaquagmuseum.com) and the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (www.wpwa.org), will introduce participants to native

history using historic artifacts and the living river. Participants will start at the museum in Exeter to view displays and learn about the history of the Narragansett Indians. Then they will travel down the road to WPWA to launch boats on the Wood River. Commentary on the water by both groups will cover early native use and current natural habitat of this extraordinary river. Meet at 9 a.m. at the Tomaquag Museum on Summit Road in Exeter. Fee is \$10 per person for the museum tour. Bring your own boat or rent one at WPWA for an additional \$15 per person for single person kayak. Contact Loren Spears, 401.492.9063 or lorenspears@tomaquagmuseum.com.

Discover Stand Up Paddle Boarding

3 Sun., June 5: The fun sport of Stand Up Paddling is now the fastest growing water sport on the planet. It is easy to learn and anyone can do it. One of the best parts of SUP is that you can appreciate the natural beauty around you every time you paddle. Osprey Sea Kayak Adventures (www.ospreyseakayak.com) specialize in

teaching people with no surfing or paddling experience. The two hour intro session will take place in the calm waters of the Blue Bell Cove in Portsmouth, RI, starting at 10 a.m. After the basics are covered participants will explore the cove and take advantage of this unique perspective on the water. Fee \$50, all equipment included. Contact Carl or Samantha Ladd, 508-636-0300 or ospreyseakayak@gmail.com.

Upper Wood River Paddle

4 Sat., June 11: Take a pleasant but challenging trip on the upper Wood River with biologist from Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. Meet at 9:30 a.m. at RIDEM's newly renovated Route 165 river access in Exeter, RI. The trip runs through both wild and light residential areas, with flatwater, quickwater and a couple of Class I rapids to negotiate, before ending at Wyoming Pond. Lunch stop at Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association campus, followed by one portage. Contact Chuck Horbert, 401.418.2838 or chorbert@juno.com.

Lower Woonasquatucket River Paddle

5 Tues., June 14: See downtown Providence from a new angle – by boat on the Woonasquatucket River with the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council (www.wrwc.org). Participants will meet at 5:30 p.m. at the boat launch on South Water Street (across the street from The Wild Colonial). The trip will go through Waterplace Park, under the Mall and up the river to near Atwells Avenue, then return to the start. After paddling past historic and modern buildings in the downtown area paddlers enter a wooded

continued on page 4

Subscribe Today!



Paddle 2011 events, continued

"corridor" that is a peaceful oasis in the middle of Providence! Canoes and kayaks are available through WRWC or bring your own boat. Children are welcome as long as they are accompanied by an adult. Suggested donation: \$20/person if using a WRWC boat; \$5/person if using your own boat. Contact Erik Talley, 401.481.1376 or finaltalley@gmail.com.

Ride the Tide with Buckeye Brook

6 Sat., June 18: Explore the wildlife and picturesque scenery of Buckeye Brook, a jewel within the urban city of Warwick. This paddling event, sponsored by the **Buckeye Brook Coalition** (www.buckeyebrook.org), is free and open to people with all levels of experience. Meet at the parking lot at Conimicut Point Park, near the play ground area. Registration starts at 9:30 a.m. and launch is about 10 am. Participants will hear about the 300 years of history made along this beautiful watershed. It is the home to one of Rhode Island's only natural free flowing herring runs in the state. The trip will take about 2 hours and start just prior to the incoming high tide. The event is free; bring your own canoe or kayak, refreshments, binoculars, & bug spray. Contact Paul Earnshaw, 401.739.6592, pearnshaw@cox.net.

Summer Solstice Paddle

7 Tues., June 21: Join the **Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone** (<http://blackstoneriver.org/blackstone>) for a sunset paddle along the Blackstone River on the longest day of the year. Meet at the Blackstone Valley Outfitters (www.bvori.com), Cumberland, RI at 6:30 p.m. Paddlers will leave the store and paddle down river with visits to several coves and wetlands. Enjoy a different type of nightlife in the Blackstone Valley. Personal equipment needed: headlamp, water, bug repellent. Cost: \$30/person includes boat rental or bring your own for \$10. Contact Don Martin, Don@bvori.com.

Second Annual Great Pawtuxet Paddle

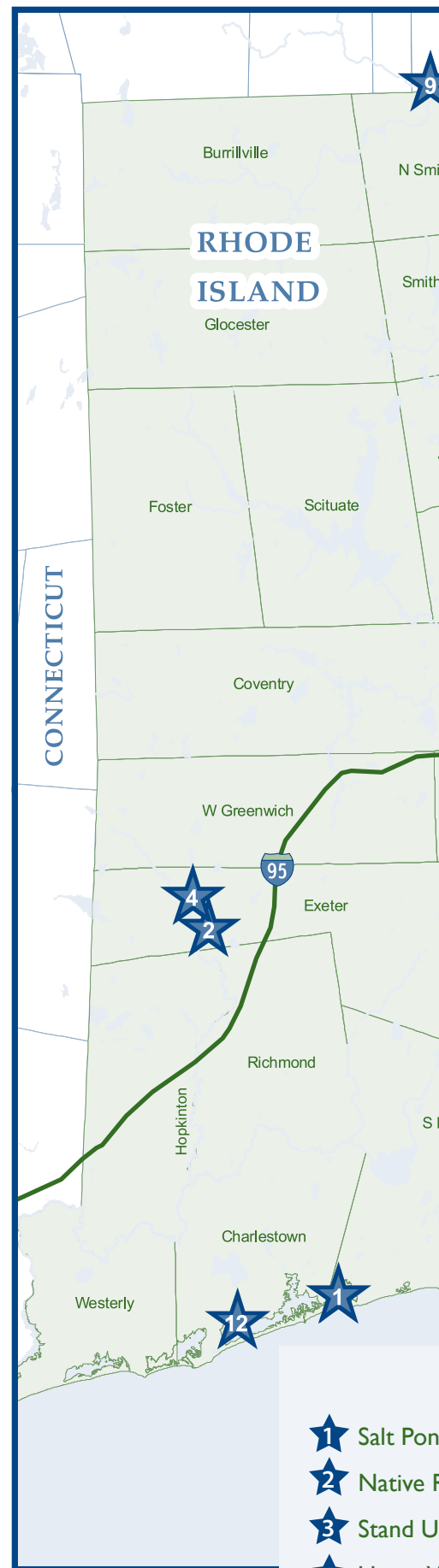
8 Sat., June 25: Join the **Pawtuxet River Authority** (www.pawtuxet.org) on their annual trip from their new Pontiac Canoe Launch. This seven mile flat water paddle, suitable for all levels, begins at the Howard Conservation Area and ends downstream at the Rhodes on the Pawtuxet parking lot. The paddle will kick off between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m.; participants should allow 2 to 3 hours paddling time. Shorter round-trips from the launch site are possible. All are welcome to return to the launch point for a B-B-Q and refreshments following the paddle. Bring your own boat and equipment or rent from nearby outfitters. A guide map and a snack will be provided. Contact Rita Holahan, 401.935.0723, rlholahan@cox.net.

Blackstone Gorge Paddle

9 Tues., July 5: Learn more about the Blackstone region on this interpretive paddle in the Blackstone Gorge with local historian and BVPC leader Erik Eckilson. The trip begins at 6:15 p.m. at the Blackstone Gorge parking area on County Street, Blackstone, MA. A limited number of canoes and kayaks can be reserved for a fee from Great Canadian. Call 508.865.0010 to reserve a boat. Sponsored by **Blackstone Valley Paddle Club** (www.ricka-flatwater.org/bvpaddlers.htm). (Membership requirements are waived for this Paddle 2011 event.) Contact Cheryl Thompson Cameron, 401.647.5887, stonefoxfarm@juno.com.

Roger Williams Historic Paddle

10 Sat., July 9: The **Ten Mile River Watershed Council** (www.tenmileriver.net) invites you on a paddle recreating the last seven miles of Roger William's historic journey that led him to founding Providence. Your guided



- 1** Salt Pond
- 2** Native Falls
- 3** Stand Upriver
- 4** Upper Valley
- 5** Woonascatucket
- 6** Buckeye Brook

continued on page 5

Paddle 2011 events, cont.

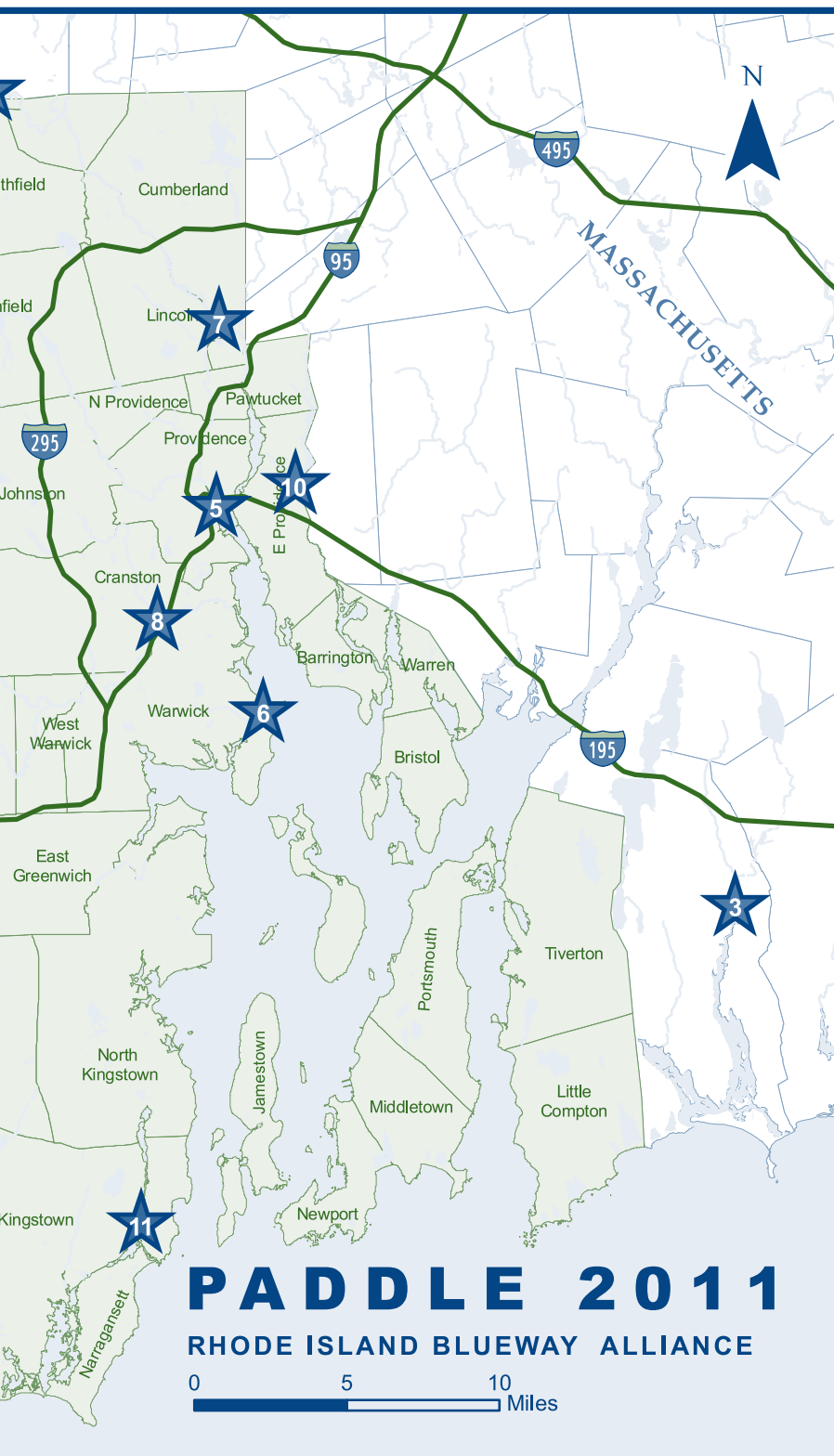
trip starts in East Providence on the Ten Mile River, with a portage into the Seekonk River and round India Point. We will end by paddling up the Providence River to the Roger Williams National where a Park Ranger will tell the story of William's paddle from Boston to Providence. This event quickly fills up so contact Keith Gonsalves early, 401.474.3813, ktggroup@aol.com.

Fourth Annual Pettaquamscutt Paddle

11 Sat., July 9: The Pettaquamscutt (Narrow) River is a unique waterway – part river, part estuary, and part fjord. Learn more about this special river on a two-hour round trip tour of the lower Narrow River. The trip features the John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge and parts of the “Narrows” with emphasis on history and shore birds of the watershed. Kayak raffle and prizes, refreshments to follow. All levels are welcome. Guided tour starts at 9:00 a.m. Cost: \$10 with own equipment, \$20 for solo kayak, \$30 tandem. Discounted rental rates are available all day for those wishing to explore the river on their own. Proceeds will benefit **Narrow River Preservation Association** (www.narrowriver.org). Contact Jason Considine, 401.317.9755, narrowriverkayaks@verizon.net.

12 Sun., July 10: Ninigret Pond is one of the premiere saltwater ponds of southern Rhode Island. Join the **Kayak Centre of Rhode Island** (www.kayakcentre.com) as they explore one of Rhode Island's undiscovered gems. Meet at 9 a.m. at Ninigret Pond. Following a short introduction about the geology and natural history of this 1700 acre pond, participants will set out in one of the stable single or double kayaks for a few hours of gentle paddling and exploration with an expert guide.

continued on page 6



Paddle 2011 Trips

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ds Sat, June 4 | 7 Summer Solstice Tues, June 21 |
| River Use Sat, June 4 | 8 Great Pawtuxet Sat, June 25 |
| p Paddle Boarding Sun, June 5 | 9 Blackstone Gorge Tues, July 5 |
| Wood River Sat, June 11 | 10 Roger Williams Historic Sat, July 9 |
| squatucket River Tues, June 14 | 11 Pettaquamscutt Sat, July 9 |
| Brook Sat, June 18 | 12 Eco Tour of Ninigret Pond Sun, July 10 |

Eco Tour of Ninigret Pond, cont.

No experience required for any of these trips. This is perfect trip for individuals, families or groups interested in the ecology of this amazing area or those just looking for a gentle kayak adventure in a terrific place. Cost: \$45 includes equipment and guide. Contact Jake Constable, 401.294.4400, funn@kayakcentre.com.



Trail Mix is the quarterly newsletter of Rhode Island Greenways.

Editors Sue Barker & Janice Velozo

Editing review by Joanne Barker, Barker Health Communications, Inc.

Contributors Jim Cole, Bruce Hooke, Chuck Horbert, Meg Kerr, Terry Meyer, and Denise Poyer

Graphic design and layout Nelson-Lee Marketing + Design e-mail: nl@nelsonlee.com (401) 423-2967

Please send your comments to Rhode Island Greenways, 31 Stanchion St., Jamestown, RI 02835 e-mail: sueb4@cox.net www. righreenways.org

Trail Mix is supported in part by funding provided through the USDOT/Federal Highway Administration's Recreational Trails Program (RTP), with approval of the RI Trails Advisory Committee. The RI Trails Program is administered through a cooperative effort of the RIDEM and RIDOT.

Rhode Island Greenways is a subcommittee of RI Bike.

Big changes

continued from page 1

These sorts of natural changes may seem big but sometimes human beings step in and make even more dramatic changes to our rivers. Historically one of the more common changes was building yet another dam, which is why there are now over 600 dams in Rhode Island! More recently there has been growing interest in taking out some of these old, unneeded dams and last year two dams were removed from Rhode Island rivers. In both cases it took many years of work before the actual removal could take place. Plans had to be worked out, sediments tested, permits obtained, and funds raised.

The first dam to come out was the Lower Shannock Falls dam on the Pawcatuck River, in the Shannock Village neighborhood in Richmond. Historically the falls here were a good site for fishing, both by Native Americans and by early settlers in Rhode Island. This all changed in the 1820's when a dam was built here to power a textile mill. The dam blocked the passage of fish such as shad and herring that used to come up the river from the salt water every year to spawn. Now, almost 200 years later, the mill is long gone and there is more

interest in opening the river back up to fish passage. So, in an effort lead by the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, this dam was removed in July of 2010. This is part of a larger project that will open up 10 miles of river to fish passage and provide migratory fish with access to 1300 more acres of spawning habitat.

In addition to opening the river up to fish passage, this section of the river can now also be paddled. What was once a required portage around the dam is now 200 feet of rapids. However, it is a challenging whitewater run so paddlers without the necessary experience and appropriate gear should still portage here. There is space to portage along the right bank of the river next to the rapids. If you are an experienced whitewater paddler, see the sidebar for more detailed guidance on paddling these rapids.

The second dam to be removed was the Paragon Dam on the Woonasquatucket River in Providence. Again the primary goal of this dam removal was restoring fish passage. One dam below Paragon and two above had already been bypassed with fish ladders to allow fish such as shad and herring to come up the river to spawn. However, the two fish ladders above Paragon were essentially useless without a way for fish to get past Paragon Dam, so dealing with Paragon was always part of the plan. For a variety of reasons removing Paragon Dam made more sense than building a fish ladder around



Photo by the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

The dam built on the Pawcatuck River originally powered a cotton mill

continued on page 7

it, so in August of 2010, in an effort spearheaded by the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council, Paragon Dam was breached and the river was allowed to run free here again.

Having Paragon Dam gone is especially helpful to canoeists and kayakers who want to paddle the lower Woonasquatucket River. Where before it was necessary to portage a quarter mile on city streets to get past Paragon Dam, it is now possible to paddle this section of river. If the rapids created by the dam removal look too challenging or too rocky there is also plenty of space to portage the hundred feet or so past the rapids on the left bank of the river. The paddling conditions in the rapids will vary greatly depending on the river level. At low water the rapids will be too shallow to paddle. At high water levels the rapids are likely to largely “wash out,” with all the rocks underwater. At intermediate water levels the rocks in the river may create some interesting challenges for paddlers. So, stop and look the rapids over before paddling down them.



Taking out the dam (left) restored the Lower Shannock Falls; now fish can travel freely on the river but paddlers need to use caution

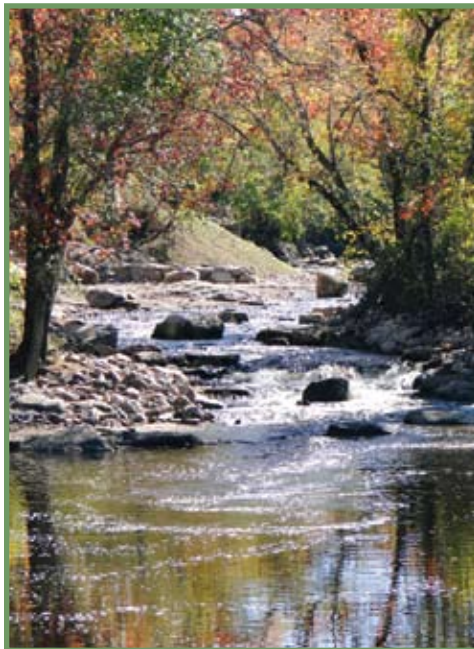
Paddling the new rapids at lower Shannock Falls

For experienced paddlers, the rapids created by the removal of the Shannock Falls Dam provide some challenging paddling. From the “Horseshoe Dam” in Shannock village, the river will generally be flatwater and quickwater for 0.4 miles. Just above the former dam site you will go down a short ledge drop (one foot) that can be easily run in most places. You will see the rapids in front of you and should head to river-right to scout them from the shore. The cleanest route swings near the river-right shore and then back out to the center of the channel, with some rock dodging. At the bottom is a very sharp, powerful 2-3 foot drop

over ledge, with a large boulder immediately below, right in your way. Do not run any of this rapid unless you are skilled in moving water, since this large boulder is a significant hazard and difficult to avoid even for a skilled paddler. Safely running this drop would require an eddy move just above the last large drop, followed by a difficult left-to-right move to avoid the boulder as you drop over the ledge. This whole rapid can be easily carried or lined along the bank on river-right. In medium to high water, the final boulder probably gives the whole rapid a Class III rating. In low water it is best to walk around or line it.

- Chuck Horbert

As you look at the rapids, think about all the work that went into taking out this dam and the dam on the Pawcatuck. As a result of that work, both fish and people can once again travel these waters.



Subscribe to Trail Mix today

A subscription to our quarterly newsletter will keep you up to date on greenway development and outdoor recreation ideas.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State, Zip _____

E-mail _____

Amount enclosed: \$15

To have *Trail Mix* mailed directly to your home or office fill out this form and mail with a check for \$15 payable to RI Bike: RI Bike, 31 Stanchion Street, Jamestown, RI 02835.

Bluewords

continued from page 1

The Blueway network is growing. Check out ExploreRI.org for on-line information on access sites on rivers, lakes and the bay. ExploreRI.org also includes links to paddle maps and local outfitters. The Blueways Alliance plans to work with watershed organizations in 2011 to develop additional paddle maps that will be accessed from ExploreRI.

The recession has been hard. And it looks like spring and summer will arrive with ever increasing gas prices. Remember that paddling is a great way to enjoy the outdoors, get some exercise, and meet great people – without spending a lot of money or using a lot of gas. Join us.

Meg Kerr

Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
and Treasurer, RI Blueways Alliance

Dear Captain Canoe,

Q Dear Captain Canoe,

My sailing friends wear inflatable life jackets. They are comfortable and easy. Can I use one for paddling?

- Uncomfortable in my PFD

A Dear Uncomfortable:

There are a couple different types of inflatables, starting with auto-inflating PFDs that use a sensor to inflate in water. A bobbin releases a pin to puncture a CO2 cartridge that in turn inflates the bladder. They can also be inflated by pulling the rip-cord or by using the oral inflation tube provided on all inflatable PFDs.

The manual inflating PFDs only have two ways to inflate. They can be inflated with a rip-cord or by using the oral inflation tube.

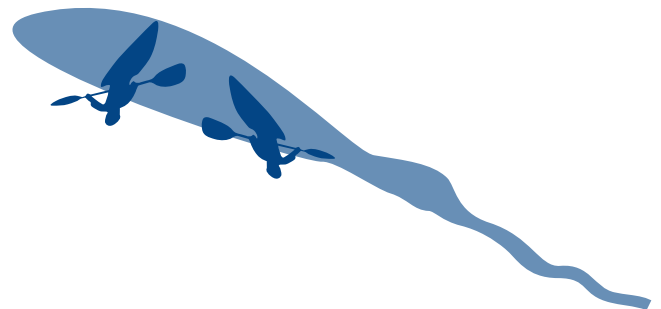


So, should a paddler get an auto-inflating PFD? My instinct tells me no. Most paddlers get wet at some point. The auto-inflating mechanism is designed to activate only if they get soaked but I can't tell you how often someone falls into the water while getting into a boat before starting a trip. Once inflated, the PFD will be inflated for the rest of the trip, which is not very comfortable. If deflated, you need a re-arm kit so it can be reactivated and used again.

The manual-inflating PFDs are a slightly better choice for kayaker and canoeist. Let's say you fall into the water and you try to swim back up to the surface to breathe. Will you remember to grab the rip-cord to inflate your PFD? Can you find your rip-cord? To me, it's just one more thing that can go making standard PFD's preferable for paddlers.

Map and Calendar of Paddle 2011 Events

Special Edition!



Rhode Island Greenways
31 Stanchion Street,
Jamestown, RI 02835
www.rigreenways.org