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WATERSHED NEWS

Finding ways to keep our water pure and plentiful

Ten Years of Community Service: 1999-2009

Spring 2009

Ten Years Serving the Community – A Look Back by Ed Edelson

On May 27, 1999, some 40 people came together for what would be the first meeting of the Pomperaug River Watershed at the Woodbury Public Library. The meeting was called to order by First Selectman Richard Crane. Also in attendance was First Selectman Al Candido. The guest speaker was the Assistant DEP Commissioner, who urged the attendees to “help people understand that living system that comprises the watershed.”

This meeting was the result of discussions that started in 1998 as part of a series of meetings on the Pomperaug Aquifer. One person asked “how the towns could work together to oversee and conserve the Aquifer resources.” As a result, the Initiative Committee was formed with Larry Pond and Marc Taylor taking the lead role; that committee would eventually lead to the founding of the Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition. Larry was the former First Selectman of Woodbury who was also teaching geology at Naugatuck Valley Community College. Larry was born and raised in Woodbury; an interview with Larry is below. Marc Taylor was a well known local physician who had recently retired and already very committed to the Southbury Land Trust and being a riparian owner in Southbury he was very concerned about the health of the rivers.

The 40 people at that meeting on May 27 were from all over the state; 13 of them are still actively involved with the Coalition in one form or another. Their recognition of the need for the towns to work together with the water companies and stakeholders was the core of why the Coalition has been so successful. (The minutes and attendees of this first meeting are posted on the website under the 10 year anniversary special page).

(continued on back page)

Reflections from Geologist on Building the Coalition’s Foundation:

An Interview with Larry Pond by Ed Edelson



One of the best aspects of my association with the Coalition has been the ability to spend time with our founding members and learn from their experience. One of the founders was Larry Pond. In early March, I sat in his living room, along with Gloria, his wife of 50 years. We spoke about their lives in and out of Woodbury and his perspective on the progress and potential of the Coalition.

Ed Edelson: Larry, how do you remember meeting Dr. Marc Taylor and starting the discussion that would lead to the founding of the PRWC?

Larry Pond: When Marc called me in December, 1998, after he was told by Jim Rousmannier that our interests coincided, the idea was irresistible. Remember, I had been concerned about water and waste water ever since I moved back to Woodbury in 1968 and became First Selectman in 1971. Early on in my tenure, I testified in Hartford that the permits for packaged sewage treatment systems were being handed out without enough site evaluation, scientific information, or maintenance agree-

ments. There were too many going in to Woodbury under the auspices of the state’s Water Resources Commission, and I felt it would impact the quality of drinking water. Back then I was able to get the First Selectman of Southbury to work with me to get a USGS study completed on the hydrology of the watershed, but the model was a bit too primitive to help in decision making. After I completed my service as Selectman in 1979 and returned to full time teaching of Geology, I was concerned about the registered diversions that were

(response and interview continues on page 5)

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Ten Years – A Look Back *(continued from Page 1)*

Looking over the minutes and the work products of that May 27th meeting, I am struck by the insight these people brought to the assessment of critical issues/pressures on the river and by the comprehensiveness of their data needs and action items list. Below is a representative sampling:

Pressures on the River	Data Needs	Implementation & Outreach
New development/existing development	Minimum stream flow requirements	Develop a conservation plan for the watershed
Aquifer and stream diversions	Existing registered diversions	Coordinate water conservation activities
Nonpoint source pollution / Impervious surfaces	Biological water quality indicators	Funding to develop plan, carry out studies, conduct long-term monitoring
Peak flows – e.g. storm events	USGS gauge information	School and general public programs
Fragmentation of riparian corridor	What is diverted out of basin	Web Site/GIS/Reports
Stream bank stabilization	Coordinate future research	
Lack of information leading to ill-advised actions	Locate and track unregulated diversions	

When looking at the full list, I am reminded of the old adage: The optimist looks at the glass as being half full, the pessimist looks at the glass as being half empty - - and the executive director says “this glass is twice as big as it ought to be in the first place.” The Coalition has accomplished so much in its first 10 years in addressing the original lists. But there is so much more that we need to do to “use science to ensure availability of high quality drinking water in the Pomperaug Watershed by protecting the river and aquifer.” I hope we can all look back in 2019 and feel as proud of our accomplishments as our founders must feel this year!



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The Pomperaug Watershed



A Drop from Your Chairman

by Dick Leavenworth

Often, an organization such as ours comes into existence because of a crisis or a near crisis. Fortunately, this is not the case in our watershed. The water in our rivers is fishable and swimmable (in fact, the same habitat conditions that make a good fishing hole also make a good, old fashioned swimming hole). The water in our aquifer system is also plentiful and drinkable. However, we do have spot problems and threats, and trends in resource use, which, if not addressed and corrected, can create major problems in the future.



Addressing these threats, the Coalition has commissioned numerous scientific studies that enable us to improve the watershed as we better understand the complexities of the threats and of the watershed system in general. For example, our joint study effort with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) on rainfall and where it goes after it hits the ground has identified methods by which ground water absorption can be increased, and has also identified areas that have the natural characteristics to achieve this. We are now getting more rainfall each year than we did in the past; this is good news, but the bad news is that it is coming on a more irregular basis. We get heavy rain events that cause flooding and stream bank erosion alternating with dry periods that cause stressful, low flow conditions in stream: a sort of feast or famine situation. But, there are ways to deal with this, and so we continue our outreach effort to educate towns and land use organizations to better understand what to do.

Likewise, our efforts to improve our stream corridors and the habitat in the streams, along the banks, and in the surrounding flood plain started with studies by Cornell University and were continued by the University of Massachusetts. These studies also provided important information on aquatic life in the streams, especially fish populations. As we move ahead we will start implementing stream improvement and restoration programs based on these studies.

One of the most important points we have come to understand is that water does not respect boundaries--neither those of individual property owners nor the political boundaries of towns, cities, and states. Water moves both above ground and below ground according to the geologic characteristics of the area. Therefore, what we do as individuals and as a community can have far-reaching effects on the water in the communities around us and vice versa.

Aiming for cooperative water protection, the Coalition during its first 10 years has been developing relationships with and between town leaders not only in the primary towns of Bethlehem, Woodbury, and Southbury, but also in Watertown, Middlebury, and Oxford, which also receive water from our watershed. Our Board of Directors and Advisory Board have members representing the major stakeholders, including the water utility companies, town planners, land use commissioners, land trust staff, Connecticut DEP staff, USGS scientists, and other major landholders. As in any relationship, communication is a key element to success. We communicate with and educate our stakeholders about fundamental watershed dynamics, and about the findings of the scientific research, to ensure that the best decisions are made when it comes to maintaining the quantity and quality of water in the Pomperaug Watershed.

As the Coalition grows, we will continue the scientific studies of our own watershed and will increasingly serve as an example for other watersheds. We will also be working to increase both communication and cooperation among our stakeholders. This will enable us to develop and implement program for the highest use and preservation of our water resources in this generation; it will also help safeguard those resources for future generations.

Larry Pond Interview (continued from Page 1)

LP (con't): being handed out without scientific information. So Marc's willingness to get the towns to work together to protect the watershed sounded like the right idea to me.

EE: How does the watershed today compare to your memories of Woodbury in the days when you were growing up?

LP: Keep in mind that I was born in Woodbury on a farm on the ridge between Roxbury and Woodbury. Most of my time was spent on the farm. As a youth, I knew very little about the geology of the watershed or for that matter about the role of the water and aquifer. In 1955 I went off to school and then on to places like West Point to teach cadets how to sport jump before turning to teaching science at Choate in Wallingford. It was while there that I did my Wesleyan Master's thesis in geology on the paleo-magnetic dating of lava flows in the Pomperaug Valley. This was just the beginning of the development of the theory of plate tectonics - a new and somewhat radical idea at that time. This work, which involved exploring rocks throughout the valley that we now call the watershed and taking core samples, gave me a new insight into my home and a special reverence for the geological forces that formed it as well as the ongoing natural system. At the core of the watershed is the river system and related aquifers. Also remember that when I moved back here, it was the beginning of the environmental movement (Earth Day was first celebrated in 1968) and the Community College where I taught was a hotbed of social, political, and environmental activism. So the real answer is that I don't recall much about the area from my youth to make a good comparison.

EE: Ok, then what do you see as different today from when the Coalition began?

LP: People are much more aware of their environment. Back then it was each man for himself and development was good, regardless of the environmental impact. People would lament that if only I-84 had been placed closer to Woodbury our properties would be worth more. But now people are asking if their lives would be better off with so much development while recognizing a high quality environment is related to their quality of life.

EE: Looking back on the first 10 years of the PRWC, what is your impression?

LP: Amazing. We have such a strong history of accomplishments and achievements. But honestly, most of that was because of Dr. Marc Taylor and his ability to convince people to work together and to continue to move forward. I personally have enjoyed meeting with people on watershed issues. And I feel very good about the amount of personal educating I have done--I guess they now call that Outreach. The point is that I am most proud of the one-on-one and group talks that I have been able to give, sharing my knowledge and understanding of what is truly important about this watershed with my friends and neighbors throughout the watershed.

EE: And what about the future of the Coalition?

LP: After much reflection I see that each problem solved becomes the start of the next problem. So there will always be more for the Coalition to do. Bottom line is that the availability of clean water will become a more and more major issue for the residents, governments, and businesses in the watershed. The Coalition is the best game in town for making sure we address those issues with as much scientific information in the hands of as many decision makers as possible. That in itself is the best step forward.

PRWC's Major Milestones:
 Ten Years of Community Service

