

THE FRIENDS OF LAKE WARNER AND THE MILL RIVER

2018 FALL / WINTER NEWSLETTER

General Store and Corn Mill in Winter, early 1900's



Greetings from the Chair, Kevin Skelly

Dear Friends,

I would like to take a moment of your time to introduce myself. I am the new chairperson of the board of directors of FoLW, as of our annual meeting on July 3. I have a long appreciative acquaintance with Lake Warner, going back to the early eighties or so. My wife Deborah and I now live on River Drive, about 200 yards from the edge of the lake, as we have for almost 25 years. It's fair to say our children grew up on and around Lake Warner, fishing, paddling, and observing wildlife in a fairly natural setting, the likes of which many children today, sadly in my opinion, don't have access to. It's also fair to say that I owe a lot to this lake and its environs, for contributing so much to my family.

We have also watched, over the decades, Lake Warner change. We see a lake that seems to be slowly filling in. Eutrophication is the name I have learned for it. Personally, I hope it's not wrong to think that children over the next decades, even into the still distant next century, would have the opportunity to grow and learn in such an environment.

I've been aware of the activities of FoLW over the past several years, and have been interested in joining the group, even though I don't know much about the biological processes underlying these changes this intrepid group has been struggling with. Lake Warner also exists in a political context, involving the town of Hadley, and organizations at the local, state, regional and national levels that I can't even keep straight at this point. Our Executive Director Jason, and the members of the board are bringing me up to speed on the many interests at play. Meanwhile, we all live around the lake, thrive by it, and affect it ourselves. Our lake lives in a complex environment.

But it lives. With the dam repair complete, we know the lake is not threatened with immediate abandonment. So now, what kind of lake do we want to have? That's the question the board is now grappling with. And how will we get there? And so, there is much to be done.

What I hope to bring to the FoLW board is basically to build strength. It's like a weightlifting program. We have a good team with diverse talents and a passion for the health and beauty of the lake. We have a healthy network of interested neighbors, extending to the surrounding communities and local and state officeholders. We need to bulk up on those muscles to develop the means to make real choices about the health of the lake. To be able to ensure monitoring; to keep the invasive water chestnuts from taking over; to address the excess nutrients flowing in to the lake; to address areas where native species are taking over.

That seems like a lot. But I'm optimistic that over time, we can have an effect. My son, who spent more of his childhood on Lake Warner than anywhere else, with the possible exceptions of home and school, just had a son, Hawkins. We're already calling him Hawk. I don't think it's too much to hope that he can enjoy fishing on Lake Warner someday, like his daddy did. And why not his children too?

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**Please attend a FoLW
meeting. The first Tuesday
of each month at the North
Hadley Congregational
Church: 7:00 p.m.
You'll be glad you did!**



Please make donations to:

The Friends of Lake Warner
P.O. Box 11 Hadley, MA 01035

Or go to our website:

<http://friendsoflakewarner.org/donate/>

Paddling at Lake Warner with Harvey Allen

by Jean Jeffries

On a quiet, balmy late August evening, Harvey Allen and I car-topped our kayaks to nearby Lake Warner and put in at the boat ramp just on the other side of the road bridge from the recently renovated dam. I was looking forward to this late afternoon paddle, not only because I enjoy Lake Warner in all weathers and at all seasons, but also because Harvey is an ideal companion on the water. Full of knowledge about nature, animal behavior, and local history, he offers entertaining and enlightening stories as we make our way around the pond.

Before we had paddled fifty yards, we came upon a great blue heron, which stood—a grey statue—at the edge of the water as we floated by. This was a treat, since it's easy to spook these gigantic birds, causing them to take to the air, looping away in slow flight on their enormous pterodactyl-like wings. We passed a green heron, too, hunched compactly on a bare branch beside the pond. Turtles basked on sunny logs; water lilies sported a few, last late summer blossoms. Every once in a while, a fish would jump just ahead of us. A swan swam by. A family of ducks escorted us for awhile. Birds. There are always birds to discuss when Harvey is around.

One bird we did not see was the juvenile yellow-crowned night heron someone spotted on the lake around that time (late August or early September 2018). A native of South Carolina and Florida, it was thought to have been blown off course by a hurricane, but Harvey says a yellow-crowned night heron spent the summer near Pittsfield a few years ago. In other words, finding them in our area, while rare, is not unheard of.



Harvey Allen on Lake Warner

I love how Harvey starts out by noticing how a bird or animal behaves, then goes beyond that to think about why it might behave that way. A lifelong observer of nature, Harvey understands the interactions between the lake and the insects, animals and birds living in and around it. He spends hours watching whatever catches his eye: dragonflies; butterflies; turtles and frogs; muskrats and beavers. I think the most compelling thing about Harvey's knowledge of nature is his enthusiasm and openness to learning more, and encouraging others to do the same. He attends lectures, slide shows, and events. He goes on butterfly trips and leads birding walks. He cheerfully squeezes into back seats of small cars in order to ride hours for the chance to catch sight of an unusual bird. Each year he participates in several Christmas bird counts. Whether in his own back yard, on public lands or on trips to

a distant countries, he keeps his eyes and ears open at all times and all hours. (We live two doors down from him in South Amherst. Last month, when I told him I had heard a couple of great horned owls calling at 3 AM, he said, "Why didn't you phone me?!")

One thing Harvey likes to do when out on local ponds is to spot and pull up water chestnut, an invasive water plant. Whether we are out on Lake Warner, or Forge Pond, or another favorite body of water, Harvey and I usually end up weighed down with slippery, shiny water chestnut plants. We pull them up as if we are hauling in an anchor, but gently so as to get the whole plant without breaking it. We pile these on our kayaks, front and back, to dispose of when we return to shore. Tonight we were delighted not to find any water chestnuts, a good sign for the health of the pond.

As we paddled and chatted, the sun began to set, making the scene magical with its rosy glow. We pulled ourselves into the shelter of a tree shaped like an umbrella overhanging the bank, a perfect bird blind. Harvey had made us egg salad sandwiches, which we enjoyed as we watched the changing light. Five great egrets flew in one by one, and landed for the night in the low branches of a half-submerged dead tree nearby. As we watched them settle and preen, the loud slap of a beaver tail broke the silence, like someone tossing a large flat rock into the water.

Once we started moving again, the beaver kept us company from a safe distance. Every once in a while, as if to remind us of its presence, it would slap its tail again. We paddled as far as we could toward the east end of the pond, finally quitting at the small beaver dam at the narrow inlet. Turning, we let ourselves drift downstream, watching the water grasses as they waved beneath us in the shallow places, and enjoying the late summer flowers along the banks.

Just as the light began to die, Harvey caught sight of a muskrat, swimming away from us, leaving a small wake. It disappeared into the reeds. When we paddled toward where it had disappeared, we saw it again, briefly, before it dove out of sight.

Recreational use postings at the Boat Ramp

by Jason Johnson

This summer we had an unprecedented number of elevated E. coli bacteria readings at the Lake Warner Boat ramp. Over the 16 weeks sampled, six of those had E.coli levels over 575cfu/100mL high enough to warrant posting at the boat ramp that the lake was not safe for swimming or boating. Increased rainfall creates runoff that raises the bacteria count in the Mill River and subsequently Lake Warner. You can view the sampling data for the Mill River and the Lake Warner Boat Ramp at the Is it Clean? website at <http://connecticutriver.us/site/content/sites-list> or Scan the image at the boat ramp with your smartphone/QR code reader to see recent bacteria results for this site.

Best Management Practices at the UMASS Horse Farm by Jason Johnson

Portions of the Mill River in the Connecticut River watershed are impaired by nutrients and pathogens, some of which are related to agricultural activities. This project which was funded by Massachusetts Department of Environment Protection aimed to minimize non-point source pollution from several farms located in critical watersheds and to conduct on-site and off-site educational training for various farms. The project accomplished several farm conservation plans and implemented various appropriate BMPs. Through this project several hands-on educational opportunities were provided to various livestock communities in the watershed.

Implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) at the UMASS Horse Farm between 2012 and 2015 was made possible through a 319 grant from MassDEP. These practices may be responsible for a measurable improvement in water quality at the local tributary. Phosphorus measurements from the Horse Farm Brook site were reduced by half in 2017 from 2016 levels. BMPs implemented included sacrifice areas, vegetated swales, excluding animals from wetland areas, reseeding and improving pastures and collecting manure from sacrifice areas. These improvements were made to reduce nutrient runoff and nutrient leaching, as well as nutrient/pathogen loading and runoff. Pollutant contribution reduction from the farm was calculated using a loading per Animal Unit. 3,942 lbs. of nitrogen, 1,642.5 lbs. of phosphorus, and 6.13×10^{12} organisms of fecal coliform are now being abated annually at the UMASS Horse Farm due to the improvements there. This should result in a substantial improvement in water quality in the tributary running through the Horse Farm upstream of its confluence with the Mill River.

If you are interested in UMASS Extension Services for pasture management, mud management, nutrient/manure management, cover cropping, or soil health, contact Masoud Hashemi by phone-413-545-1843 or via email masoud@umass.edu.

Rare Avian Visitor to Lake Warner this Fall

(species information provided by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Missouri Department of Conservation)

This September birders from all over the area were flocking to the Mt. Warner Road bridge to try and get a glimpse of a juvenile Yellow crowned night heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) that was observed at Lake Warner. While not as slender as a typical heron, the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron's smooth purple-gray colors, sharp black-and-white face, and long yellow plumes lend it a touch of elegance. Adults are gray with dark markings on back and wings; head black, with creamy white cheek patch and crown. Eyes red. Whitish head plumes develop in breeding season. Immatures dark brown with white streaks and spots on the feathers; they are less streaked and spotted than immature black-crowned

night-herons; the bill is all dark and heavier than that of the black-crowned. Legs are longer than the black-crowned's, with the feet plus the lower legs extending well beyond the tail in flight. Voice is a short quoc, higher but otherwise somewhat resembling the black-crowned's call. Length: 24 inches (tip of bill to tip of tail).



Yellow-Crowned Night Heron

A rare summer time visitor and rare summer resident, usually nesting in pairs near streams, marshes, and wooded wetlands. At night they forage in shallow water, and may occasionally be seen at dawn or dusk before they retreat into nearby vegetation. They forage at all hours of the day and night, stalking crustaceans in shallow wetlands and wet fields. Their diet leans heavily on crabs and crayfish, which they catch with a lunge and shake apart, or swallow whole. They're most common in coastal marshes, barrier islands, and mangroves, but their range extends inland as far as the Midwest. Other prey include worms, fish, leeches, insects, and other small animals they can capture and swallow. Along coasts, they have a greater variety of crustaceans to eat.

Uncommon transient and uncommon postbreeding wanderer statewide. As summer resident, uncommon in Massachusetts. Populations seem secure, though destruction of wetland habitats poses a real threat. Before conservation laws were enacted, these birds were hunted for meat and for their beautiful, graceful plumes.

This species ranges from the coasts of Brazil, Central America, and the Caribbean year-round, but for summer breeding expands its range north into Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana, and along the East Coast into New England.



Fall Lake Exploration with Hitchcock Center

Fall Lake Exploration by Kevin Skelly

On September we had the opportunity to spend some time on a seasonably cool Sunday morning with Ted Watt, Naturalist and Environmental Educator at the Hitchcock Center in Amherst, and Victoria Shaw, Executive Director of the Morse Hill Outdoor Education Center in Shutesbury. In all, there only seemed to be one complaint. It could have been longer. We meandered down through and around the first several coves, before we realized two hours had elapsed, and it was time to return to the landing.

The event began with a little canoe handling and safety training by Victoria, and we all found our way into the canoes and kayaks and paddled off. Ted led the way, pointing out various species of plants, birds and critters, with the help of some knowledgeable others, including Jason Johnson, FoLW Executive Director. Ted hinted at more such outings in the future:

“Lake Warner is unique to the Valley due to its extensive marshlands and its proximity to many users. During our canoe trip we saw a number of waterfowl and got up close and personal with some interesting wetland plants including one of my favorite trees, the Black Gum or Tupelo. There is always so much to learn in an aquatic environment and it is easy to explore marshes and shallow water species at the Lake. Come join us on one of our outings!”

We're on board with that. We look forward to more such outings in the future.

Valley Time Trade helps out FoLW

by Michele Morris-Friedman

In October the Friends of Lake Warner consulted with Flavia Musinsky through Valley Time Trade, a non-profit organization that facilitates unpaid exchange of services throughout Western Massachusetts.

Flavia has an MBA in business process improvement and is the Member Acquisition Specialist for the Girl Scouts of the USA. She gave us valuable advice about data management, community outreach, social media and recruiting volunteers. Flavia was a pleasure to work with and we highly recommend her services to other organizations. If your group or business would like to consult with Flavia email her at flavia.musinsky@gmail.com.

A nod also to Valley Time Trade, which allowed our small group to get advice without breaking the bank. If you want to find out more about VTT look at their website, <https://valleytimetrade.wordpress.com>.

Out in the Community by Michelle Morris-Friedman

This past October 21st FoLW had an information booth at the 10th (and final) Annual Kestrel 5K for Farmland. We brought educational materials and T-shirts and displayed a boat that an FoLW member has been developing for aquatic vegetation management.

As those of you who ran, walked or visited know, that Sunday was extremely windy and cold. The volunteers at the table all survived but one of our tents did not. We thank Kestrel for hosting and supporting us. We also thank everyone who volunteered at the booth and those visitors who braved the weather to visit with us. Special kudos to those people brave enough to remove mittens and gloves in order to sign our contact list.



Aquatic Vegetation Management Boat

Autumn

The morns are meeker than they were,

The nuts are getting brown;

The berry's cheek is plumper,

The rose is out of town.

The maple wears a gayer scarf,

The field a scarlet gown.

Lest I should be old-fashioned,

I'll put a trinket on.

— Emily Dickinson



Fall Sunset on Lake Warner

Winter on Lake Warner by Ginger Goldsbury



For those of us who love to kayak, canoe and fish on the Lake in the spring, summer and fall, it may feel sad to have winter on its way. However, the lake gets beautiful frozen in the winter which allows us to skate, cross country ski when it snows, stroll up the pond on a nice sunny day and recently, I have seen more people playing ice hockey.

You may or may not know about the wonderful fishing derby that Rich Blajda runs each year. There are lots of people, children and adults enjoying the food, fishing and just playing on the ice. This usually takes place around the time of the Super Bowl - weather and ice depth permitting.

I mentioned ice hockey. Andy Sunskis is the major organizer of games for the Pioneer Valley Pond Hockey group. I asked him to write something for this article. this is what he had to say.

There is really something special about spending a few hours, or the whole day outside in the winter. Getting out and staying active during the coldest time of the year when most people don't to go out is exactly when you'll see us skating and playing pond hockey!

If you love the outdoors, nature, winter, skating, hockey, or love it all, then come skate with us! We are a very beginner-friendly group and we are always looking for more people to skate with, whether or not you are an experienced skater

or hockey player! We are also looking for more people to help with shoveling and maintaining the ice after snow or bad weather. Depending on the weather and conditions of the ice, we either skate at Lake Warner in Hadley or we sometimes skate at Puffers Pond in Amherst.

Follow us on our Facebook page (Pioneer Valley Pond Hockey) to stay updated with where we will be each weekend through the winter. Generally we meet on Sundays, but sometimes during the week as well depending on people's days off. We would love to have you join, whether you just want to hang out and watch, help clear off the rink, or join us for a fun game! If you have any questions, you can contact me through the Facebook page!

There is already a thin layer of ice on the pond!!! Get your skates sharpened because we will be skating very soon!!!

Skating, fishing, strolling on the ice experiencing the winter birds and animals, the pond is wonderful even in the cold.



Blue Winter

One shade of blue for water, one for ice,
Another blue for shadows over snow.
The clear or cloudy sky uses blue twice-
Both different blues. And hills row after row
Are colored blue according to how far.
You know the bluejay's double-blur device
Shows best when there are no green leaves to show.
And Sirius is a winterbluegreen star.

— Robert Francis



Rudy Hahn Harvesting Ice on Lake Warner, 1935

Annual Campaign at UMASS Amherst

Do you work at UMass Amherst? Donations to Friends of Lake Warner be made through the UMass Amherst Community Campaign. <https://www.umass.edu/umacc/>

To donate online, go to the UMACC website and sign in. On the Charitable Organizations page, search for Friends of Lake Warner. Add FoLW to your Donation Basket, then click on Donate to choose the payment terms. To use the paper form, enter Friends of Lake Warner for the name, and use the code, 15374.

Please Renew your membership to FoLW or become a new member for 2019!

Your membership dues help keep our organization running! Your tax-deductible donations help fund lake exploration outings, invasive plant harvesting, water quality monitoring, producing publications and outreach activities. We are preparing for aquatic plant management to make the lake more accessible for fishing and boating. This management technique requires permitting and hiring of a commercial harvesting machine. It is estimated to cost twenty to thirty thousand dollars to adequately address the lake's aquatic plant overgrowth. We need your support to make this happen. We are very grateful for membership dues, but want you to know that you can contribute in other ways. Members and friends are needed to help carry out our goals!

The Friends of Lake Warner and the Mill River with your help and support accomplished the following in 2018;

- Tested for dissolved oxygen, temperature and water transparency in the lake at selected points on a bi-monthly basis.
- Sampled E. coli bacteria weekly in the lake and river between June and October. Made results available online and posted the boat ramp to keep the public aware of water quality conditions.
- Sampled phosphorus in the lake and 5 tributaries bi-monthly between June and October.
- Posted signage and welcomed the public to our property on Stockbridge Street.
- Coordinated volunteers to remove over 650 pounds of water chestnut from the lake. FoLW sponsored and ran two public pulling events at the lake this summer.
- Produced two newsletters that were mailed or send electronically to over 200 members and supporters.
- Participated in several public events like the Sustainability Festival, the Asparagus Festival and the 5K for Farmland to educate and inform the public about the lake and our work.
- Advocated and helped advertise for workshops put on by the Hampden Hampshire Conservation District on Soil Erosion and Nutrient Management in the Mill River watershed. FoLW continues to work with the HHCD on community education and collaboration to improve water quality in the Mill River Watershed.
- Advocated and advertised for conservation workshops put on by UMASS Agricultural Extension Services in the Mill River Watershed.
- Exploring Lake Warner in Canoes with The Hitchcock Center and the Morse Hill Outdoor Education Center.



Please Join The Friends of Lake Warner and The Mill River. We Need You!

We are a non-profit, citizen community organization. • Members receive a bi-annual newsletter. • Members are invited to participate in our activities, workdays and social events. • Your tax-deductible dues support our efforts to preserve, clean and maintain our lake. • Your dues also support the printing cost of our brochures and newsletters.

I want to join

☐ Individual membership - \$25 ☐ Family membership - \$35 ☐ Sustaining membership - \$100

Name _____ Phone _____

Street Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Email _____

Please make checks payable to: Friends of Lake Warner (FOLW) Checks should be mailed to: Friends of Lake Warner, PO Box 11, Hadley, MA 01035