

# THE FRIENDS OF LAKE WARNER AND THE MILL RIVER



## NEWSLETTER

SPRING / SUMMER 2018

### Working Together to Have a Healthy River and Lake

By Jason Johnson, Executive Director

Is there anything that cannot be accomplished by working together? The Mill River watershed works by providing both a valuable supply of agricultural products and habitat for wildlife to thrive in. Over the centuries, human development of the landscape has affected the ecology and productivity of our rivers and lake. The urbanization of the landscape has caused the loss of wildlife habitat in the valley. Mill River valley farmers are stewards of this working landscape. We are fortunate to have over 12,000 acres of farmland preserved in Hampshire County. The cooperation between landowners and conservation organizations is key to the success of restoration efforts. These conservation efforts are making our streams healthier and reduce the impact of sediment and nutrients entering the lake. In this issue you will find out about the Hampden/Hampshire Conservation District's Healthy Watershed Initiative Grant and how they are working with farmers in the Mill River watershed. Learn about Amherst College students sampling aquatic insects in the Mill River. Finally we have a great article by local fisherman Pete Schoenberger about the opportunities Lake Warner provides to fish in this productive ecosystem

As we welcome in this spring we are also celebrating the growth our organization and the new responsibilities we have as dam owners. Please join us on June 16th for a celebration of the transfer of ownership of the dam to the Friends. There are many new activities and projects happening on the lake. We hope to see you this spring and summer, please come and join us to explore the lake for fun or volunteer when we are working to remove water chestnut. These are all great excuses to get out on the water and enjoy this wonderful place. From working farms to recreational activities, the Mill River and Lake Warner are buzzing with activity this spring and summer. I look forward to seeing you out there.



### Lake Warner: Great Fishing for Everyone

By Pete Schoenberger

People who like to fish like to talk about fishing. One of the things they say is that when you start fishing, you just want to catch a fish, even a tiny one. As you get better at fishing, you want to catch a lot of fish. Then you want to catch big fish. Finally, the goal is to catch one really big fish. Lake Warner is one of those treasured fishing spots where it's possible to do any or all of these things, even in a single fishing session.

I grew up in Amherst and have fished Lake Warner for 50 years. In 1969 I was in junior high school and learned the gentlemanly art of fly fishing from John Fuller, a young man who worked in the school's Audio-Visual Department. John, now a locksmith, led students on bicycles to local fishing spots and "North Hadley Pond" as we called it, was a favorite. There were wild stories of huge largemouth bass, dangerous snapping turtles, and a lake bottom so soft and muddy it would suck you down if you weren't

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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/>

careful. We parked our bikes on the shady path that leads to the eastern end of the lake. Spreading out along the steep shoreline, we cast Arbogast Hula Poppers with rubber-band legs that looked like small frogs and deerhair bass bugs that looked like baby mice. Bass eat anything they can fit in their cavernous mouths. We learned to catch the same kinds of fish that still live in Lake Warner: largemouth bass, chain pickerel, bluegill, pumpkinseed sunfish, white crappies, yellow perch, white perch, bullhead catfish, and even the occasional stocked trout or an enormous carp that enters the lake from the Mill River upstream.



Any fishing technique works here: you can cast small lures like Rapala minnows and inline spinners with spinning gear, fling heavier Jitterbugs and bass jigs with baitcasting gear, flick streamers and bass bugs with a light fly rod, or even swing a weighted and baited handline.

### Lake Warner Hotspots

Beginners might start fishing at the bridge by the boat ramp on the western side of the lake. Bait a small hook with a worm, a ball of bread, or one of the many artificial scented baits sold in stores. Drop or cast your line and let it settle on the bottom and there's no telling what you might catch. Just be considerate to drivers crossing the narrow bridge, and to boaters using the paved boat ramp next to the bridge, and be sure to admire the nice work on the dam that's visible from the downstream side of the bridge.

With a kayak or canoe your odds of catching fish on Lake Warner increase greatly. You can quietly sneak up on (and catch) fish from one end of the lake to the other. You don't have to wait for the fish to come to you. And you get some exercise. Even an inexpensive recreational kayak or canoe will work: you don't need fancy rod holders, electric motors, or storage compartments. You will see some gas-powered boats on Lake Warner but a motor hurts more than helps since its protruding lower unit doesn't allow you into the

shallowest areas without raising the motor and then you just get splattered with muddy water. (I know this from personal experience since I used to fish Lake Warner from a 13-foot Boston Whaler with a 20-horsepower motor). I carry my fishing gear and personal items in a small nylon zippered lunch cooler, and I bring a paddle, Personal Flotation Device (PFD or "life jacket"), and a large plastic trash bag for the discarded trash or invasive water chestnut plants that I often bring home instead of fish. I don't eat the fish I catch in Lake Warner, but only because I prefer to eat fish I catch from saltwater. Fish usually taste like the water they live in and I find freshwater fish taste muddy and gross, other than stocked hatchery trout or maybe a yellow perch caught through the ice in winter.

With a kayak or canoe, you can access the lake's best fishing spots or even discover one of your own. Launching from the boat ramp, you immediately find several downed trees in the middle of the channel that are worth a few casts. Sometimes panfish school around these structures and aggressively chase lures. As the lake widens, you can go left towards the white church (I call it "behind the island"), straight ("in front of the island") or right (to access eastern parts of the lake).

The largest fish I've seen and caught in Lake Warner are found around the tiny narrow island where you'll see an old abandoned cabin. There are downed trees that hold decent 1-2 pound bass "in front" and dark shady undercut banks "behind" where giant bass up to 10 pounds cruise the lily pads and make huge wakes. I like to fish in a fun, sporting way that gives the fish a chance to escape using ultralight spinning gear. My 4.5 foot St. Croix rod is matched with a small Mitchell 308 reel spooled with 4-pound test monofilament line that I find is getting thinner and harder to tie knots with as my eyes get older. But I'm convinced that using lighter line leads to hooking more fish – even if some get away.

The weed beds east ("to the right") of the island are also good fishing spots, especially for large pickerel up to 24 inches long and the tasty yellow perch they're feasting on. Don't be afraid to paddle way in towards the shoreline in search of fish. As a general rule, there are always more fish around the edges of Lake Warner than in the middle. I often paddle several hundred feet across weedy patches just to flip a single cast into an open area that may be only a foot from the shore. Big fish like shallow water since that's where their food is.

Continuing east down the lake, I skip much of the steep southern shoreline ("on my right") where despite numerous downed trees and submerged stumps I have never caught many fish. Of course this is a self-fulfilling prophesy since I don't fish this area as intensely, so maybe you'll have better luck there. The eastern end is more shallow, warmer, and a bit clearer in color and relatively free of weeds at least early in the season since it's closer to the source of inflow. You can follow the Mill River back through the meandering weeded channel right up to a low beaver dam that was there last year and I assume still is. In high water, you can carry your boat over the tiny dam and continue paddling upstream into the woods for some ways.

I prefer the solitude of this end of the lake and often see blue herons, osprey, bald eagles, red-tailed hawks, pintail, wood and mallard ducks, nasty noisy swans, kingfishers, and even a river otter many years ago. Vehicles are not allowed offroad here, but you can use one of the many kayak/canoe transporters with plastic wheels and straps or bungies to access the water from the road.

If you have never fished, or if your children, nieces, nephews, godchildren or grandchildren have never fished, I recommend Lake Warner as a pretty spot to learn without any observers. (It's well-known that you only screw up in fishing when someone is watching you, especially if they have a camera.) If you are an accomplished fisher, you will find a wide variety of decent-sized and sometimes trophy fish in Lake Warner to reward your abilities. I have been broken off (line snapped) by some large bass that I saw with dropping jaw but was not able to control before they found liberation in the weeds. Adults need a fishing license, now available online, but children don't: search the state website [mass.gov](http://mass.gov) for more information. If you go early in the morning or later in the evening you will usually catch many more fish than in the heat of the day. The exception is early spring and late fall when you want the heat of mid-day to stimulate the fish into feeding..

One of my favorite self-deprecating fishing slogans is that fishing can be described as "a jerk on one end of a line waiting for a jerk on the other end." If you're a fishing jerk like me, one of the best places to wait is right here in Hadley at Lake Warner. Tight lines!

*Pete Schoenberger is 61, lives in Hadley, and fishes every chance he gets. He used to fish sometimes when he was supposed to be working, which may explain why he isn't working now. Also, this article would have been longer but Pete decided to go fishing instead. Contact Pete at [petefishes@hotmail.com](mailto:petefishes@hotmail.com) or look for his red Old Town Loon 111 kayak on Lake Warner.*



### New Signage Goes Up at the Peninsula

We are excited to welcome the public to the new Friends property off Stockbridge Road that provides access to the back of the lake. There is new signage there that reminds users to park on the street and not drive down to the lake as the road has become severely rutted. Thanks for your cooperation, enjoy this beautiful property!

### HHCD's Healthy Watershed's Initiative Grant

By Sarah Rippere, Conservation Planner, Hampshire Hampden Conservation District

The Hampden-Hampshire Conservation District (HHCD) serves landowners and communities in Hampden and Hampshire counties in the conservation and management of natural resources; farmland, woodland, and wildlife management; and farmland preservation. Community members are invited to participate in the annual plant sale, educational workshops, and farm tours offered by HHCD as well as attendance at their monthly meetings (meeting schedule available online at: [www.PioneerValleyConservation.com](http://www.PioneerValleyConservation.com)).

The HHCD has been awarded a Healthy Watershed Initiative Grant by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs, along with 7 other conservation districts state-wide, to fund local work in resource conservation and enhancing environmental quality. Specifically, the HHCD grant project is located in Hampshire and Franklin counties and focuses on enhancing water quality within the Mill River watershed. The Mill River watershed covers 30 square miles and drains in to Lake Warner, a 68 -acre water body located in Hadley. The watershed includes parts of Hadley, Amherst, Shutesbury, Sunderland and Leverett

The focus of the HHCD grant project is the mitigation of adverse impacts to area water quality through the implementation of conservation measures. The project will provide outreach, education, and technical assistance to land owners and managers within the Mill River watershed to address resource concerns that impact water quality. This project will serve towards educating area residents about conservation practices and to share what is being done by the agricultural community to preserve and protect water quality. Residents of the Mill River watershed, as well as residents of Hampden and Hampshire counties, will be invited to participate in educational workshops and farm tours to encourage adoption of best management practices to enhance the health of our area's water and environment.

HHCD has also partnered with Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts

(MACD) to employ a Conservation Planner to assist producers in the watershed with the development and implementation of comprehensive farm conservation plans that will address water quality impacts from agricultural activities. All conservation planning is free, voluntary and offered as an extension of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) field office in Hadley. The USDA NRCS is a federal agency that helps America's farmers, ranchers and forest landowners conserve the nation's soil, water, air and other natural resources. The agency offers financial assistance through programs authorized under the federal Farm Bill. NRCS also provides incentives to landowners to put wetlands, agricultural land, grasslands and forests under long-term easements. All programs are voluntary and offer science-based solutions that benefit both the landowner and the environment.

## Local Conservation Projects

The Divine Brothers Partnership was awarded \$32,000 for a no till drill project. No till farming limits soil disruption that provides better pest control, healthier soil and has benefits of increased yields in production and quality. Limitation of soil disruption has additional benefits of reducing soil erosion and nutrient runoff. Congratulations to the Divine Brothers Partnership!

## Amherst College Investigates Aquatic Invertebrates in the Mill River

By Thea Kristensen, Biology Department, Amherst College



Last spring Amherst College students started a new lab exploring diversity and ecosystem health in local streams. This lab allowed students to engage in field work and actively experience the importance of studying biology within their community. The interactive and investigative nature of this stream sampling lab made it a class favorite among this year's introductory biology students. Each lab section conducted an investigation at one of the field sites in the Amherst/Pelham area. Groups of students set samplers in riffles and pools and recorded data on the specific location including substrate type, sun vs. shade, dissolved oxygen, and flow. Students compiled data to use for analysis.

Three to four weeks later, they collected the samplers from the streams and brought them back to the laboratory for students to examine. Students surveyed the organisms from the samplers and viewed them under a microscope. They identified organisms to order by examining distinguishing features while following a dichotomous key. Students then used these findings to estimate the diversity of the sites ecosystem and consider the health of the stream.

Across the sampled sites, they collected over 700 organisms from 13 orders. Some of these organisms are sensitive to environmental disturbance, which makes the presence of each an indicator of ecosystem health. Sensitive species they detected included mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies; mayflies and stoneflies were detected at all sites and caddisflies were detected at most sites. The presence of these species provides one indication that these streams may be in good health.

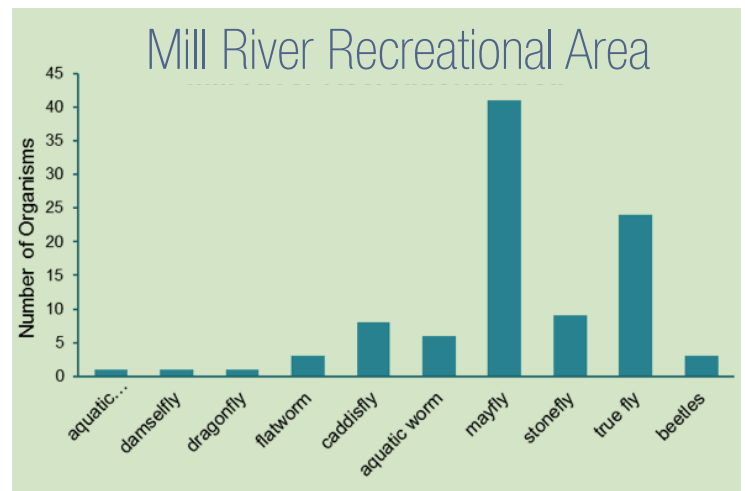
## Sustainability Festival

by Michele Morris-Friedman

For the third year in a row the Friends of Lake Warner and the Mill River tabled at the Amherst Sustainability Festival, which took place on April 14th on the Amherst Common. Several volunteers helped add to and update our contact list and educated passersby about the dam repair and our ongoing activities. We also sold a few kayak raffle tickets, which will be drawn at our transfer of the dam rights celebration on June 16th.

We are planning to table at the WGBY Asparagus Festival on the Hadley Common on June 2nd from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. We will display informational materials about the pond and about best practices for land management near bodies of water. If you would like to help FOLW, please consider volunteering to help us with the booth. It is a friendly and fun event and a great way to show your support.

We will also (drum roll here) be selling raffle tickets (\$5 for one ticket; \$20 for 5 tickets) for a Pelican kayak, to be drawn on June 16th. I am not a gambling type, and the rules preclude board members from participating in the raffle, but I'd say the odds are much better than your average raffle. You can purchase raffle tickets directly by mailing Friends of Lake Warner at PO Box 11 Hadley, MA 01053 if you are unable to attend the Asparagus Festival.



## Graphs of Organism Counts by Site

Each graph shows the number of organisms at a particular site; note for these graphs, scale of the y-axis is not equivalent.

## Kayak Raffle

We are selling raffle tickets for a Pelican kayak and paddle. The winner will be drawn at the Property Transfer Celebration on June 16th at 4pm.

Get your tickets now by sending \$5 each or 5 tickets for \$20 to Friends of Lake Warner and the Mill River, PO Box 11 Hadley, MA 01053



## Upcoming Events

### Water Chestnut scouting

**May 26**

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Paddle to the new property.

Bring your own boat,

we will have a few canoes to use.

### WGBY Asparagus Festival

**June 2**

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Hadley Common

### Property Transfer Celebration!

**June 16**

4:00 pm

Come join us on the Mt. Warner Bridge for refreshments and celebration of the transfer of the dam from Kestrel Land Trust to the Friends of Lake Warner and the Mill River.

### Water Chestnut scouting and pulling

**June 23**

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

**July 21**

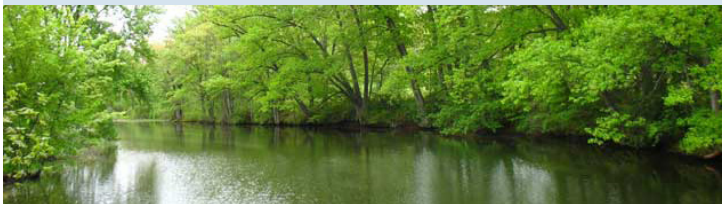
10:00 am - 2:00 pm

**August 11**

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Bring your own boat,

we will have a few canoes to use.



## Sweet May! Come Back Again

- Clarence Hawkes

Sweet May! Sweet May! Come back again;  
'Tis long since though hast smiled.  
Bring back thy gentle showers of rain,  
Thy fragrant flowerlets wild.  
Bring back the laughter of thy rills,  
The hum of drowsy bees,  
The verdant freshness of the hills,  
The bud bespangled trees.  
Bring back thy songsters' liquid flood  
Of music soft and low,  
Bring back the sweet arbutus bud  
That blossoms down below.  
Bring back each harbinger of spring.  
Of happy summer day..  
Let every voice of nature sing-  
"I would 'twas always May."  
Sweet May! Sweet May! Come back again;  
'Tis long since thou hast smiled.  
Bring back thy sweet and silent reign  
Of beauties soft and mild.  
Bring back thy converse's gentle flow;  
Those happy laughing eyes;  
Upon thy cheeks that tinted glow,  
The blush of evening skies.  
Bring back the sunshine of my heart,-  
That smile upon my face.  
Bring back each gentle winning art,  
That made thee queen of grace.  
Bring back each harbinger of bliss,  
And scatter all my fear.  
Of all the seasons, love I this,  
When thou, sweet May, art here.



## 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

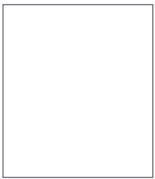
☐ Individual membership - \$25    ☐ Family membership - \$35    ☐ Sustaining membership - \$100

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



## AN ECOSYSTEM IN TRANSITION



[FriendsOfLakeWarner.org](http://FriendsOfLakeWarner.org)

Lake Warner, the Mill River, Mount Warner and North Hadley Village form a unique historical, natural and recreational environment in North Hadley, Massachusetts.