



UPPER RARITAN WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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URWA Staff Celebrates Earth Day with a Service Project Bedminster, New Jersey; April 23, 2008

It could be said that by virtue of the work they do to protect the natural resources and open spaces of the region, the staff members of the Upper Raritan Watershed Association celebrate Earth Day every day. While that is a true statement, it isn't often that the whole group gets together to work an entire day on one project. This year, they decided it would be a great idea for everyone to shut off their computers at the office, put on grubby clothes and head out to some of the special places in the watershed that need some TLC.

On Tuesday, April 22nd, the group gathered first at River Road Park in Bedminster, where they collected trash along the bank of the North Branch of the Raritan River. They gathered up and sorted everything from baseballs and beer cans to a fishing net and old sign post. They also conducted an informal inventory of the plant life along the shoreline, and noted a disturbing amount of non-native plants spreading across the area. Japanese barberry, Japanese knotweed multiflora rose, and Garlic mustard were among the invasive plants that have become naturalized there, and they are choking out the native plants and posing a threat to the biodiversity of the ecosystem.

The next stop for the group was the Burnt Mills floodplain in the Bedminster/Branchburg area. Happily, they did not find great quantities of trash along the Lamington there! Instead, they delighted in the abundant blossoms of Virginia bluebells and the calls of songbirds in the trees along the river banks. They did note the presence of lesser celandine (also known as the fig buttercup), a pretty but invasive yellow-flowering plant that is spreading into some areas formerly occupied by Virginia bluebells.

The last stop of the day for the URWA staffers was the Helen Woodman Natural Area in Far Hills, a vibrant floodplain forest with a mix of oak, maple and sycamore trees that provides opportunities for hiking, fishing and bird watching. Sadly, this site has apparently been used as a dumping ground and the group collected large amounts of trash including a computer monitor, tires and much glass and pottery. URWA Volunteer Chuck Elmendorf of Pottersville has spent many hours over the past several months removing trash and landscaping debris that had accumulated at the site, so it actually is much healthier than it had been. The URWA staff members took great pleasure in seeing hundreds of native Common Meadow Violets, which are the state flower of New Jersey, spread across the floodplain!

Executive Director Cindy Ehrenclou of Bernardsville summed up URWA's Earth Day service project. "Getting out to some of the important riparian areas in the watershed, taking inventory of what's growing and removing trash from the sites, was more than simply a staff bonding exercise or a day away from our desks. It was a day for us all to connect with what it is we are working for, to recharge our batteries and rededicate ourselves to our mission. I speak for everyone at URWA when I say that our commitment to the people, wildlife and open spaces of this region is stronger than ever, and as always, we look forward to working with everyone in our watershed community to protect and preserve the beautiful countryside of the Upper Raritan region."

About the Upper Raritan Watershed Association

The Upper Raritan Watershed Association is a not-for-profit, membership supported organization working to ensure the protection of the Upper Raritan Watershed through education, advocacy, land preservation and stewardship. Since 1959, the Association has been preserving and protecting natural resources throughout the watershed, a 194 square mile natural geographic region defined by the drainage basin of the North Branch of the Raritan River and its tributaries. The watershed, which includes 23 municipalities in parts of Somerset, Hunterdon and Morris Counties, is a vital link in New Jersey's water supply system and contains large areas of undeveloped, environmentally significant land.

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Photos: The thumbnails below are attached to the email as jpeg images.



1. Director of Operations Kate Schwab of Tewksbury and Executive Director Cindy Ehrenclou of Bernardsville gather trash at the Helen Woodman Natural Area in Far Hills.



2. Virginia bluebells cover the ground at URWA's Burnt Mills Floodplain site. These plants are native to New Jersey, and with their beautiful blooms that spread across woodland landscapes, it is easy to understand why they are perennial favorites!



3. Conservation Program Manager Patti Ruby of Mendham Township and GIS Director Melissa Mitchell of Flanders carry bags of trash collected at River Road Park in Bedminster.



4. Membership Program Director Susan Brookman of Tewksbury and Conservation Program Manager Patti Ruby of Mendham Township along the North Branch in Far Hills with a large bag of broken glass they collected from the banks of the river.



5. Native Spring beauties (light pink/white) are surrounded by invasive Lesser celandine (yellow). The ecological impact of lesser celandine is primarily on the native spring-flowering plant community and the various wildlife species associated with them. Spring ephemerals complete the reproductive part of their life cycle and most of their above-ground development before woody plants leaf out and shade the forest floor. Native spring ephemerals include bloodroot, common and cut-leaved toothwort, Dutchman's breeches, harbinger-of-spring, squirrel-corn, trout lily, Virginia bluebells, and many others. Because lesser celandine emerges well in advance of the native species, it can establish and overtake areas rapidly.