

Weir River Estuary Park Committee Annual Report 2024



The Weir River Estuary Park Committee (WREPC) is a Tri-Town committee (Cohasset, Hingham & Hull) focused on care of the Estuary and Straits Pond, including protecting land, improving water quality, and encouraging stewardship through education and respectful recreation.

Environmental Conditions

The Weir River Estuary (an area roughly 950 acres), a State designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern, runs from Black Rock Beach in Hull and Cohasset to Sunset Point in Hull, including the area from Foundry Pond Dam in Hingham, the Weir River Estuary including World's End along George Washington Boulevard. Though special protection is codified by State regulations, a variety of environmental challenges impact the Estuary. Plastic debris, excess nutrients, sedimentation from stormwater runoff, reduced streamflow, and legacy pollution all contribute to degradation of the Estuary.

Terrestrial, aquatic and avian wildlife use the estuary as a way point in their migration, a seasonal habitat to feed during the summer months, or are year-round residents. The three Towns have a joint responsibility to preserve and protect the Estuary from the negative impacts above.

The WREPC meets four to six times each year. In 2024, we monitored some of the issues impacting the Estuary, and celebrated community and educational events linked to the Estuary.

Estuary Clean-up Day

In April, the WREP coordinated with Straits Pond Watershed Assoc., Weir River Watershed Assoc., and local volunteers to conduct the annual Earth Day cleanup. Trash was collected from all areas that touch the Estuary and hauled away by Cohasset and Hull DPWs. Participants from the three Towns enjoyed a picnic cook out lunch for their efforts.

Path to the Island in Straits Pond

In 2022, Hull voters approved \$30K in Community Preservation funds to pay for permitting and surveying a walking path to the island in Straits Pond via Eastman Road. In 2023 volunteers clipped briars and cleared an initial path along the waterfront but stopped short of the island. In 2024 Hull Conservation Dept prepared a Request for Determination with the Mass Dept of Environment Protection. The RMD has been approved. The next phase of the project is community outreach and public comment. The Conservation department proposes using the Hull DPW for any challenging construction and the Hull Land Conservation Trust continues to offer to fund the building of a wildlife viewing platform. More trail work will be planned for next year.

Hull Waterfront Access Study Group. Scott Plympton represents the WREP committee in this study assisted by Woods Hole Group, with his specific focus on access adjoining the Estuary. There have been over 160 public access points identified in Hull. The study will prioritize those access points with the greatest need for repair or improvement. The group has created a survey for public input.

Support of SOS Hull

SOS Hull (Save Open Space) continues its efforts to encourage the HRA to pause its desire to develop the land that borders the beach and the estuary and seek alternative methods for raising revenue. This summer saw expanded uses with circus, carnivals, and improved collection of parking fees. This property is also a major crossover point for sea birds between ocean and bay and a feeding zone for horned larks for 3 seasons of the year.

Atlantic Avenue Reconstruction Project

The Atlantic Avenue Reconstruction Project along Straits Pond has been completed. The Project included Best Management Practices /Best Available Technology storm drains to reduce road surface pollutants entering the pond.

Residential Development in Cohasset

The Straits Pond Watershed Association continues to monitor proposed new residential development near Straits Pond. The proposed development project of 23 new homes in the Rattlesnake Run watershed has come back before the Cohasset Planning Board After appealing rejection of their 2001 subdivision approval in Land Court, the judge ruled that their documentation did not include the signatures of all members of the Planning Board when it was issued therefore it could not be filed with the County. A deadline of late January was set for the applicant to return to the Planning Board for a second attempt to receive approval.

Hingham

We want to thank Mark Buonagurio for all his work with this committee. Mark is no longer part of WREPC and we will need a replacement representative from Hingham.

There have been sightings of otters, coyotes, and eagles at Foundry Pond (Hingham). We also see many families now fishing at the Foundry Pond dam. Illegal trapping of turtles was reported to Conservation.

Straits Pond

During the height of summer we observed that algae buildup was quite low. Midge outbreaks this season were relatively minor. We also noted that invasive Green Crabs are abundant.

Tree Swallow Nest Boxes

New redesigned tree swallow boxes are working out well. These boxes provide nesting habitat for the swallows who feed on flying insects including the midges that create a public nuisance around the Pond.

Salt Marsh Loss

Salt marsh loss continues along all tidal creeks and ditches in the Estuary.

Using software tools such as Nearmap, we were able to view the results the outgoing tide has had on riverbanks near the tidal gate.

Hull 4th Grade Woods Walk

On 10/8 the Hull 4th grade classes went on a field trip to learn about the Weir River Woods. The trip was a big hit with the kids. It was low tide on the waterfront, so no one had muddy feet as we explored the coastal wetlands. A perfect day with glasswort in bloom. Volunteers worked hard to clean and trim the trails of briars and downed trees. Sadly, the kiosk at the entrance to the woods was destroyed by a falling tree.

We hope you will continue to explore and visit the Weir River Estuary Park area by bike, kayak/canoe, or on foot.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Plympton, Chair (Hull)
Judeth Van Hamm (Hull)
Sharon Allen, (Hingham)
Richard Avery (Cohasset)
Tom Bell (Cohasset)