

**Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Annual Meeting Summary**

**November 4, 2016, 5:00 pm
Bristol County Agricultural High School**

Welcome and President's Report: Joe Callahan, President

Joe thanked everyone for coming and introduced our special guests Senator Marc Pacheco and Karl Pastore, MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) South Region Director. Joe mentioned that TRWA had been forced to move out of its former long-time home at the Boyden Refuge in Taunton to make way for the Taunton Conservation Commission to move in during City Hall re-construction. DCR has kindly allowed us to store our office equipment at their vacant Sweets Knoll property and we hope to work out a permanent arrangement with them to make this our new Headquarters and a Taunton River Center. Joe briefly reviewed TRWA's activities in 2017 (list attached below).

Treasurer's Report: Richard Shafer

Richard briefly summarized TRWA's finances indicating we have about \$15,000 in the bank.

Richard mentioned the 30th Anniversary of TRWA is next year. To celebrate TRWA's 30th anniversary we are planning to bring back the Taunton River Festival to the Weirs Taunton River Water Front Park on June 10, 2018. Watch your email, local newspaper and the TRWA website for more news as the event gets closer.

Richard mentioned that we are excited about the prospect of setting up a River Center and our new Office at Sweets Knoll. For 2018 we are looking for volunteers to help on committees for:

- Fundraising/membership
- Property
- Activities
- 30th Anniversary Taunton River Festival

Nomination and Election of Board of Directors through 2019

- Priscilla Chapman
- David Rosa
- Craig Heffernan
- TJ Torres
- Carol Traverse

The members present approved the proposed slate of TRWA Directors. All in favor.

Election of Officers Joe Callahan, President
Priscilla Chapman, Vice President
Richard Shafer, Treasurer
Stephen Silva, Secretary

The members present approved the proposed slate of TRWA Officers. All in favor.

Featured Speakers

Senator Marc Pacheco

Senator Pacheco noted his past efforts to secure designation of the Taunton River as a State Heritage River which was a precursor to its designation as a federal Wild and Scenic River. He is now the Founding Chair on the Senate's Environment Committee. He believes Climate Change is the greatest threat to the environment, our children, grandchildren and the environmental progress we have achieved to date. We need to shine a light on this issue. Toward this objective he created the committee on Climate Change and global warming in the legislature. He said Massachusetts is well on its way to reducing greenhouse causing emissions. He said Massachusetts has an 11 billion dollar clean energy business economy. He is sponsoring a climate adaptation and management bill in the state senate to help Massachusetts plan and adapt to the extreme weather events like hurricane Sandy that come with climate change.

Senator Pacheco said he supports the important work of the Taunton River Watershed Alliance and that he will do all he can to support our organization. He noted that he thought an agreement for TRWA to relocate into the vacant DCR building at Sweets Knoll would be worked out within the next month. He said if TRWA needs his help to call his office.

Karl Pastore, DCR South Region Director

Mr. Pastore thanked TRWA for inviting him to our meeting and for the important work our organization does to support the environment of the Taunton River watershed. He said given tight state budgets his organization is welcoming opportunities to partner with others to maintain a presence at DCR owned facilities. He noted how quickly facilities are run down without occupancy, heat and power. He said to address the big question in the room that he thought TRWA could look for an official designation for TRWA to use the Sweets Knoll site for its new office in the next month or so.

Advocacy Update: Priscilla Chapman

Priscilla mentioned that the Taunton River watershed is large (562 square miles) and developing quickly. We must learn to share the resources of the watershed and manage them well or lose them forever. Toward that end TRWA often comments on significant projects not to say they should not occur but how they may be redesigned to minimize impact on endangered species or water quality. Examples of issues we have commented on this past year include South Coast Rail and Peace Haven.

Priscilla requested that if members are aware of projects they believe might harm the environment they contact TRWA.

2017 Taunton River Tide Calendar: Jen O'Keefe

Jen thanked the photographers who submitted photos for the 2018 calendar and urged people to look at the photos on the table in the back of the room and purchase a calendar for the discounted price of \$15 if they are interested. We will be running another calendar photo contest during 2018. Jen is always looking for volunteers and interns to help with the effort.

As Patty will be discussing later in the program we have studied endangered turtles in Assonet Bay for two years. We have pictures of 30 turtles. For TRWA's

30th Birthday we will be auctioning naming rights to local businesses (starting at the \$1000 donation level) during 2018.

Report on TRWA 2017 Water Quality Monitoring Program: Steve Silva

Steve thanked the volunteer monitors for their service. He believes the volunteers are the unsung heroes and “**Guardians of the Taunton River Watershed**”. We have 28 volunteers for 20 sites but always want more volunteers for back-ups or replacements, come to the training meeting the last Saturday in February to learn more. The monitoring results are similar to last year extremely high nitrogen levels and elevated phosphorus. The data and a brief PowerPoint presentation on the results are on the TRWA website.

Steve mentioned that as noted by Senator Pacheco due to climate change that has already occurred extreme weather is the new normal. Our watershed has had drought conditions that used to come every 10 years every year for the last 3 years. When it does rain in the fall, winter or spring the rain comes so intensely much of it runs off causing flooding rather than replenishing groundwater for gradual beneficial release as stream base flow in the summer. This problem is exacerbated by outdated stormwater regulations.

He noted that the instream nitrogen levels in the watershed are many times over what any reasonable target or water quality criterion might be for a river that flows to an estuary. Up to: Taunton R. (main stem) 6x, Town R. 15x, Matfield R. 6x, Three Mile R. 18x, and Nemasket R. 7x. Elevated levels of phosphorus were measured as well. With continuing dry summers resulting in treated WWTP effluent dominated rivers the next incremental jump or improvement in water quality, and aquatic life + wildlife diversity will occur when the treatment plant upgrades for N + P removal are completed from 2020 to 2022. Our monitoring is important to track progress as plants are upgraded and prevent municipalities from dodging their permit WWTP upgrade schedule requirements.

As an example Steve mentioned TRWA’s recent need to join Mass Rivers and eight other watershed groups in a lawsuit against Scott Pruitt and EPA over what we believe was an illegal last minute action to delay (just 2 days before the effective date) the effective date of the new stormwater permit called the MS4 permit which would have helped water quality throughout Massachusetts. (See the website for details on the lawsuit).

2017 TRWA Turtle Study: Patty Levasseur

Patty thanked TRWA, the Taunton River Stewardship Council, Brian Bastarache and his colleagues at Bristol Agricultural School for their support the last two years. She said based on what they learned last year they had a good year using some modified traps (one was on display) and new tagging methods. The goal of the study is assessment of the population of rare endangered Diamond-back terrapin (turtle) in Assonet Bay to see if protection measures are warranted or possible. The study lasted almost 7 weeks or 150 trap days. In 2016, 9 females and 1 male were captured. In 2017, 5 female and 5 males were captured and 1 male recaptured. The turtles looked well fed. There was evidence of predator influence at a nesting site on private property. The landowner is willing to support protection efforts.

Patty indicated some of the biggest threats to the turtles are:

- Loss of salt marsh habitat (a consequence of both development and sea level rise);
- Human disturbance;
- Road mortality.

Adjournment

What We Do: (Summary of 2017 activities)

1. **Defend water quality, stream flow and wildlife habitat** in the watershed by commenting on draft permits and project plans to regulatory agencies. An ongoing activity.
2. **Volunteer Water Quality Sampler Training and Monthly Monitoring**, Training was February 25, 2017. Monthly monitoring March to November each year – a watershed check-up. Almost 30 dedicated volunteers “Guardians of the Taunton River”. See TRWA website for program information and 2016 and 2017 data.
3. **Annual Watershed Photography Contest**. Submission deadline is July 31st. Winners are featured in the Annual Taunton River Tide Calendar printed in September. Visit our website or grab a brochure with more information on how to obtain a copy starting any month of the year.
4. **Music in the Grove** – Was May 28, 2017, 2:00 – 5:00 with Michael Higgins and in partnership with the Friends of Boyden.
5. **Studies** – Culvert Study (2014/2015) Final Report published by Mass Audubon; Turtle population assessment of rare turtles – 2016 report published. TRWA has received a grant for a follow-up rare turtle study in Spring/Summer 2017 which was completed in the summer of 2017.
6. **Overnight Canoe/Kayak Trip** – Was weekend of June 10 and 11, 2017. Great weather and time by all (photos on TRWA website)!
7. **Angler Education / Family Fishing Day** – Sunday, July 16, 2017; Noon – 3:00 PM, Dighton Rock State Park. A family affair where people can learn more about the river and how to enjoy its many benefits. We put a net in the water and have the children identify the different fish. Mass Wildlife brings various types of fishing gear and shows how to catch different fish in the river. The museum is open.
8. **Annually publishes a Taunton River Tide Calendar**. Discounted copies are available from September-January at the TRWA offices (after we relocate) or events TRWA attends. Print-on-demand copies are available online year round (starting at any month in the year you choose.) Visit our website or grab a brochure with more information.
9. **Fall Foliage Tour Canoe/Kayak Trip** – Sunday, October 15, 2017
10. **TRWA Annual Meeting** – late October or early November. This year November 4, 2017.