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Stormwater Pollution Continues to be a Problem for Milton's Waterways

The Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA), a local environmental non-profit, publishes a report on the health of the local streams and Neponset River in Milton every year based on over 20 years of volunteer-collected water quality data.

In their most recently published report, NepRWA claimed that while water quality was better this year, stormwater pollution continues to cause bacteria and phosphorus problems in the town's streams and rivers. NepRWA's Environmental Scientist, Chris Hirsch, stated, "Our 2019 results show that *E.coli* levels spike whenever it rains. This is a big deal because *E.coli* can make waterways unsafe for recreation."

Phosphorus, a key nutrient for plants, followed a similar pattern of increasing after rainstorms, except for in Pine Tree Brook. The report suggests this is possible evidence of the town's rain gardens and other stormwater filtration devices having a positive effect on water quality. "Excess Phosphorus typically comes from lawn fertilizer and yard waste that's dumped in streams or down storm drains. When phosphorus pollution reaches a waterbody, it can cause harmful algae blooms," said Hirsch.

Stormwater pollution occurs when rain or snowmelt washes pollutants off streets, yards, construction sites, etc. into our local streams and ponds. Ian Cooke, NepRWA's Executive Director noted, "It's a common misconception that the storm drains you see on your street lead to a treatment plant of some kind. Most of those drains are actually connected to pipes that transport the rainwater directly to the nearest waterbody, completely untreated."

When asked about what can be done about this issue Cooke responded, "Municipalities, developers, and private homeowners should reduce the amount of runoff their properties create and break the direct connection between the pavement and the river. NepRWA partners with various groups to help install green infrastructure, like rain gardens, that collect and soak stormwater into the ground before it gets into the drainpipes."

The Town of Milton has built more than thirty stormwater filtration devices to help protect local waterways. These include six "tree filter boxes" that were installed in 2018, in partnership with NepRWA, and supported with a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. The tree filter boxes collect rainwater from nearby streets and filter it through specially engineered soils to remove pet waste, sand, oil, fertilizer, and other pollutants.

The Town of Milton has been working with the Association and neighboring communities through the Neponset Stormwater Partnership to comply with new requirements from EPA to reduce polluted stormwater runoff. Under the new requirements, which apply throughout eastern Massachusetts, the Town must implement numerous pollution reduction measures, such as more frequent street sweeping, new rules for land developers, and checking for and eliminating sewer and septic leaks. Public education about stormwater pollution is another major requirement.

“The Town of Milton is well positioned to continue addressing stormwater pollution,” said Anna Meyer, the Town’s new Environmental Coordinator. “The stormwater fee helps support green infrastructure projects, and our involvement in the Neponset Stormwater Partnership helps tremendously with raising awareness about pollution. And on June 16, Town Meeting participants voted to adopt an updated stormwater bylaw,” Meyer said. In addition, town staff members applied to multiple state grants this spring that could provide funding for additional structural stormwater pollution-prevention projects.

For the full report on the health of Milton’s waterways, and for more information about how you can help reduce the amount of polluted runoff coming from your property, visit the Neponset Stormwater Partnership website, at www.YourCleanWater.org

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