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Stormwater Pollution Continues to be a Problem for Westwood'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 Westwood every year. The report is based on over 20 years of volunteer-collected water quality data from Westwood's waterways.

In their most recently published report, NepRWA claims 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, according to the report. "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. and 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 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 Westwood 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.

Brendan Ryan, Westwood Assistant DPW Director emphasized, "The Town of Westwood continues its proactive approach in stormwater management. Our main objective is to follow all regulations to clean

our water bodies and provide the necessary education to our residents in order to better understand the issues surrounding stormwater pollution. Westwood is grateful for the partnership with NepRWA and the work that is done on behalf of the Town.”

For the full report on the health of Westwood’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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