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# Reconnecting with waters flowing through so much South County history

by Todd Corayer | Sep 14, 2020 | Recreation Public Access, Rhode Island Waterways, Wild and Scenic Rivers

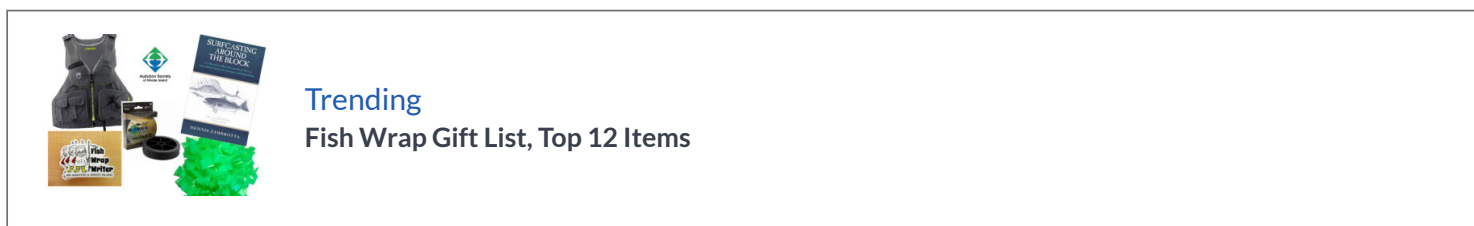
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Kassi Archambault held up a clipboard, the international symbol of getting chatty people to pay attention, and called fifteen eager people in life jackets and orange floppy vest to assemble by a river. Gracious as always, her first words were, “Thank you.” Kassi addressed a crowd assembled at the John “Jay” Cronin Fishing Access on Route 91 in Richmond who were ready to get into their kayaks and discover some South County history. As the [Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council](#) Coordinator, Kassi helped organize a few hours on the Pawcatuck River to raise awareness of local rivers and how so much of our collective history was woven with them.



The Council is a stakeholder group, helping to maintain the health of seven rivers while encouraging people to use them. They’re supported by volunteers from twelve towns who offer their visions through a collective mission of protecting and promoting and is funded through the National Parks Service. Nan Quinlan, Neil Wardley and Kevin McGovern hosted the tour and after the dreaded group-wide name exchange, everyone headed upstream. This bright day was a slow showcase of a small piece of one river which binds them all, flowing from the shaggy edge of Worden Pond, through remnants of colonial development and collapse, outdated dams, fish ladders and miles of peaceful emptiness before unceremoniously spilling into Little Narragansett Bay in Westerly.

The Council is enjoying a few long moments of well-deserved time in the spotlight as they promote their recent accomplishment of Wild and Scenic designation. Newspapers and magazines have recently highlighted the long process and success while South Kingstown representative Bill McCusker is being celebrated for paddling almost fifty miles of watershed rivers from the Chipuxet all the way to Westerly in a “source to sea” adventure. Beneath the rumble of fast cars and old trucks announcing separation from their mufflers, the Pawcatuck River quietly made her way past the access, tumbled over a small wide ridge of stones and disappeared south.

“When we blow our whistles, it’s all stop!” Kevin told the group during his safety talk. Being summer, water levels were low so paddling was easy. At their first stop, Neil offered a semi-brief recounting of how Carolina, with her industrial mill concepts and related businesses were similar to his native England. Thankful for a cool canopy of weeping maple and birch, the group relaxed as he spoke of the Joseph Nichols, how mills supported small towns like Carolina and how progressive mill owner Rowland Hazard was.

“Roland was a visionary,” Nan offered. What a gift, to drift along a pollen speckled river running along back yards while learning about Roland Hazard’s impact on Carolina and the nation while weaving personal ambitions with concerns of business, slavery and women’s suffrage.

Bill McCusker offered that the Council’s goal was partially to get people on the river but also to help them see it from a different perspective, learn how things were and how we can all help improve these waters.

Looking down, certainly there were those usual signs of rivers in modern times. Shadowed by crumbling mills, whole and fractured bricks are emerging from and succumbing to copper colored mud. You’ll see tires, with and without whitewalls, old

boots and tennis shoes, pocket combs, dustpans, endless beer cans and the occasional rusting metal barrel. But alongside the callous discards of man and machine is a blooming color pallet with striking red Cardinal flowers, gorgeous purple pickerel weed and a host of flowering bushes with busy bees hovering while wild grape vines secure it all from bending too far. It's amazing that 70% of globally rare and 63% of RI rare species are within this watershed.

The Council's mission includes several Outstanding River Values of which recreation is a critical component. Pausing alongside the Carolina Management Area camp sites, Kevin mentioned our proximity to the [North South Trail](#), a seventy-seven mile state-wide pathway and how visitors can camp along the river. In a state fixated on high-end tourism in tony shore-side towns, it's refreshing to float in small circles on a peaceful and easily accessible river steeped in so much history. And to meet new people.

Alongside White Brook, with its comparatively chilly waters flowing from underground wells ahead of the Carolina Trout Hatchery, Ann Perri and Delite Primus joined the group to learn about the area and discover new waters. Having just moved to South Kingstown from the west, they are perfect examples of how this Wild and Scenic designation is attracting people to float, wade, fish, camp and appreciate rambling rivers. The lovely Pat Lardner held her position in the back of the plastic flotilla, keeping a regular count of the river's guests. Pat represents West Greenwich, is the President of the RI Canoe and Kayak Association and can deftly handle a kayak even in the skinny waters of a bone dry August. It only takes one to wander but how fun to be with a small group of paddlers wanting to learn.

Before landing two by two back at the Cronin landing, Nan asked for observations and comments. "I think I hit every obstacle coming down the river," someone said with a chuckle.

While kayaks were loaded and numbers exchanged, the Pawcatuck was still inching its way to the sea. Our easy fall back positon as humans often is to ignore significance and consequence if something impedes our personal progress but here, watching tiny trout, waving grasses, gaping mussels and amazing floating bugs, the future of these watery threads are clearly at stake, making this Wild and Scenic designation a wonderful announcement of how rivers should be respected, protected, enjoyed and celebrated.

"They should do this more often and I love that it's free," someone offered with a laugh.

Amen to that because we're all stakeholders in these rivers.



## 2 Comments



**David Carter** on September 14, 2020 at 7:14 pm

Again Todd, great article. Thank you.



**stephen perrone** on October 12, 2020 at 9:13 am

Great article, thank you!