

Concerns for Our Watershed

Randy Walker, President of the Pootatuck River Watershed answers more questions about our watershed.



POP: What is the condition of our streams?

Walker: The Pootatuck River Watershed Association and the Town monitor the water quality and chemistry of our streams. We are seeing a decline in water characteristics that make our streams special. Monitoring during warm months shows average water temperatures have increased several degrees. During low flow periods of hot weather, rain runoff from heated pavement, roofs, and retention ponds can kill cold water species of aquatic life. Water sampling shows unacceptable E-coli levels in our streams per State and EPA standards. Adults, children, and pets risk illness when wading in these waters. Sources of E-coli are animal feces and leaking septic and sewer systems.

POP: What else is impacting our waterways?

Walker: Detergents and lawn chemicals are causing higher nutrient loads, resulting in harmful algae blooms in our ponds, lakes and Long Island Sound. A recent DEEP study identified the Pootatuck River as having the highest nutrient load of the streams flowing into Lake Zoar. In addition, we know that pharmaceuticals, pesticides, and other chemicals are easily dissolved and held in solution by water and are impacting all forms of life. Excess fertilizers and pesticides destroy aquatic life and recovery can take decades. The best way to eliminate these chemicals is to never expose them to the land on which rains fall.

POP: Are PFAS in our drinking water?

Walker: Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as “forever chemicals”, have been determined by the EPA to be a public health hazard. These compounds do not readily breakdown. PFAS accumulates in our body and are associated with certain cancers and health issues during pregnancy. Our aquifer level of PFAS exceeds the EPA standard for drinking water under the Clean Water Act. PFAS are also found in non-stick cookware, stainproof carpets, firefighting foam, and yard fertilizers.

POP: What about road salt?

Walker: Conductivity of surface water is an indicator of increased salt in that water. It is only a matter of time before rising levels occur in the aquifer and our well water. Once saturated with salt, it would take about 20 years for the salt to flush from the groundwater. Salt ions also capture heavy metals like lead, dragging them deeper into the water table. While salt is used in winter for public safety, we need to find better alternatives to protect our water supply from high salt levels, which is already the case in some Connecticut locations.

POP: What is the impact of development?

Walker: Development increases the demand on our aquifer. Most citizens take our water supply for granted and do not view its supply as finite. Land values place an incentive to develop land for economic gain. Yet without a stable and healthy water supply, the value of the land and homes decline. Ground water keeps our streams flowing during droughts. Last summer the Pootatuck River flow at Sandy Hook showed us that the ground water level almost severely depleted. No Lion’s Club duck race without a flow.

POP: What can be done to protect our watershed?

Walker: Development plans need to have the lowest negative impact on the environment to ensure a sustainable and healthy water source. We need to limit impervious surface designs that do not provide water absorption capability to recharge the aquifer. Homeowners must refrain from using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Septic systems need to be properly maintained. Our wetlands need to be preserved and protected. While we still have a healthy water supply, now is the time to protect our watershed and improve our aquifer’s capacity to recharge.

This article appeared in the Newtown Bee on July 28, 2023 - Protect Our Pollinators (POP) column: *My Backyard Habitat*.