



ON THE POND

SPRING 2014

President's Message

Spring has sprung in my part of the world (Massachusetts) and I'm starting to dream of sunny days on our beloved pond. Like many of you, I spent most of my winter at home, away from life on the pond. It was a long, cold winter for much of the country, and our pond was no exception.

My family was lucky enough to make it up to camp in mid-March for a weekend of ice fishing and general winter fun. When we arrived, there was waist deep snow on the ground. Keep in mind, I'm only 5'2", so waist deep for me isn't really that impressive, but it was certainly a challenge for me to shovel out! At the time of our visit, the lake had about 26" of solid ice – proof that it was a cold winter, indeed. Thankfully we are now passing into spring (and mud season), which is just a brief precursor to summer on Neal Pond.

I'm sure you're all as excited as I am to get back to camp and reconnect with neighbors and friends. As the new President of the Neal Pond Camp Owners

continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 President's Message
- 1 Dam Update
- 2 Nesting Loons
- 2 Buffers for Blue Lakes Grant
- 3 Vermont Invasive Patrollers
- 4 Fishing Line Recycling Program



Dam Update

In early April, I contacted the State to inquire about getting our dam evaluated. At the 2013 Camp Association meeting, quite a few members expressed concern about the current structural state of the dam and any impact a breach might have on water levels, property values, and the overall health of the pond. I paddled down to the dam several times following the meeting and got a good look at what is left of the structure.

Len Gerardi, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Fisheries Biologist responded to my request. He told me "VTFW's general perspective is that the one-time dam at the outlet of Neal Pond is essentially a vestigial relic that plays no role in the control of the pond's water levels. Essentially Neal Pond has returned to being a natural pond without a dam. VTFW, which owns the area around the pond's outlet (the one-time dam site) and the stream corridor all the way down to the Neal Pond Rd., would not be in favor of construction of a new dam at Neal Pond's outlet."

I let him know that the Camp Association is not looking to reestablish a dam with higher water levels, but rather we are looking to maintain the current depth of the pond through maintenance and repair of what exists. At the very least, I asked if it were possible to have the State evaluate the integrity of what remains of the structure so we can determine whether a washout is likely to happen and then seek ways to mitigate the impacts of such an event.

I reiterated that if water levels were to drop, our Association is concerned the boat ramp would become unusable due to large rocks and extremely shallow water. I also expressed our concern about the impact a lowered water level would have on

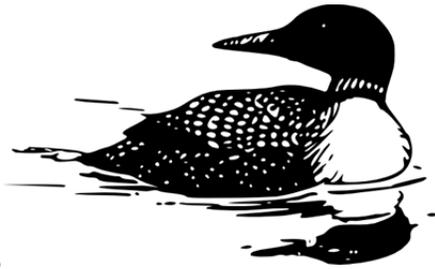
continued on page 3

Association, I thought it would be helpful to establish a seasonal newsletter where I can share updates on association news and projects. I intend to send two or three newsletters annually – Spring, Summer, and possibly Fall/Winter.

As this is the first newsletter, I want to take the opportunity to address some of the questions that were raised at our annual Neal Pond Camp Owners Association meeting last July, set some goals for 2014, and introduce some new and exciting programs. Enjoy this first edition of “On the Pond” and feel free to reach out to me directly if you have any questions.

See you on the pond!

Jackie Pratt
NPCOA President 🐾



Nesting Loons

As discussed at the 2013 annual meeting, our resident pair of loons lost their eggs due to high water last spring. As requested, I contacted the State to find out what, if anything, we can do aid our loons in having a successful hatch this year.

Eric Hanson, Coordinator of Vermont's Loon Program for the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, stated that he has visited our pond three to five times per year for the last 15 years. He has generally observed loons nesting at the South end of the pond, down past the boat ramp. Because of the nature of that area, boat traffic in the region is generally kept to a minimum.

We already have several observers on the pond that report loon nesting habits to Mr. Hanson throughout the spring and summer. If our loons do nest this spring, it is extremely important that we avoid heavy traffic around their nesting site. That means keeping kayak and canoe excursions to the South end dam area to a minimum through mid-July.

At this time, Mr. Hanson would like the loons to try nesting on their own. However, if we have five or so years without successful nesting due to flooding (as we experienced last year), he would suggest we look

into creating some loon nesting platforms to assist them. I will remain in touch with Mr. Hanson to make sure we are kept up to date on what's going on with our loons and to find out if any further action is required. If he feels their nest location is in any danger, he may opt to place signs in the area to keep people away until the chicks hatch. This is a fairly common practice and he would remove the signs once the chicks have fledged.

Please be aware and respectful of our loons as they try to nest this spring and early summer. 🐾

Buffers for Blue Lakes Grant

Through a Vermont Fish and Wildlife Watershed Grant, The Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds (FOVLAP) is working with eight lake associations and 40 property owners to plant blueberry bushes on their shores to help prevent erosion and improve water quality. I have been in touch with the program coordinator and have arranged for the Neal Pond Camp Owners Association to be one of the eight lake associations participating in the 2014 program. FOVLAP has agreed to allow five Neal Pond Camp Owners Association members to receive a grant this year.

Grantees will receive four blueberry bushes and will be provided with training on planting and maintenance as well as erosion prevention, shore land vegetation, and lake health. The cost of the program is \$50 for each grant recipient (50% off the regular price). We will schedule a delivery and training date for some time in late July. If you are interested in participating in this program, please email jpratt@townisp.com. Grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis to the first five respondents. Additional blueberry bushes will be available for \$20 each (a 20% discount) if other Camp Association members are interested in participating in the program.

Once we have our list of participants and a count of how many blueberry bushes we will need overall, FOVLAP will make arrangements for a drop off date. This is an exciting opportunity to get some very nice native blueberry bushes at a great price while helping maintain our water quality and providing forage for wildlife. 🐾

Vermont Invasive Patrollers

Throughout last summer, I heard from a number of you who were concerned about the possibility of invasive species gaining a foothold on Neal Pond. The good people at the State have informed me that there are currently **NO KNOWN INVASIVE SPECIES ON, AROUND, or WITHIN NEAL POND.** This is a very big deal, and I'm sure we'd all like to keep it that way. The state has recommended a number of programs that will help us achieve this goal. Jen Carbonneau and I are also looking into some grant opportunities to fund a boat ramp inspector/greeter for the 2015 season.

In the meantime, we are looking for several volunteers willing to get trained by the state on invasive species. These folks will be able to help us monitor and detect any potential invasions this summer. Vermont Invasive Patrollers (VIPs) are trained to monitor local water bodies for new introductions of invasive species while also learning about native aquatic plants and animals. A basic VIP workshop spans four hours, split between classroom time and "field" time on the water. In this workshop participants will learn:

- The fundamentals of lake ecology
- The difference between native, exotic, nuisance and invasive species
- How invasive species are introduced and established
- How to identify common aquatic plants and animals, both native and invasive (the latter will be emphasized)
- How to conduct surveys of native and invasive species in their natural habitats

I have been in touch with VIP program director Bethany Sargent to request VIP training for Neal Pond Camp Owners Association members. Ms. Sargent has invited our group to attend a training she has scheduled on Friday, June 27th with the Lake Groton Association in Groton, VT. There are currently eight spots available to our group. If you are interested, please contact Ms. Sargent at Bethany.Sargent@state.vt.us to pre-register and shoot me an email at jpratt@townisp.com to let me know you are willing to be on our VIP team. 🗨️

property values and the ability to use and enjoy the pond as we do today.

Mr. Gerardi responded: "We hear the concerns you articulate. However, we don't believe NPCOA's level of concern is supported by the physical circumstances near the outlet, and certainly not to the extent that we would support artificial maintenance of some target water level through significant intrusion and construction intervention at the outlet. My understanding is that the Dams program of the Department of Environmental Conservation does not see much of a risk for catastrophic failure of what remains at the outlet, and rates the structure as low hazard in the event of a failure. It is possible that over the coming decades Neal Pond water levels may trend slightly lower, back towards its original configuration. We can tolerate that and are interested in having the natural processes and stream channel dynamics prevail for governing water level fluctuations."

So, in a nutshell:

- The State does not consider our pond to have a dam. What remains is a "relic" that has for better or worse been abandoned by the state.
- Any intervention or maintenance of the existing structure at the outlet of the pond will not be permitted by the state.
- Neal Pond will remain un-dammed and the waterway will be allowed to return to a "natural" state.
- The vestigial structure is solid and is not at any significant risk of failure. Should a breach occur, the state would take no action to restore the pond to current water levels.

From my direct observations, the dam seemed pretty solid and did not appear to be increasing the depth of our pond by any significant amount when compared to what would be viewed as the "natural" high point at the outlet. It looks to be adding a foot or two of depth at most to the overall body of water. Although I am not an expert, I am inclined to agree with the State's evaluation on this one. There does not appear to be any significant risk of draining the pond if a breach were to occur. 🗨️

NPCOA is Going Digital

We live in a connected world. Most, if not all, of our members have access to email and the web. It's high time NPCOA joins the 21st century!

We launched www.NealPondVT.org a couple of years ago and went live with the Neal Pond Facebook page just last year. However, we still rely heavily on old fashioned snail mail and face-to-face visits to stay in touch with our members. A major initiative for this year is to get an updated contact list – including email addresses – for our members.

Please fill out the online contact form at www.NealPondVT.org to provide us with your up-to-date contact info.

The form will allow you to choose how you prefer to receive our seasonal newsletter (print, email, or both) and will allow us to gather additional information about how you would like to receive other news briefs and updates going forward. ☺

Fishing Line Recycling

The Neal Pond Camp Owners Association will be placing a fishing line recycling receptacle at the boat launch sometime in May.

This drop bin will be available seasonally during the summer months as a pilot program. Vermont Fish & Wildlife is excited that our Camp Association is taking an interest in this program and has given their permission to mount the drop bin to the information kiosk at the boat ramp.

This program is being offered in partnership with the Boat Owners Association of the United States, which has provided us with signage and other program materials at no cost. The drop bin will be checked on a regular basis by NPCOA volunteers and all line collected will be sent to Berkley fishing line for recycling. This bin is for fishing line only. Please report any abuse of the drop off location to your Quadrant Captain or Camp Association Officers. If frequent abuse occurs, the drop bin will be removed from the boat launch permanently. ☺



Other Notes

• Website Updates –

www.NealPondVT.org has been updated to include information on our current water quality report along with an explanation of what the different readings indicate. A new page on Pond Improvement programs has also been added. Please be sure to visit the site and update your contact info so we can stay in touch with you throughout the summer.

• **Facebook** – Follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/NealPondVT](https://www.facebook.com/NealPondVT) to stay abreast of what's going on

at the pond and to keep in touch with your neighbors.

• **Lakeshore Encroachment** – I have been in touch with the State's Lakeshore Encroachment coordinator and he mentioned that there is going to be increased monitoring at Neal Pond. If you are considering making any alterations to the shoreline, please be sure to apply for the proper permits from the state to avoid any problems.

• **Summer Newsletter and 4th of July Information** – The next edition of our newsletter is scheduled to go out in early to

mid-June. All information regarding 4th of July activities and our annual Camp Owners Association meeting will be included in the Summer edition of the newsletter. If you have ideas for 4th of July activities or would like to host a Poker Run stop on your dock, please contact me at jpratt@townisp.com by the end of May to ensure we can include all events in the Summer newsletter.

• **Other Ideas?** – Feel free to reach out with any ideas you may have for improving our pond, protecting our water, or just having fun with neighbors! ☺