

Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

Spring 2011

Eco-Fest and Our Fragile Earth

by Karen Grossman

The Town of Arlington's EcoFest this year is entitled "HOW you affect the Water that affects YOU" and is focused on a variety of aspects of water including the seven water bodies in Arlington. That means Spy Pond too, of course. FSPP will have a table at the event on March 26th from 10-2 p.m. at Town Hall. Hope to see you there.

The exhibit OUR FRAGILE EARTH will open the same day. Artists Sabrina McCormick and Gail Teschmacher McCormick created the works to focus on environmental issues with primary emphasis on climate change. Problems addressed include sea level rise, weather extremes, deforestation, desertification, endangered species, population explosion, air and water pollution, among others. Solutions presented include source reduction and recycling, energy efficiency, and alternative energy.

This time the exhibit will focus more on water related issues to connect it with the EcoFest and what we're doing in Arlington. It is being assisted by a grant from the Arlington Cultural Council and co-sponsored by Sustainable Arlington and the Town EcoFest committee. The exhibit will be on the 2nd floor of the Town Hall and runs from 3/26/11 to 5/23/11 with a reception on April 1st from 6-8 pm.



COLLAGE BY GAIL MCCORMICK

Conspicuous Consumption by Gail McCormick

These award-winning works have been exhibited at several universities, museums and the United Nations Conference on Women and the Environment. The 8' x 36' raw canvas petition has been displayed as far North as Harvard and as far South as the New College in Sarasota. It was taken to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. With thousands of signatures, it urges the U.S. to join with other nations in a treaty to limit carbon dioxide emissions and encourage energy efficiency and use of renewal resources. A new section will be hung at the exhibit in Town Hall allowing for more signatures.

Gail is Co-chair of FSPP's beautification committee. She has a Master's Degree from Columbia University, is Co-chair of Sustainable Arlington and board member of HealthLink which focuses on the environment. Dr. Sabrina McCormick is an American Academy of Science fellow at the EPA in Washington, D.C. and an adjunct professor at George Washington University with numerous publications and documentaries. She is a lead author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.



PHOTO BY FRED MOSES

Pools of water reflecting on Spy Pond ice

Winterkill

by Bill Eykamp

I really truly hope I'm wrong, but this could be the year for winterkill.

The symptom is a sickening mass of dead fish floating in the pond soon after the ice clears. The numbers can be staggering, and the odor leaves something to be desired as the water warms. In my 40+ years here, I've seen two or three winterkill events.

The early symptoms appear as ice becomes thinner after the snow melts. I recall seagulls pecking at the ice. That's common enough, but lots and lots of gulls are not common. They will be after the early victims of winterkill, dead as the ice thickened, and caught in it.

Here's what causes winterkill. Ice forms, and snow covers it. OK, that is every year. But, the snow comes early and stays deep. Lots of snow. Like this year. Thick snow blocks light. Algae grow all winter—different varieties grow in different temperature regimes, but they're down there all the time. No light means no photosynthesis. Photosynthesis produces oxygen, so no new oxygen. Ice prevents most transfer of oxygen from air to water. Then, if the algae aren't growing, many die, and their decay combined with the decay of other organic matter consumes oxygen. So do fish. Low oxygen means dead fish.

In cold water, the fish don't all float up at once, since it takes some decay to make them buoyant. So the ice can be out for a while before masses of dead fish appear.

Spring kill is a related phenomenon occurring when winter-weakened fish are unable to stand the stress of rapidly warming water, and their own rapidly rising metabolism.

Twice, I've skimmed off masses of dead fish that fetch up near my shore, and planted them under my corn patch. The Indians were right—it works. A bit smelly and very unpleasant, but the price is right and it sure removes nutrients from the pond. Where do I advertise for volunteers?

Now there are also positive benefits of darkness under the ice. Vascular weeds also grow under the ice, mostly slowly, but I recall one March day when I was out in my boat as the ice was breaking up, and I was shocked to see Eurasian milfoil at the surface just beneath the last skim of ice. Since we just treated the pond, that side-effect is unlikely to be of much benefit this year.

In the event winterkill does happen, please note that this is the international year of chemistry. The causative agent is a chemical, the chemical is oxygen, and humans had nothing to do with it.



PHOTO BY ILSE OLIVEIRA

Thoughts of spring and winter

By Ilse Oliveira

Spring is only 7 weeks away – comforting thought when there are high walls of snow on the side of the roads.

So today, on my daily walk, it was in the 40's, the air was delicious, the sun felt warm on my face, and the birds were singing (love the chickadees' calls). And then there are these huge walls of snow still waiting to melt. Oh well, we tend to get impatient this time of year; can't wait until spring!

My walk brings me back to my childhood in Austria and to the farmer's village where I grew up. The fields were safely covered with snow to protect the soil for next year's plantings. The village geese were stripped of their feathers to make downs for selling to manufacturers who made down-filled pillows and quilts out of them. The corn cobs were stripped of their kernels to keep for the winter to make food for the livestock. Life became quiet and simple, and evenings were spent playing board games, or singing, or listening to stories on the radio, or visiting neighbors to see if they needed anything or wanted some company.

Ah, the days are now getting longer, and the ice on the Pond is getting thinner.

How many days until spring? But wait, there is this unbelievable beauty of the freshly fallen snow glistening on trees and branches, and it makes me happy that I can see the beauty of all of our seasons here on Spy Pond.

Keep warm.

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

Wow, winter certainly seemed longer this year since the snow and ice never stopped coming! During the long, cold break, only the occasional dog walker braved the mounds of snow piled everywhere blocking the path through Spy Pond Park. People ventured down the boat ramp to enjoy the ice on Spy Pond. Even on wild and windy days people caught the gusts in sails while riding on a board, in a boat or hand held just gliding on skates! It sure looked like fun.

The Friends of Spy Pond Park is gearing up for spring in a very organized fashion, recruiting groups for each Work Day this year to augment the regular volunteers who have helped us previously. So, on April 16th, Boston University's Global Day of Service, we will have B.U. alumni and students work alongside us to get the park cleaned up and in shape for returning visitors. People Making a Difference will assist us again on May 14th when we may have our first view of invasive plants returning to the planting beds. If you know of or would like to organize a group of friends or others who'd like to provide this community service, please notify Doris Birmingham or Gail McCormick, our Beautification Co-Chairs (see page 8). You know, the more people who work, the easier the job will be.

Ahead we also have many projects. We are investigating places for a potential rain garden, reviewing the durability of the StaLok installation at Linwood Circle, pursuing treatment for poison ivy in our planting beds, and continuing our attempts to figure out the best approach to ameliorate path erosion throughout the park. Arlington's Public Art Committee has asked us to join them in a mural project that will hang on the wall of the Boys and Girl's Club facing Spy Pond and Spy Pond Park. The work of Arlington High School student(s) will be on display there. In conjunction with the outdoor celebration of Elizabeth Island we hope to have activities in the park.

Please join us in our efforts in the park or at our next meeting. We'll be soliciting membership dues soon and hope that you'll be generous in renewing, joining for the first time, or making additional donations to support our mission. Thank you for your support of the Friends of Spy Pond Park.

Sincerely,



Karen L. Grossman
President, Friends of Spy Pond Park

The Dead Sea and Spy Pond

by Anne Ellinger

At this moment, I'm about as far from Spy Pond's ambiance as one can get. I'm in Israel, sitting on a bench overlooking the Dead Sea and the hills of Jordan on the far shore. And though I'm grateful to be here, where the soft air and warm sun can caress my winter-starved skin, the stark beauty makes me feel more attached to the beautiful pond I call home.

I'm a creature of moisture. Even in winter the pond is beautiful. I love how the ice and snow of Spy Pond take on a thousand forms during an average winter—the crusts, sheets, star-bursts, sparkles, leaden coats, grey-blue slicks, crinkles, crackles, slabs, slushes, depths, and dustings. Here the ancient dry cliffs stare down unblinkingly. I can see they're beautiful in their unchanging way, but my heart does not respond.

I'm a creature of intimate New England spaces. I like to look at things up close—the way each tree's bark is revealed in winter; how the delicate shades of brown and grey shift and change in February's half-light. Spy Pond's expanse covered in snow looks beautifully vast to me...and I can walk across it in twenty minutes. Here, my glance covers 20 miles to Jordan and 2,000 years of history between the top of the cliffs and the bottom. At home, I am cradled in the small spaces between rolling hills; in this arid expanse I feel tiny and disoriented.

I'm a creature of friendly connections. I love how often I run into neighbors at the pond, and how I know by sight a few dozen other "regulars," even if I don't know their names. Although New England does not have a reputation for friendliness, that's not been my experience in Arlington. Even strangers usually return my smile and nod. In the bustling city of Tel Aviv (where we're staying most of this trip), as I walk down the street not one person meets my eyes, much less returns a smile. Believe me, I've tried!

Ok, I confess I'm writing with this angle in part so you won't feel bad about being stuck amidst the snowbanks while I'm galavanting in the Middle East. I'm not going on about fresh pomegranates, the smell of jasmine in the air, the coo of doves, the stately date palm trees. But I also mean every word above: Spy Pond has a gentle beauty comparable to any place on earth. We're all lucky to live near its shores.



PHOTO BY JAMIE CIOCCO

Motorboats on Spy Pond

Betsy Leondar-Wright spearheaded discussion concerning motor boating on Spy Pond via a letter to the Editor of the Arlington Advocate and a posting on the Arlingtonlist:

We'd like to open a community dialogue about motorboats on Spy Pond. It seems to quite a number of us -- members of the Friends of Spy Pond Park, residents of the Spy Pond Condos, and other Pond abutters -- that stronger controls are needed.

There are a number of positive uses of motorboats on Spy Pond that virtually everyone supports: fishing with a quiet electric trolling motor; coaching boats that have to keep up with the fast rowers on the Arlington-Belmont High School Rowing Team; and of course emergency boats. For these purposes, the current law, limiting both horsepower and miles per hour to 10, ought to prevent problems.

Nevertheless, problems have come up -- either because the law isn't enforced, or because it needs to be strengthened. The worst problems come from occasional recreational speed boaters, whose gas-powered motors are very noisy and smelly, whose wake sloshes kayaks and erodes the shoreline, and whose speed endangers animals and humans. These careless motor boaters are not frequent visitors, but they are alarming. When we see someone boating recklessly like that, what can we do? Is there any authority to call?

But even the more careful motor boaters increase the risk of gas and motor oil pollution that could harm the pond's ecology. And even those using motors for fishing or rowing-team coaching sometimes go too fast near paddled boats or too fast near the shore, causing noise annoyance and shore erosion.

The most drastic measure would be to ban gas-powered motors on Spy Pond entirely (except for emergency vehicles). This would impose an added expense on the rowing team and on a few fishing boat owners. A ban seems like a last resort.

Are there intermediate steps the Town could take? What about a law requiring that boats cause no wake on Spy Pond? That would keep speeds down, reducing noise and erosion. Could a slower speed limit than 10 mph, perhaps 5 mph, be imposed within 50 feet of the shoreline? And in the meantime, could the existing law be enforced somehow?

The Friends of Spy Pond Park would like to hear from boaters and other Pond visitors about what you think would be a reasonable policy. If we bring a proposal to Town Meeting, we'd like to have discussed it with all the affected parties in advance and developed a workable solution.

Sincerely,

Betsy Leondar-Wright
Belknap Street
For the Friends of Spy Pond Park

After much discussion and deliberation of various pros and cons, those attending the Annual Meeting voted to submit the following warrant articles for consideration at Arlington's Town Meeting in April:

Warrant Article Submission

PETITION OF TEN REGISTERED VOTERS FOR INSERTION OF ARTICLE INTO THE WARRANT FOR THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

We the undersigned registered voters of the Town of Arlington, hereby petition the Board of Selectmen pursuant to MGL C 39 10 to insert the following articles into the Warrant for the Annual Town Meeting.

ARTICLE SPY POND MOTORBOAT BYLAW

To see if the Town will vote to approve a bylaw creating a no-wake zone within 50 feet of any shore, including Elizabeth Island, for motorboats on Spy Pond.

ARTICLE SPY POND MOTORBOAT REGULATIONS SIGN

To see if the Town will vote to approve a new sign specifying all motorboat regulations (including no-wake bylaw if approved, 10 horsepower and 10 mph limit) and boating courtesy expectations for the Spy Pond boat ramp and will vote to appropriate the funds for creating and posting the sign.

Requested by:

The Friends of Spy Pond Park

Contact individual:

Betsy Leondar-Wright

Address:
21 Belknap St.
Arlington, MA 02474

Telephone: 781-648-0630

Email: betsy@classmatters.org

Why Spy Pond Needs a No-Wake Zone

By Betsy Leondar-Wright

The Friends of Spy Pond Park has filed two Town Meeting warrant articles about motorboats on Spy Pond, one establishing a no-wake zone within 50 feet of any shore (including Elizabeth Island), the other directing the Town to put up a sign explaining the limits on motorboats in the pond. (The current limits are 10 horsepower and 10 miles per hour.)

There are very few motorboats on Spy Pond, with two common exceptions: small, quiet electric trolling motors on fishing boats, which cause no problems; and the coaching boats for the Arlington/Belmont High School Rowing Team, which the Friends of Spy Pond Park enthusiastically supports. So why do we feel it's important to further regulate motorboats?

When big gas-powered pleasure boats do show up on the pond, their owners are usually unaware that there are any speed limits or horsepower limits – hence the need for the new sign. When told, most thoughtfully slow down, or pull their big motor up and put an electric trolling motor down.

I've had these rule-enforcement conversations, calling to a motor-boater from another boat or from the shore, dozens of times, and I know others have had them too. However, this kind of enforcement can be difficult when violations of the limits are hard to measure. We can't really tell how many miles an hour a boat is going, or how many horsepower an engine has. A no-wake zone would make violations visually clear to both the concerned watcher and the motor-boater. Calling "no wake!" would be much easier and clearer.

All motor-boaters are familiar with the idea of a no-wake zone, since virtually every public body of water has them in danger zones. We chose the 50-foot limit based on research into ordinances affecting other small fresh-water lakes.

The coaching boats for the rowing team would not have to change their behavior much at all if this new regulation is enacted. FSPP has been talking with the adults in charge ever since the program about minimizing the impact of the coaching boats on the ecosystem of the pond. The team has graciously agreed to make their next motor purchase be an electric one to reduce noise and pollution risk. The coaches know about the existing 10 mph limit and always need to avoid creating a wake too close to the rowing boats, as a wake can tip over such narrow shells. While those high-school rowers are impressively fast, they're not so fast that the coaches can't keep up with them while avoiding a wake near shore.

Most of the harm from excessive motorboat speed tends to come from a small number of hotheads who treat Spy Pond as if it were Lake Winnepesaukee. Every summer a few motor-boaters

zoom around our small pond at high speeds. Here are just a few of the reasons they worry us:

- Risks to canoes, kayaks and sailboats (I know someone whose legs were both broken when a motorboat ran over his canoe in upstate NY);
- Risks to swimming dogs and to wading kids;
- Erosion of fragile shorelines already battered by wind and waves, such as the Spy Pond condos' lawn, which has already required much extensive restoration, and the spots of wetland environment on the shores of Elizabeth Island and the park;
- There have been many complaints by park users about the loud noise from fast gas motors;
- The risk of a gas or oil leak polluting the water after a boat collides with a rock or scrapes bottom in a shallow area of the pond.

While some speed demons would probably disregard any rules and requests to slow down, some, if they saw a big bold sign at the boat ramp saying "No Wake Zone Within 50 Feet of Shore; Speed Limit 10 mph," would respond by boating more slowly – or would choose a different lake to zoom around. And the responsible motor-boaters, including the coaches would have a clearer guideline to follow.

The no-wake zone got a very strong vote of support at the FSPP annual meeting. Now we need to get the support from the rest of the town.

I will be meeting with the Arlington/Belmont crew team representatives and we'll make a final appearance before the Selectman to discuss our warrants early in April, perhaps refining the wording of the warrant articles. Town Meeting will be voting on the two, the no-wake zone and the new sign, later in April. If this plan makes sense to you, please contact your Town Meeting representative and ask him or her to vote in favor of the two Spy Pond motor powered boat warrants.



PHOTO BY JAMIE CIOCCO

Friends of Spy Pond Park next meetings at Karen Grossman's Sunday, April 3, 2011 & Sunday, June 5, 2011 both at 7:00 p.m. 32 Hamilton Road #402

RSVP (optional) to 781-646-5990
email fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

Park on Linwood Street off Mass. Ave. or on Lakehill off
Lake St. at the far end of the complex.

To join Friends of Spy Pond Park...

Send your annual dues (\$15 individual, \$25 household, \$5 low-income) to:
FSPP, P.O. Box 1051

Arlington, MA 02474-0021

For more information, call a Friends officer.

President: Karen L. Grossman	(781) 646-5990
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Jacki Katzman	(781) 648-9227
Lally Stowell	(781) 777-2759
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Doris Birmingham	(781) 641-2392
Gail McCormick	(781) 646-0614
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Co-chairs for Outreach/Park Events:	
Betsy Leondar-Wright	(781) 648-0630
Kathy Modigliani	(781) 643-0766
Town Day Coordinator: Sally Hempstead	(781) 643-9642

For newsletter contributions, contact berkshire2@juno.com
General comments can be sent to fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org

Friends of Spy Pond Park • <http://www.friendsofspypondpark.org> • P.O. Box 1051 • Arlington, MA 02474-0021

It's Back to Work We Go!

by Doris Birmingham
Co-Chair, Park Beautification

Yes, we could still see snow, but it is less than a month until our work season begins at Spy Pond Park. The first workday is Saturday, April 16, 1-4 p.m. (with the rain date of April 17). Thanks to a severe winter and many very windy days in March, the park is heavily littered with fallen branches and twigs along with the usual unsightly collection of bottles, cans and miscellaneous trash. In April, therefore, we will be concentrating on a general clean up with perhaps just a little weeding, and we hope that our members and supporters will come out in force. Although we have a fairly good supply of tools, it would be helpful if this time you could bring a rake (if you have one), just in case there aren't enough of our own to go around. April 16 is also Boston University's Global Day of Service and we are registered as one of the University's international (!) service sites. If you are a BU graduate or student, you might want to sign up with the University, thereby earning gold stars from both FSPP and your alma mater. To learn more and to sign up: <http://www.bu.edu/dayofservice/cities-sites/boston/>

Here is the complete list of Work Days for the season. You will note that a one of them is still tentative. That is because we are trying to coordinate our activities with other events taking place in the park vicinity this summer. So, keep your eye on our website and the next *Newsletter* for updates as the dates become

finalized. Meanwhile, mark the entire schedule on your calendars and make a resolution: if you've never attended a Work Day, resolve to join us at least once this season; if you have, resolve to help out one more day than you did last year. Summer, of course, brings hordes of weeds and many hands are needed to keep the planting beds neat. Think of these Work Days as an opportunity to enjoy the fresh air, the camaraderie of fellow workers, and the satisfaction of maintaining the beauty of Spy Pond Park.

Tentative Work Days 2011

Sat., April 16, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., April 17, 1-4 p.m.);
BU Global Day of Service

Sat., May 14, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., May 15, 1-4 p.m.)

Sat., June 11, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., June 12, 1-4 p.m.)*

Sat., July 16, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (rain date Sun., July 17, 1-4 p.m.)

Sat., Aug. 20, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (rain date Sun., Aug. 21, 1-4 p.m.)
[alternate date Aug. 13]

Sat. Sept. 10, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., Sept. 11, 1-4 p.m.)*

Sat., Oct. 15, 1-4 p.m. (rain date Sun., Oct. 16, 1-4 p.m.)

* *There will be children's activities in the park during work hours on this date.*