

July 15, 2020

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SUCCESS OF LOON STUDY VALIDATES FALL RIVER'S PARTNERSHIP IN SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS BIORESERVE AND THE UNDERSCORES THE VALUE OF PROTECTING AND STEWARDING OUR DRINKING WATER SUPPLY AREAS

*Fall River, MA* – The announcement last week by the Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) of Portland, Maine that the first Common Loon chick to hatch in a Massachusetts pond in over 100 years occurred at a pond in Fall River is big news. Since 2015, BRI introduced twenty-four loon chicks from Maine and New York to a small pond in Lakeville in hopes of developing a nesting pair that would successfully breed and begin the process of restoring the bird to its former habitats in southeastern Massachusetts. A banded male loon from that batch formed a territorial pair, nested and successfully hatched a chick here just weeks ago.

David C. Evers, Ph.D., BRI's executive director and leading expert on loon ecology and conservation called it "a major milestone in loon conservation". However, the loon is just the latest species to mark a return to its native southern New England home. In the 1990s, the first wild turkeys were released by MassWildlife in the Copicut area and now seem to be everywhere. Bald eagles nest each spring at North Watuppa Pond. Even fisher cats and bobcats are spotted occasionally by residents and visitors in the watershed areas.

No surprise. When, twenty years ago, the Commissioner of the then named Executive Office of Environmental Affairs partnered with Fall River and Freetown to create the state's first (and ultimately only) bireserve here, he was drawn to the expanse of wild woodlands, wetlands and water bodies that make up the area. Fall River, despite its urban identity, is fully half woods and water. The Southeastern Massachusetts Bireserve now approaches 16,000 acres of permanently protected forestland. And it is still growing. With proper management and care, the stage is now set for more reintroductions of rare or threatened wildlife species such as wood ducks and eastern bluebird as well as tree species such as blight-resistant American Chestnuts.

The Fall River Water Department marks its own milestones this year. Construction of Copicut Reservoir, the city's 550-acre secondary water supply body, was completed fifty years ago in 1970. And the Fall River Water Works itself, one of Fall River's oldest and most vital institutions, began in 1870 – fully 150 years ago.

In that time, the mission of the water department has not changed. We still provide clean, pure water to over 100,000 residents and customers. But, today, the duty of safeguarding the water supply lands is greatly amplified. As development closes in around it, the Southeastern Massachusetts Bireserve is a sanctuary for native plants and animals – even rare, threatened and endangered ones. It is also evolving into a regional mecca for passive outdoor recreation and for environmental education including one of America's fastest growing hobbies - birding.

The City of Fall River is pleased and excited to continue to work with the BRI field biologists and program heads and congratulates them for a job well done.

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