

## Info about Hood Pond January 2019

Having lived here since 1977, Skip and I know what Hood Pond can be like. When our children were little, we could access the pond from the shore in front of our house, where Dyer's Boat House used to be, and take them swimming. When they were taking swim lessons at the Topsfield Beach, they could swim the entire width of the pond and walk the complete shoreline of the beach without any interference from plants. Now, places where you can access the pond for swimming and boating are fewer and fewer as invasive aquatic plants have encroached.

We didn't know which plants were native and which were invasive until our friend, Jim MacDougall, who at that time worked for the Ipswich River Watershed Association and is now working as a Biodiversity Consultant, alerted us to the problem of the Chinese Water Chestnut, a highly aggressive invasive plant which can destroy a pond by blocking out light, thereby destroying animal and plant life. It also has a very nasty seed which has sharp spikes sticking up in all directions and renders the shoreline useless to anyone who wants to fish, swim or boat. The seed remains viable for 12 years. Jim and others from the IRWA came and pulled a great quantity of it out of the pond. Skip and I spent a lot of time over the next few years pulling the plant. We began to feel a sense of accomplishment that we were keeping the plant under control.

Jim referred us to Ryan O'Donnell, also from the IRWA. Ryan hosted several meetings of the "Weed Watchers" and ran an educational workshop presented by members of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Through that workshop, we learned that we also have other invasive aquatic plants in Hood Pond, all of which are highly competitive, spread aggressively and are difficult to eradicate - variable milfoil, fanwort, and phragmite. We became extremely worried about the health and future of Hood pond. It has been so discouraging to watch these plants spread as they threaten to take over. Every time we looked at the pond, we felt a sense of doom. We had no idea how to address the problem. We decided to reach out to our neighbors.

In a very loosely structured manner, (mostly through stuffing letters in mailboxes and through word of mouth), we created a group of interested neighbors, so that we could begin working together to address this problem. However, it became immediately clear that the process is arduous, multifaceted and difficult to navigate. We knew we needed help. Jim helped us to connect with the DCR, with whom we have been working since October. Anne Carroll and Vanessa Curran have been wonderful to work with - very knowledgeable and helpful, as well as empathetic. We also contacted Brad Hill, who expressed willingness to do whatever he could to help. For the first time in many years (we have been working on this since 2009) we finally have hope that we can save this wonderful pond. We hope that more people will join this endeavor. If there is anyone who would like to offer support, we would welcome his/her input and will add him/her to our distribution list, through which we provide updates. Through the DCR, we are beginning the process, which will potentially result in treatment. Hopefully, the time will soon come when our situation will be on the agenda for the Conservation Commission. At that time,

we would hope to have support at the meetings. Also, we don't know how much treatment will cost and have not yet organized a method through which to ask for donations. That's the sticky part, and something at which Skip and I lack any expertise.

Hood Pond has so much to offer. I have been testing the water for the Topsfield Beach Association since 1993 and it always tests beautifully. There are underground springs in addition to the streams which enter and exit the pond. Ben Gahagan and others from The Department of Marine Fisheries have been conducting a study of Hood Pond to determine its suitability as a spawning habitat for alewife. As Jim has said, "The pond itself is a rare example of a natural pond with cedar swamp margins and an exceptional complement of native aquatic plants." For us, it has long been a place full of life. It is home to countless mammals and birds in addition to various types of aquatic life. We see eagles, hawks and Great Blue Herons as well as ducks, geese and swans. There have been a number of beaver lodges over the years and we have even seen otter in the early spring. In the summer, the sound of bullfrogs fills the night air. And, of course, there are people. To be trite, it is truly a happy place. The sounds that drift from the pond are of people having a great time, whether they are fishing, swimming, or paddling. In the winter, cars are lined up and down the street when Skip's hockey teammates, the "Pond Rats", come to play and the adults and children skate and toast marshmallows over the fire. People are always in a good mood when they are here. Hood Pond brings joy to so many. As we said, we know what Hood Pond can be. We fervently hope that future generations will be able to experience this beautiful pond as we have for these past 42 years.