

OUTDOORS

Festival celebrates river restoration

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Municipal agencies in all 11 Naugatuck River towns as well as state and federal agencies have been working to restore the river since the Clean Water and Water Quality acts went into effect in 1977 and 1987, respectively.

The Naugatuck Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited has been working to restore and enhance the Naugatuck River's fishing, wildlife, recreational and educational scene for 32 years. The Boy Scouts Troop 140 of Oakville has 25 years to its credit, followed by 24 years for the Northwestern Chapter of Trout Unlimited, 22 years for the Naugatuck River Watershed Association, 11 years for the Naugatuck Valley Outdoor Club, seven years for the Naugatuck High Junior ROTC and five years for the Naugatuck River Revival Group.

The four longest-serving of those nonprofit groups have sponsored more than 160 restoration projects in most

of the 11 towns. Several thousand volunteer conservationists completed those projects. In recent years, other organizations joined in the restoration, enhancement and promotion of the river through greenways, riverside parks, river races, festivals, videos and websites dedicated to the Naugatuck River system.

Now that one of the worst polluted rivers in the country has been restored and its fish and wildlife abound, it's time to provide access to the river via roadways, walkways and greenways so people can enjoy the benefits and the beauty of the flora and fauna that this 40-mile natural treasure has to offer.

Attending a river festival is one way of observing some of the conservation projects that have been completed and learning what is planned for the future.

In preparation for the festival to be held at Naugatuck's Linden Park today, some kayaking members of the Naugatuck Valley Outdoor Club recently cleaned the west bank opposite Linden

Park. They removed 39 bags full of trash and more large waste. On Monday, a squad of Naugatuck High Junior ROTC members and leaders cleaned the east bank, the greenway trail and park. They removed a dozen bags of trash.

The comparatively small cleanup may be attributed to that cleanup being 12th in the last seven years. In each of the last seven years, the Junior ROTC has done a spring cleanup (and it's often added a fall cleanup). The Junior ROTC will have an exhibit at today's festival.

Today's river festival at Linden Park will last from noon until 3 p.m.. The Naugatuck River Festival and Fun Paddle Run is the focus of calling attention to the revitalized Naugatuck River. Visitors are encouraged to attend the festival to learn, explore and become stewards of the river.

There will be family-friendly river and wildlife and conservation exhibits and activities by many of the conservation organizations.

There will also be canoe and kayak demos from CT Outdoors and other area exhibitors.

Approximately 371,000 trout were stocked before opening day into 100 lakes and ponds and nearly 170 rivers and streams. DEEP's in-season stockings are now underway with nearly 230,000 additional trout to be stocked before the end of May.

The Connecticut River remains cool and flows are currently well below typical mid-April levels. Some fish are in the river, but reports of American shad are few (they should pick up as water temperature increases). Shad darts and willow leaf generally work well.

Black crappie fishing is good. Striped bass are being found in the river, but mostly schoolie size and action is slow. Some northern pike catches continue to be reported in the Middletown to Haddam Meadow section. Anglers are finding some small-mouth bass in the mainstem.