

Housatonic Rapids

For A Fishable, Swimmable Housatonic River

Summer 2004

Newsletter of the Housatonic River Initiative and the Housatonic Riverkeeper - HRI

Housatonic River Festival: Riverfest 2004

The original festival dedicated to the citizen-led campaign to clean up the
Housatonic River

**Lee Town Soccer Fields
Route 102 in Lee
Sunday July 25
12pm - 6pm**



**co-sponsored by the
Housatonic Environmental Action League
Berkshire Environmental
Action Team
Center for Ecological Technology
Berkshire County League of Sportsmen
Lee Land Trust**

solar powered by Sunweaver

**Wind Over Wings - Birds of Prey
Canoeing
Fly casting lessons
Fly tying
Activities & Great Prizes for Children
Food
Learn about environmental groups**

**Hear some of the Berkshires' best
musicians play for the river
David Grover & The Big Bear
Band**

**Dooley Austin
Housatonic Philharmonic
Square-contra dancing with
Cliff & Senta Brodeur
Terry ala Berry & Friends**

For the latest scheduling information check out:
www.housatonic-river.org

American Rivers: “Housatonic one of America’s 10 most endangered rivers!”

American Rivers, a Washington based environmental group, issued a report in April naming the Housatonic River as #7 on its list of America’s ten Most Endangered Rivers. HRI nominated the river to bring more attention to the upcoming decision by the USEPA to determine whether more of the river should be cleaned of the PCBs that continue to make the river a toxic waterway.

This is what American Rivers said:

“Irresponsible industrial activity has left the floodplain and river bottom of the Housatonic River contaminated with some of the highest levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the nation.

“People who consume contaminated fish and wildlife from along the river are at elevated risk for cancer, birth defects, and immune problems.

“Unless the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) orders a cleanup of the remaining contamination, General Electric Company’s (GE) toxic legacy in the Housatonic will remain a major health hazard for generations to come.”

Check out the report at
www.americanrivers.org



Housatonic ducks contain PCB levels more than 200 times EPA’s level for human consumption.
[photo courtesy of the EPA]

After twelve years of HRI’s successful advocacy to win the clean up of the first two miles, we know the next two years will be critical to ensure that the EPA will order further clean up. HRI is keenly aware that an organized, educated, and demanding citizenry will be the key.

Peer Review panels convene in Lenox

HRI effectively participated in some of the most important scientific meetings for the future of the Housatonic River. The **Human Health Risk Assessment** Peer Review panel met on November 18-20, 2003.. The Human Health Risk assessment is one of the reports that will allow EPA to decide if the “rest of the river” will be cleaned of PCBs.

HRI was the only Massachusetts environmental group to testify before the seven risk assessment scientists who made up the panel. The Housatonic Environmental Action League was the only Connecticut group to testify. We have been told that the Human Health Risk Assessment prepared by the EPA – the report that the panel was considering – is considering one of the most damning risk assessment ever written by the EPA.

The Ecological Risk Assessment meetings were convened in January. HRI and our consultants suggested several areas where these assessments could be strengthened.

HRI’S HUMAN HEALTH AND ECOLOGICAL RISK SUMMIT

We have been fortunate to work with some of America’s leading experts on PCBs and their effect on both the natural environment and human health.

We recently hosted the first grassroots risk summit on the Housatonic River to an overflow crowd at Town Hall in Lee. With our co-sponsors, the Housatonic Environmental Action League and the newly formed Berkshire Environmental Action Team, we presented talks by two leading environmental and public health experts.

Dr. Peter L. deFur has extensive experience in ecological risk assessment. He is chair of the Board of the Science and Environmental Health Network (SEHN), President of the Association for Science in the Public Interest, and recently completed a term on the National Research Council Board on Environmental Studies and Toxicology (BEST). He has conducted numerous reviews of EPA's ecological and human health risk assessments. These are some of the interesting things he told us:

"Skin rashes is a hallmark condition of either PCB or dioxin and furan and I know that Tim has talked about ... some workers in the Pittsfield plant who have skin rashes.

"Neurological development, that is the development of the young brain, fetal development of the brain is impaired by PCB exposures.

"It turns out that children and young animals are considered to be the most sensitive to PCB exposures. And it is not unlike the same condition as lead exposure.

"And it happens to children so we are most concerned with exposure to children and that's because the brain is just developing and very important developmental patterns and cell functions are being established in the womb and immediately thereafter as the brain begins to develop. And that's when it's most sensitive. It turns out that children are most sensitive and that's true for PCBs as well as the PCB-like compounds.

"Immune system impairments are under investigation now. We know that there are a number of experimental animals who have their immune systems altered by PCB exposures and it seems that that pattern holds up for humans as well.

"There's some recent work on seniors – that is, people my age and older and, in fact, even some younger, over the age of 40-something who may have cognitive deficits as a function of PCB exposure, principally through fish consumption.

"They have a couple of different ways of exerting harmful effects on humans and one of them is because they behave like the compound known as dioxin which means that if they are acting in that mode then they may exert that entire suite of toxic effects, one of which is

cancer. So cancer can be caused by dioxin and in fact PCBs are also considered to be a probable human carcinogen."

Dr. David Carpenter is an internationally recognized expert in PCBs and public health. He is a Professor at the Environmental Health and Toxicology Division, School of Public Health at the University of Albany in New York. Dr. Carpenter has been an editorial advisor to many scientific journals, and hosted a 170 station syndicated Public Health Radio Show. He has 220 publications, 37 reviews and book chapters and 12 other publications to his credit. Here are some of the very important things he had to say:

"I want to emphasize is that I don't think that fish consumption is the major route of exposure. I don't think it is at all. I think it is air transport and breathing in PCBs.

"PCBs are stable – they're stable in the environment; they're stable in our bodies. If you eat a PCB-contaminated fish today and don't have any more exposure for 10 years, in 10 years time you will have half of the amount you ate tonight in your body. The only way they're degraded in the body is if the liver can break them down. The livers try to break them down, they're not very successful. If you're a woman who is breastfeeding her child you will secrete PCBs in the fat in the breast milk because that is the only way humans secrete fat. And so your infant will be contaminated.

"If you're pregnant, your fat, which contains the PCBs, is in equilibrium with the fat of your infant. And this is why these effects on the nervous system, effects on development of reproduction, reproductive organs, effects on various hormones are so important in children, especially children before birth."

"Now how do the PCBs go from Pittsfield to the globe? Now PCBs only go in the air when the water evaporates so they have to go into the water from the sediments, to get into the water and then get into the air. But if you have a contaminated site, contaminated soil exposed, every time it rains some of those PCBs are going to go into the water and then they are going to go into the air.

"The sediments can move. ... That's how the lower Housatonic got contaminated. But where does the Housatonic flow? It flows into the Atlantic Ocean."



GOOD THINGS TO LIFE: GE, PCBs, AND OUR TOWN

Blue Hill Films is pleased to announce the availability of its award-winning documentary.

Produced & Directed & Edited by Mickey Friedman, "Good Things To Life" is the story of one of America's largest and most complicated PCB-contaminated sites: the General Electric plant in Pittsfield, MA and 110 miles of the Housatonic River. Shot over 12 years on digital video, it is several interconnected stories. GE manager Ed Bates and several workers share their first-hand experiences about working at GE Power Transformer, their on-going exposure to PCB-contaminated oil, and the routine discharge and dumping of contaminated material.

"Good Things To Life" is also the story of a river and the people who live alongside and love that river. George Darey, the Chairman of the MA Division of Fish and Wildlife talks about his decades-long struggle to reclaim the Housatonic.

It's also a story about PCBs and public health. Former Mayor Remo Del Gallo speaks about the health concerns of GE workers and the people who live in the neighborhood closest to GE.

Diane Dumanoski, co-author of "Our Stolen Future" and Dr. David Carpenter, one of America's leading PCB-researchers share their experiences with people in Pittsfield.

And finally, "Good Things To Life" is the story of Tim Gray and HRI and the successful battle of an exceedingly rare coalition of workers, sportsmen, and environmentalists to force GE into a \$350 million cleanup.

"Good Things To Life" was an official selection at the 2003 Lost Film Festival in Philadelphia, the 2003 FilmColumbia Festival, VisionFest 03 in New York City, and the Civic Cinema Festival in L.A. in April, 2004. Mickey Friedman won the award for "Outstanding Achievement in Editing" at VisionFest 03.

For more information and/or to order a copy for your school, library or for home use, go to the website: <http://www.goodthingstolife.com> or <http://www.bluehillfilms.com> or you can email Mickey at bluehillfilms@verizon.net For those of you without internet service, you can contact him at Blue Hill Films, 32 Rosseter Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230 or call 413-528-9395.

HRI'S EDUCATION PROGRAM

HRI and the Housatonic Riverkeeper took part in the following community activities this year:

St Joseph's High School with Steve Antil's science dept.

Lee High School Environmental Classes with Tim Hickey

Lenox High School with Christine Laubach's science classes

Hotchkiss School - PCB / HRI presentation
Williams College - PCB environmental forum

Simon's Rock Environmental Classes with Professor Don Roeder.

BCC - PCB/ river forum - Mass Waterwatch student-run environmental group

Housatonic River Appreciation Day- with the Housatonic River Commission and eight Northern Connecticut schools on the banks of the river

EPA National Panel on Contaminated Sediments

Lecture at the Southern Berkshire Community Center

PCB Presentation at Waterkeeper Alliance National Conference

Three community river clean ups in partnership with Mass Waterwatch and the Berkshire Environmental Team at October Mt. Wildlife area, west branch, and Wahconah Park

Many successful canoe trips with groups from the girl scouts to the Southern Berkshire Community Center.

HRI RECEIVES MET and NEGEF GRANTS

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET) and the New England Grassroots Fund has awarded grants to HRI for 2003- 2005. The MET grant totals \$30,000 to continue our advocacy to clean the Housatonic. The NEGRF \$2000 grant was used for basic program support and help with our highly successful PCB Congress, an event that brought together community representatives from PCB sites across America.

ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR., HEAD OF WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE, ON AIR AMERICA RADIO

As the Housatonic Riverkeeper, and one of the members of the nation-wide Waterkeeper alliance, we urge you to check out "Ring Of Fire," an important show about the environment every Saturday morning from 10 – 11 via the internet at www.airamericaradio.com.

HRI JOINS PITTSFIELD NEIGHBORS TO OPPOSE A PROPOSED WASTE TRANSFER STATION ON THE BANKS OF THE HOUSATONIC

HRI joined neighbors, concerned citizens, and the Berkshire Environmental Action Team at press conferences and Pittsfield City Hall to urge the city not to approve a waste transfer station on the banks of the Housatonic River. The proposed site is on the only clean branch of the Housatonic and directly across from a city park.

A local residential group named RATTS (Residents Against the Transfer Station) has burst on the scene to protect their neighborhood. While a waste transfer station might make sense in terms of recycling, the banks of our river is certainly not the place to site it. This industrial facility would be within 200 feet of a residential neighborhood,

and the developers must obtain waivers from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection..

Residents fear additional pollution, noise, traffic hazards, and the loss of property values if Pittsfield allows the facility there. HRI Director Tim Gray argued that the city should protect the river and take a proactive, positive stance, and help the developer find a more appropriate site.

POLAR BEARS & PCBs

Scientists in the Arctic region of Norway have warned that polar bears are at risk because of high levels of chemical pollution from the rest of Europe and East Asia.. The bears have been found with both male and female sexual organs.

Scientists say chemicals used in heavy industry are causing the abnormalities, which could eventually lead to the bear's extinction. Polar bear birth-rates are already falling, and the Norwegian Polar Institute has detected high levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in the bears' blood.

According to polar bear research scientist Andrew Derocher: "Even a very small change in reproductive rates can cause a very slow decline in the population level, and if this happens you could see a population greatly reduced or in the worst case go to extinction."

The polar bear suffers because it is at the top of a food chain. At each step in the food chain, more PCBs accumulate in the body fat. Scientists are worried that humans may also be at risk from PCBs, whose effects are felt much further afield than the Arctic Circle.



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**HRI exists on a tiny budget; and we donate
hundreds and hundreds of hours of work. Please
support our important advocacy by donating
whatever you can.**

Housatonic River Initiative
Box 321
Lenoxdale, MA 01242

**HRI:
WORKING
FOR A FISHABLE,
SWIMMABLE
HOUSATONIC
SINCE 1992**

RIVERFEST
Lee Town Soccer Fields
Route 102 in Lee
Sunday July 25
12pm - 6pm

NON-PROFIT
U.S.
POSTAGE
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Pittsfield, MA 01201