



# The Watershed

Vol. 14, No. 1

**The Oyster Pond Environmental Trust Newsletter**  
**OPET, P.O. Box 496, Woods Hole, MA 02543-0496**

**Summer 2010**  
**www.opet.org**



Michael Talbot is our featured speaker at the OPET Annual Meeting. The title of his talk is *Ecological Landscaping: New Approaches to Land Care that Protects Our Bays, Ponds and Inlets*. As you may know, ornamental lawns and landscapes are a significant reason why Cape Cod bays, inlets, ponds and streams are becoming more polluted. This slide program is an opportunity to learn from a well-known professional tree, lawn and conservation expert on how to have healthy gardens, lawns and plantings that are attractive AND environmentally sensitive; using less water and fertilizer, using fewer and safer pesticides and avoiding damage to our natural resources such as Oyster Pond.

Michael Talbot is the co-owner of Talbot Ecological Land Care, a nationally recognized company that specializes in Natural Landscape Design and Conservation Restoration, as well as Lawn and Plant Care Services here in southeastern Massachusetts. In 2008 Michael received the "Environmental Champion Award" as "an early pioneer of organic lawn and landscape care, as well as sustainable [landscape] design...." In his three decades working in both the public and private sectors, he has been staff horticulturist and educator for the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and Boston Urban Gardeners, and a consultant for institutions such as the National Park Service, the John F. Kennedy Library and the Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority. Michael has appeared on The Victory Garden, New England Chronicle and many other television and radio programs. He was a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Maine and teaches yearly at professional conferences and colleges, garden clubs, environmental organizations and other institutions throughout the eastern United States. He has written numerous articles and was a co-founder of the Ecological Landscaping Association and the principal author of their publication on professional turf management.

**Please Join us for the  
OPET Annual Meeting  
Thursday, July 22, 2010**

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**7 pm Light Refreshments  
7:30 pm Michael Talbot,  
Talbot Ecological Land Care**

**Ecological Landscaping:  
New Approaches  
to Land Care that  
Protects Our  
Bays, Ponds and Inlets**

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**SEA Education Association  
171 Woods Hole Rd**

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The past two years have made it clear that the health of Oyster Pond is closely linked to both the Lagoon and the Trunk River. In this Watershed the article, "Clearing the Pathway to the Sea," describes what OPET has done to increase the flow of water out of the Pond and to make it easier for herring to get into and out of the Pond. Another article describes the great progress we have had in making the Phragmites along the south shore of the Pond a nuisance instead of a big problem. The pictures in this issue of the Watershed can also be viewed on our new website. In addition, you can also see short videos showing the clearing of the Lagoon and the Trunk River this spring and the mowing of Phragmites last February. We are pleased with and proud of this website. It is user friendly with beautiful pictures and is educational. The website address is opet.org. Building the osprey platform has been the only project that has not worked out as we had hoped. In 2009, after two years, two ospreys brought nesting material to the platform and then abandoned

it. This spring, two ospreys used it briefly as a resting place. Maybe next year we will finally get lucky. As most of you know by this time, the economic slowdown has forced OPET to become better organized in asking for your support. We cannot do everything we need to do without the continued support of everyone reading this. Please keep OPET in mind when you make your annual donation list.

I step down as President at our annual meeting on July 22 when we elect our next President. I will not disappear. I plan to continue attending monthly meetings, counting herring, and volunteering at OPET work days. I am proud of what OPET has done during the last 4 years that I have been President.

*Lou Turner*



## We are Winning the Phragmites Battle!

Substantial progress was made this past year over OPET's battle to remove *Phragmites australis*, the invasive, exotic reed, from the south shore of the pond. Significant areas are now nearly "Phragmites-free," greatly expanding the views of the pond from bike path and allowing native plants to rebound! Hooray!

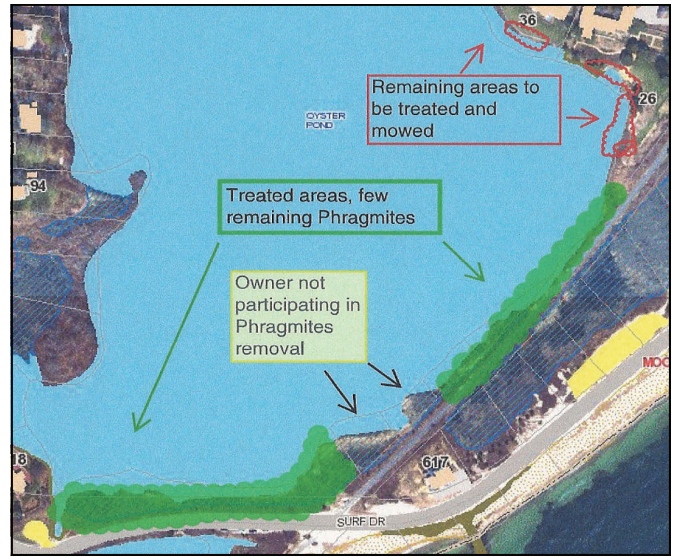
Chris Polatin of Polatin Ecological Services sprayed large swaths of the areas with low volume back pack sprayers with Rodeo (the aquatic safe version of Roundup) in late September and hand swiped stalks in sensitive areas near native vegetation and the shoreline. The results are fantastic! Only handfuls of stalks are appearing in the treated areas, while Phragmites is growing just as thickly as ever in the untreated lots (unfortunately, a land-owner on the south shore will not grant us permission to cut his Phragmites). Our grant from the Town of Falmouth Community Preservation Committee paid for Polatin's services.

In February we also tried a new idea. When the pond was completely frozen with several inches of ice, we mowed down the dead Phragmites stalks with a brush cutter. What a revelation! With the pond frozen over, it was the perfect opportunity to reach Phragmites growing in the water. The rest of the year this would require boots, waders or delicate and difficult balancing from a boat to reach these stalks. It is also tiring as the reeds grow so thickly together, one row must be removed before cutting the row behind it.

Now we could simply walk along with a brush cutter, cutting down and grinding up several rows at once. There was also the added advantage that we didn't worry about accidentally removing any native vegetation as it was dormant under the ice.

For the areas we did not mow before the pond thawed, we again recruited Americorps to help clear away the dead stalks. Americorps was once more fantastic to work with, and I can't say enough about how great this organization is. Their labor is free and the young workers were energetic and cheerful hauling cut phragmites through the water to the waiting trucks. All the rain this winter and spring raised the pond level significantly. Sometimes the water was knee high, but many times, unseen holes opened up and Americorps and OPET volunteers alike found themselves toppled over into the water. A grant from the Woods Hole Foundation paid for the disposal of the Phragmites stalks and lunch for the Americorps volunteers.

It was a great feeling when we cleared through to join two work areas! We've now cleared Phragmites from 1000 feet of shoreline!



Our next round of work is to take out the remaining stragglers, most of which are growing up through other vegetation. Chris Polatin and his crew will be back to treat them in the fall.



The foreground is a cleared and treated area that was once thick with Phragmites. Only a few Phragmites are growing here now. In contrast, Phragmites grow just as thickly as ever in the background along the shoreline. The owner of this property is not participating in the Phragmites removal project.

This winter we will mow down the remaining stand of phragmites at the southeastern end of the pond. This is an area that is difficult to access as you either have to wade through big bushes of poison ivy from the land side or try balancing from a boat—best to wait for the return of the ice! *By Wendi Buesseler*

### Officers & Directors 2009—2010

<b>President</b> - Lou Turner	Michael McNaught
<b>Vice Pres.</b> - Steve Leighton	Martin Monk
<b>Treasurer</b> - Bill Rowe	Dana Rodin
<b>Clerk</b> - Peter Valtin	Jonathan Smith
<b>Directors</b>	David Sykes
Alfred Allenby	<i>Executive Assistant</i> - Wendi Buesseler
Ron Breteler	<i>Hon. Board Member</i> - Robert Livingstone
Barbara Doe	
John Dowling	

OPET Board meetings are open to all OPET members. Meetings are usually held on the third Sunday of the month, at 4:30 pm in the Treetops Clubhouse.

We'd love to have you come!

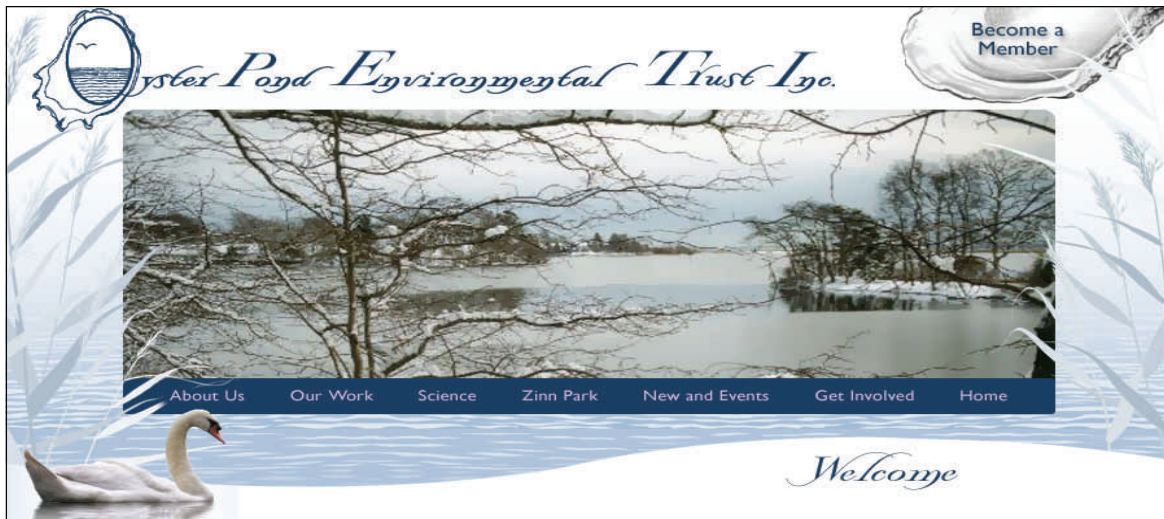
OPET does not have an official phone, but you can leave a message at 508-540-3263. We'll gladly get back to you!

Or email: [info@opet.org](mailto:info@opet.org)

Please visit our website [www.opet.org](http://www.opet.org).



## OPET's New Web Site is Launched!



Hooray! OPET's shiny new, improved web site is up and running. We invite you to explore our expanded and improved site at [opet.org](http://opet.org). There are several new sections including a new **Science** section that incorporates all the data from OPET's Water Quality Monitoring Program. This will be a big plus for researchers that use Oyster Pond as a study site. We've also pulled together other information and research conducted at Oyster Pond and posted it in this section including Pond Watchers information, Boston University Marine Program studies and published scientific research papers.

You'll also see videos of OPET members and others in action from mowing phragmites over the frozen pond to watching the DPW dredge Trunk River after March's fierce

nor'easter storm that completely plugged the river.

Our new **Our Work** section describes all the various projects that OPET is involved in from invasives removal, to keeping Trunk River and the Lagoon open and flowing, to monitoring Oyster Pond's herring population.

For the first time, all of OPET's newsletters are available in pdf format, just in case you want to read any back issues and follow the evolution of OPET since our first newsletter in 1991. We also have a new section on the history of OPET and a **Quick Facts** section about the Pond.

We will also soon offer PayPal so that you can become a member or donate to OPET on line. So please surf over to [opet.org](http://opet.org) and see what is happening for yourself!

### THE 2010 HERRING RUN



On March 14, a nor'easter brought so much sand into the Trunk River that the sand was 2 feet deep from the end of the jetty all the way to the elbow where the River turns east towards the Lagoon. Needless to say, the River was completely

blocked, and the depth of water at the weir reached almost 14 inches — 6 inches higher than the previous record. The Department of Public Works cleared the sand on March 16, and the first adult herring migrated into Oyster Pond that night.

Herring were seen migrating almost every night during the following two months with the last herring headed for the Pond on May 3. The total count this year was 2,148. The

Trunk River is about 3 feet wide and 2 to 3 inches deep, and the herring migrate in small enough numbers that it is possible to count (rather than estimate) every single one as they go by. However, the total count does contain an estimate of 800 migrants seen by a late-night fisherman on two separate nights. Five members of the Board (Al Allenby, Ron Breteler, Wendi Buesseler, Steve Leighton, Lou Turner) did the counting with occasional help from Carl Breivogel. Each counter spent about one hour at the River. This was a longer time than in 2009 and is part of the reason the migration into the Pond was about double last year's count.

The herring fry migration back to the ocean began on June 10. There have been fry at the weir every day since, and the estimate of the total migration as of the day this is being written is 80,000. In 2009, the first herring fry were seen on June 21, and the total seen by today's date was about 15,000. We are obviously well ahead of last year when the total estimate of the fry migration was 340,000. There is still a long way to go. The last fry migration is usually in early December. *by Lou Turner*

## CLEARING THE PATHWAY

OPET's mission is to protect the health and beauty of Oyster Pond. But the health of the Pond is closely linked to the Lagoon and the Trunk River, and OPET pays a lot of attention to all three bodies of water. For years, the western end of the Lagoon has been filled with decaying eelgrass brought in by various storm surges. The storm surges have also brought in a lot of sand that has been deposited at the mouth of the Trunk River. As it decays, the eelgrass produces an unpleasant hydrogen sulfide smell, and the eelgrass also makes it difficult for herring and eels to navigate between the Trunk River and Oyster Pond. In 2009, about 500 adult herring heading back to the ocean were trapped because they took the wrong path through the eelgrass and were blocked by sand only 4 feet from the Trunk River. A short channel was quickly dug to link them to the river. Glass eels about 2 inches long have also been observed struggling mightily to make their way through the mat of eelgrass on their way to the Pond. It had become clear that the wrong storm surge could completely



*A map showing the close link between Oyster Pond, the Lagoon and Trunk River.*



*The western end of the Lagoon filled up with dead eel grass and sand.*

block the passage of herring and eels between the ocean and the Pond.

The sand pile at the mouth of the Trunk River was also slowing the flow of water out of the Pond. In the spring of 2008, OPET dug a channel through this sand to increase the flow of water out of the Pond. As a result, the Lagoon experienced no algae bloom during the summer of 2008 and 2009.



*The Lagoon open and clear.*

For many years, OPET had been urging the town to dredge the Lagoon to solve this problem, and this year our prayers were answered. The DPW brought in a crane that removed all of the eelgrass and muck that had been accumulating for many years. Here are two pictures that show the Lagoon before and after dredging. If you visit our new website, you will be able to see two videos of the crane at work ([opet.org](http://opet.org)).



## TO THE SEA

Shortly after the dredging was completed, another problem arose. A huge nor'easter swept up the coast, dumping nearly 3 inches of rain. In addition, high winds and surf pushed sand into Trunk River, almost filling up the jetties to the bottom of the



Trunk River bike path bridge! The sand was two feet deep all the way to the elbow where the River does a right angle bend and heads for the Lagoon. One OPET member saw 6-foot waves breaking on the beach near the Trunk River jetties. Lou Turner, OPET President reported on the conditions:

*"There is presently no water flowing in the Trunk River or out of the Pond. The amount of sand that has been deposited really does require the help of a backhoe, if we are to restore the flow of water in the river quickly. The depth of water at the weir is about 12.5 inches, the highest in the two years I have been making measurements. There has been a lot of sand removed from beaches. Quissett Beach at the junction of Surf Drive and the Bike Path has lost almost all of its sand."*



Thankfully, at the urging of Herring Warden Chuck Martinsen, the DPW quickly brought in a backhoe to clear out the river as soon as the storm passed. The

Falmouth DPW did an excellent job quickly clearing the river. Two videos of the backhoe at work can be viewed on our website. The pictures here gives you a good idea of the amount of sand that ended up in the River.

The work was completed just in time: that evening the first herring of the season migrated up Trunk River into Oyster Pond to spawn. We had some inkling that the herring were nearby. During the entire dredging operation, a seal hovered just offshore at the Trunk River outlet awaiting a herring snack.

Despite the dredging of the lagoon and work of the DPW, OPET must still carefully monitor the condition of Trunk River. The Trunk River is so narrow and shallow that every March OPET manicures the river daily to make it deep enough for adult herring to swim upstream. High tides carry in sand and rocks blocking the river. The monitoring continues until mid-December to ensure that the herring fry



*OPET volunteers readying Trunk River for the spring return of herring.*

can also move down Trunk River to the ocean. During the summer, children frequently add rocks to the river to build dams. There is also a problem in the fall when high tides create eelgrass dams near the bike path bridge that can be 18 inches thick and over 20 feet long. The herring warden, Chuck Martinsen, relies on OPET to remove these dams. A member of the OPET Board, Stephen Leighton, has designed a gate that will be constructed at the end of the jetty to prevent eelgrass from ever getting into the River. It will be constructed by DPW at the end of the summer. We hope it works.

The above makes clear that how important the Lagoon and the Trunk River are to the health of Oyster Pond and the success of our herring population.

*by Lou Turner*



**A Tip to Help Oyster Pond — Recycle lawn clippings —** Leave clippings on the lawn to break down and re-nourish your lawn. They can provide up to 25% of your lawn's nitrogen needs. Clippings are a free and easy source of nitrogen for your lawn. Contrary to old folk tales, clippings do not cause thatch. Thatch is caused by the excessive use of fertilizer. Never dispose of lawn clippings or leaves in the pond or in wetlands. It is **illegal** to dump any thing in a wetland area. **Recycled clippings = Less Fertilizer = A Healthier Pond!**

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at the SEA Education Association, 171 Woods Hole Road



7 pm Light Refreshments  
7:30 pm **Ecological Landscaping: New Approaches to Land Care that  
Protects Our Bays, Ponds and Inlets**  
with Michael Talbot of Talbot Ecological Land Care



**The Oyster Pond  
Environmental  
Trust**

P.O. Box 496

Woods Hole, MA 02543-0496

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