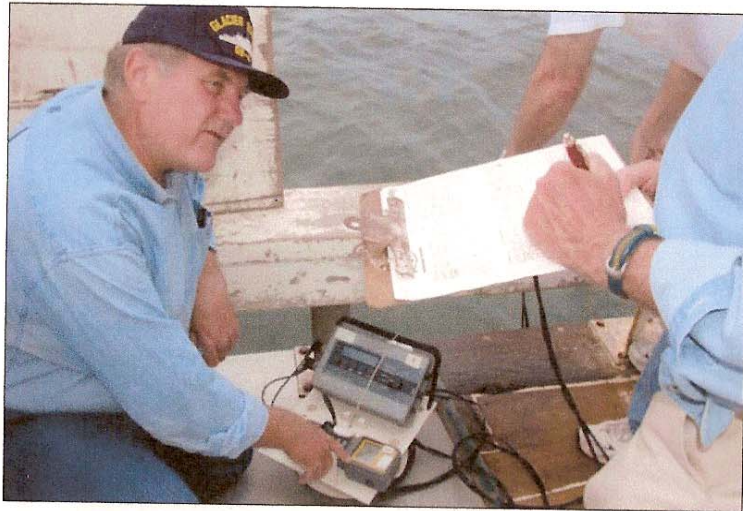


Auxiliary Trains With Harbor Watch/River Watch

Water Quality Sampling Program Will Become Part of Routine Patrols in Norwalk Harbor

Over the Memorial Day weekend, Norm Bloom served as host and helmsman aboard one of his company's 14 oyster boats to provide the platform for the first on-water training session for members of Flotilla 72 who have volunteered to provide water sampling data for Harbor Watch/River Watch. Dick Harris, the program's founder and director, demonstrated the exacting procedure required to provide the kind of scientifically reliable data that, over the past nineteen years, has served to make Norwalk Harbor one of the best-documented maritime environments in the Northeastern United States.



"We created this program to make users and friends of Norwalk Harbor aware of the critical factors that can keep it healthy or threaten its vitality," said Harris. "In all this time, the local media have strongly supported our effort," he added. Harbor Watch data clearly predicted the catastrophic fish kill of 2005. After Harris communicated his forecast to local papers, the resulting publicity served to create an ecological object lesson around the event, to the ultimate benefit of Norwalk Harbor, its creatures, and its users.

With a combination of professional and volunteer workers, Harbor Watch has generated several years' of data, primarily

on the salinity and oxygen content of the inner harbor, from Wall Street to the vicinity of Peach Island. But that's not all there is to the Norwalk estuary, and Harris has long been eager to extend the reach of Harbor Watch efforts. "We're really concerned with a marine system that ranges from Norwalk Harbor to the Saugatuck River," he said.

Ralph Field, staff officer for Marine Safety and Environmental Protection at the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 72, saw an opportunity for the Auxiliary to help fill some of the gap. "We conduct regular safety patrols throughout the boating season from Darien to Westport," he noted. "It seemed a natural to integrate a sampling program into this effort on behalf of Harbor Watch/River Watch," he added.

The Flotilla ran 89 patrols in 2006, amounting to well over 2,000 volunteer member hours. Starting in the 2007 season, these patrols will extend the reach of Harbor Watch beyond the inner harbor, measuring water quality data at designated stations near Buoy 17, Buoy 9 (East Passage), Grassy Hammock, and Peck Ledge Light. "If that goes as planned," Field said, "we can certainly consider monitoring other sites. The only caveat is that direct mission orders from the Coast Guard will continue to take priority."

It was Fields's initiative that brought eight Auxiliary members aboard the Bloom Brothers vessel for the Memorial Day training session with Harris. "This will add important new dimension to the data we have been supplying to DEP and others for many years," said Harris. "Our hope is that some day, state and local governments will see fit

to budget the funds needed to make it all pay off in more effective management of our harbors and waterways."

At the end of the day, a bonus bag of world-famous Norwalk oysters constituted compensation for the Auxiliary volunteers. The oysters are reported to be plentiful and healthy these days, thanks in part to efforts like Harbor Watch/River Watch.

With a little lemon juice and a dollop or two of Trader Joe's Jalapeño Hot Sauce, they served as an appropriate complement to the day's endeavors.



Left, Coast Guard Auxiliarist Joe DeFranco reads a salinity measurement to Ralph Field for recording and submission to HR/RW. Routine measurements include dissolved oxygen content, salinity, turbidity, and temperature at various depths.

Below, Hal Erichs reads wind speed to Chris Williams, Division Staff Officer for Marine Safety, while project leader Ralph Field confers with Dick Harris, founder and director of Harbor Watch/River Watch.

Above, skipper Norm Bloom stands watch. One bonus for participants was a bag of fresh oysters, courtesy of Bloom Brothers. Thanks Norm!

