From: Friends of Alewife Reservation Board of Directors

186 Alewife Brook Parkway #304

Cambridge, MA 02138

30 April, 2014

Dear Department of Public Works,

Owen O’Riordan, Catherine Woodbury, Kathy Watkins

Although there have been several issues of concern, the most prominent is water quality since the discovery of 4 deceased geese and 1 deceased opossum in early March. At present 8 dead animals have the Friends of Alewife Reservation concerned. A swan, duck, meadow vole and another goose were found dead in areas of water flow, around a particular location on the Reservation which I can point out if there is another site visit. Although 2015 is the date scheduled by the city for the improvement in water quality all are seeking through separating the sewer from storm water in north Cambridge, FAR must bring attention to problems now, as an on-the-ground stewarding group, we must represent the wildlife that cannot speak, and for the safety of people who come to this marvelous restored wetland.

1). Quality of water and water testing:  Testing of water at the oxbow was completed by the City (DPW) after much discussion in April. The results showed oil and grease. Bacterial testing (e.coli, coliform) was not performed because the samples were sent to the lab too late in the day for the prep required, it was explained.  Those tests are still needed by the City of Cambridge or other agencies so as to note if there are any water bound toxins.

2).  Ellen Mass, President of FAR, suggested I establish a photo page for reference.  There are now77 photos on the page from the goose carcasses at the oxbow extending to recent photos of alewife brook channel dated. Several times a week on my visits I check the areas that seem to contain sewage:  Alewife Brook channel, stormwater forebay stormwater ditch, oxbow boardwalk area at Little River and O photograph those areas that seem to contain a fair amount of sewage, floatables, grease and oil.  The amount and places vary; but every visit results in one or two being photographed.  .[https://www.flickr.com/photos/120571205@N06/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/120571205%40N06/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

3) Every involved agency such as Bioengineering, the city, the state (DCR) , MWRA and Watershed Assoc. Mywra and Lesley University were unable to test for bacteria or chemicals after dead animals were reported.  IT was too late to do a necropsy, but we ruled out natural predation.The City did say that as part of the wetland contract they would be testing the forebay and the wetlands on a regular basis.  There are no provisions for the oxbow as that is considered part of the Little River and outside the jurisdiction of the wetland project, so we are concerned. However, this area should be tested as it is within Cambridge’s jurisdiction. And there is a great deal of construction connected to the forebay, and its toxic debris must be kept away from the marshes of the wetland.

4) Recently, prior to the MWRA’s NOI for the new sewer interceptor being presented to the Conservation Commission, the MWRA sent 3 years worth of results. With some assistance we were given Mystic River Watershed Association (Mywra) results and have seen results through 2013..  But are not seeing 2014 as the water quality seems to have worsened both in Alewife Brook Channel, Alewife Brook and Little River. Patrick Heron of MyRWA also sent several “hot spot” results. We have also requested that Health Department stay involved in the water quality issue.

5).  A repeat email to the DPW referenced the photo page and requested testing.  There was an immediate response to this with more data.The Alewife channel was tested that day.  The results were remarkably low considering the appearance and odor of the Alewife brook channel., and our observations were only that. DPW also now has a table of water testing results on its website that end at 2009 except for one result (above) in 2014.  We hope all prior results will be filled in. This week, we received much more data from Kelly Coughlin of MWRA through April 2014.

6).  Recently, MWRA filed NOI with the Conservation Commission to begin a major 2 million dollar project to place a floatables management system near the Reservation entrance and inside the Reservation.  We now all openly agree this water in the Channel is sewage filled and receives 004 and 401 Cam outfall waste.  This project is part of the Federal mandate lawsuit and needs to be started by August 2014 and finished by December 2015.  Unfortunately it will disrupt the Reservation at its entrance and is happening after the Reservation restoration work has been completed. Particularly troubling is the likely loss of the enriched 3 year developed Native Garden which is a community garden, worked on by hundreds of volunteers from universities, neighborhood and many more, with assistance by DCR and Mass Highway bringing soils and plantings to the garden. Many of its plants there represent the indigenous plants of New England, and a remarkable welcome to the Alewife Reservation and part of our large community. FAR is asking that the plants be removed during the work, and re-established after the work is over if possible. And is concerned as well that the NOI by MWRA’s LEC company is not correct in terms of wildlife and plants assessment. An appeal is contemplated.

7) FENCES- There was a fence left around the oxbow land to keep wildlife off the grasses.  This was quite damaged in the winter and a hazard in the Spring.  It was removed last week and we are pleased.

8) The meadow to the left of the oxbow was sodded and reseeded during the height of geese and duck nesting season with a wire fence with neon pink ribbon to keep the animals away.  It is a very large area , nearly football sized.  Most unfortunately this was done without considering wetland wildlife and caused much visible animal confusion.  Our request to wait further work until the end of mating season was denied by Bioengineering, but perhaps next year, work will be done with wildlife nesting habits in mind.

8) On Monday, May 19th, at 1pm two members of the Massachusetts DEP Strike Force arrived at the tributary of the Alewife Brook to inspect the orange colored pipe outflow.  Under the direction of Lorene Melvin of FAR, the outflow pipe was located and mapped on the DEP map of the area. The DEP team entered the waterway to take water samples and pictures of the outflow area.   In an attempt to discover the source of the tainted water flowing from the pipe, an inspection of the adjoining property was made.  The DEP believe that the underground MBTA station is pumping water out of the train tunnels and into the brook tributary. They hope to confirm this theory by consulting with MBTA survey information as well as the analysis of the water tests.  They will send the report directly to Ellen Mass when completed with a copy to Lorene Melvin.

Kathy Johnson

Monitor, Friends of Alewife Reservation

Board Member for FAR Board of Directors