No doubt about it — the days are getting shorter, the nights a little colder, and the palette of colors we associate with fall will soon appear. New England is famous for its array of autumnal splendor, and tourists trek far and wide to catch a glimpse of fall’s very best. But did you know you can view the brilliance of autumn’s colors practically right in your backyard? Almost all of the recreation areas offer great fall foliage vantage points. Now you know where to go for local viewing, but what determines how great the colors will be this fall?

First, let’s talk about leaves. The leaves on trees are really food factories for the tree. Inside the leaf, there are numerous cells that contain different pigments. One of these pigments is chlorophyll; this gives the leaf its green color. During spring and summer, the chlorophyll captures the sunlight and uses this energy to process carbon dioxide and water to make food for the tree.

In the fall, when the sunlight becomes weaker and the temperatures decrease, the chlorophyll begins to break down, and the leaves lose their green color. Other pigments in the leaves, like carotenoids that provide the yellow, orange and brown colors and anthocyanins that provide the red, blue and violet colors, show through.

The type of tree also determines the color the leaves will turn in the fall. For example, oak leaves turn red, brown or russet; beech trees turn light tan; red maple leaves turn brilliant scarlet and sugar maple leaves turn orange-red.

Why do the intensity and duration of color vary year to year? Weather plays a big part in determining the amount and brilliance of leaf color. The best weather scenario for a dazzling display of fall foliage is a wet growing season followed by a dry autumn filled with sunny days and cool nights.

When Mother Nature cooperates, leaves are able to produce a lot of sugar from abundant sunlight during the day. The extra sugar is stored in the leaf, so when chlorophyll production slows down, there is still plenty of sugar left for anthocyanin production, which occurs mainly in the fall and shows up as red, purple and crimson tints in the fall foliage palette. The carotenoid pigments, on the other hand, are always present in leaves and not as dependent on excess sugar supplies, so the yellow and gold tints are usually consistent from year to year.

The weather also plays a part in determining when the colors are at their peak. This year, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) predicts that peak foliage will appear in the northwest and northeast corners of the state around Columbus Day and progress through the Connecticut River Valley and the shoreline through early November.

DEEP also predicts that this year will be a magnificent foliage year. The rains in August helped ensure healthy forest conditions as we enter fall. From bright yellow tulip poplars and hickory to deep red maples and purple ash, fall foliage seekers will be treated to some great fall colors.

Later in the year, when all of the pigment-producing processes are done, a layer of cells forms at the base of the leaf, and the veins carrying fluids in and out of the leaf begin to close off, eventually forming a layer that completely separates the leaf from the tree. This causes the leaf to fall off, and winter is not far away!
So Many Rules!

When you receive your permit, you also get the list of rules and regulations for the program. By signing your permit, you are agreeing that you will follow those rules. It may seem that there are too many rules, but are all of them necessary? The short answer is yes.

The Regional Water Authority is, first and foremost, the supplier of drinking water to almost 430,000 people in the Greater New Haven area. The Connecticut Department of Public Health and the RWA’s governing boards regulate all activities on public drinking water supply watersheds.

The opening of our public water supply lands for recreation in 1983 was the subject of an intensive planning process that included input from the public through hearings and letters. As a result of that process, the RWA’s Land Use Plan prohibits pets, including dogs. We love our dogs, but they pose a potential disturbance to wildlife. Our land is an unofficial wildlife sanctuary, and introducing domestic animals conflicts with providing the best habitat we can for wildlife of all kinds. There is also a potential for negative interactions with humans. And there is a state statute prohibiting dogs from entering drinking water reservoirs. It is easier to enforce this law if dogs are not allowed on the property.

Swimming and wading in a reservoir is no longer as tempting as it was during the summer months, but it is illegal at any time during the year. As the temperatures get colder and ice begins to form, that offers a new temptation. RWA rules prohibit activities on the ice of frozen reservoirs, partly for public health reasons and partly for safety reasons. Short of a sewage discharge to a tributary or a drinking water reservoir (also illegal), human body contact with the water is the most threatening human activity to the quality of drinking water. Additionally, the reservoirs are typically located away from populated areas, so if there is an accident, it is difficult to get help.

The recreation program rules and regulations are in place to protect the public’s drinking water supply. While they may seem onerous, they are the first step of our multi-barrier approach to protecting the quality of the drinking water in the Greater New Haven area.

Safety on the Trails

Bear Sightings

Sightings of black bear in Connecticut are on the increase. The black bear is the smallest American bear, weighing from 159 to 400 pounds. They are good tree climbers and strong swimmers and can run up to 35 miles per hour. Their habitat is forest, usually with deciduous and coniferous trees. Knowing this, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that bears have been sighted on Regional Water Authority property. In hiking areas, bears will normally leave when they sense a human, but if you do happen to see a bear, here are some tips:

- Enjoy it from a distance.
- Avoid direct eye contact. Do not run and do not climb a tree.
- Make your presence known by shouting and waving your arms.
- If you surprise a bear at close range, walk away slowly while facing the bear and try to stay calm.

During Hunting Season

Hunting season is underway and runs through early next year. While hunting is not allowed in Regional Water Authority recreation areas, some of our adjacent land-owners do allow it, and we also allow limited bow hunting in non-recreation areas. To stay safe wherever you’re hiking during hunting season, follow these tips:

- Wear brightly colored clothing or an orange safety vest while hiking.
- Be sure to complete your hike during daylight hours.
- Stay on clearly marked trails.
- Have your trail map and a watch.
- Carry a cell phone.

Our trails are patrolled by RWA police to help maintain a safe environment for you. If you have any concerns while on our trails, please call them at 203-401-2525.
Calendar of Events

Shore Fishing Ends at the Lakes Friday, November 30, at Dusk
Fishing season opens Saturday, April 13, 2019 at 6 a.m.

Bird Walk at Lake Chamberlain Saturday, October 20, 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Come to Lake Chamberlain for a fall walk with the New Haven Bird Club to see what birds can be found in the fall. There is an active bluebird population, many woodpeckers and a number of waterfowl that visit the lake before heading further south when the lake freezes over. The walk at Lake Chamberlain is relatively easy. After birding the Lake Chamberlain property, the group will visit the adjoining Cooper and Calabresi Farms. The fields and woods have been maintained, providing habitat for a variety of woodland, edge and grassland species. The group will bird in the lower areas, then head up the hillside for more birding and spectacular views. Hiking to the top field may be strenuous; those who decide it may be too difficult can choose to stay by the lake or in the lower fields. For more information, contact Pat Leahy at ptjleahy@yahoo.com or call him at 203-314-0566.

Bird Walk at Genesee Saturday, November 3, 7 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
The RWA recreation program and the New Haven Bird Club are teaming up once again to bird the Genesee property in Madison. Timber harvests in this area within the last five years have changed the habitat; come see what birds like the area now. Meet at the Genesee recreation parking lot on Route 79 in Madison.

Opie’s Holiday Party at Lake Gaillard Saturday, December 8, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Once again, we’re celebrating the holidays with our favorite opossum, Opie. The annual party will be in the tool house at Lake Gaillard in North Branford. There will be activities for children, swag making for adults, and hot chocolate and cookies to warm you up. And Santa may pay us a visit! From Route 80, drive north on Great Hill Road in North Branford and continue through the gate at the top of the hill. An Opie Event

Tree Cutting at Lake Gaillard Saturday & Sunday, December 8 & 9, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Come find your "perfect" tree at Lake Gaillard. The cost is $30. We can only accept cash in payment for trees. Bring your own bow saw if you have one. An Opie Event

Bicycling Moratorium Begins Monday, December 31, at Dusk
Trails are closed to bicycling until April 15 for mud season.

Any event marked “An Opie Event” means that it is suitable for children. In the event of inclement weather, please check our Facebook page or call 203-401-2660 for an event cancellation notice the day of the event.

New Ideas for the Rec Program

The group that runs the recreation program at the Regional Water Authority is looking for ideas of what kinds of recreation programs appeal to you:

- A geology or meteorology mini-course?
- A series of guided walks or events at multiple recreation areas?
- More one-time events like wildflower or bird walks?
- Or how about something that explains the inner workings of the Regional Water Authority; what does it take to provide high-quality water to almost 430,000 consumers in the Greater New Haven area?

We would love to hear your suggestions. Please email them to ask.recreation@rwater.com. You may see a program in the next calendar year that is a result of your suggestion!
Recreation Permit Definitions

All recreation permits allow permit holders access to the nine recreation areas, but each category of permit has its own definition. Please make sure you understand what your permit allows:

- **An Individual Permit** allows one adult and one guest to fish, hike or bike at designated areas. The guest must accompany the named permit holder. A child is considered a guest.
- **A Family Permit** includes two named permits and two guest permits. A family is defined as up to two adults and accompanying children up to the age of 21. Any guest must accompany a named permit holder.
- **A Horse Permit** is the same as a Family Permit except that, in addition to allowing access to all the recreation areas for fishing, cross country skiing, hiking or bicycling, it allows the permit holder to ride his or her own horse (we do not rent them) at the Genesee Recreation Area. To ride at the Lake Chamberlain recreation area, you must be a member of the Bethany Horsemen.
- **The RWA also offers an Organization Permit** which allows organized groups and organizations to provide recreational opportunities to clients on a year-round basis. This permit is transferrable within the organization.

If you have any questions about your permit, please call our recreation department at 203-401-2654.

Winter Celebrations

This December, we’re celebrating the holidays again with our favorite opossum, Opie.

The festivities will be at Lake Gaillard on Saturday, December 8, from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. There will be activities for children, swag making for adults and hot chocolate and cookies to warm you up. We’re hoping Santa will visit again this year, too. The activities are based at the tool house at Lake Gaillard.

There are lots of Christmas trees at Lake Gaillard available to cut on Saturday, December 8, and Sunday, December 9, between 9:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. When you find your perfect tree, it will be bagged for the trip home.

If you’re cutting a tree, bring your own bow saw if you have one. Please wear your permit and bring cash for the tree. Each tree is $30. As with all other events, in case of inclement weather, call 203-401-2660 or check our recreation Facebook page for notice of postponement or cancellation.

You can find all the fun by coming up Great Hill Road from Route 80 in North Branford.