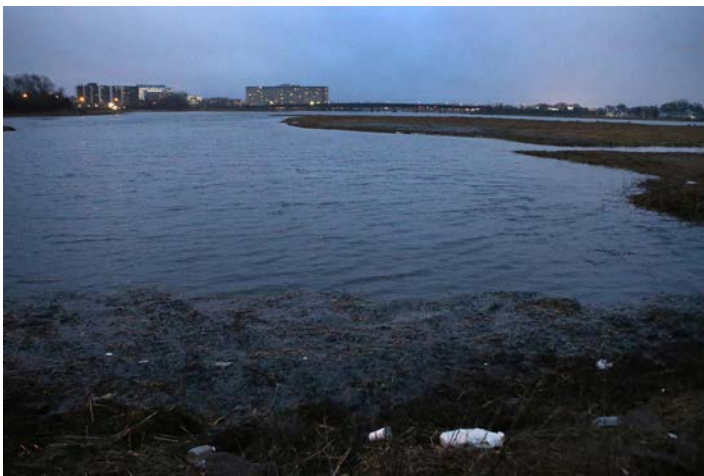


# BOSTON Herald

Chris Cassidy, Wednesday, January 24, 2018

## Neponset River seeing rising tide of needles coming ashore



*Credit: Nancy Lane*

*Neponset River seen from Commander Shea Blvd. in Quincy on Tuesday, January 23, 2018.*

Dangerous needles are turning up along parts of the Neponset River, forcing an environmental group to start warning volunteers to take special precautions when they pick up debris.

“The last couple of years, actually, we have started to discover that needles are becoming a regular part of our river cleanup events,” said Ian Cooke, executive director of the Neponset River Watershed Association. “It’s been a challenge for us.”

Needles have been spotted particularly in locations in Quincy, near Squantum Point, Cooke said. And the discoveries have become so frequent that the group has bought new equipment to dispose of them and has instituted a new protocol that involves educating volunteers to watch out for needles — and not to pick them up — when they’re out cleaning the river.

About three years ago, a river cleanup volunteer accidentally stuck himself while trying to dispose of a needle. He was ultimately OK, Cooke said, but since then, the reports of needles along the river have only grown.

“It certainly could get worse,” he added. “I think it’s going to be directly in proportion to our success dealing with the opioid crisis. If the opioid crisis gets

worse, this will get worse.”

The Herald reported yesterday that communities along the Merrimack River are dealing with a plague of hypodermic needles washing ashore. It’s so bad that the 15 cities and towns by the waterway are planning to hire an outside group to collect needles as part of a three-year contract expected to cost between \$300,000 and \$400,000 a year.

The Clean River Project, a Methuen-based nonprofit, reported collecting some 1,700 sharps along the Merrimack River last year.

“The needles are just the tipping point when it comes to the pollution we’re seeing in rivers in Massachusetts,” said Gabby Queenan, a policy specialist with the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance.

She said sewage overflows, such as the 2.8 billion gallons of untreated wastewater and raw sewage that flow into state rivers each year, combined with industrial pollution and stormwater runoff are wreaking havoc on Bay State waters.

But groups eyeing other Bay State riverways reported few problems with needles.

Patrick Herron, executive director of the Mystic River Watershed Association, told the Herald that volunteers almost always find a needle or two during cleanup events, but that he didn’t think the problem was growing.

Andrew Fisk, executive director of the Connecticut River Conservancy, said needles can be found along river locations that are “in-town” but out of sight of the general public, often alongside railroad tracks.

“We don’t see huge numbers, but yes, they’re certainly found,” he said.

Bruce Berman of Save the Harbor/Save the Bay said Boston Harbor has not seen a spike in needles.

“There isn’t a park, beach, public place or community in Massachusetts that isn’t affected in some way by the opioid epidemic,” Berman said. “That said, we do not have a problem with needles washing up on Boston Harbor region’s beaches.”