

ASG Comments on ANI's Wetlands and Wildlife Reports

May 21, 2021 (by David Bass)

Alewife Neighbors, Inc. (ANI) hired Matt Schweisberg to join other wetlands and wildlife specialists representing IQHQ and the City of Cambridge to observe and delineate the wetland areas on and adjacent to the IQHQ property, and to evaluate the site flora and fauna.

The largest wetland is the area surrounding Jerry's Pond, a man-made water body in the middle of a highly developed landscaped. There are also several small wetlands north of the Alewife T Station, including a former bioremediation cell near Russell Field and three more along the northwest property boundary that are partially on or just to the west of the IQHQ property.

Overall, the area is heavily disturbed by surrounding parking lots, paths, roadways, and the Alewife T station plaza. Trash, debris and other human impacts of ground are widespread. From a wetlands perspective, there is nothing particularly sensitive about Jerry's Pond or the other wetlands.

The vegetation is dominated by non-native, invasive species, including honeysuckle, garlic mustard, Asian bitter-sweet, multiflora rose, grape, buckthorn, crabapple, reed, and algae. Some native vegetation was also observed, including eastern cottonwood, red maple, red oak, and cattail. Non-native plants often crowd out natives and reduce species diversity, which has less value as habitat for wildlife. In contrast, native plants are almost always used by all wildlife far more readily for their life needs. But it's difficult and costly to remove invasive flora, plus there is no guarantee it would be unsuccessful.

Despite the disturbed and degraded landscape, the IQHQ wetlands are the "only game in town" for wildlife, and evidence of numerous species that can tolerate human activity and disturbance was

observed. These include great blue heron, Canada geese (including a nesting adult), seagulls, mallards, and other urban/suburban birds such as bluejay, cardinal, robin, finch, sparrow, pigeon, crow; as well as rabbit, squirrel, vole and muskrat.

Matt reviewed various proposals for improvement of Jerry's Pond and advised:

- Tree removal is the biggest downside. Replacing tree canopy will take decades.
- An elevated boardwalk is better for wetlands and habitat.
- The closer the boardwalk is to the pond edge, the more it would fragment the habitat.
- A boardwalk that goes partway around but not all the way around, would require removing fewer trees, not fragment a habitat area, and provide more of a secure place for wildlife going in and out of the pond area.
- There is more ecological value where there is varied habitat with regard to depth of the pond and steepness of the bank, among other factors.