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THE WRACK LINES CONNECT US

You never know what you'll find in the wrack line.

The first day of spring on March 20 brought me to Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison for the official unveiling of the Long Island Sound Blue Plan, a significant achievement in the state's

stewardship of the estuary. Arriving early, I headed to the beach with my camera to get some scenic shots.

Looking up the beach along the wrack line, I noticed an outspread blanket with three figures, one of them playing the flute. It sounded like the cool sigh of the Earth welcoming the longer days of the vernal equinox.

As I walked towards the blanket, three smiling women amid a rainbow of coverings for themselves and the sand came into focus. I introduced myself and asked to take their picture.

Toni Johnson, Azua Echevarria and Andrea Cortez told me they'd traveled to Hammonasset from their homes in Hartford that day to celebrate nature and the first day of spring.

"Do you know you're sitting in the wrack line?" I asked them.

"What's that?" one replied.

The line of shells, seaweed and driftwood that collects at the high tide line, I explained. Birds use it to find insects and small sea creatures that get brought in with tide.

The three women nodded. Echevarria said she's noticed wrack lines many times, but didn't know the name. Why had they laid their blanket there?

"We were drawn to it," Echevarria said.

This brief encounter reminded me not only of the endless possibilities of wrack lines – both the ones on the beach and the magazine that I edit – but also of the many ways people and nature are connected. Sometimes, as in the case of these three women, humans seek nature deliberately as a place to restore the spirit. Other times, nature seems to seek us and can't be avoided, however troublesome. Either way, humans and nature can't stay away from each other.

This issue explores those connections from different vantage points. Superstorm Sandy brought the realities of climate change home for many shoreline residents, and remains their frame of reference for understanding the risks of coastal living. Elevating homes has been one way to respond, but does that bring more exposure to high winds? Rising seas are flooding some coastal roads routinely, challenging shoreline communities to find solutions that protect homes, businesses and salt marshes.

But the practical realities of the physical world are just one side of the human-nature bond. Richard Telford, reflecting on the writings of Edwin Way Teale, and the artists of our *Crosscurrents* exhibit all summon us to consider the many meanings of that relationship, and how it shapes us.

So next time you're at the beach, examine the wrack line. Amid the shells and fronds of rock weed, are there fish bones, sea glass and perhaps a plastic water bottle? Is there also fishing line and a chunk of Styrofoam, coated green with algae? A section of wrack line can reveal some of the negative ways humans are intertwined in the natural world. Or, if you find a wrack line free of trash, it will call attention to the organic diversity in the local waters. Whatever you find, it will connect you both to wild places and the human shore, and you might just discover new insight into both.



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Above photo: Toni Johnson, left, Azua Echevarria, center, and Andrea Cortez enjoyed the first day of spring at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.

Cover photo: Guilford town road crew workers make repairs on a seawall along Falcon Road in April. The road had been closed since November after flooding from several storms. Photos: Judy Benson