

# 2009

## Thames River Basin Partnership Coordinator Final Grant Report



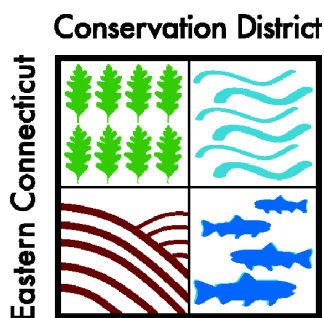
FY 07-13

Task 1 g Final Report

Jean Pillo

Eastern Connecticut Conservation District

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## **Executive Summary**

The Thames River Basin Partnership (TRBP) is a coalition of government agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, municipalities and individuals with a common focus on natural resource conservation in the Thames River basin watershed. With Clean Water Act section 319 funds awarded by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CT DEP), the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD) was able to maintain the position of a part time TRBP Coordinator for a third year. This report is an overview of the successes achieved during this cycle of funding, as well the cumulative impacts to the organization resulting from a paid staff person and recommendations for further actions.

## **Introduction**

The Thames River Basin Partnership is a coalition of over 40 different organizations and municipalities with a shared mission to improve water quality and protect natural resources within the Thames River watershed basin. This organization grew out of locally led workshops organized by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The organizations meet on a quarterly basis to review their activities on an agreed upon Thames River Basin Partnership Annual Plan of Work. With US Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act section 319 funds appropriated by the CT DEP, the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, a core member of the organization, was able to maintain a part time staff member for the Thames River Basin Partnership. Duties of the TRBP Coordinator were devoted to the TRBP organization, its mission and specific tasks assigned to meet the grant objectives. This grant period represents the third and final year of funding provided through this funding source.

## **The Resource, Environmental Problems**

The Thames Major Drainage Basin is comprised of nine regional drainage basins: the French, Five Mile, Moosup, Pachaug, Quinebaug, Shetucket, Natchaug, Willimantic and Yantic Rivers as well as the Thames Main Stem. The northern half of the basin is relatively rural, characterized by small towns, farmland and forest. A variety of pressures have caused the disappearance of many working farms and privately-owned forest lands. The southern half of the basin trends towards more urbanized and industrial land uses where urban redevelopment and suburban expansion has occurred. Recent development and expansion of two Tribal Nations' casino resorts has made southeastern Connecticut a national tourism destination area. The proximity to the urban areas of Hartford, Springfield and Providence has increased development pressures throughout the watershed area.

Under the Clean Water Act, the CT DEP is required to complete a *Connecticut Water Quality Assessment Report* and submit it to the US Congress on a biannual basis. Within this report is the *List of Connecticut Waterbodies Not Meeting Water Quality Standards*; a list of impaired waterbodies organized by regional watershed boundaries. This list is referred to as the "303d list" in reference to the section of the Clean Water Act that mandates its compilation. While the information is easy to reference if you know how to look for it, a Municipal Survey conducted by the Thames River Basin Partnership in 2009 revealed a lack of understanding of water quality

issues at the local level. The survey indicated that only 11 of the 25 towns that returned the survey track any information related to local water quality. While many of the partnering organizations involved in the TRBP are involved in non-point source (NPS) pollution prevention outreach, there is now a measure of disconnect regarding the importance of these implementation actions at the municipal level.

There are various non-point causes/sources of water impairment in the Thames River basin which include farming, construction, lawns, roads, urban runoff/storm sewers, watercraft, and wildlife. These activities contribute to nutrient and sediment loading, and bacterial contamination of surface water. Many causes of impairment in the 303d list developed by the CT DEP are listed as “unknown.” Non-point sources are thought to be significant contributors to the impairments. Many water quality issues cross municipal and interstate boundary lines, making it more difficult to coordinate corrective efforts without an outside facilitator.

## **The Solution**

The Thames River Basin Partnership is a coalition of over 40 different organizations including the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, CT Department of Environmental Protection, University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System, Project Oceanology, U.S. Geological Survey, The Green Valley Institute, Eastern Connecticut Conservation and Development Area, The Last Green Valley, Inc., Northeast District Department of Health, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments, Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, Windham Region Council of Governments, Willimantic River Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Trout Unlimited – Thames Valley Chapter, Connecticut Audubon Society, Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., CT Non-point Education for Municipal Officials Program, CT Department of Public Health, Willimantic Whitewater Partnership, Inc., U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Connecticut College, Atlantic Rural States Water and Wastewater Association, area businesses and/or industries and multiple municipalities in the Thames River watershed. Each organization in the Partnership voluntarily participates in the TRBP mission by identifying actions their organization is focused on that are compatible with the annual TRBP Plan of Work. The Plan of Work outlines the planned actions that will fulfill the TRBP mission to:

- Protect the region's agricultural and natural areas being threatened by land use changes;
- Protect ground and surface water quantity and quality being threatened and degraded by contamination;
- Protect the region's biodiversity;
- Improve the coastal zone resource conditions.

By continuing to fund a part-time Coordinator, whose time is dedicated to fulfilling the TRBP mission, members of the Thames River Basin Partnership have continued to become more successful in their outreach efforts and networking capabilities. In addition, the Coordinator has been a physical representation of the Partnership both by maintaining regular office hours (office space provided courtesy of Connecticut Audubon Society Center at Pomfret) and by planning and/or attending multiple outreach events. Directed by specific tasks outlined in this grant and

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the TRBP Plan of Work, the Coordinator has been able to develop educational materials to enhance the knowledge of the public about non-point pollution sources and impacts. This includes an October 2009 report which updates implementation actions in support of the Eagleville Brook Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) determination. The Eagleville Brook TMDL is the first one in the nation based solely on the amount of impervious cover in a watershed area. In addition, the TRBP Coordinator has successfully been able to conduct fund raising and apply for additional funding support in order to implement outreach activities on behalf of the organization.

### Partners and Project Funding

The Thames River Basin Partnership Coordinator has been funded in part by the US Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act section 319 program through the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. The Eastern Connecticut Conservation District contributed administrative support for the Coordinator. Office space and communication technology for the Coordinator has been provided by The Connecticut Audubon Society Center at Pomfret. The Last Green Valley, Inc. supplied a computer for use by the Coordinator. Additional information related to partners and project funding is listed in table format below:

Organization	Item or service	Value (non-fed)	Value (fed)
Eastern Connecticut Conservation District	Grant administrative support	\$2500	
CT Audubon Society Center at Pomfret	Office space/communication/use of program room	\$14,400	
Partners for Fish and Wildlife	Floating Workshop grant		\$6000
Rivers Alliance of CT Small Grant program	Storm drain marker program		\$4000
New England Rain Barrel Company	Fundraising support donation	\$500 \$1035	
Project Oceanology	Use of facility for meetings Presentation at 07/08 quarterly meeting	\$200 \$96	
CT DEP -Judy Wilson	Quarterly meeting presentation 04/08	\$96	
The Last Green Valley, Inc	Meeting presentation 09/09		\$288
The Town of Mansfield	Rain barrel promotion advertising Workshop advertisement and meeting space 05/09	\$1500 \$1800	
Town of Waterford	Rain barrel promotion support	\$100	
The Town of Ledyard	Meeting space for workshop 04/09	\$50	
The Ledyard Garden Club	Workshop advertisement 04/09	\$200	
The Town of Woodstock	Meeting space for workshop 05/09	\$50	
The Woodstock Area Garden Club	Workshop advertisement 05/09	\$200	
The Town of Canterbury	Meeting space for workshop and advertisement 04/09	\$50	
Town of Lisbon – Lee Szruba	Steering Committee	\$192	
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc	Grant administration for Poquetanuck Cove project	\$3000	
Green Valley Institute	2 quarterly meeting presentations 01/09, 10/09	\$192	
Natural Resources Conservation Service	Quarterly meeting presentation Steering Committee		\$96 \$192
Southeastern CT Council of Governments	Meeting room facilities Steering Committee	\$50 \$96	
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$26,307</b>	<b>\$10,576</b>

## Results

- With funding support provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as part of the Long Island Sound Study and allocated through Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., the TRBP Coordinator organized a volunteer plant community monitoring program for Poquetanuck Cove in August 2008.
- The second annual rain barrel promotion was a success, partnering with the New England Rain Barrel Company, the Towns of Mansfield and Waterford – a total of 115 rain barrels were purchased by residents in eastern Connecticut to reduce local stormwater runoff. This program raised \$1035 to support future TRBP educational programs.
- With funding awarded by the Rivers Alliance of Connecticut under their Small Grants Program, a volunteer storm drain marking program was initiated in the Willimantic section of the Town of Windham, CT.
  - Durable storm drain markers were adhered to storm drains after consulting with the Windham Town Engineer for the most vulnerable areas.
  - More than 2000 multilingual door hangers were also distributed in these neighborhoods for additional NPS education.
  - A core group of 4 volunteers were involved with this process, but over 20 volunteers have contributed time to this effort.
  - As a result of the publicity developed about this initiative, individuals representing the Town of Stafford contacting the TRBP Coordinator for information on how to initiate a similar project.
- With funding support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as part of the Long Island Sound Study, the TRBP was able to plan and execute their 9<sup>th</sup> annual flagship event, the Floating Workshop.
  - The workshop was designed for municipal officials and focused on the Total Maximum Daily Load for Nitrates for Long Island Sound.
  - In preparation for this workshop, a Municipal Survey was developed and mailed to each town that lies completely or partially in the Connecticut portion of the greater Thames watershed area.
  - The survey was utilized to plan the relevant topics of interest covered during the workshop, as well as to select examples of functioning municipal regulations or ordinances that effectively reduce the export of nitrates to Long Island Sound.
  - Each workshop participant was provided with a flash drive loaded with municipal Best Management Practice examples, and asked to participate in a follow up activity. For more information on the TRBP Floating Workshop IX, please visit the TRBP website <http://www.thamesriverbasinpartnership.org/floatingworkshop9.htm>.
  - Following the Floating Workshop, the Town of Thompson invited the DEP Low Impact Development Coordinator to present a workshop for a regional audience.

The TRBP Coordinator was also involved in many other initiatives:

- Developed a report that outlined *An Inventory of Existing, Scheduled and/or Planned Implementation Actions in Support of the Eagleville Brook TMDL*. Once approved by the CT DEP, the report will be posted to the Thames River Basin Partnership website and be

a resource to municipalities and other organizations concerned with 1) NPS pollution associated with high concentrations of impervious cover in a watershed and 2) potential stormwater retrofitting solutions.

- Working with The Nature Conservancy, the Windham Region Council of Governments, the Naubesatuck Watershed Council and municipal representatives of the 8 towns within the Natchaug River watershed area, participated in the Natchaug Watershed Conservation Action Planning Process. This consisted of a series of 3 meetings; one to highlight the most important natural resources in the watershed basin, one to identify the threats to those resources and one to identify remedies to those threats. As a result of this process, a short list of priority implementation targets was identified and measures are being taken to implement those targets. The Natchaug Watershed Conservation Action Planning Process was funded in part by a Patagonia Environmental Grant.
- Building on the rain garden installation assistance in the Town of Coventry during the prior grant round, the TRBP Coordinator was able to develop a webpage dedicated to rain garden construction along with other useful Low Impact Development links. The Town of Canterbury contacted the TRBP Coordinator for facilitation assistance for a demonstration rain garden at their municipal office location. The TRBP Coordinator was able to refer them to the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District.
- Photos taken during the Coventry rain garden installation were developed into a Back Yard Water Wise workshop. This workshop was conducted in the towns of Ledyard, Woodstock, Canterbury and Mansfield, and attended by over 120 people.
- Continued to facilitate the *Phragmites australis* control project in Poquetanuck Cove.
  - By invitation, presented a poster focused on the successful Partnership collaboration represented by this project at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Connecticut Conference on Natural Resources in March 2009.
  - Participated with the Connecticut Environmental Review Team on a natural resources review of a property adjacent to Poquetanuck Cove in Preston and provided information on the tidal cove's rare plant communities.
- Continued to support the TRBP Plan of Work by organizing guest presentations at quarterly TRBP meetings. The presentations focused primarily on collaborative efforts that exemplify successful TRBP Plan of Work action items.
- Upkeep of the TRBP website - a dynamic informational tool for topics related to natural resource protection.
  - The Calendar of Conservation Events lists relevant workshops presented by partnering organizations.
  - Workshop themes were developed into informational resources on the topic.
- Continuation of the TRBP quarterly newsletter, the *Partners in Action Report*, to highlight the various TRPB Plan of Work related initiatives of partnering organizations.
  - The newsletter is imbedded with web-links to partner agency websites where additional information can be obtained.
  - The *Partners in Action Report* e-distribution list continues to grow.
  - The newsletter assists partner organizations with their outreach efforts, and helps to build collaborative efforts to achieve natural resource protection goals.
  - The newsletter is used by many partnering agency representatives for reporting purposes at interdepartmental meetings.

- Applied for a Technological Assistance Grant from the Center for Watershed Protection to support previous efforts to engage the Town of Killingly in a stormwater retrofit initiative during a road improvement and greenway expansion project on Water Street. Although not funded, the Town of Killingly Engineering Department staff was exposed to many different stormwater retrofitting concepts during the grant writing process. Hopes for their greenway expansion project were dashed when a property owner reversed his decision to donate land to the town for the project. The Water Street improvement project is currently incomplete.
- Applied for a grant from Tom's of Maine for continued financial support for the TRBP Coordinator. Unfortunately, Tom's of Maine was unable to fund the entire annual grant round due to the economic downturn.

## **Future Plans**

Without additional funding support for a staff TRBP Coordinator, the Thames River Basin Partnership will revert back to committee governance.

- The Eastern Connecticut Conservation District has committed to support the organization by continuing to provide record keeping for the organization. This will include managing the financial accounting and recording of meeting minutes.
- A planning committee has been formed to begin the process of planning the TRBP Floating Workshop X for 2010.
- A search for funding support will continue with Partnership assistance.

Without funding support, the position of Thames River Basin Partnership Coordinator has been suspended. If additional funding is secured, the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District will reactivate the position and partition their staff time to support the Workplan outlined by the funder.

## **Conclusions**

Since April 2006, the Thames River Basin Partnership has enjoyed the benefit of a part time staff person to help direct the organization towards a fulfillment of their shared mission. During the 3 years of support provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency through the CT DEP, participation in Thames River Basin Partnership events has increased significantly and interagency collaborations have increased as well. Examples of successful Thames River Basin Partnership interagency initiatives during the 08/09 TRBP Plan of Work cycle include:

- Partnering to Protect Poquetanuck Cove;
- Natchaug River Conservation Action Planning;
- Source to Sea; Connecting the Drops in The Last Green Valley.
- Creation of an Ag-vocate Pilot Project to support agribusiness in northeastern CT

In 2006, TRBP quarterly meetings were attended mostly by a core group of partnering agencies, who reported on their current activities and relevant committee reports relating to TRBP activities. Beginning in April 2007, the TRBP Coordinator began to include a special presentation by a partnering agency or an outside guest on a Plan of Work related item at each

TRBP quarterly meeting. These presentations attracted a larger audience to participate in the Thames River Basin Partnership meetings, while offering partnering agencies a stage to conduct outreach on a relevant topic. The presenting agency was also rewarded with peer review of their work. In order to continue the organization of the quarterly meeting to include a special presentation, it will require up to 10 hours per quarter to solicit a speaker and schedule the meeting, including the development and advertisement of the meeting agenda.

The Thames River Basin Partnership quarterly newsletter, the *Partners in Action Report*, is a product of the funding support provided by the US EPA through the CT DEP. This newsletter debuted in July 2006 as a means to promote the success of the Partnership's member organizations at meeting TRBP Plan of Work objectives. As previously stated, many of the partnering agencies utilize the TRBP newsletter at internal staff meetings when reporting on their activities. Others reported they use the newsletter to look for opportunities to collaborate with other organizations. The newsletter offers a broader view of activities and relevant resources that provide for natural resource conservation. It requires up to 20 hours per quarter to compile and distribute the newsletter. A source of funding will be required to continue the newsletter at its current level of production.

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection is required to assemble a Connecticut Water Quality Assessment Report to submit to the US Congress on a biannual basis. Included within this report is the impaired waters list, also known as the 303d list. The 2009 TRBP Municipal Survey of Thames watershed municipalities revealed there is a lack of awareness at the municipal level regarding local water quality issues, despite the information being available on the CT DEP website. With additional funding support, the Thames River Basin Partnership Coordinator could develop a web based outreach tool that would include simplified color coded municipal maps highlighting waterbodies with known water quality issues. This project would conservatively require 40 hours to develop just for the Connecticut municipalities in the watershed. Additional time would be required to create similar maps for Thames watershed municipalities outside of Connecticut, and to post the outcomes to the website and conduct outreach on the development of this resource. The municipal water quality maps would need to be updated every two years, as the impaired water list is revised on a biannual basis.

The Thames River is the third largest watershed area draining into Long Island Sound. Unlike the Connecticut and Housatonic Rivers, which have the same name from source to sea, the Thames River watershed area is comprised of 9 regional watersheds that join together to become the Thames main stem in Norwich. With additional funding support, the Thames River Basin Partnership website can be expanded to include a clickable Thames watershed map. This map can be divided into the regional watershed outlines that are each hyperlinked to a special webpage. Each webpage will contain information relevant to each named basin, including background information, additional maps, water quality issues, active USGS monitoring locations, TRBP member organizations that have special ongoing or completed initiatives within that watershed and other relevant information. The time estimate for this project is 200 hours, which does not include periodic updates as new information becomes available.

*An Inventory of Existing, Scheduled and/or Planned Implementation Actions in Support of the Eagleville Brook TMDL* is a current snapshot of the actions that have been undertaken towards



the goal to eventually restore the aquatic habitat function of Eagleville Brook in Storrs/Mansfield, CT. There is much more stormwater retrofitting work that needs to be completed to reach this goal. An annual update to the Eagleville Brook watershed stormwater retrofit inventory which includes a summary of the results from effectiveness studies from previously installed technologies would be a useful tool. This project would require approximately 40 hours per year.

The flagship event of the Thames River Basin Partnership is the annual Floating Workshop. These themed workshops have been an important tool to highlight problems and the solutions to them by agencies making those efforts. The overall planning coordination of the TRBP Floating Workshop since 2006 has been a responsibility of the TRBP Coordinator. The most recent TRBP Floating Workshop included a municipal survey that was developed, distributed, and collected, and then the results were tabulated by the TRBP Coordinator in order to plan a workshop based on the needs of the target audience - Connecticut's Thames watershed municipal officials. The total time involved in the 2009 Floating Workshop development involved approximately 140 hours of effort. The average Floating Workshop requires a minimum of 50 hours to plan, coordinate, advertise and implement. Additional time is required to prepare funding applications (up to 10 hours per application submitted).

Under the general "umbrella" of NPS pollution education and outreach as funded by this grant cycle, the TRBP Coordinator was able to develop a variety of outreach materials from newspaper and newsletter articles and topic specific webpage development. The TRBP Coordinator was also available to offer assistance and programming for municipalities and other organizations. Small, but significant, projects including the Willimantic storm drain marking program and the Coventry rain garden outreach project would likely be neglected by agencies not funded for these specific tasks. Continuation of funding for this type of general and flexible NPS outreach in the Thames watershed basin is needed to continue the facilitation of small, but meaningful, programs.

This final report outlines the good investment return resulting from funding a part time Coordinator for the Thames River Basin Partnership. From 2006 – 2009, the funding has been tied to NPS water pollution, and most activities planned by the TRBP Coordinator matched that theme. In the future, any agency that provides funding to address any of the listed TRBP mission objectives, in the form of financial support of a TRBP Coordinator, can expect the same level of performance from their investment. There are many opportunities to expand on the past three years of success if funding is found to support a paid Coordinator for the organization. The Thames River Basin Partnership, with its mission statement broken into 4 general categories, is uniquely situated to coordinate multiple agencies' goals when a Coordinator is available to facilitate this effort. If additional funding is secured for a TRBP Coordinator, the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District is adequately staffed to be able to reactivate the position and would be willing to resume providing grant administrative services on behalf of the Partnership.