



Thames River Basin Partnership Partners in Action Quarterly Report

Winter 2019

Volume 49

The Thames River watershed includes the Five Mile, French, Moosup, Natchaug, Pachaug, Quinebaug, Shetucket, Willimantic, and Yantic Rivers and all their tributaries. We're not just the "Thames main stem."

Greetings from the [Thames River Basin Partnership](#). Once again this quarter our partners have proven their ability to work cooperatively on projects compatible with the [TRBP Plan of Work](#) and in support of our common mission statement to share organizational resources and to develop a regional approach to natural resource protection. I hope you enjoy reading about these activities as much as I enjoy sharing information about them with you. For more information on any of these updates, just click on the blue website hyperlinks in this e-publication, but be sure to come back to finish reading the rest of the report.

*Jean Pillo, Watershed Conservation Project Manager
Eastern Connecticut Conservation District
And TRBP Coordinator*

Special Presentation

If you missed the January 2019 meeting of the Thames River Basin Partnership, then you missed a presentation by Lois Bruinooge, Executive Director of The Last Green Valley (TLGV). Her presentation was on two very impactful programs for natural resource conservation in the Thames watershed. The first part of her presentation was an update on the Southern New England Heritage Forest Regional Conservation Partnership Project (RCPP). This \$6.1million tri-state initiative funded through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is focused on preservation of the forested landscape in parts of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island through the purchase of conservation easements on forest lands, and through sound forest management. After releasing the request for proposals in May 2018, TLGV was inundated with applications from 30 different landowners representing over 2500 acres of forested land who were interested in selling conservation easements on their land. Through a carefully thought out metric, they were able to narrow their focus on parcels over 100 acres in size including four parcels that are over 200 acres each. The overwhelming response to the easement program is an indicator that there is an interest in land conservation as long as there is a financial incentive. Phase two of this project is to fund forest management plans and bird habitat assessments on forested properties. The application process was advertised and closed on January 18, 2019. A temporary government shutdown may have impacted some applicants' ability to complete their USDA Farm Service Agency eligibility requirements in time. We look forward to presenting updates on this project in the future.

Next, TLGV, in partnership with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, was awarded \$120,000 by the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut for a three year collaborative program to accelerate the pace of regional conservation. The project goal is to strengthen the individual and collective capacity of participating member land trusts. Through this program, they will update outreach materials focused on land conservation and explore options for regional collaboration of land trusts in ways that may include shared services, organizational mergers and development of comprehensive geographic information system tools. The kick off meeting for this project was held on January 21, 2019.

TRBP Updates

The Thames River Basin Partnership has a new updated website! The website is still accessed at <http://www.thamesriverbasinpartnership.org> and www.TRBP.org. The new website has an interactive map of the greater Thames River watershed, where you can click on a river to learn more about each regional watershed, including the southeastern coastal areas and Long Island Sound. Information on these pages are preliminary and will be updated over time. Under the **Learn** tab, there are links to various on-line GIS mapping resources. Under the **News and Events** tab, there is a news feed that is connected to the Thames River Basin Partnership Facebook page, so now it is easier than ever to share announcements from our Partners about their achievements and upcoming events. Please take some time to visit the website and explore the information on it. Check out the Partner List under the **Partners** tab. If your organization is not on the list, you can change that by Contacting the Coordinator (Jean.Pillo@Comcast.net) and request to be added. Please review our key mission objectives on the bottom of the homepage to see if your organization's mission overlaps with ours. Most important, going forward, TRBP meeting and Floating Workshop announcements and the *TRBP Partners in Action Report* e-newsletter will be sent out through an email distribution list. Please take the time to add your name and email address at <http://thamesriverbasinpartnership.org/subscribe> if you want to receive these announcements or the TRBP Partners in Action Report.

The updated TRBP website was funded in part by a Watershed Assistance Small Grant Program by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection through a US Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act §319 Nonpoint Source Grant, and administered by the Rivers Alliance of Connecticut. Additional project support was provided by The Last Green Valley, Inc., under a cooperative agreement with the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District.

Planning is underway for the 19th annual Thames River Basin Partnership Floating Workshop. This year's workshop will feature the Yantic River. June 14, 2019 has been selected as the date for this workshop. Be sure to follow the TRBP on Facebook for updates, or if you are not a Facebook user, be sure to subscribe to the [TRBP distribution list](#), or visit the News and Events tab on the new website for workshop announcements.

Do you follow the [Thames River Basin Partnership](#) on Facebook? 75 people do. Help us to bump this number up to over 100 before the next newsletter. TRBP also now has a Twitter account @CoordinatorTrbp but I admit there is a little learning curve on the best use of that social media platform. We will also be initiating an Instagram account in the near future.

Partner Reports

Connecticut's Governor Lamont has appointed [Katie Dykes](#) as the CT DEEP Commissioner-designate. She awaits confirmation by the Connecticut General Assembly during the current legislative session.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Project Summaries

The 2014 Farm Bill included new ways for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to innovate, leverage additional contributions, offer impactful solutions and engage more participants. One such program was the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The purpose of the program is to promote coordination with partners to deliver conservation assistance to agricultural producers and landowners. This is done by providing technical assistance through agreements and direct funding for conservation practices. Through Thames River Basin Partnership meetings, partners meet to discuss ways to collaborate on projects like these. TRBP is partnering in all three of these projects by providing outreach support.

FY14/15 (State level funding) The Last Green Valley is lead partner in this \$400,000 NRCS RCPP project entitled **Improving Soil Health and Water Quality in the Thames River Watershed**. This project addresses two national priorities (soil health and water quality), and all five Connecticut state priorities (water quality degradation, soil erosion, soil quality degradation, degraded plant conditions and livestock production limitations). Utilizing the RCPP, four collaborating partners will implement soil health conservation practices through EQIP on cropland in eastern Connecticut's Thames River Watershed. The long-term objective of this project is to show a measurable improvement of edge-of-field and in-stream water quality, including a decrease in nutrient and turbidity levels, thereby improving soil health and water quality in the area.

Project update: The EQIP funding for this project has been obligated. Water quality monitoring will begin on selected fields during the 2019 growing season.

FY15/16 (State level funding) The University of Connecticut is the recipient and lead partner in an RCPP project entitled **Path to Reduce Pathogens in CT Agricultural Runoff**. This \$669,000 NRCS RCPP project is focused on unacceptably high bacteria levels in Connecticut's rivers and shellfish beds. This is, in part, caused by runoff from agricultural operations. To address water quality degradation, ten conservation partners are collaborating to achieve the objectives of the project: University of Connecticut, Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, The Last Green Valley, Inc., CT Department of Agriculture Bureau of Aquaculture, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, CT Sea Grant, Stonington Shellfish Commission, CUSH, Inc. (Clean Up Sound & Harbors), the Thames River Basin Partnership, and UCONN Extension.

Potential conservation practices to reduce pathogens will include composting, nutrient management, residue and tillage management, cover crops, fencing, buffers and filter strips, vegetated treatment areas and wetland restoration or creation. This project incorporates cutting-

edge research tools that will allow for the identification of species-specific DNA markers. This will allow the source of *E. coli* to be determined by the species that contributed it, which in turn will focus remediation efforts where they are most needed. Jack Clausen of UCONN is the project lead.

Project update – Outreach to agricultural producers continues. The bacteria monitoring in the 2018 growing season focused on edge-of-field monitoring of two corn fields at the request of the producer. New monitoring sites for 2019 are being investigated.

FY16/17 (National level funding) The Last Green Valley (TLGV) was awarded \$6,144,000 through the NRCS RCPP program for **Accelerating the Pace of Conservation in the Southern New England Heritage Forest**. The Southern New England Heritage Forest (SNEHF) is a uniquely-positioned forest corridor stretching north along the Connecticut and Rhode Island border to the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts. A remarkable partnership of non-profit organizations and regional, state and municipal agencies are offering private woodland owners a suite of NRCS tools for sound management and forestry conservation practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Permanent protection through easements under the Healthy Forests Reserve Program is also available. This project will serve as a “conservation pipeline” of forest and bird habitat plans, EQIP practices and HFRP easements on private forestlands in order to accelerate the pace of conservation in SNEHF.

Project update – The response to the easement opportunity through the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (30 landowners representing 2500 acres of forested land) has been overwhelming and not all applicants can be included under this project. The next step for this project phase will be to close on the easements after title work, hazmat due diligence and restoration plans are drafted. Phase 2 applications for forest management plans and bird habitat surveys were accepted through January 18, 2019.

For more information about USDA NRCS RCPP opportunities, please visit the NRCS website at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmland/rcpp>.

The Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Area ([CT RC&D](#)) is currently managing eleven ongoing projects valued at over \$11 million throughout the State of Connecticut. The organization works in collaboration with the State’s Conservation Districts, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and other organizations. Eighty percent of their funding is pass through money, meaning they bring funding from various sources and spend it on local initiatives. Programs they oversee include the Farm Energy Program, the Environmental Review Team program and promotion of healthy soil/no-till cover crop programs. RC&D was awarded funding to coordinate a [Connecticut Airline Trail](#) twelve town task force to develop a Master Plan that includes resource inventory wayfinding, economic opportunities, bike to work assessment, increase safe routes to schools and a maintenance plan. This project is funded by the CT DEEP Recreation Trails grant program.

More updates from The Last Green Valley – TLGV helped coordinate the Mid-Winter Eagle Survey held by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Here are the early results:

- They coordinated 35 volunteers.
- The volunteers were in 15 survey teams – each team with an experienced team leader.
- The survey teams scouted 31 separate locations.
- A total of 22 bald eagles were sighted during the survey with 17 adult and 5 juvenile birds.

TLGV is once again providing [Clean Up funds](#) in 2019. Municipalities and non-profit organizations who apply will be reimbursed up to \$500 for expenses such as publicity, cleanup supplies such as trash bags and work gloves and food and refreshments for volunteers. TLGV will also help publicize your event and work with you to recruit more volunteers.

TLGV also announced round two of a small-grant program, the [Heritage Transaction Fund](#), for non-profits, towns and cities in The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor. The grants will be awarded to projects that will permanently protect significant historic properties or structures, agriculture or forested lands, important wildlife habitat or open spaces suitable for passive, nature-based recreation. The grant funds can be used for closing costs such as filing fees, title work, attorney fees, surveys, appraisals and other costs associated with projects that are “nearing the home stretch” but need additional funds to complete the deal.

The Fourth Annual TLGV Spring Outdoors kicks off March 20! If you or your organization is a member of The Last Green Valley, you are invited to host a Spring Outdoors event. Plan an event or share one you already have in the works that highlights all the amazing woods, water, agriculture, history and culture of The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor. Call Fran at 860-774-3300 or email Fran@Tlgv.org to learn more.

TLGV also invites you to Share Your Voice, Your Vision for The Last Green Valley. So far, more than 100 people have participated in our community conversations to help shape a vision for The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor. TLGV is far from done with these conversations and they still want to hear from you. Please give five minutes of your time to take the survey in this [link](#). If you would like to get even more involved, they are still holding workshops with organizations and community groups. Please contact Kyle Gregoire, TLGV Community and Donor Relations Manager, at 860-774-3300 or Kyle@tlgv.org

The Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD) was awarded a capacity building grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. This two part project will allow ECCD and its Board of Directors to develop a strategic plan to guide the organization into the future. The second part of this grant involves development of a [Southeastern Connecticut Storm Water Collaborative](#) to provide a regional approach, using shared resources, to address the management of pollution from municipal stormwater discharges. ECCD has organized two well-attended meetings and are learning from the municipalities what tools and resources will be valuable to them to be in compliance with the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) general permit.

ECCD is continuing to monitor the inflow and outflow from a [Woodchip Bioreactor Project](#) installed on a farm in Woodstock in August 2017. They are more than midway through a four season water quality monitoring project that will evaluate the effectiveness of the system to remove plant nutrients and pathogens from groundwater discharging through a farm field tile

drainage system. The final season of data will be collected in spring 2019, and the results will be shared during a farm tour being planned for summer 2019. This project is being supported by an US EPA Clean Water Act §319 grant through the CT DEEP.

ECCD's Fairvue Farm Agriculture Waste Management Practices Project in Woodstock is nearing completion. The main management system that connects liquefied manure to two large blue storage tanks previously installed by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service was switched on. A few smaller projects need to be completed by the farm before the entire project is complete. This project will be included on a farm tour being planned for summer 2019. This project is being supported by an US EPA Clean Water Act §319 grant through the CT DEEP.

ECCD fell a little short of its goal to install 7000 ft² of rain gardens in 2018 as part of its [100 Rain Gardens, 100 Rain Barrels](#) project that was funded by a Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant. ECCD successfully distributed 120 rain barrels, which exceeded their goal. At the end of the 2018 growing season, ECCD staff installed 26 rain gardens in 20 different towns totaling 6,730 ft² (equivalent to 96 rain gardens at 70 ft² each). With funding still left in the budget to install even more rain gardens in 2019, ECCD has requested a project extension with hopes of installing additional rain gardens this year.

While working with officials to install a rain garden at the Mystic Museum of Art, it was discussed that further storm water filtration could be achieved with the installation of a catch basin filter insert. ECCD was able to acquire an [Abtech smart sponge stormwater basin insert](#) using the Watershed Assistance Small Grant Program funded in part by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection through a US Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act §319 Nonpoint Source Grant, and administered by the Rivers Alliance of Connecticut. The Museum provided matching funds for the purchase of back-up filters and will be hosting a workshop. ECCD will be conducting the workshop about nonpoint source pollution. Todd Megronigle of AbTech will be presenting the company's product line to provide municipalities with options to reduce pollution from stormwater.

At the end of summer 2018, ECCD wrapped up a multiyear project designed to evaluate different edge-of-field stormwater collection systems and water quality monitoring protocols. A final report on the findings of the project was submitted to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for review in December. The project was funded by a NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant.

Anguilla Brook is the main inland drainage source to Wequetequock Cove in Stonington, CT. The brook is not meeting CT Water Quality Standards for pathogens. The elevated level of pathogens causes the shellfish beds in the cove to be closed for direct consumption. ECCD was awarded funds from a US EPA Clean Water Act § 319 grant by the CT DEEP to trackdown the sources of pathogens impacting water quality in the brook and to develop a Watershed Based Plan to address those pathogen sources. A well-attended kick off meeting of local stakeholders and agency officials was held in January 2019. Plans are under development to recruit volunteers to assist with collecting water quality data that will be used to bracket the contamination sources.

ECCD will be sponsoring two programs in March focused on local native pollinator plants, trees, and shrubs you can plant to benefit pollinators.

- Emily May, Pollinator Conservation Specialist at the Xerces Society will give a presentation on Tuesday, March 12, 6:30 – 8:00 pm (Snow date March 13) at Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Avenue, New London.
- John LoRusso, Master Gardener Coordinator at UCONN Windham County Extension will give a presentation on Tuesday, March 5, 6:00 – 7:30 pm (Snow date March 6) at UCONN Windham County Extension Center, 139 Wolf Den Road, Brooklyn.

Pre-registration for either of these workshops is required. Contact Maura at maura.robie@comcast.net or 860-319-8807. Order forms will be conveniently available for the upcoming Eastern Connecticut Conservation District's plant sale!

ECCD was awarded additional funds through the 2018 Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant. ECCD will prepare an engineered plan suitable for permitting and bidding to support development of a fishway on the Shewville Dam in the Poquetanuck Brook watershed, upstream of Poquetanuck Cove. Poquetanuck Cove is a tidewater tributary of the Thames River in Ledyard, Connecticut. Currently, alewives can get past the first two dams along this riverine migratory corridor because of prior work by ECCD to open them up to fish migration. These migratory corridors are river systems that drain to Long Island Sound. Migratory fish use these rivers to travel and dams can block their passage to spawning habitat. A fishway is needed to get fish around the Shewville Dam, allowing them to reach upstream lakes. The project aims to provide an engineered design for a fishway that would reconnect 4.3 river miles and 152 acres of lake for alewife migration, providing access to historic upstream habitat.

Other Long Island Sound Futures Fund project recipients in the greater Thames River watershed include:

Community-driven Nitrogen Action Planning for Southeastern Connecticut Harbors and Bays

The Nature Conservancy-Connecticut will develop a locally-driven watershed-based nitrogen action plan that prioritizes activities to reduce nitrogen pollution entering three Southeastern Connecticut coastal harbors and bays and Long Island Sound. Poor water quality from nitrogen pollution is the Sound's most pressing ecological problem particularly in coastal harbors and bays which contribute 20% of the total nitrogen into the Sound. Excess nitrogen contributes to harmful algae blooms, fish kills, and mats of seaweed that plague coastal waters. This project will work with communities to set pollution reduction targets, identify sources of nitrogen in their local watershed, and select solutions to tackle the problem. The project will: 1) convene local stakeholders to develop a nitrogen action plan that supports community needs; 2) use a nitrogen loading model data to build awareness of nitrogen pollution impacts from different local sources (wastewater, fertilizer etc.); 3) solicit local feedback to refine local nitrogen loading model data; 4) develop nitrogen reduction scenario maps to help residents visualize options to restore and protect the health of local coastal waters; 5) select priority options for nitrogen control activities that reduce nitrogen; and 6) expand the Long Island Sound Clean Coastal Waters website. The project will produce a framework for municipal and watershed-level planning, decision-making and implementation that is useful Sound-wide.

Planning for Two Fish Passage Projects in Southeastern Connecticut

Connecticut Fund for the Environment will develop engineered designs for two fishways at Whitford Pond Dam, Whitford Brook, a tributary of the Mystic River, Stonington; and Alewife Cove Dam, Fenger Brook, a tributary of Alewife Cove, Waterford. These two dams are barriers to migration along riverine migratory corridors preventing fish from accessing upstream spawning habitat. These corridors are river systems that drain to Long Island Sound. Migratory fish use these rivers to travel and dams can block their passage from the Sound to rivers to spawn. The project will: 1) complete, permit-ready and construction-ready fish passage designs and consult with state and federal agencies about the designs and related permits; and 2) conduct eight meetings with the 50+ public and local stakeholders including the Connecticut Riverine Migratory Corridor Working Group and the Alewife Cove Conservancy during the design process at key milestones to seek feedback and provide information about project progress, and efforts to restore fish passage in Southeastern Connecticut. The project planning will set the stage to provide 4.2 miles of access to spawning, rearing and refuge habitat along two riverine migratory corridors valuable to Long Island Sound diadromous and freshwater fish such as alewife, blueback herring, brook trout, American eel, and American shad.

Sound Discoveries – Education through Exploration

Sea Research Foundation (Mystic Aquarium) will host a two-day experiential and hands-on education program to immerse 500 students and families in the Sound habitats in Mystic, Connecticut. A 2006 survey of New York and Connecticut residents living in the Sound watershed found people had low environmental knowledge about watersheds and pollution problems but a high belief they could change something about their everyday behavior to improve the Sound with younger residents as stand-outs in their belief that they could make positive change. The project is specifically designed to educate students and their families about the Sound environment and actions they may take to improve it. The project will: 1) conduct a Long Island Sound Day for students from pre-school to high school, and a day for families and learners of all ages; 2) send participants on a journey of discovery to explore preserves and public land which serve as experiential learning laboratories about the Sound; 3) engage participants in hands-on activities at four guided learning stations (Freshwater Ecosystems, Trash Survey, Salt Marshes, Estuary Exploration) to learn about an ecosystem, its inhabitants, human impacts and steps that can be taken to reduce impacts; 4) conduct visits with the Discover Long Island Sound interactive exhibit. Use the Mystic Aquarium Facebook, Twitter and Instagram followers to generate a Long Island Sound Day social media campaign focused around the community event.

Thames Valley Trout Unlimited (TVTU) is involved in conservation work focused on cold water fisheries and preservation.

- In 2018 TVTU volunteers placed temperature data loggers in multiple locations in Merrick Brook, a wild brook trout stream that is a tributary of the Shetucket River. The data will provide valuable information on summer stream temperatures.
- [Trout in the Classroom](#) is an environmental education program that can be used in any school grades K-12, and applied across the curriculum. It has been a huge success in the schools that are involved. Basically, teachers set up an aquarium and incubate trout eggs in their classroom, under the guidance of a Trout in the Classroom coordinator (a TU member). The teacher and students are responsible for daily maintenance and observation of the eggs, while the coordinator is responsible for guidance and delivering the eggs and food. The final result is an

aquarium full of trout fry that are released into a trout stream during a class field trip in late May to early June. There are currently 14 schools enrolled in this program.

- Thames Valley TU will be conducting a Beginners Fly Tying classes again this winter. Bob Walsh and John Preston will be teaching the course. The classes will be held 9:30 - 11:30 am Saturdays at the Fish Connection, 127 RT12, Preston, CT. Class dates are February 23, March 2, 9 & 16th. Classes are open to members (young & old) and to the public.
- Thames Valley usually does three river clean-ups per year. To volunteer or discuss river stewardship opportunities, please contact: River Clean-up Coordinator Jim Valuckus jfvret@gmail.com
- With the assistance of TVTU volunteers, the Shetucket River in Sprague was stocked by the CT DEEP with large broodstock Atlantic salmon (average weight was 10 lbs. with the largest fish being around 15 lbs.) in December 2018.
- TVTU has offered to provide fly casting demonstrations during the 2019 Thames River Basin Partnership Floating Workshop.

Project Oceanology (Project O) will be offering [public seal watches](#) in March and April. The trips will be education focused, and include the collection of water quality data and benthic species monitoring at the mouth of the Thames River. Project O has been collecting this type of data in the mouth of the Thames River for 40 years. They are seeking website development funding in order to create a data interface.

During the 2019/20 school year, Project O will be hosting professional development workshops for teachers. Project O staff will be inviting conservation professionals to these events to connect with the teachers.

Project O has offered to bring water testing supplies for a hands-on learning experience in the Yantic River as part of the 2019 TRBP Floating Workshop.

The Connecticut Audubon Society released their annual 2018 State of the Birds publication. More information can be found at this [link](#).

In 2007, the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) developed the Eagleville Brook Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) analysis – the first of its kind in the country to be based not on a specific pollutant or pollutants, but on impervious cover. Eagleville Brook is in the Willimantic River watershed. It is a small headwater stream that intersects with the UCONN campus in Storrs. Since the TMDL analysis and subsequent Eagleville Brook Management Plan were developed, \$1.7 million of EPA Clean Water Act § 319 nonpoint source pollution funds and UCONN matching funds have been invested in retrofitting the stormwater system with a variety of low impact development (LID) options on the UCONN campus. A virtual tour of the LID projects can be visited at this [UCONN link](#). Despite this investment, the water quality in Eagleville Brook has not been restored to state of Connecticut standards.

The draft 2018 Connecticut Integrated Water Quality Report to Congress is expected to be released soon, with a deadline to submit the final draft of the report to the US EPA by April 1.

The CT DEEP Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program is collaborating with multiple watershed organizations to host a conference for volunteer water quality monitoring groups. The theme of the conference is Many Waters, One State: Uniting Connecticut's Lake, River, Wetland & Long Island Sound Citizen Science Communities. The workshop will be held on Friday, April 5, 2019 from 8:30a - 4:00 pm at Three Rivers Community College in Norwich, CT. Registration and other program information can be found at this [link](#).

The DEEP announced that it has awarded \$3,173,530.50 in grants for nineteen projects to plan and design, build, expand, or enhance and improve multi-use trails and greenways across the state.

In the Thames River watershed basin, several of our partners have been awarded funds.

- CT Audubon & Town of Pomfret were awarded \$53,491 for Air Line State Park Trail Enhancements. Preparation of construction documents for an ADA shelter, restroom, and interpretive exhibit observation deck.
- CT Forest & Park Association was awarded \$295,500 for Blue Blazed Hiking Trail system for maintenance and restoration of the Blue Blaze Trail Hiking system in addition to management of CT Trails Day.
- CT RC&D was awarded \$188,522 for Air Line State Park Trail to support a 12 Town Task Force to develop a Master Plan to include resource inventory wayfinding, economic opportunities, bike to work assessment, increase safe routes to schools, maintenance plan.
- The Town of Killingly was awarded \$130,000 to support a Quinebaug River Trail Section 6 Planning and Design request for to extend this highly used trail.
- The City of New London was awarded \$265,000 to support Multi-use Trail Completion of a waterfront multi-use pathway.
- The Town of Putnam & NECCOG were awarded \$64,200 for Air Line Trail Gap Connection Analysis. Their goal is to develop a shovel ready plan to complete the Air Line State Park Trail connection to the Putnam River Trail and the YMCA/Technology Park system.
- UConn Extension System was awarded \$206,049.50 to work on a CT Trail Census. This will be a statewide volunteer-based data collection and education program implemented as a pilot from 2016-2018 on 16 multi-use (bicycle, pedestrian, equestrian) trail sites across the state.

Congratulations to all our eastern Connecticut Recreation Trail Grant recipients!

The mission of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is to provide resources to farmers and landowners to aid them with conservation. The NRCS office in Windham County is currently managing 13 different contracts under the 2014 Farm Bill. The 2018 Farm Bill was recently passed, but the details of the programs funded under the new Farm Bill are not yet fully fleshed out.

The annual New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission [NEIWPCCC NPS](#) Conference will be held April 18-19, 2019 in Portsmouth NH. Registration for this event is now open.

The Connecticut Federation of Lakes (CFL) announced a 2019 Lake Grants Program. For this first year of their program, the CFL has allocated \$3,000 to be awarded. It is their hope that in future years growing membership, greater support through donations, and proceeds from their events will allow them to grow the size of the program. CFL will make awards in three

categories: an Association Lake Grant, a Non-Association Lake Grant, and a Lake and Watershed Research Grant. Each grant we award will be for up to \$1,000. Applications for this year must be submitted by April 15, 2019 and will be announced/awarded at CFL's Annual Meeting on May 18th. The winners must agree to present a project report at a future CFL Meeting to share what was learned with fellow members. To apply visit CFL's website at <http://www.ctlakes.org>.

EPA and Army Announce Public Hearing on Proposed New “Waters of the United States” Definition. The hearing will be held February 27-28, 2019 in Kansas City, Kansas. Following President Trump's directive to provide certainty to American farmers and landowners so that the economy can continue to expand while waters are protected, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Army (Army) are moving to the next steps in proposing a new definition of the “Waters of the United States.” EPA and the Army will hold a public hearing on the proposed new “Waters of the United States” definition in Kansas City with sessions on February 27 and 28, 2019. All persons wanting to speak are encouraged to register in advance. EPA and the Army will also hold an [informational webcast](#) on February 14, 2019. Enrollment is limited to 2000 registrants but the webinar will be available for download after the live presentation.

Background:

On December 11, 2018, EPA and the Army signed a proposed rule providing a clear, understandable, and implementable definition of “waters of the United States” that clarifies federal authority under the Clean Water Act while respecting the role of states and tribes in managing their own land and water resources. The agencies have submitted the proposed rule to the Office of the Federal Register for publication.

Oral statements and supporting information presented at the public hearing will be considered with the same weight as written statements and supporting information submitted during the public comment period. **The agencies will take comments on the proposal for 60 days after publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register. Comments can be submitted online at <https://www.regulations.gov>.** Please follow the instructions for submitting comments to **Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OW-2018-0149**.

More information about the public hearing, informational webcast, and the proposed rulemaking, including the pre-publication version of the Federal Register notice, are available at: <https://www.epa.gov/wotus-rule/step-two-revise>.

News from Municipalities

Members of the Lebanon Inland Wetland Commission have been volunteering with The Last Green Valley water quality monitoring program.

- In 2018, a bacterial source trackdown survey assessing water quality in 3 sites in Ten Mile River was completed.
- Riffle Bioassessments were conducted in 2 streams.
- Four temperature data loggers were deployed to monitor the summer water temperature in 2 streams.

- Dennis Latchum has offered to demonstrate the Riffle Bioassessment protocols and set up a large screen connected to a field microscope as part of the 2019 TRBP Floating Workshop.

The City of New London was awarded funding for Developing a Natural Resource and Watershed Plan for New London through a Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant. New London is situated on the Thames River and Long Island Sound and is one of only three deep harbors in Connecticut. The City is the State's smallest and has a very limited (~130 acres) area of freshwater wetlands which provide flood, ecological, wildlife, nitrogen retention, and sediment trapping functions for the community. The most recent environmental inventory of the City's land and water resources, including these wetlands, was published in 1991. This inventory needs to be updated to address issues facing coastal communities including rising waters and flooding, and the greater frequency of 20- and 50-year storms. The project will: 1) engage the City's Inland Wetlands Commission and Sustainability Committee to develop the planning process; 2) research and evaluate current resource documents considering hydrology, soils, flora, and fauna; and identify information gaps; 3) conduct multiple public sessions to gather information and feedback during plan development and draft plan release; 4) deliver a Final Natural Resources and Watershed Management Plan to be adopted by the City Council; and 5) achieve Sustainability Certification through the Sustainable CT initiative which promotes the well-being of current and future residents, and supports efforts to protect the health of valuable water resources. The plan will be implemented starting in 2020, and support the City's coastal protection efforts long-term.

Land Trust Updates

Wyndham Land Trust Continues to Protect Bull Hill

In just two years, the Wyndham Land Trust has expanded the Bull Hill Preserve in Thompson and Woodstock to 885 acres, a testament to the land trust's commitment to protecting this expansive unbroken forest. Three properties were added to the land trust's holdings at the end of 2018: 55 acres formerly owned by the Young family, 56 acres owned by Mark Cunningham, and 2.5 acres owned by Marcus Johnson.

- The Young property is just north of the parking area for the preserve, which can be accessed from Bull Hill Road, via Senextet Road in Woodstock. The new lot contains a red oak and white pine forest with a thick understory of mountain laurel. The property also holds a large blueberry swamp that supports uncommon nesting bird species, notably Magnolia Warbler and Northern Waterthrush.
- The Cunningham properties consist of three separate parcels. One parcel connects to a land trust preserve in the northern part of the forest, and two parcels expand the main core of the preserve to the south. These properties are mainly oak forest, and one parcel contains a scenic waterfall. Whip-poor-wills, a rare bird in the State of Connecticut, are known to nest in this forest.
- The Johnson parcel is located in the southern part of the forest and is adjacent to existing land holdings. It consists of mostly oak and white pine.

The Wyndham Land Trust also expanded four other preserves in the Quiet Corner at the end of 2018, closing out one of the most productive years in its 43-year history.

- The Long Pond Preserve in Thompson increased to 100 acres thanks to the acquisition of 24 acres formerly owned by Scott McWilliam. The property is mostly dry ground with many very large white pine trees, and the land trust hopes the site will become a nesting site for the Bald Eagles that frequent Webster Lake. A hiking trail forms a nice loop around the northern edge of the pond.
- A 27 acre-parcel, formerly owned by the late Ron Blain, expands the Robbins Preserve in Thompson along its southern boundary to 155 acres. Whip-poor-wills, an uncommon nesting bird in the state, rely on the forest in this parcel to breed each year. The property also includes undisturbed frontage on the Five Mile River.
- The addition of 152 acres, situated in both Thompson and Putnam, expands the Lower Pond Preserve to 280 acres. The property was formerly owned by the Orr family. The land trust now protects the entire shoreline of Lower Pond. The new parcel contains an Atlantic white cedar swamp, white pine/oak upland forest, a grassy marshland, and a small stream. The property holds a high concentration of endangered plants and insects associated with Atlantic white cedar swamps. Ospreys nest in the dead trees that line the swamp.
- The land trust acquired an additional 18 acres from the Orr family, which expands the Chafee Preserve in Putnam to 47 acres. The Chafee Preserve was donated to the land trust in 1977 by Joseph Chafee and was the first property protected by the land trust.

The Wyndham Land Trust now protects more than 100 parcels in ten towns in Northeast Connecticut totaling over 4000 acres. More information about the land trust can be found on its new web site at www.wyndhamlandtrust.org. The website includes information about how to access the Bull Hill preserve along with a map showing the trail to the viewpoint.

Connecticut Land Conservation Council will be hosting the 2019 Connecticut Land Conservation Conference on Saturday, March 23, 2019 from 8:30 am - 5:00 pm, followed by a reception at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Registration for this conference is now open. The Conference will feature a Plenary Session Conversation focused on Getting Land Conservation Into the Room Where it Happens. They request land conservation advocates bring their questions and ideas to this interactive conversation about accelerating the pace of conservation in CT. More Information at <http://www.ctconservation.org/2019-conference>.

In eastern Connecticut, Avalonia Land Conservancy added more to celebrate than just their 50 year anniversary as a land trust this year. They were awarded 3 grants that will protect almost 350 acres of land.

Town: Griswold

Project Title: Boyd Rixtown

Sponsor: Avalonia Land Conservancy

Grant: \$58,435

Acreage: 54 acres

Description: This undeveloped forested acquisition, located in Griswold, will be an addition to the recently approved 409-acre Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest (part of a greenway of over 1400 acres). The parcel has rough terrain (180' – 510' above sea level), with rocky ledge, upland

forest, ponds and vernal pools. The property is in the PA490 program, and is geographically in two watershed basins – Pachaug River and Miller Brook/Broad Brook.

Town: Griswold

Project Title: Dutka Property

Sponsor: Avalonia Land Conservancy

Grant: \$30,469

Acreage: 62.58 acres

Description: This property is located along the southern portion of Pachaug Pond (Griswold) and in combination with land owned by Avalonia and DEEP (Pachaug State Forest) would create over 120 acres of unfragmented, mature forest block. The property will enhance public access to Pachaug Pond, through its water frontage and the use of a seasonal dock. The property will also provide access to Barton Island (Avalonia). Known state listed species of concern may be located on this property.

Town: Ledyard

Project Title: Athinson/Dirlam Preserve

Sponsor: Avalonia Land Conservancy

Grant: \$697,775

Acreage: 230 acres

Description: This acquisition will add significantly to the Great Oak Greenway by adding open forest and associated habitats, and by adding miles of trails in one of the longest trail systems in southeast Connecticut. The conservation of this property will protect the water quality of Thompson Brook and Great Brook and serve as an addition buffer through filtration for the Morgan Pond Reservoir (Groton Utilities). The property abuts protected open space owned by Groton Utilities and the Town of Ledyard and links to other land of Avalonia Trust.

The grants were awarded through the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition program, which is administered by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and assists local governments, land trusts, and water companies in purchasing open space using funding from the Community Investment Act and state bond funds. This grant program requires match by the grant recipient and requires the open space land be protected by a conservation and public recreation easement, ensuring that the property is forever protected for public use and enjoyment.

Other News

Effective January 7, 2019, Lilian Ruiz joined the CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation as Executive Director. She will oversee the execution of the Council's activities, coordinate the work of the Conservation Partnership in Connecticut (Council, Districts, and NRCS) and manage the work of the Long Island Sound-Regional Conservation Partnership Program (LISW-RCPP).

Ms. Ruiz is an Agricultural Engineer with a Master's degree in Agricultural Economics from Cornell University, with expertise in Sustainable Agriculture and training in Diplomacy. She works as a consultant dedicated to sustainability of the supply chain of agricultural products, guiding and designing sustainability efforts. Previously with Danone as Agriculture Director

with a dual function in procurement and sustainability, she designed Danone's Soil Health Program and contributed to the Global Sustainable Agriculture Policy.

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<http://www.ctcouncilonsoilandwater.org>

If you would like your organization's efforts included in the next edition of the TRBP Partners in Action Report, consider attending one of our quarterly meetings. It includes a [TRBP Plan of Work](#) activity reporting session, which is an informal "round the table" discussion of Partner activities. It is a great time to network with like-focused organizations. All meetings begin at 9:30 AM. Generally, the TRBP meets quarterly on the 3rd Tuesday of the month.

Next meeting will be on April 16, 2019.

If you are not already on the e-distribution list for this publication, sign on to our TRBP Distribution list <http://thamesriverbasinpartnership.org/subscribe>, or you can download previous versions of this quarterly publication from the TRBP website <http://thamesriverbasinpartnership.org/newsletters>.

The Thames River Basin Partnership is a voluntary, cooperative effort to share resources, and strives to develop a regional approach to resource protection. The Partnership is made up of a variety of agencies, organizations, municipalities, educational institutions, companies, and individuals interested in the environmental health of the greater Thames River basin. Partial funding support for FY 19 for TRBP Coordinator time has been provided by The Last Green Valley. Additional sources of funding are being sought to continue the TRBP Coordinator position. Please consider making a donation to the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District and designate it to support the Thames River Basin Partnership Coordinator position.