



Thames River Basin Partnership

Partners in Action Quarterly Report

Winter 2020

Volume 53

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 fall TRBP meeting, you missed a presentation by Mary Becker of CT DEEP. Her presentation explained how diatoms, a type of single cell algae that have a cell wall made of silica, are good indicators of water pollution in fresh water/high gradient streams. They are especially useful for detecting elevated concentrations of phosphorus. There are over 20,000 species of diatoms, and some are sensitive to different environmental variables. Those that are phosphorus-sensitive are used as indicator organisms. A higher prevalence of phosphorous-sensitive diatoms in a stream indicates a lower phosphorous concentration. Previous studies completed by USGS scientists show seasonal variability in phosphorus concentrations in streams. Because of their presence in the stream 24/7, diatoms are a more consistent measure of nutrient enrichment. Sampling takes place in June or July and includes scraping the diatoms off of rocks and collecting them in a bottle, then shipping them off to a lab for identification. At the same time, a traditional water sample is collected and analyzed for nutrient concentrations. The cost per sample sent out for diatom identification is high, but the reduction in the number of sampling events per site to complete an assessment is less when staff time and nutrient analysis for sample set are factored in. Connecticut DEEP has been studying the use of diatoms as water quality indicators since 2002.

TRBP Updates

During the last quarter, the TRBP Coordinator posted 39 updates on our partners' activities on the TRBP Facebook page. If you would like to get more of your organization's information out to the public, email the information in a cut and paste format to Jean.Pillo@comcast.net.

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 is 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 three Regional Conservation Partnership Programs by conducting outreach.

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 financial assistance funding for this project has been obligated. However, technical assistance funding remains. Water quality monitoring on selected fields was discontinued in November prior to winter freeze and will resume in spring 2020.

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.

Project update - Mike Dietz of UCONN CLEAR/CT Non-Point Education for Municipal Officials along with staff from the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service visited a few potential farms to evaluate them for potential EQIP-funded projects that would reduce pathogen contaminated runoff from their farms.

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 – Connecticut NRCS, in partnership with The Last Green Valley (TGV), the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership (MassConn) and the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District (NRICD) has announced a sign-up period from now until April 17, 2020 for woodland landowners who want to improve bird habitat and forest health on their property through implementation of forestry practices. Eligibility requirements include the land be within the priority area, that the applicant currently has a forest management plan with a bird habitat assessment, and be ready for implementation. Applications due by April 17, 2020. For more information, visit the [TGV website](#).

Long Island Sound Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program Update:

The Long Island Sound Regional Conservation Partnership Program 2020 Agricultural Conservation Easement Program recently announced an Agricultural Land Easement Grant Round for Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island only. This round of funding requests closed on March 12, 2020. For more information, visit their project website at <https://www.lisw-rcpp.com/home.html>.

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/farmbill/rcpp>.

Partner Reports

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) reported that they have been continuing to operate under interim rules through 2019 but the new rules for 2018 Farm Bill are expected to be completed by early 2020. NRCS has been rolling out new web-based assessment planning tools. Not all of the new web-based tools had been released by the January 2020 meeting.

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) announced accepted a new round of EPA Clean Water Act § 319 grant applications through February 27, 2020. Section 319 of the Federal Clean Water Act is a federal program to control nonpoint sources (NPS) of water pollution. Connecticut receives funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for Section 319 grants that can be passed onto communities, local conservation groups, and other organizations for NPS implementation projects, plans, and statewide NPS management efforts.

CT DEEP accepted comments on the Proposed Reissuance with Modifications of the General Permit for the Discharge of Stormwater and Dewatering Wastewaters from Construction Activities (GP) through mid-February. This general permit authorizes construction activities and associated stormwater and dewatering wastewater discharges on a site, as defined in the general permit, with a total disturbance of one or more acres of land area on a site, regardless of project phasing. CT DEEP intends to reissue the construction general permit with modifications to become effective on October 1, 2020.

The Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD) is continuing its efforts on many soil and water conservation projects in or near the Thames Watershed:

ECCD is moving along with a non-point source (NPS) pollution implementation project in Ashford, CT. The project includes installation of concrete dumper pads at an apartment complex and the installation of storm drain filters downstream of the complex driveway and parking areas. The apartments were installed prior to current stormwater regulations, and it was noted that leachate from the dumpsters was draining down the driveway into Bassett Brook. Once the new dumpster pads are complete, new dumpsters with lid stops attached will be put in place to prevent rainwater from draining through the trash. Rain gardens will also be planted near the dumpsters to infiltrate any runoff in the future. The storm drain filters have already been installed.

A second stakeholder meeting was held on December 20, 2019 as part of the upper Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan project. Traci Iott of CT DEEP gave a presentation on DEEP monitoring data and suggested areas of concern to focus on in the development of the pollution prevention plan for the Natchaug watershed upstream of the Willimantic Reservoir. Several public outreach sessions are in the planning stages. A Natchaug Watershed Values Survey was completed and a summary of the survey results has been posted to the ECCD website. The plan is currently in the development phase, with a first draft of the plan expected this spring.

As part of the Anguilla Brook Watershed Based Plan project, a watershed fair featuring Wequetequock Cove and Little Narraganset Bay is in the planning stages. Anguilla Brook drains into Wequetequock Cove in Stonington, CT. An Anguilla Brook and Wequetequock Cove watershed values survey was created and distributed to solicit information from local residents as to what is important to them about the local water resources.

The winter meeting of the Eastern Connecticut Stormwater Collaborative was held at the Northeastern CT Council of Governments on Wednesday, January 22, 2020. Judy Rondeau, ECCD, welcomed attendees. Judy and Dan Mullins, ECCD, announced that ECCD has submitted a proposal to the Community Foundation of Eastern CT for an additional three years of funding. ECCD has also entered into an MOU with NECCOG to provide storm sewer infrastructure mapping for member MS4 towns. Amanda Ryan reviewed the upcoming MS4 annual report requirements and referenced the available report template. Correne Auer of HRP Associates provided an overview of good housekeeping practices required in the MS4 permit. Katie Milardo reviewed the stormwater management good housekeeping practices at the University of CT Storrs campus.

With funding provided by a grant from Long Island Sound Futures Fund, ECCD is moving forward with the design phase of a fishway that will allow migratory fish to pass over the Shewville Dam in Ledyard. ECCD has contracted with Milone and McBroom to design the new fishway. Design work has begun. Title searches, and possibly an A-2 survey of the project site, are necessary to verify the both sides of the stream are owned by the same property owner. Raber Associates has been hired to conduct an archaeological and historical assessment.

ECCD has created a Baker Cover Watershed Committee to focus on the water quality issues in Baker Cover in Groton and to implement recommendations from the Baker Cove Abbreviated Watershed-based Plan. A workplan was drafted and presented at a well-attended meeting in January.

ECCD is also continuing to focus on implementation projects upstream of the surface intake for the Town of Putnam's Little River source water supply. ECCD is collaborating with CT DEEP and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service on a major agricultural conservation project in the watershed.

The Last Green Valley Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program Update:

- Riffle bioassessments were completed and eight voucher samples have been turned into CT DEEP for interpretation.
- A preliminary review of data from 6 temperature data loggers deployed at different locations in the Mount Hope River watershed did not demonstrate any impact from the Ashford Well field adjacent to the Mount Hope River in 2020. Two loggers were placed upstream and four downstream of the well field.
- A proposal to give a presentation on the TLGV volunteer cyanobacteria monitoring program at the Northeast Aquatic Biologists Conference was accepted. The conference was held in early March, 2020.

The Southeast Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) completed a follow up to a joint land-use study at the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, CT. The study was necessary in anticipation of an expected increase in hiring at Electric Boat and the submarine base.

SCCOG has completed a [regional bike and pedestrian plan](#). The study was undertaken to better understand how to include more facilities for biking and walking in southeastern Connecticut's regional transportation network and what improvements could be made to existing facilities.

On January 9, 2020, the Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments hosted a workshop focused on Sustainable Waste Management. The program included how to increase recycling, Governor Lamont's PFAS action plan and a proposed regional environmental depot for hazardous waste management for northeastern Connecticut.

The Eastern Connecticut Land Bank presented to the SCCOG Board of Directors on January 15th. The Eastern Connecticut Land Bank is a newly formed organization with the mission of providing support to eastern Connecticut municipalities with contaminated properties. The Eastern Connecticut Land Bank is envisioned to be a partner organization in acquiring, investigating, remediating, and marketing properties, such as brownfields, for reuse.

Thames Valley Trout Unlimited (TVTU) was awarded a Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant for planning for fish passage at Papermill Pond Dam in Little River, Sprague, CT. The project will include an engineering alternatives analysis, engineered designs, and commence pre-application consultations with federal and state agencies to advance installation of a fishway at the dam. A consulting firm has been selected and a contract was being prepared at the time of the TRBP Winter Meeting.

TVTU volunteers delivered trout eggs to the schools involved in their Trout in the Classroom program. The students will raise trout fingerlings in their classroom while collecting water quality data from the tank. A date will be arranged in May where the students can release to a stream the trout fingerlings they raised. Fourteen schools in eastern Connecticut are involved in the program.

News from Municipalities

The Woodstock Agriculture Commission and Conservation Commission co-hosted a presentation by the Connecticut Chapter of the American Chestnut Society. The program featured the history of the American Chestnut Tree and its decline due to the chestnut blight fungus. The CT Chapter of the ACS is seeking landowners interested to be voluntarily involved in planting backcrossed chestnut trees in an effort to restore chestnuts to the forested landscape.

The National Parks Service joined members of the Thompson Trails Committee, the Thompson Historical Society and Director of Planning & Development Tyra Penn, for the first meeting in fulfillment of an assistance award for their grant proposal “Thompson, CT – More Than Just a Train Wreck”. The grant sought the expertise of the NPS in planning improvements to the Thompson section of the Air Line Trail where the Great East Thompson Train Wreck occurred in December of 1894. The grant was awarded on December 3, 2019, almost on the very anniversary of that important historic event! The group took a tour of the site, where Paul Provost and Tom Chase of Thompson Historical Society matched up the events of the Train Wreck to spots in the terrain, to provide context for the NPS advisors. During the tour and the brief wrap-up meeting, they also discussed challenges related to the parking area, access for the disabled to the trail, and problem spots for illegal ATV use, in addition to describing aspirations for a future interpretive park at the site. Congratulations to Thompson Trails and the Historical Society for receiving the assistance award from National Park Service!

The Town of Pomfret was awarded \$187,220 from the Connecticut Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant program to purchase the Frankfurter Project. This 131-acre parcel is almost completely surrounded by protected open space and is adjacent to the Airline Trail. The property was logged about 10 years ago and is now an early successional forest. It is part of a wildlife corridor made up of more than 2,000 acres of open space. There are 2 inland wetlands and a pond on the property. Old logging roads on the site will be used for passive recreation. They can be accessed from several points along the Airline Trail. Access is also available on Wolf Den Road and from the New England Forestry Foundation’s trail system. Bass fishing will be allowed at the property’s pond.

The Pheasant Farm property, atop the Lisbon and Canterbury town line, is a 104-acre property that has been formally protected via the state Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program. Therefore, nothing can be built on the land, except for some farm buildings. The land is comprised of 73% prime agricultural soil. Prime agricultural land, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is the best quality of land for agricultural use.

The Town of Coventry, CT, in conjunction with the Estate of Adelma Grenier Simmons, is seeking proposals for the adaptive re-use of the former Caprilands property located at 534 Silver Street. Sealed proposals must be received by May 11, 2020 at 12:00 pm in the Town of Coventry, Town Manager's Office, 1712 Main Street, Coventry, CT. The Town of Coventry and the Estate reserve the right to award in part, to reject any and all proposals in whole or in part, or waive technical defects, irregularities, and omissions if, in their judgement, the best interest of the Town and the Estate will be served. All questions regarding this RFP can be directed to: Eric Trott, Director of Planning and Development, 860-742-4062/etrott@coventryct.org

Land Trust Updates

Avalonia Land Conservancy (ALC) was awarded funds from the CT Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant program to continue its mission to preserve land in southeastern Connecticut.

ALC was awarded \$108,000 to help purchase the 95.82 acre Maynard Farm in Ledyard. The Maynard Farm borders Avery Preserve and would almost double the size of the existing acreage of preserved land. There are 30 acres of wetlands on the site which flow into Billings-Avery Brook and then into Morgan Reservoir. This reservoir provides drinking water for the towns of Groton, Ledyard and Preston. The property is part of one of the largest intact coastal forests in Connecticut. The site is part of a proposed greenway/wildlife corridor in Ledyard. Habitats within the property include a red maple swamp and an acidic Atlantic white cedar swamp. A mixed hardwood forest and former pasture create habitat for an array of plant and animal species. Access to the property from 32 Avery Hill Road will offer passive recreation on 1.37 miles of trail. A link will be created to the trails on Avery Preserve. Maynard Farm is less than 10 miles from Groton, Norwich and New London.

ALC was awarded \$2,340,000 towards the purchase of the 669 acre Bond Property in Montville. The land was previously used for sand and gravel extraction. The property lies within the Niantic River watershed. Barnes Reservoir and Bogue Brook Reservoir lie to the north and south of the property respectively and are part of the New London water system. Latimer Brook runs along the western boundary of the property and will allow for trout fishing opportunities. Prior gravel extraction on the property has resulted in multiple states of forest regrowth. The property lies within the Lower Connecticut River New England Cottontail Conservation Focus Area. Flooded quarries, accessible by dirt roads with parking areas, will offer paddling and fishing opportunities. Thirty acres of the property are currently being used to grow feed hay which the conservancy will continue to allow.

Avalonia has initiated a Hike and Seek Program to encourage exploration of their beautiful preserves by children, families, and the general public through a scavenger hunt format. It allows

participants to use technology in a simple, positive way to learn about the nature of each preserve and encourage observations and sharing of discoveries! To learn more about this initiative, visit Avalonia's website at <https://avalonia.org/hike-and-seek>.

Kim Bradley has been elected to serve as the 10th President of Avalonia Land Conservancy. Chuck Toal has stepped down from the position of Director of Development and Programs, but will continue to volunteer for Avalonia.

The Groton Open Space Association was awarded \$600,000 to support its effort to purchase the Sheep Farm South preserve. This 100 acres of new open space will add to the Association's recently secured Sheep Farm property. The acquisition of this second parcel will provide a link between Groton's east-west X-Town Trail and north-south greenbelt. More than 1,700 acres of open space are adjacent to the property. A unique vernal pool system connects to Fort Hill Brook. Fort Hill Brook flows through the property into Mumford Cove, a rehabilitated coastal area. Access to the property will be available from Fort Hill Road and Flanders Road. A trail will be built to connect the Flanders Road entrance to trails on the initial Sheep Farm property.

The Campagna family of Canterbury donated 58 acres to the Wyndham Land Trust. The property sits on the West side of Brooklyn Road in the Town of Canterbury. An expansive swamp sits along the northern boundary, and the pristine wetland is home to a diverse array of animals and plants. The swamp feeds into Downing Brook which continues through the property before entering New River. The property has a mixture of oak forest, white pine stands, and red maple swamp and is riddled by stonewalls—a testament to the hard-scrabble farming of previous generations.

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 in January, April, July and October on the 3rd Tuesday of the month.

Next meeting will be on April 21, 2020. Meeting location TBD.

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 20 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.