



Thames River Basin Partnership Partners in Action Quarterly Report

fall 2020

Volume 56

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 ECCD's Assistant Director, Judy Rondeau. Judy gave an overview of the Eastern Connecticut Stormwater Collaborative. Modeled after the Central Massachusetts Stormwater Coalition, the Eastern Connecticut Stormwater Collaborative is a partnership of municipalities, non-profits, educational institutions and agencies working together to help the municipalities navigate the requirements of the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) General permit. This unfunded mandate requires certain municipalities to comply with six minimum control measures of the MS4 permit. Rather than each municipality struggling through these requirements alone, the Collaborative gathers municipal representatives and agency specialists to discuss common issues, resource sharing and education and outreach strategies to meet the requirements of the MS4 permit. More information on the Eastern Connecticut Stormwater Collaborative is available on the [ECCD website](#).

TRBP Updates

A virtual Floating Workshop was presented on September 25, 2020. The theme for the 20th annual Floating Workshop featured the Natchaug River Healthy Watershed Implementation Planning Project under development by the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District. ECCD was given permission to combine the TLGV sponsored Floating Workshop with the CT DEEP funded Upper Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan outreach requirements to create a TRBP Virtual Floating Workshop/Natchaug River Story Board. This storyboard pieced together the story of the Natchaug River, its designated uses, the environmental services

performed by a healthy watershed, its economic value to the local residents and business, as well as the customers of the downstream water treatment plant. The storyboard also highlighted some of the threats to those valuable resources. ECCD staff recorded workshops, created video segments (either field or zoom interviews, or recorded PowerPoint presentations) to hyperlink to the storyboard. The storyboard is featured on the TRBP website under the Floating Workshop tab as [FW 20th Anniversary Natchaug River Storyboard](#). As the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Protection Plan is put into action, this storyboard will be expanded to feature implementation efforts.

TRBP Facebook page has 111 followers. There were 18 posts this quarter. One included the link to the TRBP Partner 20th anniversary of the Floating Workshop video with compiled [congratulatory messages from an assortment of Partners](#). 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 to producers for implementing conservation practices. Through Thames River Basin Partnership meetings, partners meet to discuss ways to collaborate on projects like these. TRBP is a partner in 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 decreases in nutrient and turbidity levels, thereby improving soil health and water quality throughout the watershed.

Project update: The EQIP financial assistance for this project has been obligated. However, funding for technical assistance remains, some of which is being applied toward a comprehensive assessment and inventory of agricultural operations in the Little River watershed (Woodstock/Putnam). The assessments will be used to update the *2009 Muddy Brook and Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan*, which is required to maintain the watershed's status by NRCS under its National Water Quality Initiative.

FY15/16 (State level funding) The University of Connecticut is the recipient and lead partner in an RCPP entitled *Path to Reduce Pathogens in CT Agricultural Runoff*. This \$669,000 NRCS-funded project is focused on reducing high bacteria levels in Connecticut's rivers and shellfish beds. High bacteria levels are caused in part by runoff from agricultural operations, as well as other sources such as septic systems. 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 – ECCD, in partnership with NRCS, is working on conservation plans for a number of farms in the southeastern portion of the watershed, including dairy and pig farms, with recommendations for practices to improve stormwater runoff and erosion. Some of the practices include grassed waterways, manure storage facilities and bedded pack facilities requiring Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs). One or more of these projects may be selected for PATH funding when contracted. UCONN's Anita Morzillo lead the group in compiling a list of known producers in the project area and developed a survey to gain insight into why people do NOT apply to NRCS financial assistance programs.

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. In order to accelerate the pace of conservation in SNEHF, this project will serve as a "conservation pipeline" of forest and bird habitat plans, EQIP practices and HFRP easements on private forestlands.

Project update: The Last Green Valley (TLGV), the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership (MassConn) and the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District (NRICD) are pleased to offer a new opportunity for woodland landowners of ten or more acres to obtain forest management plans with bird habitat assessments. The sign-up period ends December 31, 2020. For more information, visit the [TLGV website](#).

Long Island Sound Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program Update:

The Long Island Sound Regional Conservation Partnership Program held a 2020 Healthy Forest Reserve Program Grant Round for Vermont landowners only. The grant round closed on July 24, 2020.

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

From the University of Connecticut

A blog post from UCONN Today [When in Drought, Build Resilience](#) features a question and answer conversation with Mike Dietz, UConn extension educator and Director of the Connecticut Institute of Water Resources, about the fall 2020 drought and how impacted homeowners and local water resources.

From The Last Green Valley (TLGV)

The Last Green Valley, Inc. (TLGV) has reopened its office to the public in a limited capacity. All visitors must wear a mask and maintain a physical distance of six feet or more. Appointments are recommended as no more than half the staff will be in the office at any time to ensure compliance with the state's executive orders. TLGV has self-certified its reopening to ensure safe practices are in place.

TLGV Board of Directors have approved an additional year of funding for the cooperative agreement between TLGV and ECCD. This funding will support another year of ECCD services to support TLGV's Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program and the Thames River Basin Partnership Coordinator position through September 30, 2021.

In recognition of the difficulty non-profits are facing with engaging the public during the Covid-19 pandemic, TLGV is offering capacity building grants for non-profits that are striving to advance their mission during difficult times. TLGV will provide grants up to \$1,500 for equipment, services and training to improve remote communications (i.e. virtual meeting or e-newsletter subscriptions, cloud-based software, website upgrades, etc.) or provide alternative means of engaging the public (i.e. video/audio equipment for virtual tours or podcasts, equipment to photograph, scan and digitize collections, etc.). More information is available [here](#).

2020 marked the 30th anniversary of Walktober events coordinated by The Last Green Valley. Initially known as Walking Weekend, this program has grown to include events in October, September and November! This year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Walktober was done differently. Events that historically drew large crowds were scaled back. Social distancing, mask wearing and hand sanitizing were required. Many innovative volunteers exchanged live in person events for live online events. Many of those online programs were recorded and are available to watch on TLGV's YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheLastGreenValley>

TLGV is working with the CT Land Conservation Council and 5 land trusts in northeast CT on a 3-year communications and capacity-building project funded by the Community Foundation of Eastern CT. The focus this upcoming year will be on finding ways to be more inclusive and welcoming of people from diverse communities and to better understand and serve community needs.

TLGV Water Quality Monitoring Program Update:

In a Covid-19 challenged monitoring season, 45 devoted TLGV Water Quality Monitoring Volunteers logged almost 600 hours collecting water samples from over 50 unique locations. At some locations, multiple types of monitoring were conducted.

- *E. coli* samples were collected from 17 monitoring stations in CT and MA.
- HOBO temperature data loggers were placed in 10 streams.
- Secchi disk data was collected from 10 lakes/ponds.
- By special request, cyanobacteria samples were collected from 4 lakes and shipped to EPA. Due to a history of blooms, two other lakes were visually monitored for signs cyanobacteria.
- Multiple parameters were tested using a multiprobe at 17 locations.
- Nutrient and Chlorophyll A samples were collected from 3 locations in Webster Lake.
- 7 Riffle bioassessment samples were submitted to CT DEEP in 2020.

In addition to the special Covid-19 safety compliance protocols the volunteers were required to work with, an additional challenge to the program this season was the severe drought experienced in late summer through most of fall. Many upland tributary streams dried up this summer. Those that didn't dry up had very reduced flow. Despite these challenges, data was collected, processed and shared with CT DEEP, MA DEP and US EPA.

Updates from the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD):

With ECCD Assistant Director, Judy Rondeau, leading the effort, the Niantic River Watershed Committee hired a consulting firm, Fuss & O'Neill, to update the Niantic River Watershed Based Plan. The original plan was completed in 2006. The updated plan was completed in July 2020 and approved by the Niantic River Watershed Committee Board of Directors in August 2020. The updated plan can be found at the NRWC website at <http://www.nianticriverwatershed.org/nrwpp-update/2020-nrwpp-update/>. This project was funded by CT DEEP through an EPA 319 grant, as well as the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.

ECCD has initiated the *Niantic River Watershed 4-Town Bio-Infiltration, Filtration & Water Collection Project*, involving the four watershed towns of Montville, Waterford, East Lyme and Salem. ECCD is in the process of developing MOUs with the towns and purchasing storm drain filters. BMP location selection will begin in the spring. In part, this project is funded by CT DEEP through an US EPA Clean Water Act section 319 grant.

At the end of September, ECCD submitted its final draft of the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Protection Plan (Plan) to CT DEEP. CT DEEP staff is in the process of combining this document with their greater Natchaug watershed assessment project which they will present at a public hearing upon completion. The Natchaug Healthy Watershed Protection Plan is a first of its kind watershed plan focused on cost effective, non-regulatory methods to prevent pollution in the greater Natchaug River watershed. The Natchaug watershed consists of the Fenton, Mount Hope and Natchaug Rivers and includes land under the jurisdiction of 8 towns. It is the largest watershed upstream of a drinking water reservoir in Connecticut. While there are many conservation-focused actions recommended in the Plan, the most important will be for the eight towns to adopt the Plan and reference it in their Plans of Conservation and Development, then

create a Natchaug Healthy Watershed Action Group to meet periodically and coordinate implementing recommendations from the Plan. Initially, ECCD will facilitate the group, but in the future, an alternate source of funding to support Group coordination will be necessary.

Development of the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan included a considerable public outreach component. In addition to the TRBP Floating Workshop Storyboard, ECCD held a series of four stakeholder group meetings as well as three workshops for municipal officials on key conservation themes included in the Plan. Due to the Covid-19 meeting restrictions, workshops and meetings held after February 2020 were online events. They were recorded and posted to the ECCD YouTube Channel.

- The Importance of Riparian Buffers in a Healthy Watershed <https://youtu.be/LdlEphYsBe4>
- Cold Water Stream Habitat https://youtu.be/_q_sYyW4mxs
- Development with Intent: Using the Model Pre-development Review and LID Checklists to Guide Development for Compatibility with the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Protection Plan https://youtu.be/rK_z_BCY0r0

The *Shewville Dam Fishway Design Project*, funded by the Long Island Sound Futures Fund and a CT DEEP Mitigation Fund, is continuing. An archaeological assessment of the project area has been completed. The final report of the archaeological findings is pending completion. Final engineered designs of the fishway are anticipated to be completed by Milone and MacBroom by September 2021.

ECCD received a TLGV Capacity Building Grant. With funding from the grant, ECCD expanded its social marketing capacity through expansion of and integration of its social marketing networks using Hootsuite. With the assistance of ECCD Intern Bailey Comeau, a freshman at Drew University, ECCD staff was trained on how to use Hootsuite and other social marketing tools to development of a more robust social media presence. To follow the activities of ECCD, you can choose your preferred platform:

- Facebook: Eastern Connecticut Conservation District
- Instagram: ECT Conservation District
- Twitter: @ectconservation

From the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP):

CT DEEP Staff pioneered an Innovative Method to Monitor Stream Connectivity. DEEP staff successfully deployed trail cameras to monitor stream levels, proving a cost-effective method that will help inform stream management efforts. For more information, use this link: https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/News-Releases/News-Releases---2020/DEEP-Staff-Pioneer-Innovative-Method-to-Monitor-Stream-Connectivity?fbclid=IwAR37w9Tu0b2o3tEF_mOAEBS8Zp7Fapm2p5aZ_dIAQHcbKribP18vfiRzP0 .

In the Naugatuck, Housatonic and Shetucket Rivers, from September 1 through December 15, angling for Atlantic salmon is restricted to catch-and-release only. From December 16, 2020,

through March 31, 2021, the daily creel limit for Atlantic salmon will be one. During the open season in the rivers, the legal method for taking Atlantic salmon is limited to angling using a single fly, or an artificial lure with a single free-swinging hook and no additional weight can be added to the line above the fly or lure. Also, from September 1st through March 31st, fishing for other species in the designated Atlantic Salmon “Broodstock Areas” is restricted to the gear legal for Atlantic salmon. On the Shetucket River, anglers can fish for salmon downstream from the Scotland Dam (Windham) to the Water Street Bridge in Norwich (the first bridge upstream of Norwich Harbor). The salmon are stocked into one designated Atlantic Salmon “Broodstock Area”, from the Scotland Dam to the Occum Dam.

From the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

USDA is seeking public input on Nonindustrial Private Forest Land (NIPF) related to technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs of USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS welcomes input from stakeholders to assist with the development of guidance about how to identify NIPF for program enrollment purposes. NRCS must ensure that such guidance is consistent with how other USDA agencies identify NIPF under identical or similar programmatic frameworks. This request for input is to improve transparency about how NRCS makes land eligibility determinations with respect to forest lands. NRCS invites input on this technical guidance through January 19, 2021. Electronic comments must be submitted through [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) under Docket no. NRCS–2020–0009. All written comments received will be publicly available on <http://www.regulations.gov>.

From the UCONN Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR):

The University of Connecticut has developed a Stormwater Corps, a program that combines classroom instruction on stormwater management with community-based projects to develop an impervious cover disconnection “action plan” for a town. The Stormwater Corps is currently working with the Town and City of Groton looking for Low Impact Development opportunities for the towns to implement. CLEAR is looking for additional towns with which to collaborate on this initiative.

CLEAR is developing a LID Certification program, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, and is planning for a late fall 2020 pilot training program.

CLEAR and its Non-point Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) program offers support for MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Service) communities. NEMO staff offer guidance on municipal regulations and help to identify barriers to implementing Low Impact Development strategies, then help to address those barriers. As part of this effort, NEMO is reminding MS4 communities that their Municipal MS4 annual reports are due April 1. For the convenience of municipalities and to help them meet their scheduling targets, an [MS4 scheduling calendar](#) is available on the CLEAR/NEMO MS4 webpage.

UCONN has been awarded a \$2.25 million grant from the National Science Foundation to expand a program known as the Environment Corps. The Environment Corps integrates STEM skills with service learning projects to help students gain real world work experience. The

program combines teaching, service learning and UCONN extension outreach as the students address environmental issues such as climate adaptation, brownfields remediation and stormwater management at the municipal level. Click [here](#) for more information:
<https://news.extension.uconn.edu/2019/08/01/uconn-receives-nsf-grant-for-environment-corps-project/>

Update from the Southeast Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG):

SCCOG is working on an application for an EPA Brownfield grant hoping to conduct a brownfield inventory in the towns of Bozrah, Lisbon and Sprague. A brownfield is any previously developed land that is not currently in use that may be contaminated.

Update from the Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG):

The Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments hosted a Connecticut Land Use System Forum in late October. The focus of this forum was to introduce [Desegregate Connecticut](#)'s goals and objectives. Desegregate Connecticut is a coalition of neighbors and nonprofits focused on making Connecticut communities more inclusive, by design and believe in creating abundant, diverse housing in service of equity, inclusive prosperity, and a cleaner environment.

An update from the Willimantic Whitewater Partnership (WWP):

The Willimantic Whitewater Park in Willimantic was recently featured as a [Brownfield Success Story](#) by the US EPA. It has been the goal of the Partnership to transform this former industrial site to a downtown whitewater park. The park is located on the Willimantic River and can be accessed from Bridge Street in Willimantic.

From the Connecticut Federation of Lakes (CFL):

The New England Chapter of the North American Lake Managers Society held a free webinar on September 30, 2020. The theme of the webinar was *Understanding and Managing Internal Phosphorus Loading in Lakes*. If you missed it, the recorded presentation is available at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tew3_zf06fk.

In Massachusetts, the Statewide Stormwater Coalition was awarded a \$75,354 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. The Statewide Stormwater Coalition has developed education and outreach programming for more than 180 municipalities in Massachusetts that satisfies one out of six minimum control measures of the 2016 MS4 permit. For this project, the Statewide Stormwater Coalition will expand the education campaign through social media and YouTube advertising, translate video outreach materials to Spanish to reach a broader audience, and offer social media training for municipal staff on how to reach under-represented audiences.

The Worcester Conservation District was awarded a \$42,000 Conservation Grant from the Massachusetts State Commission for Conservation of Soil, Water & Related Resources to implement a healthy soils initiative. The District will work with the USDA Natural Resources

Conservation Service (NRCS) to implement good soil and habitat conservation practices on the agricultural, forestry and developed landscape. This will enable District staff to provide technical assistance, outreach and education to Worcester County landowners, students and citizens to help them maintain soil health, protect water quality, and promote wildlife habitat. Worcester County includes several municipalities within the Thames watershed north of the MA/CT state line.

News from Municipalities

The Town of Groton partnered with The Nature Conservancy, under the guidance of a consulting engineer from Biohabitats, on a conservation improvement project in Sutton Park. With grant funding from Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, they planted 600 native trees and shrubs along Fort Hill Brook, a tributary to Mumford Cove.

The Town of Killingly is continuing their focus on the expansion of the Quinebaug River Trail. Municipal funds will be used to match a Connecticut Recreational Trails grant to hire a consulting firm to design Phase V & VI of the Quinebaug River Trail, an approximately 1.06 mile stretch of multi-use trail which will include a bridge. These two portions of the trail will terminate the River Trail at the Plainfield town line. They anticipate having a design in hand and to begin construction on the Phase V portion of the trail in about two years' time. They have already acquired construction funds through a DOT grant for Phase V. The bridge and Phase VI will be part of a future construction project that they have yet to acquire funds for. After these phases are complete, the Town will be focused on the northern portion of the River Trail through Killingly to meet up with Putnam's trail system.

Land Trust Updates

The Friends of the Shetucket River are seeking funding or other donations to meet the \$40K match requirement for the acquisition of a parcel of land adjacent to a Connecticut State Park and other preserved open space.

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 January 21, 2021. Meeting will be remote via Zoom. The special presentation will be an overview of the newly updated Plan of Open Space and Conservation by Town of Groton Conservation Commission.

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.