



Thames River Basin Partnership Partners in Action Quarterly Report

Summer 2020

Volume 55

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 Spring TRBP meeting, you missed a presentation given by Andrew J Kowalczyk, Hydrologic Technician from the USGS New York Water Science Center. He gave a presentation on Edge-of-Field Monitoring and Sediment Monitoring in the Genesee River Watershed, New York. Andrew and his team have been collecting concurrent edge-of-field runoff and tile drainage data from the same fields in the Genesee River watershed basin in upstate New York. The research team documented differences in nutrient and sediment loss on sloped vs non-sloped fields and how the losses compared between fields with and without tile drains. Sloped fields lost more sediment during a precipitation event than non-sloped fields. Tile-drained sites had less surface runoff than non-tile-drained fields. Fields with tile drains lost a lot of nitrogen in forms that dissolve in water, especially Nitrate-Nitrogen. Phosphorus losses were mostly particulate P that was associated with sediments. The project is at its midway point and will continue as adaptive management practices are installed on the fields. Good discussion followed the presentation.

TRBP Updates

2020 is the 20th anniversary of the TRBP Floating Workshop. It is unfortunate that the original FW planned for June 12, 2020 has to be cancelled due to Covid-19. However, in place of an in person/onsite event, a virtual Floating Workshop will be conducted. The theme for the 20th annual Floating Workshop had been previously selected to focus on the Natchaug River Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan under development by Eastern Connecticut Conservation

District (ECCD). Funding to support this initiative will come from multiple sources. An agreement was reached between TLGV, who funds the TRBP Coordinator position, DEEP and ECCD to develop the storyboard. It will feature video links to showcase the Natchaug River. The project will combine funding from CT DEEP through an EPA grant, as well as TLGV.

The TRBP Virtual Floating Workshop/Natchaug River storyboard will piece together the story of the Natchaug River, its designated uses, the environmental services performed by a healthy watershed, its economic value to local residents and business, as well as the customers of the downstream water treatment plant. The storyboard will also highlight the threats to those valuable resources, followed by individual actions residents, businesses and municipalities can take to retain the designation of a healthy watershed. The date of the virtual TRBP Floating Workshop has not yet been determined.

During the last quarter, the TRBP Coordinator posted on the TRBP Facebook page over a dozen updates on our partners' activities. 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 on 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 region.

Project update: EQIP financial assistance for this project has been obligated. However, funding for technical assistance remains. Edge-of-field water quality monitoring on selected fields was resumed in May. Some of the remaining technical assistance will be used to supplement funding to update of the Muddy Brook and Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan. The Plan update will focus on agricultural assessments, recommendations and conservation practice

implementations required by NRCS to retain the Little River's status as a National Water Quality Initiative watershed.

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 reducing 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), Thames River Basin Partnership, and UCONN Extension.

Project update – A horse farm in Stonington that expressed interest in this program has decided not to participate. ECCD and NRCS have been working with a horse farm owner in Pomfret to develop a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan and the potential to install a manure storage facility at the farm. Some of the funding for technical assistance will be used to supplement development of an update of the Muddy Brook and Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan.

FY16/17 (National level funding) The Last Green Valley (TLGV) was awarded \$6,144,000 through the NRCS RCPP 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 is 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 – 3000 acres of forests are under contract for forest management plans in the MA/CT/RI tri-state region. Most of these 3000 acres are within The Last Green Valley and the Thames River watershed.

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

Updates from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP)

CT DEEP has drafted the 2020 CT Integrated Water Quality Assessment Report on the status of water quality in Connecticut. CT DEEP is required to prepare a report for the US Congress every two years. A fact sheet on the 2020 IWQR can be found at this link:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/water/water_quality_management/305b/2020-RJ/IWQR2020Factsheet.pdf.

In June, CT DEEP issued fish consumption warnings for three rivers, including the Natchaug River below the Willimantic Reservoir Dam, the Willimantic River downstream of the last dam before the confluence with the Natchaug River, and the upper reach of the Shetucket River. The contaminant of concern is a category of chemicals known as PFAS. PFAS chemicals are found in many different common products, including foam used to fight fires. The source of the PFAS in the Natchaug, Willimantic and Shetucket Rivers is the Northeast Firefighting Academy located on the bank of the Natchaug River in Mansfield. More information on safe consumption of fish is available in a brochure produced by the CT Department of Public Health, [If I Catch It, Can I Eat It?](#)

CT DEEP supports certain types of volunteer water quality monitoring efforts, including a specially developed program known as Riffle Bioassessment by Volunteers. Riffle bioassessments are a means to document high quality streams by using pollution-sensitive bugs that live under water as bio-indicators of water quality. If a stream has a high diversity of pollution sensitive bugs in it, it can be inferred that the stream has minimal pollution impacts. The Last Green Valley Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program contributed data used in this report. The results from the 2019 RBV DEEP Riffle Bioassessment by Volunteers Program can be found at this link:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/water/volunteer_monitoring/2019rbvreportpdf.pdf

The CT DEEP EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Management Grant Program is planning to announce the FY2021 RFP later this fall:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Water/NPS/FY19-Request-for-Proposals-for-Nonpoint-Source-Management-Grant-Program>

CT DEEP developed a series of online training videos for Municipal Inland Wetland Agencies. These free online modules are very informative and available to all IWAs or anyone interested in learning more about Connecticut's inland wetland resources:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Water/Inland-Wetlands/Training-for-Inland-Wetlands-Agencies>

A CT National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) has been proposed for portions of Long Island Sound, including the lowermost reaches of the Thames River, and areas of Groton including Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve and Natural Areas Preserve, and Haley Farm State Park. Public comments are encouraged at the upcoming public hearing and follow up comment period. Learn more on this subject at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Coastal-Resources/NERR/NERR-Home-Page>.

CT DEEP Fisheries has put together a story map about sturgeon. Check it out at this [link](#).

Updates from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MA DEP)

The staff of MA DEP are still working remotely with no plans to return to their offices yet.

MA DEP conducts water quality monitoring in 27 watersheds throughout the Commonwealth. The Integrated List of Waters 2018 report and the 2020 report are being combined into a single report and is being drafted currently.

Updates from the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD)

The Niantic River Watershed 4-town Bio-infiltration, Filtration & Water Collection Project which involves the four towns in the Niantic River watershed (Montville, Waterford, East Lyme and Salem) will be underway soon. The project will include many types of stormwater retrofits, including up to eight stormwater tree filters, twenty storm drain filter inserts, rain gardens, rain barrels and a considerable education and outreach program on the benefits of managing stormwater runoff. The project is funded in part by CT DEEP through an USEPA Clean Water Act section 319 grant.

The Eastern Connecticut Stormwater Collaborative is continuing to meet on a quarterly basis using an online meeting format. The Collaborative is being funded by the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.

The Shewville Dam Fishway Design Project is continuing to move forward. The Shewville Dam is the last major obstacle for migrating fish in a historically productive fish run from Long Island Sound and Amos Lake through Poquetanuck Cove. With limited access to the Ledyard Town Hall due to Covid-19 restrictions, municipal land records have been difficult to obtain. However, an A-2 survey to determine property boundaries is underway. The fishway design is being funded by a Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant and a CT DEEP mitigation fund.

ECCD is anticipating a contract soon from the Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation, which is administering a source water protection grant from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to fund an update to the Muddy Brook and Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan (Woodstock/Putnam). The original plan was prepared by ECCD in 2009. Little River had been designated as a National Water Quality Initiative watershed by NRCS, in cooperation with CT DEEP and the US EPA beginning in 2013. This designation allows NRCS to reserve program funds for applicants in the watershed without making them compete at the state level. In 2018, NRCS updated its requirements for watershed-based plans in NWQI watersheds. Unfortunately, the Muddy Brook and Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan did not meet the updated criteria. In addition, many of the recommended water quality improvement projects have been completed and new information is available on the condition of the watershed.

The first draft of the Natchaug River Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan is nearly complete and will be available for public comment soon. The Natchaug watershed includes land within eight communities and the Fenton and Mount Hope River watersheds. The Plan development is being funded in part by CT DEEP with an USEPA Clean Water Act Section 319 grant.

ECCD coordinated educational programs for municipal officials on topics important for watershed protection. The workshops were presented online and recorded. They are available to view on ECCD's YouTube Channel.

The Importance of Riparian Buffers in a Healthy Watershed <https://youtu.be/LdlEphYsBe4>
Cold Water Stream Habitat https://youtu.be/q_sYyW4mxs

From The Last Green Valley (TLGV)

As a result of the Northeast Initiative Mapper Project updating the locations and acreage of conserved land, it has been determined there are 139, 926 acres of conserved land in the Last Green Valley, or 19.8% of the landscape. This includes land in state parks and forests. This number will likely increase once municipal land holdings are updated. The conserved land is not evenly distributed by town. The Northeast Initiative Mapper Project has been funded in part by a grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.

Covid-19 safety guidelines were developed to consider the safety of volunteers assisting with TLGV initiatives including the volunteer water quality monitoring program and the trail assessment crews.

TLGV's annual Walktober events will be impacted by the Covid-19 virus. Events in past years have attracted hundreds of participants. This year, smaller walks with attendance restrictions or online events will be the focus of participant programming.

From the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Construction began on a \$5 million anaerobic manure digester being built at Fort Hill Farms in Thompson. The project will convert manure and food waste into energy that can sustain the farm, while also be sold, making it financially viable. It is expected the system will be online and producing energy by summer 2021.

NRCS is responsible for administrating funding requests for multiple Farm Bill programs, which in a typical year involves several rounds of funding applications. This year, \$5.3 million in requests were received during the first round, which means the program will run out of funds after the first round.

From the Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation (CT CSWC)

CT CSWC is the lead for a Source Water Protection grant funded in part through USDA NRCS. The grant has multiple components. One is the development of a statewide mapping initiative that will facilitate prioritization of land for open space protection based on agreed-upon conservation factors. A second component of this project is the development of a watershed-based plan for the Farm River in the Branford, North Branford and Durham area, and a third component to be added will be an update to the Muddy Brook and Little River Water Quality Improvement Plan in Woodstock/Putnam. This statewide source water protection initiative involves a diverse group of partners, including ECCD.

From the US Army Corp of Engineers (US ACE)

Water chestnut is an invasive aquatic plant species that has been discovered in West Thompson Lake. The Corp has been working annually with volunteers to remove the plants before the flowers set seed. This year, US ACE rangers continued their effort and removed another 22 cubic feet of water chestnut.

The Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut announced its 2020 Environmental Grant Awards.

Conservation		
Avalonia Land Conservancy	General operating support to increase programming and fundraising capacity	\$25000
Connecticut Fund for the Environment	Bringing Alewife back to Alewife Cove	\$25000
Connecticut Land Conservation Council	Advancement Initiative - Phase III: Developing a Strategic and Comprehensive Conservation Vision	\$20000
East Lyme Land Trust	Nehantic Nature Preserve	\$15000
Eastern Connecticut Conservation District	Eastern Connecticut Stormwater Collaborative	\$25000
Groton Open Space Association	Sheep Farm South: land conservation in Groton	\$15000
The Trust for Public Land	Mono Pond State Park Expansion Project - Closing Phase 1	\$15000
Wyndham Land Trust	Wyndham Land Trust	\$15000
Environmental Justice		
Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs	A Green New Deal for New London: jobs, training and access for people of color in New London area	\$10000
FRESH New London	General operating support for urban garden, leadership and education program in New London	\$25000
Grow Windham	Windham Youth CORE: leadership and gardening program for Willimantic youth	\$20000
Sustainable CT	General operating for environmental justice initiatives in 21 towns in eastern Connecticut	\$35000
The University of Connecticut Foundation	Brownfield sites revitalization in eastern Connecticut using student interns working with CT Brownfield Initiative	\$15000

Congratulations to all our Partners who will be able to continue their good work with funding support from this grant program.

News from Municipalities

The Town of Windham signed a resolution recognizing the Windham Pollinator Pathway Initiative, that calls upon Windham landowners, the Departments of Public Works, the Department of Recreation, as well as the Conservation, Open Space and Agriculture Commissions, the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Inland Wetlands Commission, the

Sustainable Windham Committee, the Garden Club of Windham, the Windham Community Food Network, and all other departments and Commissions or Committees, to take cognizance of this initiative and, as means allow, to create, restore and enhance pollinator habitat on land managed or influenced by the town, and to create linked and safe yards, properties, and trails that can provide pesticide and herbicides-free, native floral resources and habitat for threatened pollinators.

Town of Groton/Groton Open Space Association (GOSA)

Groton Go Pass October 2020 is a cooperative effort of the Town of Groton and local community partners, including GOSA. Groton Go invites Groton families with young children to explore their community. Families were invited to download a Groton Go Pass for free, and once completing at least one activity on each page of the activity book, participants then return the books to designated locations. One random entrant will win a prize.

Land Trust Updates

Updates from Avalonia Land Conservancy (ALC)

Teresa Eikle is ALC's new Director of Development.

ALC closed on 228 acres of land in Ledyard adding to the Great Oak Greenway project. Funding for these purchases came in part from a Connecticut Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant, matched by funds provided by the town of Ledyard, the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, the Fields Pond Foundation, the Helios Foundation, the Bafflin Foundation, Groton Utilities and supporters of the Avalonia Land Conservancy. More information on this purchase can be found [here](#).

Data collected by the AllTrails app indicates that trail use is up on Avalonia preserves during the pandemic.

Updates from Wyndham Land Trust (WLT)

WLT added 9.5 acres of protected land to its holdings. This property abuts two other parcels the Trust owns, making the new total of 220 acres of preserved land in that location. The purchase of the property was made with funding provided by conservation minded neighbors, the Town of Pomfret, Friends of Bird Conservation Research Inc., and Wyndham Land Trust members.

Updates from New Roxbury Land Trust

NRLT hosted an educational walk on one of its preserves in Woodstock. The focus of the walk was edible plants.

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 October 20, 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.