



Thames River Basin Partnership Partners in Action Quarterly Report

Spring 2020

Volume 54

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 Spring TRBP meeting, you missed a presentation given by Brian Hall and Hunter Brawley, GIS consultants hired by The Last Green Valley to update the protected land database in an online mapping format. Their presentation, entitled *Exploring Landscape Scale, Regional Conservation Priorities* included a demonstration on The Northeast Initiative Mapper. This online map is available at <https://harvard-cga.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=86b89989f5674809b311a61eab027b44>. The TLGV-led project was completed in cooperation with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council and multiple area land trusts which provided updated information on land they have worked so hard to conserve. In addition to updated open space information, the mapper also includes other regional conservation data, such as important bird areas, ecological integrity information as well as social justice data. Incorporating all this information into one online map makes it an important tool for regional open space planning. This project has been funded by a grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut.

TRBP Updates

TRBP Coordinator Jean Pillo has relocated to the Brooklyn Agricultural Center at 139 Wolf Den Road in Brooklyn. After 14 years being co-located with the Connecticut Audubon Society at its Grassland Bird Conservation Center, CAS has expanded its teaching staff and needed the space. TRBP would like to thank the Connecticut Audubon Society for its years of generosity in

supporting our Partnership through its in-kind support. To reach Jean by phone, her new number is 860-774-9600 extension 24. Her email remains the same, Jean.Pillo@comcast.net.

TRBP Floating Workshop Update: June 12, 2020 was selected for the TRBP Floating Workshop. Crystal Pond Park in Woodstock/Eastford. A certificate of insurance was secured through the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District and a deposit was made to reserve the site. An agenda focused on the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan is under development, including a speaker from the park, which was purchased jointly by Woodstock/Eastford using a CT DEEP open space grant. The draft agenda also features the Yale Meyers Forest Quiet Corner Initiative's forest management plan for the park and, potentially, Jon Morrison from USGS, who offered to talk about long term monitoring data from the Natchaug River. Further planning for this in-person workshop is on hold until it is determined that it will be safe to gather in a group for this event due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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 watershed.

Project update: The EQIP financial assistance for this project has been obligated. However, funding for technical assistance remains. Water quality monitoring on selected fields was discontinued in November prior to winter freeze and will resume in May 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 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), the Thames River Basin Partnership and UCONN Extension.

Project update: The team is working with a horse farm in the Anguilla Brook watershed in Stonington on a potential manure management project. Owners of a horse farm located in Pomfret within the Mashamoquet Brook watershed are also participating in an assessment and considering a manure storage facility.

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 – TLGV received 19 applications for forest management plans and bird habitat assessment requests. The bird habitat assessments will be conducted by Audubon Connecticut.

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. This round of funding requests closed on March 12, 2020. For more information, visit the 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/farmland/rcpp>.

Did you know that April 22, 2020 was the 50th anniversary of Earth Day?

The Covid-19 pandemic has reduced the fanfare that would normally accompany this milestone, but there are still ways to celebrate this monumental anniversary. Take the time to notice the rivers are cleaner, the sky is clearer and numerous conservation efforts have been successful. Thanks to the many land trusts in the Thames watershed, there are abundant places where you can take a hike and maintain social distancing requirements. Perhaps this is the year you buy a kayak and get out in your own personal space on the water. While we may not be able to gather on this date to celebrate, we can all continue as individuals to make a difference to protect our precious natural resources for future generations to enjoy.

Partner Reports

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

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the CT DEEP office located at 79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT is closed to the public until further notice.

CT DEEP has made available the draft State of Connecticut Integrated Water Quality Report for public review and comment (Public Notice) from May 19, 2020 to June 19, 2020. This Report was prepared by CT DEEP to fulfill requirements of the Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) under Sections 305(b) and 303(d). The final document will be submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) following the Department's consideration of comments received. Interested persons may obtain a copy of the draft Integrated Water Quality Report (IWQR) on the CT DEEP website at <https://www.ct.gov/deep/iwqr>. Hard copies of the document may be requested by contacting the Department at rebecca.jascot@ct.gov. In order to be considered prior to submission of the final document to US EPA, comments on the draft document must be received at the Department by June 19, 2020. Comments should be directed electronically to rebecca.jascot@ct.gov. Written comments may also be submitted to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Bureau of Water Protection and Land Reuse, Water Planning and Management Division, 79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106-5127, Attn: Rebecca Jascot.

CT DEEP administers the US EPA Clean Water Act section 319 grant program. DEEP is currently overseeing six active contracts in eastern Connecticut for the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD). In the most recent request for proposals for 319 grants, a total of 16 applications totaling more than \$3 million in funding was requested. There is only \$1 million of funding available. This demonstrates that a new approach for project funding for conservation projects is needed as demand exceeds capacity.

Due to retirements and interdepartmental transfers, there were many recent staff changes within the CT DEEP Water Bureau. This may have an impact on CT DEEP meeting target dates.

From the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD):

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, ECCD staff will be working remotely until further notice.

ECCD has completed a series of stormwater best management projects at an apartment complex located in the Mount Hope River watershed in Ashford, CT. The project included installation of two cement dumpster pads that drain to rain gardens. Prior to the dumpster pads being installed, stormwater runoff from the dumpsters flowed down the sloped driveway to storm drains that emptied directly into Basset Brook. Storm drain filters were installed in those storm drains. In addition, two pet waste stations were installed at the apartment complex to encourage residents to clean up after their pets. An additional 10 pet waste stations were installed at various facilities throughout the watershed. Two brochures, one focused on trash management and the other on pet waste, were distributed to residents as part of an education and outreach effort.

A workshop on Septic System Care and Maintenance organized by ECCD has been rescheduled for May 6 using an online format.

Efforts to develop a Healthy Watershed Protection Plan for the Natchaug River are still ongoing. A workshop focused on Riparian Buffers was held on April 28, 2020. To view the recording of the workshop, use this link: <https://studio.youtube.com/video/LdlEphYsBe4/edit>.

ECCD receives annual funding from a shared grant provided to all five of the state's conservation districts. These funds are from US EPA through its Clean Water Act Section 319 Non-point source grant program, which is administered by CT DEEP. This grant, referred to as a block grant, provides ECCD with some funding support to provide technical assistance to municipalities and residents of eastern Connecticut. A portion of these block grant funds is directed to cover staff time to facilitate different watershed groups, such as the Little River Healthy Watershed Collaborative, the Baker Cove Watershed Committee, and the Niantic River Watershed Committee. The watershed groups have been organized to oversee implementation of completed watershed based plans.

ECCD Shewville Brook Fishway Project update: ECCD, with funding from a Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant and an Electric Boat Mitigation Fund, is working to develop plans for a fishway at the Shewville Dam on Shewville Brook in Ledyard. This dam is the last major barrier to fish passage between Poquetanuck Cove and Amos Lake in Preston. A flow gage was installed for collecting stream flow data. An archaeological review of the site is pending completion.

ECCD is cooperating with CT DEEP and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service on a large project on a dairy farm in Woodstock. The project includes replacement of aging infrastructure with a modern free stall barn with manure storage and construction of a new silage bunker, both within the Little River watershed.

To support ongoing efforts of the four towns within the Niantic River watershed, ECCD is conducting a project to reduce stormwater runoff. The project involves installing 20 AbTech SmartSponge stormdrain filters, up to 6 tree filters, 20 rain gardens and 30 rain barrels. The project is being funded by CT DEEP with an EPA CWA Section 319 grant.

The Eastern Connecticut Stormwater Collaborative is a venue coordinated by ECCD to assist municipalities with their Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer System (MS4) general permit requirements. The collaborative is funded by Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. Recently, water quality monitoring equipment was purchased for the towns to share. The equipment will be used to sample and assess stormwater from outfalls.

ECCD staff continues drafting the Anguilla Brook Watershed Based Plan (Stonington/North Stonington). A public outreach campaign for the project is currently on hold due to meeting restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Niantic River Watershed Committee (NRWC) is updating the 2006 Niantic River Watershed Protection Plan (NRWPP) and has hired Fuss and O'Neill to do the work. The 2020 NRWPP update is being funded through an EPA Section 319 grant provided by CT DEEP and a grant

from Community Foundation of Eastern CT. The Niantic River Watershed Committee has partnered with the Long Island Sound Study and The Nature Conservancy to promote lawn care practices that are healthy for lawns and the Niantic River. The program, called Healthy Lawns and Healthy Rivers, is scheduled to begin in summer 2020.

Updates from The Last Green Valley (TLGV):

TLGV has cancelled all indoor and outdoor meetings, workshops and programs through at least May 20th. The TLGV office in Danielson is closed to the public until May 20th. TLGV staff is working remotely, but will be checking voicemails and email daily.

TLGV Spring Outdoors has been put on hold. TLGV staff has removed the on-line Spring Outdoors guide and will not be updating it at this time. TLGV does hope to resume hosting outdoor programs, including Spring Outdoors, and will update its members and supporters in the coming weeks.

Chief Ranger Bill Reid and Fran Kefalas will use this time of social distancing to visit and hike several outdoor locations and make short 8-10 minute videos about key features sites they visit. The videos and “virtual programs” will soon be added to TLGV’s YouTube page and linked through its social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, as well as on TLGV’s website.

Get Virtual with a new TLGV Grant for Non-Profits: As non-profits strive to advance their mission while not being able to offer their usual programs, events and opportunities, TLGV will provide up to \$1,500 for equipment, services and training to help organizations improve communication or provide alternative means of engaging the public. These grants may range from \$500 – \$1,500. Funds will be dispersed on a reimbursement basis and must be matched 1:1 by cash or in-kind contributions. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. Non-profit 501(c) organizations are eligible and must have missions aligned with and advancing the visions and strategies of Vision 2020, the management plan for The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor, which can be found at TheLastGreenValley.org in the Publications section under the About menu. Full application details and requirements can be found on TheLastGreenValley.org on the home page in the News section. All applications must be emailed to LyAnn@tlgv.org and will be accepted on a rolling basis until funds are exhausted.

The Last Green Valley (TLGV) is again offering clean-up funds to municipalities and non-profits, but is encouraging river clean-up organizers to follow proper safety protocols. This year, TLGV has reconfigured its program into The 50th Anniversary of Earth Day which is on April 22. You can be part of the effort to make the National Heritage Corridor cleaner. If there is no organized clean-up near you, we've got you covered. Download our trash tracker, fill it out, take a photo and email both to LyAnn@tlgv.org by May 31. You could win a prize!

TLGV Volunteer WQM Program

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the volunteer water quality monitoring season has been delayed. However, TLGV purchased a replacement multiprobe in 2019. The probe allows users to collect data on Dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH, specific conductance, turbidity, depth, and

phycocyanin and chloride ion. The Quality Assurance Project Plan for this device was approved by both CT DEEP and MA DEP for data collection this season.

Monitoring plans by the volunteer teams have been presented to the TLGV Water Advisory Committee and approved at the February meeting as required by the QAPPs. They include:

1. temperature monitoring in the Natchaug watershed and in Lebanon streams, seeking data on potential cold water habitat;
2. bacteria monitoring in the Natchaug River and tributaries to isolate the source of *E. coli* bacteria causing the river to be listed as impaired;
3. a second year of bacteria monitoring in the Massachusetts reaches of the French River watershed. This monitoring is being supported by a \$3222 MA DEP grant awarded to the French River Connection;
4. Webster Lake Association spring/summer/fall baseline monitoring in Webster Lake and tributary streams;
5. Charlton Lake and Ponds – summer monitoring of ponds and lakes in Charlton MA;
6. Roseland Lake – biweekly monitoring for cyanobacteria and other lake profile data;
7. Ashford Lake – monthly lake monitoring including nutrients at the surface;
8. Amos Lake – spring/summer baseline monitoring;
9. Riffle Bioassessments sites will be assigned once cold water stream data is reviewed.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) solicited public comment on proposed revisions to 49 national conservation practice standards through a posting in the Federal Register. The public comment period is closing April 23, 2020.

The 49 updated national conservation practice standards include:

- 12 agronomic practices for water quality and erosion control;
- two aquaculture practices;
- three forestry practices;
- six practices affecting waterways;
- five drainage-related practices;
- seven livestock-related practices;
- three energy and air quality practices;
- eight water conservation practices;
- three farm traffic-related practices.

As part of its review, NRCS wanted to ensure, as much as possible, that the standards used to carry out the conservation practices are relevant to local agricultural, forestry and natural resource needs, including specialty crops, native and managed pollinators, bioenergy crop production and forestry.

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) has rescheduled its annual conference to October 24, 2020. The conference will likely be a virtual, online experience this year.

CLCC is scheduling a series of regional round table discussions which allows local land trusts an opportunity to brainstorm on different subjects.

The Thames Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited been awarded funding by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to design a fishway over the dam at Papermill Pond in Sprague. The contract for the project has been stalled due to Covid-19 impacts.

TVTU's Trout in the Classroom (TIC) has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. In a normal year, the students release the trout they raised into local streams as permitted by DEEP. With the sudden closing of many TIC schools, it is uncertain what happened to the trout fingerlings the students were raising from eggs. A few schools released their trout fingerlings early.

The Amos Lake Association has purchased 3 bottom blankets for use in the lake as part of its effort to reduce the spread of variable milfoil, an invasive aquatic plant. Variable milfoil was first detected in the lake near the state boat ramp. The plant spreads easily when fragmented by boat propellers and floats to other parts of the lake where it re-roots. The bottom blankets will be used to smother new, small clusters of the plant. The purchase of the bottom blankets was funded by a small grant from Preston Community Fund.

News from Municipalities

The Woodstock Conservation Commission is promoting a townwide [Pollinator Pathway](#) initiative. In place of an in-person workshop, an online workshop was held on April 23. You can view the workshop presentation at this link, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p98KJuYr4x302-MYwUz9rFMPYFL5KGcB/view>.

The Town of Groton is in the process of updating its land acquisition plan, which has not been updated for 30 years. The updated acquisition plan will include an economic model of the land values of developed land and open space.

Land Trust Updates

Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust is coordinating with the Town of Mansfield on a Forest Legacy Program proposal. The [Forest Legacy Program](#) (FLP) is a conservation program administered by the U.S. Forest Service in partnership with State agencies to encourage the protection of privately owned forest lands through conservation easements or land purchases. Initial interest involves multiple forest land owners in the Wormwood Hill area of Mansfield, representing 450 – 500 acres of land. The application for this proposal is due on June 30, 2020.

With funding assistance through the Northeast Connecticut Land Trust Initiative, Eastern Forest Landowners Association/Wolf Dan Land Trust recently updated its website. This initiative is being co-sponsored by The Last Green Valley and Connecticut Land Conservation Council.

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.

The next meeting will be on July 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.