



# Thames River Basin Partnership Partners in Action Quarterly Report

Fall 2023

Volume 67

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](#) 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 this fall's special presentation, then you missed a special presentation given by Katie Lund, Coastal Training Coordinator at the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR). The Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve includes more than 50,000 acres in Long Island Sound, Fishers Island Sound, the Thames River and the Connecticut River and 1,955 acres of state-owned land in the surrounding area. NERR is one of 30 reserves in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. Meeting participants learned about the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve's geography, mission, programs, and ways to collaborate with reserve staff. The Thames River estuary, up to the Gold Star Bridge, is included in the Reserve. You can learn more about the significance of NERR and partnership opportunities at <https://estuarineresearchreserve.center.uconn.edu/>. If you would like to join their email list for updates about their Coastal Training Program (CTP) workshops, please send an email the CTP Coordinator at [CTNERR.Training@uconn.edu](mailto:CTNERR.Training@uconn.edu).

## TRBP Updates

The Last Green Valley (TLGV) has renewed the cooperative agreement with Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD) to continue to support TRBP coordinator time for FY 2024 beginning October 1, 2023.

The TRBP Annual Report for FY23 has been prepared and submitted to TLGV. Once the report is approved, it will be uploaded to the TRBP website.

TRBP social media was kept active showcasing partner activities that are compatible with the TRBP Plan of Work.

The TRBP website is in need of maintenance. This task will be addressed in the near future.

The TRBP Plan of Work is set to expire in 2024. A Plan of Work committee will be necessary to review and revise the Plan of Work to focus on the conservation themes that reflect our partners' missions. You are encouraged to review the current plan of work at [https://thamesriverbasinpartnership.org/trbp-2021-2024\\_planofwork\\_adopted\\_4-19-22/](https://thamesriverbasinpartnership.org/trbp-2021-2024_planofwork_adopted_4-19-22/) and prepare to include your organizations goals into the TRBP program. Not on the list of partners? Contact Jean.Pillo to request being added. There is no charge for membership.

With so many municipalities involved in the [Pollinator Pathway](#) initiative, partners recommended that TRBP create a subcommittee to help coordinate and share resources regionally.

### **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 program's aim is to foster collaboration with partners in order to provide conservation assistance to agricultural producers and landowners. This is done by providing technical assistance through agreements and direct funding for conservation practices. Through The Thames River Basin Partnership, partners meet to discuss ways to collaborate on projects like these. TRBP conducted outreach for the Regional Conservation Partnership Programs.

FY16/17 (National level funding): The Last Green Valley (TLGV) was awarded \$6,144,000 through 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 offered 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 (HFRP) was also available. To accelerate the pace of conservation in SNEHF, the project served as a "conservation pipeline" of forest and bird habitat plans, EQIP practices and HFRP easements on private forestlands.

Project update: This project was completed by September 30, 2023. The outcome of this project includes over 8,000 acres of forested land that are now being managed under Forest Management Plans. Approximately \$400,000 worth of USDA NRCS EQIP practices were funded for woodland properties in the 3-state project area. Approximately 1,000 acres are in the pipeline for forest easements through NRCS funding. An easement on one of the properties in Rhode Island has been closed and the remainder are pending.

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>.

## **Partner Reports**

### **The Last Green Valley (TLGV)**

TLGV and ECCD renewed the cooperative agreement to fund the TRBP Coordinator position. The funding to support this cooperative agreement comes from *Millenium Power*.

TLGV will continue to make funding available to non-profits and municipalities that wish to organize a cleanup event, pollinator planting or invasive species eradication event. Recipients working in the heritage corridor will be reimbursed up to \$500 for expenses such as publicity, cleanup supplies such as trash bags, work gloves, small gardening tools, native seeds and plantings, and food for your volunteers. TLGV will also help publicize your event and work with you to recruit more volunteers. This program is proudly sponsored by *bankHometown*. Contact [LyAnn](#) for more information.

The National Park Service signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Rotary Clubs to help promote and plant pollinator gardens. TLGV is one of 45 National Heritage Corridors eligible to receive funding through the National Park Service as the result of the National Heritage Area Act signed into law in January 2023.

TLGV concluded the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of Walktober events. This year Walktober featured 280 walks, hikes, historic tales, paddles, bike rides, farm visits and more offered by dedicated and passionate Walktober leaders and generous sponsors.

### **The Last Green Valley Water Quality Monitoring Program update**

In FY 2023, 71 trained volunteers contributed 734 hours collecting, managing and/or discussing water quality data. Several volunteers were involved in multiple programs.

TLGV's volunteer water quality monitoring program engaged and supported volunteers from eight lake and pond groups to collect data on current water quality.

Eight temperature data loggers were placed in potential cold-water streams to document the water temperature in the critical summer season.

Volunteers were trained to spot and report cyanobacteria blooms to US EPA. Volunteers Cindy Wright-Jones and Grant Jones were able, on request, to provide feedback on the type of algae in a bloom quicker than the EPA program could respond. Only one lake was sampled for algal toxins in 2023, and unfortunately, the dip strip results provided by US EPA showed the algal scum in Avery Pond in Preston exceeds the US EPA recommendations for recreational contact for the second year in a row. In other lakes and ponds, the rainy summer weather may have diluted the nutrients that supported algae blooms during the drought in 2022.

The Riffle Bioassessment program wrapped up on November 30, 2023, with 8 samples collected and ready to be delivered to CT DEEP for assessment. The results of the 2022 Riffle

Bioassessment surveys were published in November 2023. TLGV volunteers assessed 9 locations in 2022. Of those 9 locations, four met the criteria that qualified them as meeting the CT DEEP water quality standards for aquatic life support; Baileys Brook\* in Franklin, Knowlton Brook in Ashford, Stones Brook\* in Eastford and Taylor Brook\* in Woodstock. Those with an \* were new monitoring locations and will likely be added to the list of Connecticut waterbodies that fully support aquatic life use in the next biennial Integrated Water Quality Report CT DEEP sends to the US Congress.

### **Eastern Connecticut Conservation District**

ECCD staff is excited to announce that the District has been awarded a \$1.3 million grant from Long Island Sound Futures Fund to assist a dairy farm in North Stonington, within the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed, to construct a free-stall barn with agricultural waste storage and management facilities. The Wood-Pawcatuck has been designated as a Wild & Scenic River, so the construction of the facility will further efforts to protect the river system, as well as improve water quality in Narragansett Bay, Little Narragansett Bay and Wequetequock Cove.

ECCD is grateful for all of the organizations that provided letters of support for this important project: Save The Bay, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, Town of North Stonington, Southern RI Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, North Stonington Land Alliance, Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council and Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Green Schoolyard v2.0 - ECCD staff are planning a green schoolyard at Jennings School in New London. Ambassadors for the school's Global Connections initiative (staff and students) will be developing a green schoolyard action plan. Actions from the plan will be selected for implementation. Funded in part by Community Foundation of Eastern CT. CFEC funding is being combined with a LISFF grant, "Urban Waters and Underserved Populations."

Urban Waters and Underserved Populations – to be implemented in tandem with Green Schoolyard v2.0 grant. An Enviroscape has been purchased and this project likely will include implementing a small project at Ocean Beach Park (New London). Funded by Long Island Sound Futures Fund.

From Rain Gardens to Riparian Buffers – work continues on installing rain gardens and riparian buffers throughout eastern CT along the coast from Groton to Stonington and along the tri-town trail from Groton to Preston. Rain gardens have been installed in Stonington, Groton and Ledyard. A riparian buffer is planned in Ledyard and riparian buffers have been installed in Groton and Stonington. Funded by Long Island Sound Futures Fund.

Water Quality Data W. Thompson Lake – ECCD is assisting USGS with managing data for water quality monitoring at West Thompson Lake; ECCD will likely assist again next season for another year of sampling. Funded by CTDEEP with 604b funding.

Project Oceanology B-WET Grant Partnership – in collaboration with Project O, ECCD completed an outdoor learning space in Norwich at Mahan Elementary School and constructed a pergola at Kolnaski Elementary School in Groton. ECCD will be assessing Kolnaski for

installation of a rain garden with funding from LISFF (From Rain Gardens to Riparian Buffers). Collaborating with the school, Project O installed raised bed gardens and pollinator gardens. In 2024, an outdoor learning space will be developed at Charles Barnum School in Groton and additional projects will be implemented at Barrows STEM School in Windham.

CSWC Source Water Grant/Little River –the update to the Muddy Brook and Little River Water Quality Protection Plan was delivered to stakeholders for review and comments. Once NRCS reviews the Plan and provides final recommendations, ECCD will finalize it for approval by NRCS, which will re-qualify the Little River watershed as a National Water Quality Initiative watershed under NRCS.

EB Mitigation Fund/Mohawk Northeast Mitigation Fund Shewville Fishway Construction in Ledyard, CT – ECCD received bids from qualified contractors and selected a construction firm to build the fishway. The District is awaiting contracts and commitment letters from CT DEEP before executing an agreement with the contractor. We anticipate construction of the fishway will begin in June 2024.

Free-stall barn/manure waste storage facility in Lebanon, CT – ECCD executed the agreement with LISFF and has begun planning the project. We were hopeful site work would commence this fall, but high groundwater levels have caused a delay. We anticipate site work will begin in late spring 2024. Funded by Long Island Sound Futures Fund.

French River-N Grosvenordale BMPs – in collaboration with the Town of Thompson, ECCD is installing a rain garden at the newly reconfigured Blain Rd intersection. Additionally, pervious pavers will be installed at the Thompson Public Library. Both elements of the project will be completed next spring and summer. Funded by CTDEEP with EPA CWA Section 319 funding.

### **CT Council of Soil and Water Conservation**

CSWC, in partnership with the CT Association of Conservation Districts, organized a series of public listening forums to gather information from residents about important natural resource concerns they have in the area. By participating in these sessions, residents and conservation groups were provided an opportunity to shape federal and state natural resource assistance programs, including those offered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Local work group participants, including farmers, forest landowners and other landowners, government officials, community leaders, Councils of Government and other NGOs were encouraged to participate. The final Local Working Group convened on Thursday, November 7 at the UCONN Avery Point Campus with over 50 participants engaged in the process.

### **CT Sea Grant**

CT Sea Grant, in partnership with NY Sea Grant and the Long Island Sound Study, hosted the 2nd Annual Sustainable and Resilient Communities Bi-State Workshop on December 7, 2023. The half-day virtual workshop brought together local government, Indigenous, tribal, and community leaders, nonprofits, and other stakeholders from around the Sound. This year's workshop focused on debuting a new Long Island Sound Resilience Resource Hub website and providing information on resilience planning and implementation.

Owen Placido has been hired as an Assistant Extension Educator. His job focuses on promoting nature-based approaches for climate adaptation, engaging community voices across the Connecticut coastline, and helping people find the resources they need to develop sustainable and resilient communities. You can reach Owen at [owen.placido@uconn.edu](mailto:owen.placido@uconn.edu).

### **UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources**

A Native Plant and Pollinator Conference was held at UConn (Storrs Campus) on November 2, 2023.

### **CT Resource Conservation and Development Area (CT RC&D)**

RC&D has recently undergone staffing changes and will be rolling out new programs. Please check its website for potential employment opportunities. <https://ctrcd.org/>

Climate Smart Agriculture Grant opportunity. Request for proposals for funding up to \$50,000 for the implementation of energy projects (on-farm energy efficiency and renewable energy) and/or soil health equipment and practices was recently announced. Funding for this project has been provided by the Climate Smart Farming: Agriculture and Forestry Grant. Funding will be awarded and administered by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. The first round under this program closed on October 31, 2023. A second round is anticipated for Spring 2024.

The CT Compost Alliance is a coalition of composting enthusiasts from a variety of non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies, and businesses that promotes and educates composting education efforts, resources, and activities in the state of Connecticut. The CT Compost Alliance is excited to announce that the first CT Compost Conference will be held on March 14, 2024, at Connecticut College in New London, CT. For more information, use this link.

<https://www.ctcompostalliance.org/events>

CT RC&D also oversees the CT Farm Energy Program. This program provides technical assistance to rural farmers. For more specific program information, please visit this website.

<https://ctfarmenergy.org/>.

### **Amos Lake Association**

ALA contracted with the CT Agricultural Experiment Station Aquatic Invasives Program to survey Amos Lake to inspect the lake following a treatment program for Variable and Eurasian Milfoil. The treatment appeared to be very effective and no populations of either milfoil were located. However, it was determined a new aquatic invasive plant species has been introduced to the lake. Hydrilla has been introduced and became established in the lake near the state boat launch. As much hydrilla as could be hand pulled in a few days of effort was removed from the lake. This hydrilla was tested and determined to be genetically related to the unique strain found in the Connecticut River. More information about Hydrilla is available at this link:

<https://files.constantcontact.com/a4be083b601/97aafbe8-d07e-4b60-9b81-3ec04cd4e217.pdf>

The ALA is continuing to pressure on CT DEEP to install boat wash stations at state-owned boat launches to prevent the spread of invasive aquatic species.

The Town of Preston is in the process of updating its Plan of Conservation and Development. ALA has submitted comments regarding promotion of Low Impact Development.

### **UCONN Center for Land-use Education and Research (CLEAR)**

The staff of UCONN CLEAR recently gave a presentation on their completed Source Water Protection Project. Source water is a general term used to describe any water used as a source of drinking water. Using an online map viewer, the project systematically and objectively identifies parcels with the most value for source water protection. It uses a GIS inventory of all parcels (properties) occurring either in a surface water protection area (drinking water watersheds) or ground water protection area (aquifer protection areas). Discussion and expert opinion defined a thorough yet reasonable set of metrics for parcels existing in drinking water watersheds and a second list for parcels existing over aquifer protection areas. The metrics were then combined so each parcel has a rank score identifying those that are most valuable for source water protection. This tool will be important for prioritizing land being considered for open space acquisition using grant funds. For more information, visit this link.

<https://clear.uconn.edu/projects/sourcewater/>

### **US Army Corp of Engineers**

The US Army Corp temporarily closed the boat launch at West Thompson Lake to improve the drainage and pave additional parking spaces at the popular boat launch. All work has been completed and the boat launch reopened on November 27.

### **News from Municipalities**

#### **Town of Groton**

The town of Groton purchased a vacuum truck using funds available through the America Rescue Plan Act. This purchase will provide critical maintenance for green infrastructure projects such as permeable pavement or pavers.

Funds derived from the CT Bottle Bill “nips” fee in Groton will be used to purchase and install storm drain filters. The number and proposed locations for the inserts have not yet been determined.

The Town of Groton Conservation Commission has begun working up inputs to the next revision of the Town of Groton Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), which will have 6 focus areas of:

1. Open Space definition
2. Climate Change Resilience
3. Sustainability
4. Outreach
5. Waste Management/reduction
6. Stewardship of town open space with volunteers.



### **Town of Hampton**

The Hampton Conservation Commission hosted a tour of the town-owned Little River Preserve as a TLGV Walktober event. The tour featured both historical and environmental features of the land. Approximately 25 people attended the event.

The Hampton Conservation Commission is seeking information on the best way to enhance the habitat opportunities of a wet meadow.

### **Town of Woodstock**

The Woodstock Conservation Commission, with support from the local community, planted a memorial pollinator garden adjacent to the Senexet Grange parking area.

### **Important news for our Municipal Partners - Long Island Sound Resilience Grant Writing Assistance Program**

With funding from US EPA through the Long Island Sound Study (LISS), New York Sea Grant (NYSG) and Connecticut Sea Grant (CTSG) announced a second round of funding open to municipalities and community organizations to facilitate the hiring of grant preparation and writing support to assist with the development of grant applications for sustainable and resilience focused projects that will impact a community(ies) within or partially within the Long Island Sound Coastal boundary (within Westchester, Nassau, Suffolk counties, Western Connecticut, and Eastern Connecticut). More information at this link:

<https://longislandsoundstudy.net/about/grants/grants-and-grant-writing-assistance-opportunities/long-island-sound-resilience-grant-writing-assistance-program/>

### **Land Trust Updates**

#### **Wyndham Land Trust**

WLT added two more preserves to its land holdings. The Dilorio property lies on the border of Woodstock and Pomfret and is connected by an old cart road to Johnson Road. It is wet and surrounded by undeveloped steep hills. In the future, WLT hope to connect it with existing parcels in its Nightingale Forest Preserve.

The Grochoswki property has extensive frontage on Ravenelle Road in Thompson and sits east of several other of WLT parcels on the Bull Hill ridgeline between Thompson and Woodstock. The land is predominantly wetlands with some large, mature trees. It does not appear that the property has been logged for decades.

#### **Avalonia Land Conservancy**

Avalonia members participate in several local watershed groups, including the Wequetequock Cove Clean Water Coalition, the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed and Baker Cove Watershed Committee.

#### **Connecticut Land Conservation Council**

2023 - 2024 TAG Grant Cycle Opens November 1, 2023.



The CLCC Transaction Assistance Grant (TAG) Program seeks to accelerate the pace of land conservation by providing financial assistance to land trusts for transaction-related project costs. TAG responds to immediate conservation needs and is designed to get funding on the ground efficiently and effectively.

Applications for TAG grants will be accepted monthly, with applications due on the last day of a given month as long as funds are available (see grant application for due dates). Applicants may only submit one application for one project per due date but may apply for multiple transaction expenses within the same grant application.

Please refer to the grant application for a comprehensive overview of the TAG program and application evaluation criteria. If you have any questions or concerns, contact Yaw: [yodarko@ctconservation.org](mailto:yodarko@ctconservation.org).

Planning for the 2024 Connecticut Land Conservation Conference is in full swing, and CLCC is excited to announce its return to Wesleyan University on March 23, 2024. And if it's anything like previous conferences, it will be an exciting day packed with workshops and information-sharing opportunities for board members, staff, and volunteers from Connecticut's many land trusts and conservation organizations (and beyond!) More information at this link: <https://ctconservation.org/conference/>

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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, TRBP meets quarterly on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month.

The next meeting will be on January 16, 2024, at 9:30 AM Eastern Time, via Zoom. The meeting will feature Lois Bruinooge presenting a wrap-up of the Southern New England Heritage Forest Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

If you are not already on the e-distribution list for this publication, sign on to the 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. Funding support for FY 24 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.