



Thames River Basin Partnership Partners in Action Quarterly Report

Summer 2023

Volume 66

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 summer's special presentation, then you missed a presentation from Justin Richardson, Assistant Professor in the Department of Earth, Geographic, and Climate Sciences at UMASS Amherst. He spent a good amount of time over the past few years digging holes, sampling sediments, and helping students collect water and soil samples from several watersheds in the Thames River, comparing the concentration of several toxic metals and phosphorus, and he presented a summary of his findings. The official title of his talk is "Understanding Spatial and Temporal Transport of Toxic Metals and Phosphorus in Soils, Sediments, and Waters Across the Thames River Watershed". This presentation was recorded and available to view on the ECCD YouTube channel. <https://youtu.be/Gd9K6V-uPWw>.

TRBP Updates

The focus of the TRBP Coordinator for the recent quarter had been planning, implementing, and reporting on the Floating Workshop (FW). The theme of TRBP Floating Workshop #23 was Resilient and Sustainable Communities. A very discounted price was offered to participants that were from economically distressed or Environmental Justice Communities. This was possible because of a workshop sponsorship provided by the Chelsea Groton Bank. A total of 37 people were involved in the FW. This included presenters and workshop participants. After the workshop, an ESRI StoryMap was created that included workshop highlights. This StoryMap can be viewed at this [link](#).

https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/512c7f5c5ff247a895cc1b8d34d1a873?fbclid=IwAR3rkbKKTh8jFMRf6jzRkdPIMHcEVQ8kUAnxLh_E6rCQBqqI_wlX_-KZ_n0

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 collaborative coordination 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 is conducting outreach for three Regional Conservation Partnership Programs.

Funding for the TLGV RCPP, *Improving Soil Health and Water Quality In the Thames River Watershed*, expired on June 25, 2021. The project has been successfully completed. You can find a summary of its final outcomes by following this link.

<https://thamesriverbasinpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/TLGV-RCPP-Improving-Soil-Health-and-Water-Quality-in-the-Thames-Watershed-Project-Summary-Presentation.pdf>.

FY15/16 (State level funding): The University of Connecticut was the recipient and lead partner in an RCPP, *Path to Reduce Pathogens in CT Agricultural Runoff (PATH)*. This \$669,000 NRCS RCPP was focused on reducing high bacteria levels in Connecticut's rivers and shellfish beds, which is, in part, caused by runoff from agricultural operations.

Project update: This project has been completed and the final project report has been submitted to USDA NRCS for review.

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) is also available. To accelerate the pace of conservation in SNEHF, the project serves as a "conservation pipeline" of forest and bird habitat plans, EQIP practices and HFRP easements on private forestlands.

Project update: This project is in the final wrap up phase and will be completed by September 30, 2023. The outcomes 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)

This year will mark the 33rd year of Walktober. Multiple partners are helping to make this Walktober incredible and shine a light on this amazing National Heritage Corridor. Vast expanses of unexplored terrain await your discovery, boasting over 280 opportunities for exploration. These encompass walks, hikes, historical narratives, paddling adventures, bike rides, farm visits, and an array of other activities thoughtfully provided by enthusiastic Walktober leaders and the benevolent sponsors who bring them to life. You can find a printed Walktober calendar at your local library, town hall or many businesses, or you can call the office at 860 774-3300 and they will mail a copy to you. Another way to find a Walktober event is to visit the online calendar at <https://thelastgreenvalley.org/walktober-2/>.

The TLGV CT DEEP Forest Legacy Application for \$3.6 million was approved. This Inflation Reduction Act funding will preserve approximately 800 acres of forested land, mostly in the Natchaug River watershed. It will take several years to close on all the parcels included in the application. This project naturally evolved from the Forestry RCPP in collaboration with NRCS, driven by the strong interest of forest landowners in conservation easements for their land. The demand exceeded the funding capacity of the RCPP project.

TLGV staff and volunteers helped to remove 35 gallons of invasive water chestnut from West Thompson Lake this summer. The water level in the lake was above normal this summer, making it impossible to access all the submerged water chestnut plants.

TLGV Green up/Clean Up mini grants were used to install 5 pollinator gardens in the National Heritage Corridor in 2023.

The Last Green Valley Water Quality Monitoring Program update

TLGV Water Quality Monitoring volunteers wrapped up their pathogen monitoring in the Yantic River in August. The water quality results were influenced by the frequent rain events this summer and show that the river fails to meet the CT water quality standards for recreation. The results will be properly formatted and uploaded to the WQX database once all the quality control protocols have been completed.

TLGV hosted a lake monitoring workshop in May 2023, inspiring additional lake groups to become involved in lake monitoring using the CT DEEP Lake Watch Protocol and the EPA Cyanobacteria Monitoring Collaborative methods for monitoring for Harmful Algae Blooms. New teams were initiated for Coventry Lake in Coventry, Amsted Lake in Hebron and Mashapaug Pond in Union.

Eight temperature data loggers were placed in streams in towns from Mansfield to Woodstock. The intent of the monitoring is to document whether any of the streams meet the cold-water habitat criteria. These loggers will be removed in September.

Eastern Connecticut Conservation District

Green Schoolyard v2.0 is being implemented at Jennings School in New London. The project will be incorporated into the school's Social Justice Curriculum. Ambassadors for Global Connections initiative (staff and students) will be developing a green schoolyard action plan. This project is being funded by the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut (CFEC) funding combined with a LISFF grant, "Urban Waters and Underserved Populations."

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

From Rain Gardens to Riparian Buffers – work continues, 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 being planned for Kolnaski School in Groton and Stonington Marina that was installed on 7/19/23. Rain gardens are being planned in Preston and Ledyard. A riparian buffer is planned in Ledyard and Stonington but will be planted in the fall. Funded by the LISFF.

Water Quality Data W. Thompson Lake – ECCD assisting the 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 the 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 in August installed a pergola at Kolnaski Elementary School in Groton. Collaborating with the school, Project O installed raised bed gardens at Kolnaski.

Little River Watershed Based Plan Update. The first draft of the update to the Muddy Brook and Little River Water Quality Protection Plan was presented to local stakeholders on August 24 2023 for stakeholder review and comments. This project has been funded in part by an NRCS National Water Quality Initiative Planning Grant through the CT Soil and Water Council.

EB Mitigation Fund/Shewville Fishway Construction in Ledyard, CT – all permits are in place for construction of the fishway over the Shewville Dam. The dam has been registered with the DEEP's dam safety unit. ECCD received 3 bids for the construction phase of the project which are currently under review. All partners are hoping to begin construction of the fishway this fall.

CT DEEP fisheries informed ECCD of the final count of alewife that passed through the ECCD owned Hallville Dam fishway in Preston. A total of 6625 fish were able to swim over the dam in spring 2023. This significant increase in number is likely related to the stocking of pre-spawn alewife in Amos Lake and Avery Pond three years ago. Those juvenile fish migrated out to the ocean and are now that they are of reproductive age, returned to where they were spawned.

A free-stall barn, complete with a manure waste storage facility, is set for installation in Lebanon, CT. ECCD will soon be overseeing the agreement with LISFF, with construction anticipated to commence in the upcoming fall season. Funding for this project is provided by the Long Island Sound Futures Fund.

ECCD has received funding support from a Long Island Sound Stewardship Fund grant to facilitate the formation of a Wequetequock Cove Clean Water Coalition (WCCWC) made up of local stakeholders focused on improving degraded water quality in the cove. Wequetequock Cove is located in Stonington. The coalition will be focused, in part, on implementing the Angilla Brook/Inner Wequetequock Cove Watershed Based Plan. Wequetequock Cove scored a D- on the Save the Sound Water Quality Report Card.

A vegetated riparian buffer has been installed along the shoreline of a condominium with frontage along Quanaduck Cove in Stonington. This buffer will filter stormwater runoff from the land while also discouraging Canada geese from entering the lawn area from the water. This project is part of a suite of stormwater management practices that will be installed at the condominium complex. Students from Grasso Technical High School, working with their instructors, will build and install several downspout planters to intercept and filter runoff from the roof of the complex. A Stormwater BMP guide for condominiums will also be an outcome of this project. This project is funded by a Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS staff are involved with many projects throughout the watershed focused on carbon sequestration funded through Inflation Reduction Act funding. Improving riparian buffers along waterbodies is a stated focus area.

NRCS Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) When most people think of flooding and disaster relief, they generally think of FEMA or, with farmers, FSA and crop insurance. The EWP program is an NRCS program to help local communities recover after a natural disaster strikes. This program must be applied for within 60 days of an event and/or access to the impacted area. EWP does not require a federal disaster declaration. NRCS can assess the site and make a determination of need.

NRCS offers financial and technical assistance for various activities under the EWP Program, including:

- Remove debris from stream channels, road culverts and bridges;
- reshape and protect eroded streambanks;
- correct damaged or destroyed drainage facilities;
- establish vegetative cover on critically eroding lands;
- repair levees and structures;
- repair certain conservation practices, and purchase of [EWP Buyouts](#).

Here is the link to the NRCS Emergency Watershed program.

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/ewp-emergency-watershed-protection>.

Southeast Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG)

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) has received a CTDOT grant to conduct a Corridor Study of downtown Norwich. SCCOG has selected the consulting firm VHB to conduct the study, who will work with their subconsultant VN Engineers, to prepare a plan that will provide streets that are safe and accessible for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit users of all ages and abilities. The study goals include improvements to livability, mobility, access to essential services, safe routes to the waterfront and Howard T. Brown Park, the Intermodal Transportation Center, the Norwich Marina and other downtown destinations.

SCCOG serves 22 cities, towns, and boroughs, each of which has its own departments engaged in various activities related to open space, including conservation commissions, parks and recreation departments, wetland commissions, and more. In addition to that, the region boasts 14 Land Trusts and over 30 non-profits that engage in some form of conservation or recreation work. SCCOG has been working on a regional open space plan. The completion of the draft plan has been delayed but is expected to be completed prior to the October TRBP meeting.

SCCOG has received Brownfield Remediation funds for four parcels from the Department of Economics and Community Development. Two of the parcels are in Windham and the remaining two in Waterford. In Waterford at 74 Scotch Cap Road, a former oil terminal right on the Thames River, will be turned into deed restricted open space, as well as 207 Mohegan Ave Parkway, also directly abutting the river, which had previously been a dumping ground for the Navy and General Dynamics and is now owned by the Mashantucket Pequots. In Windham, the funding will help to remediate the American Thread Company Mill #4, which is on the confluence of the Willimantic and Natchaug rivers, as well as 11 Machine Shop Hill Rd in South Windham (this one is not abutting a river).

UCONN Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) and Non-Point Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO)

UCONN CLEAR has completed a new online app useful for planning riparian buffer restoration strategies. The term riparian refers to the land immediately adjacent to water bodies such as streams, ponds and lakes. These areas are known to provide a number of environmental amenities, including wildlife habitat, temperature moderation, and processing of pollutants. The new app uses 1 M resolution 2016 landcover data to map the type of vegetation in the riparian area. Access the tool at <https://clear.uconn.edu/projects/landscape/lis-riparian/>.

A new Local Watershed Assessment Tool has been developed by CLEAR in partnership with Footprints on the Water. This web-based tool assessed local watersheds based on landcover types and disturbance of the natural riparian vegetation. Based on metrics in the tool, the watershed is graded either Mitigation, Remediation or Conservation. To learn more about how this tool was developed, or to access the tool, use this link. <https://clear.uconn.edu/2022/10/21/a-new-tool-to-assess-watershed-health-in-ct/>

Project Oceanology

The Project O summer camp program was filled to capacity this year. The number of school districts that are members of Project O programs has increased.

CT Sea Grant

Sea Grant is thrilled to introduce the newest member of our SRC Extension Professional team, Sarah Schechter! A Connecticut native, Sarah brings a wealth of experience in environmental policy and management and a passion for building resilient communities. With her expert knowledge of planning for climate resilience and flooding throughout the state, she has developed a strong understanding of the diverse needs of Connecticut communities and is ready to make waves in our efforts towards sustainability and resilience. Sarah will be covering eastern coastal CT, and you can reach her at sarah.schechter@uconn.edu.

Celebrating Agriculture!

Celebrating Agriculture will be held this year on Saturday, September 23 at the Brooklyn Fair Grounds.

UConn CIRCA

NEW Conservation Commission Fact Sheet

Connecticut town commissions and boards can play a pivotal role in building climate change resilience into local decision making. Conservation Commissions have the authority to advise land use boards and can play a role in increasing climate resiliency by advocating for nature-based solutions for problems like flooding, excessive heat, erosion, shoreline stabilization or poor water quality. Learn more about the role and authority of Conservation Commissions and how natural resource conservation can help build climate resilience in CIRCA's new Factsheet "Conservation Commissions and Natural Resource Resilience."

<https://resilientconnecticut.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2761/2023/05/Conservation-Commission-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

News from Municipalities

Town of Hampton

The Hampton Antiquarian and Historical Society will be hosting a Walktober event on Sunday, October 15 on the Hammond Hill/Little River Preserve, a recently acquired 52-acre parcel of land that abuts Little River. The Hampton Conservation Commission is seeking funding to install ADA compliant access to a pond on the property.

Town of Woodstock

The Woodstock Conservation Commission tabled a display on the Pollinator Pathway Initiative at the Woodstock Locally Grown Day on August 5. Free native plant seedlings provided by the Northeast Connecticut Pollinator Pathway Group were also distributed.

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) announce a funding opportunity 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). See Sustainable and Resilient Communities webpage for regions. <https://longislandsoundstudy.net/our-vision-and-plan/sustainable-and-resilient-communities/>

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until all available funding is allocated, which may be no later than September 30th, 2023.

Land Trust Updates

Connecticut Land Conservation Council will launch a new grant round in November. This upcoming round will continue to aid land trusts in initiating new conservation projects and providing critical funding needed to bring projects to completion.

Wyndham Land Trust (WLT)

WLT was a recipient of a \$24000 grant from the CT DEEP Recreational Trails Program. The funding will help to design and build a parking lot on Bull Hill Road in Thompson for improved access to the 1100-acre Bull Hill Preserve. This preserve straddles a ridgeline between Woodstock and Thompson. The current access to the preserve is via a challenging gravel road through the western side of the ridgeline in Woodstock. The planned new access will allow vehicles and visitors with special needs to access the trail head from the eastern side of the preserve.

Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust (JT)

JT closed on a 45-acre parcel of land at the Chaplin/Mansfield line. The "Chaine Property", named for Jean Chaine the seller, will be managed as a part of the Harvey Preserve as it is in the middle of several Harvey Preserve parcels. In the future, this property will likely have a parking area and host the kiosk for the Harvey Preserve. The long-range goal is to link this property with many other previously preserved lands to the US Army Corp of Engineers owned land at Mansfield Hollow.

JT is also working to close contracts on ~400 acres of forest easements. They hope to finalize easements on approximately 245 acres in Ashford, including a section of the Nipmuck trail, before the end of this year.

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 3rd Tuesday of the month.

The next meeting will be on October 17, 2023 at 9:30 AM Eastern Time, via Zoom.

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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 22 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.