



# Thames River Basin Partnership Partners in Action Quarterly Report

Fall 2018

Volume 48

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 Workplan](#) 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 July 2018 meeting of the Thames River Basin Partnership, then you missed a presentation by Jean Pillo representing the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD). She presented their annual *ECCD Year in Review* slide show. The presentation highlighted multiple projects the ECCD staff have been involved with over the last calendar year, from plant sales to rain gardens, and coalition building to agricultural conservation practices. While partners have been routinely updated on these projects during the quarterly TRBP meetings, this program included a more detailed overview of the projects with images that enhanced the project summaries.

## TRBP Updates

The Rivers Alliance of Connecticut approved a Watershed Assistance small grant in the amount of \$3000 to support the creation of a new TRBP website. A website subcommittee was formed to develop a Request for Proposals that was advertised and closed on October 19, 2018. Caryn Oresky of Ledyard was chosen by the committee. She will create the website framework and Jean Pillo will be providing the material to be hosted on the new and improved website. The Watershed Assistance Small Grant Program (WASGP) is funded in part by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection through a US Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act § 319 Nonpoint Source Grant, and administered by the Rivers Alliance of Connecticut.

## Partner Reports

### 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 was 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 in all three of these projects with outreach support.

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 Program, 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 area.

Project update: The EQIP funding for this project has been obligated. Water quality monitoring will begin on selected fields during the next growing season.

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 unacceptably high bacteria levels in Connecticut's rivers and shellfish beds. This is, in part, caused by runoff from agricultural operations. To address soil and 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 Partnership, and UCONN Extension.

Potential conservation practices to reduce pathogens will include composting, nutrient management, residue and tillage management, cover crops, fencing, buffers and filter strips, vegetated treatment areas and wetland restoration or creation. This project incorporates cutting-edge research tools that will allow for the identification of species-specific DNA markers. This will allow the source of E. coli to be determined by the species that contributed it, which in turn will focus remediation efforts where they are most needed. Jack Clausen of UCONN is the project lead for this project.

Project update – Outreach to agricultural producers continues. The bacteria monitoring in the 2018 growing season focused on edge-of-field monitoring of two corn fields at the request of the producer.

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 – The response to the easement opportunity through the Healthy Forests Reserve Program has been overwhelming and not all applicants can be included under this project. Phase 2, funding forest management plans and bird habitat surveys, is in the initial outreach phase.

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/farbill/rcpp>.

The USDA NRCS, Windham County office reported that another workshop in the Healthy Soil series was held on August 9, 2018 in Ellington. The focus was on how diverse cover crops and healthy soil are related and ways to reduce tillage.

The USDA NRCS in Connecticut contracted \$5 million statewide with 130 producers for approved conservation practices. Until a new Farm Bill was passed by Congress in December, many agriculture producers met their funding cap and were ineligible for more funding.

The Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut has awarded funding to support **Accelerating the Pace of Regional Conservation by Building Stronger Land Trusts and Developing a Regional Conservation Strategy**. The Project Partners include the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC), The Last Green Valley (TLGV), and the following Northeast Connecticut land trusts: Northern CT Land Trust, Joshua’s Trust, Wyndham Land Trust, Wolf Den – Eastern CT Forest Landowners Association, and New Roxbury Land Trust. The overarching goal of this project is to significantly strengthen the individual and collective capacity of participating land trusts to save and enhance the region’s natural heritage, land, and water resources by investing in a program focused on: (1) community engagement and communications to raise the visibility of land trust work in Northeast Connecticut; (2) strategic conservation planning to assist land trusts in identifying, prioritizing, and conserving critical lands; and (3) establishing the framework for a larger, watershed-wide regional conservation strategy that will allow land trusts to cooperatively seek landscape-scale funding for shared priorities.

The CT DEEP reported that there is the potential for a southeast basin (Connecticut & Rhode Island Pawcatuck River/Little Narraganset Bay and Long Island Sound) to participate in a freshwater and estuary monitoring project funded by a US EPA SNEP (Southern New England Program) grant administered by Restore America's Estuaries, Inc. Areas of the extensive watershed in both CT and RI are adversely impacted by nutrient pollution. The goal of the bi-state collaborative project will be to use the sampling data within watershed models to determine where the nutrients are originating and what loads are being delivered to the rivers and receiving estuaries. The project will run through 2020. The Pawcatuck project may be a template for other coastal nutrient-challenged areas along Long Island Sound.

The Connecticut State Bond Commission met on 9/21/18 and approved \$795 million in capital improvement projects across CT including:

- \$10 million for brownfield remediation projects in the state.
- \$5 million for open space acquisition; plus \$5 million for the statewide asbestos-removal program

The [Connecticut Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program](#) is accepting applications until February 7, 2019. Applicants are advised to refer to the [Connecticut Green Plan](#) for guidance on statewide open space priorities.

Using a nitrogen [credit exchange program](#), Connecticut exceeded their statewide annual goal for nitrogen removal from waste water treatment plants in 2013, a year earlier than their commitment to US EPA.

Sustainable CT! has provided initial certification to 21 towns throughout Connecticut, including Coventry, New London and Windham in the Thames River basin. A new 2019 certification cycle is starting up now. It's never too late to register your community for Sustainable CT! Join the dozens of already registered communities implementing sustainability actions across Connecticut. Actions your town has taken in the past can count toward certification as well. Sign up at any time or learn more at [www.sustainablect.org](http://www.sustainablect.org)!

The annual New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission [NEIWPC NPS](#) Conference will be held April 18-19, 2019 in Portsmouth NH. A current Call for Abstracts is out.

The 2019 [Northeast Aquatic Biologist Conference](#) will be held on February 27 – March 1, 2019 at the Holiday Inn in Saratoga Springs, New York. The Conference Agenda may be found [here](#). This conference, coordinated by New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPC) in partnership with member states and EPA, continues the tradition of providing a forum for the professional sharing of knowledge and collaboration that the aquatic and environmental biologist community in the Northeast has come to represent.

[Highstead](#) hosted the 2018 Regional Conservation Partnership Network Gathering at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in November. In its ninth year, the conference focused on identifying and building the connections between the woods, farms, wildlands, and waterways that link New England's rural to urban landscapes.

In September, Project Oceanology and New England Science and Sailing held a free 2-day professional development program for educators integrating Long Island Sound, STEM and Next Generation Science Standards.

Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD) is continuing to work within the 36 towns in their District to install 100 free rain barrels and distribute 100 free rain gardens. This project is being funded by a Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the US EPA. For more information on this project, please contact Dan Mullins at 860-319-8808.

ECCD is spearheading the creation of a Little River Healthy Watershed Collaborative that will focus on prioritizing and then implementing projects that were recommended in the Roseland Lake Management Plan and the Muddy Brook/Little River Watershed Based Plan. The initial Little River Healthy Watershed Collaborative meeting was held on October 24, 2018.

Work on the Fairvue Farm Agricultural Waste Management Practices Project is nearing completion. Completed projects phases include:

- Installation of subsurface drainage under the silage bunker;
- Inside the silage bunker: Installed a concrete floor with asphalt cap;
- Installed high/low flow separator to control silage leachate;
- Constructed two concrete receiving tanks to temporarily store waste;
- Built pump house to transfer waste to large blue tanks installed by USDA NRCS.

The final project phases to be completed this fall include:

- Install barn and milk house waste transfer system to pump waste via underground pipes to concrete storage tanks.

ECCD is continuing their analysis of the effectiveness of the woodchip bioreactor installed to intercept drainage from a tile drained farm field at a Woodstock farm. The bioreactor is being monitored for nutrients and *E. coli* flowing into and out of the system. A total of 20 samples representing all seasons of the year will be collected. The project will conclude in summer 2019. ECCD is also wrapping up a Conservation Innovation Grant funded by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. In a multiyear study, two different edge of field monitoring systems were evaluated for comparability in collecting edge of field runoff. One is a passive sampling system and the other a solar powered pump system that is compliant with USDA NRCS Conservation Practice Codes 201 and 202. The passive system costs a fraction of the amount it costs to set up the pump system. A final report on the outcomes of this comparison was completed on December 30, 2018.

ECCD was awarded funding for a two part capacity building grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. The first part is to focus internally on the development of a strategic plan for ECCD to follow going into the future, and monthly meetings have been held with staff and members of the ECCD Board of Directors to work on this initiative. The second part of this project is to work with municipalities in southeastern Connecticut to discuss the formation of a stormwater collaborative in order to pool resources to meet the requirements of the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) general permit. A regional meeting was held on October 24 involving municipal representatives from government agencies.

Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) has been partnering with ECCD on the stormwater collaborative. SCCOG is also involved in a regional sewer study, of which a scope of work is in development. The project team will research areas in need of sewer expansion and work with local municipal Water Pollution Control Authorities to look for solutions to regional sewer issues.

SCCOG is involved in a FEMA study to develop flood insurance premium discounts if the towns are willing to make an effort to improve conditions that lead to flooding.

### **News from Municipalities**

The City of New London has enacted a stormwater authority through their existing WPCA and was to begin collecting fees for their capital improvement budget this past fall. This is the first Connecticut municipality to develop a stormwater utility or authority.

The Woodstock Conservation District is working with local landowners to get more information from the CT Department of Transportation and the CT DEEP on salt contamination in their groundwater wells. Several homes in the Woodstock Valley area near a DOT salt storage facility have high levels of sodium and chloride in their wells making the water non-potable. The interior plumbing and appliances have corroded.

The Woodstock Planning and Zoning Commission drafted new subdivision regulations that allow for a density bonus in exchange for open space. The effective density of a Major subdivision (5 or more lots) with a conservation design, as proposed, may be reduced from the current 2.5 acre effective density to a 1.5 acre effective density. The Woodstock Conservation Commission opposes this change.

### **Land Trust Updates**

Governor Dannel P. Malloy announced that \$4.8 million in state grants are being awarded to support the purchase of 1,139 acres of land for 15 projects in 14 Connecticut municipalities that the state will designate to be preserved as open space.

In eastern Connecticut, Avalonia Land Conservancy has more to celebrate than just their 50 year anniversary as a land trust this year. They were awarded 3 grants that will protect almost 350 acres of land.

Town: Griswold

Project Title: Boyd Rixtown

Sponsor: Avalonia Land Conservancy

Grant: \$58,435

Acreage: 54 acres

Description: This undeveloped forested acquisition, located in Griswold, will be an addition to the recently approved 409 acre Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest (part of a greenway of over 1400 acres). The parcel has rough terrain (180' – 510' above sea level) with rocky ledge, upland forest, ponds and vernal pools. The property is in the PA490 program, and is geographically in two watershed basins – Pachaug River and Miller Brook/Broad Brook.

Town: Griswold

Project Title: Dutka Property

Sponsor: Avalonia Land Conservancy

Grant: \$30,469

Acreage: 62.58 acres

Description: This property is located along the southern portion of Pachaug Pond (Griswold) and in combination with land owned by Avalonia and DEEP (Pachaug State Forest) creates over 120 acres of unfragmented, mature forest block. The property will enhance public access to Pachaug Pond, through its water frontage and the use of seasonal dock. The property will also be used to provide access to Barton Island (Avalonia). Known state listed species of concern may be located on this property.

Town: Ledyard

Project Title: Athinson/Dirlam Preserve

Sponsor: Avalonia Land Conservancy

Grant: \$697,775

Acreage: 230 acres

Description: This acquisition will significantly increase the Great Oak Greenway by enlarging open forest and associated habitats, and by adding miles of trails to make up one of the longest trail systems in southeast Connecticut. The conservation of this property will protect the water quality of Thompson Brook and Great Brook and serve as an additional buffer through filtration for the Morgan Pond Reservoir (Groton Utilities). The property abuts protected open space owned by Groton Utilities and the Town of Ledyard and links to other land of Avalonia Trust.

The grants are being awarded through the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition program, which is administered by the CT DEEP and assists local governments, land trusts, and water companies in purchasing open space using funding from the Community Investment Act and state bond funds. This grant program requires match by the grant recipient and requires the open space land be protected by a conservation and public recreation easement, ensuring that the property is forever protected for public use and enjoyment.

Wyndham Land Trust now owns over 4000 acres of preserved land in ten towns in northeastern Connecticut. Their current projects include the expansion of the Bull Hill Project. Bull Hill is a 3000 acre forested ridgeline at the Thompson/Woodstock border that they are targeting for preservation. They have successfully preserved over 900 acres of the ridgeline and are working hard to grow that number.

In the Five Mile River watershed, the Wyndham Land Trust expanded their Long Pond Preserve in Thompson with an addition of 24 acres. They also added 27 acres to Robbins Preserve. Visit their new website <https://www.wyndhamlandtrust.org> to learn more about the land trust and preserves. It's for all to enjoy.

The New Roxbury Land Trust held a free program on native bees featuring Kimberly Stoner, PhD from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. The program was held in October at Roseland Park in Woodstock.

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

Next meeting will be on January 15, 2019.

If you are not already on the e-distribution list for this publication, contact [Jean Pillo](#) by email and request to be added, or you can download the previous versions of this quarterly publication from the [TRBP website](#) (Summer 2006 – Spring 2015) or more current editions at <http://thelastgreenvalley.org/learn-protect/watershed-protection/thames-river-basin-partnership>.

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 18 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.