

# Willimantic River Review

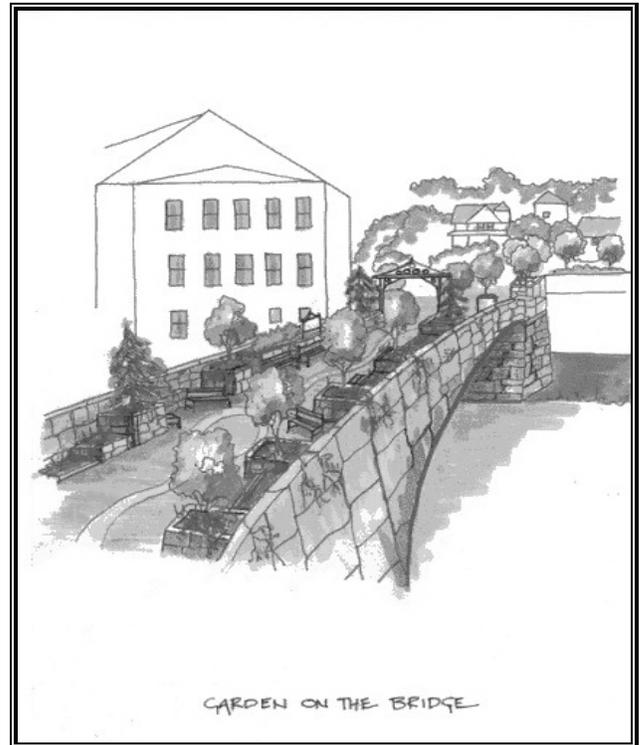
Fall 2006

## WRA Celebrates!

The Alliance is celebrating its Tenth Anniversary on Friday, September 15 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Windham Textile and History Museum in Willimantic. Festivities will begin with a tour of the new "Garden on the Bridge." Then the celebration will move across Main Street to the museum for refreshments and an exhibit of paintings of the Windham Mills by Wyeth, Weir and Wandell. At 6:00 a brief ceremony will be followed by comments about the future prospects for Connecticut's rivers by Margaret Miner, Executive Director of the Rivers Alliance of Ct. If you plan to attend, RSVP to [info@willimanticriver.org](mailto:info@willimanticriver.org) or 455-0532. We look forward to seeing you there!

## Garden on the Bridge Blooms

The long-awaited "Garden on the Bridge" in Willimantic will be completed this fall, and a dedication ceremony is planned for October 22 at 3 p.m. This new Windham town park will offer a pleasant spot to enjoy the Willimantic River on a double-arched stone bridge located off Main Street between Windham Mills State Heritage Park and the mill building renovated by ArtSpace. Formerly known as the Jillson Hill bridge, it carried horses and wagons, cars and trucks across the river for almost 150 years until traffic was moved to the new "Frog Bridge" in 2001. Once the town took over ownership of the old stone bridge from the state, a plan for the garden moved forward quickly. The layout was designed by Ruth Cutler and Kim Kelly from UConn's Cooperative Extension System and Master Gardener program. Master Gardeners have helped install the plants, along with the Garden Club of Windham, which will maintain the garden. Among trees, shrubs and flowers, visitors will be able to enjoy views of the river, with a steep wooded bank on one side and nineteenth-century granite mill buildings on the opposite shore. The American Thread Company closed these mills in the 1980's, and the classic buildings are gradually being renovated for commercial and residential use.



*Courtesy of Garden Club of Windham*

## The Greenway Grows

Thanks to volunteers from the towns along the river, there are now Willimantic River Greenway signs at entrances to parks, trails and canoe launches on the river. The Stafford Conservation Commission has laid out and cleared the Highland Trail. This one-and-a-half-mile loop trail leads to the top of the high ridge on the west side of the Willimantic River valley. Park in the lot across from the Witt Middle School in Hyde Park in Stafford Springs and walk up the hill to the trail entrance off the shared driveway between 72 and 78 Highland Terrace. For access to the trail, follow a grass "trail" along side the larger trees behind 78 to the woods. A gravel road leads to the right and uphill through pastures returning to forest. The blue-blazed trail turns left at the top, crosses a large stone wall, then turns right to follow the edge of the

ridge with scenic lookouts over the river valley. The trail turns right and right again to loop back to the gravel road. This trail is part of the Willimantic River Greenway, and eventually it will be extended south into Ellington. Stafford's "Autumn in the Park" Arts Festival on Oct. 7 may include a hike of the trail ([www.staffordct.org](http://www.staffordct.org)).

## Riverwatch

☞ The Ct. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has issued a draft of its **2006 Ct. Impaired Waters List**. The rivers, streams, and ponds/lakes on this list do not meet official water quality standards and may be required to have additional pollution controls or management actions to meet these standards. The Willimantic River is no longer on this list, but several tributaries are included.

Items with a high priority for DEP action:

In **Tolland**, Crandall Pond on Paulk Brook is impaired for the designated use of recreation, caused by the presence of indicator bacteria from an unknown source.

In **Mansfield**, Eagleville Brook flows from UConn's Storrs campus to Eagleville Lake in the Willimantic River just above the dam. This stream now lacks appropriate habitat for fish and other aquatic life. Possible causes include construction activity, stormwater runoff, and streambank modifications and erosion. DEP is drafting a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) analysis to address water quality impairments in two segments of this brook.

Items currently being addressed:

In **Willington**, at the Travel Centers of America service station on I-84, a previous diesel fuel spill entered the Ruby Lake outlet stream, which discharges into Roaring Brook. Since 2003, a DEP consent order has guided improvements to the stormwater drainage system to prevent further contamination and to restore aquatic life to the stream. In **Mansfield**, two tributaries to Cedar Swamp Brook were first listed in 1998 because of contamination leaching from the former UConn landfill. (This brook flows into Eagleville Lake.)

Following a remediation action agreement with DEP, the University will cap the landfill, direct the remaining leachate to the wastewater treatment plant, remove "hot spots" of contamination from surrounding areas by the summer of 2007, and monitor the remediated site for many years.

Other items:

☞ In **Stafford**, a section of lowermost Furnace Brook, which includes the concrete channel in Stafford Springs, is impaired for the designated use of recreation due to an unknown source of E. coli bacteria. Following a public comment period in August, a final draft of the 2006 list will be submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency this fall for approval. Then DEP can address the high priority items.

☞ The University of Ct. has applied to DEP to renew its "wastewater discharge to surface waters" permit associated with its operation of the UConn wastewater treatment plant, which discharges into the Willimantic River just below Eagleville dam. The Alliance requested an extension of the chlorination/dechlorination season for the benefit of recreation (fishermen and boaters) in this river segment. This extension will be included in the new permit, so that chlorination/dechlorination treatment will be in effect from April 1 to October 30, beginning in 2007.

☞ In the past year, the Alliance has expressed concern about the potential for UConn's wells to draw too much water from an aquifer associated with the Willimantic River and thus negatively impact aquatic life and recreational uses of the river. A low-flow study of seasonal river levels at the wells is important to determine a minimum river flow and maximum allowable withdrawal by these wells. Recently some progress was made toward this study. The in-stream flow gauging station by UConn's Willimantic River wellfield at Spring Manor Farm has been upgraded. Now real-time data is available for river flow rates and for water levels at the USGS website <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ct/nwis/uv?01119384>. This data is essential for the low-flow study and for future monitoring of water levels in the river.

## Calendar

### Friday, September 15

Tenth Anniversary Celebration. (See page 1 for details.)

### Saturday, October 14

Willington Awards and Walk at 10 a.m. Willington's Conservation Commission will present to the Alliance and the Naubesatuck Watershed Council the "Raymond K. Daley Environmental Action Award" for establishing Greenways along the Willimantic and Fenton Rivers. A walk in Fenton-Ruby Park along the Fenton River will follow. The park is off Moose Meadow Road in Willington.

### Sunday, October 15

Willimantic River Ramble in Coventry/Mansfield. Adults and children over 8 can enjoy scenic views of the Willimantic River, historic Mansfield Depot, and Spring Manor Farm along the Midriver Greenway Trail. This is a moderate 3-mile, 2-3-hour, walk from River Park in Mansfield to Riverview Trail Park in Coventry. Meet at River Park in Mansfield at 1:00 p.m. Directions: From Rte. 44 in Mansfield, take Rte. 32 south 0.3 mi.; turn right on Plains Rd. for 0.2 mi. River Park is on the right. This Walking WeekendS event is sponsored by Willimantic River Alliance, Mansfield Parks Advisory Comm., and Coventry Rec. Dept. Visit [www.thelastgreenvalley.org](http://www.thelastgreenvalley.org) for information on over 80 other Walking WeekendS events offered on October 6-9 and 14-15 in northeast Connecticut.

### Tour of UConn's Wastewater Treatment Plant

Visit a state-of-the-art treatment plant and find out how various potential pollutants are removed from UConn's wastewater before it enters the Willimantic River below Eagleville dam. Tour will be in October or November. Contact the Alliance at [info@willimanticriver.org](mailto:info@willimanticriver.org) or 455-0532 for the date and to reserve a space.

## Willi River Ramble

We took a spring walk with Deborah Nye Corgan at Nye-Holman State Forest. Deborah is a seventh-generation descendent of Ebenezer Nye. He traveled to Tolland from Sandwich, Massachusetts, by 1718, and was granted land along the river to establish a homestead. Deborah began researching the homestead's history and landmarks several years ago, and she shared some of her discoveries on a walk through the family's former riverside farm in Tolland.

We parked at the Nye-Holman State Forest entrance next to the Rt. 74 bridge. The Nye family had a toll bridge at this spot, where the road from Tolland Green approaches the river through a gap in the high ridge to the west. "Nye's Bridge" probably was a good source of cash, because West

Willington village was established across the river around 1727, and the road (now Rt. 74) was extended through Willington to Ashford later in the 1700's.

As we walked along the Forest's loop road, we noted the appeal of this site for an early settler: level land along the river for crops, and hillside forests for pasture and timber. The river provided water and fish. By the 1750's the Nyes had a large farm on both sides of the river. This land was farmed by Ebenezer and six generations of his descendants. His great, great, great granddaughter, Alice Holman Hall, inherited the oldest part of the farm. In 1931, she gave this land to the state (186 acres on the Tolland side). The fields were planted with evergreens by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) in the 1930's to create a demonstration forest, which is now 70 years old.

When we reached the point where the Forest road curved left, we ventured onto an informal trail along the river under tall pines. Wildflowers and ferns bordered the path, which is used by fishermen who enjoy year-round fly-fishing here. This stretch of the river is part of a state Trout Management Area (TMA) for catch-and-release fishing. (For a map of the TMA trails and fishing spots, visit the Ct. Fly Fisherman's Association's website [www.ctflyfish.org](http://www.ctflyfish.org).) We could have followed this scenic trail for a half-mile up the river, but we decided to return to the Forest road and follow its loop back to Rt. 74. On the right, Pero Road (a private road) extended past fields to an older house that may have been one of the Nye family homes. This road once was part of North River Road, which continues on the other side of I-84 to more former home sites of Nye relatives. Many questions remain about the Nye farm, so Deborah plans to continue her research into the generations that lived there for over 200 years.

Nye-Holman State Forest is open throughout the year for a ramble along the Forest loop road and trails. No hunting is allowed in this part of the Forest. Thanks to Deborah and to Marilyn Aarestad, Forest Supervisor, for their help with this Ramble. For other Rambles, visit the Recreation page at [www.willimanticriver.org](http://www.willimanticriver.org).

Contributors: Vicky Wetherell, Meg Reich, Eric Thomas  
 Design and Layout: Ella Ingraham  
 Inquiries or items for the Spring 2007 Edition can be submitted to:  
 WRA, Inc. P.O. Box 9193, Bolton, CT 06043-9193  
 or to [info@willimanticriver.org](mailto:info@willimanticriver.org).  
 Previous newsletters can be viewed at the Alliance website [www.willimanticriver.org](http://www.willimanticriver.org)

**Willimantic River Alliance – Membership Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Contact me about volunteer opportunities for the WRA

Mail completed form and check to:

**WRA at P.O. Box 9193, Bolton CT 06043-9193**

Memberships	Annual Dues
Senior/Student	\$ 5.00
Individual	\$10.00
Family	\$15.00
River Steward	\$ 50.00
Patron	\$ 250.00
	(Lifetime Member)

**Thank you for joining the Alliance! Your membership dues are tax deductible.**

# **Willimantic River Alliance**

Founded in 1996, the Alliance has a mission "to protect and preserve the Willimantic River through cooperative and educational activities that promote regional awareness, stewardship, and enjoyment of the river and its watershed." As a coalition of citizens, officials and local agencies, the Alliance sponsors events such as regional forums and outings and publications, including a website and biannual newsletter.

Willimantic River Alliance, Inc. is a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt corporation. The Alliance promotes development of the Willimantic River Greenway, an official state greenway along the river's 25 miles from Stafford Springs to Willimantic. This regional project aims to connect recreational, historical and natural resource features along the river. These connections are being created by the nine riverside towns through natural resource preservation and recreation projects, such as linking trails and improving access to the river.

The river's watershed includes seventeen towns: (in Ct.) Andover, Ashford, Bolton, Columbia, Coventry, Ellington, Hebron, Lebanon, Mansfield, Stafford, Union, Tolland, Vernon, Willington, Windham, and (in Mass.) Monson, Wales.

**Fall 2006**

**C/O WINCOG**  
 968 Main Street  
 Willimantic CT 06226

Presort Standard  
 U.S. Postage Paid  
 Permit No. 34  
 Willimantic CT  
 06226