



# Willimantic River Review

Fall 2009

## Award to Alliance

In April, the Alliance received a 2008-09 Environmental Leadership Award from the University of Connecticut, recognizing the Alliance's contribution to a more environmentally aware and sustainable Storrs campus. This award recognizes our efforts to monitor and recommend environmentally responsible actions by the University. At the presentation, Richard Miller, Director of Environmental Policy, thanked the Alliance for "keeping us honest" by asking questions and for providing background information to UConn officials.

In recent years, the Alliance was represented on environmental committees at the University: the Willimantic River Study's Technical Advisory Group, the Compost Facility Siting Committee, and the Hazardous Waste Facility Siting Advisory Committee. The Alliance has also submitted testimony concerning UConn's potential impact on the Willimantic River to the Ct. Department of Environmental Protection, to the Governor's Council on Environmental Quality, and to UConn's Water and Wastewater Advisory Committee. Our watchdog efforts will continue!

## Going National

The Alliance is working with The Last Green Valley (the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor) to apply for support from the National Parks Service, specifically from its Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. The goal is designation of the Willimantic River (and segments of other rivers in northeastern Connecticut and in Massachusetts) as National Canoe Trails. A section of the Quinebaug River was awarded this designation in 2007 as part of the National Trails system. The proposed designations would raise awareness of the recreational opportunities on the rivers and attract paddlers who could become advocates and caretakers for these rivers.

Plans for the Willimantic River include a forum, facilitated by the Park Service, to share ideas for making the river more accessible. One focus could be additional sources of information for the public, such as signs and kiosks at launch sites. Stay tuned!

## The Greenway Grows

In 2006, **Tolland** purchased development rights from the King family for 191 acres along the Willimantic River. This **King Riverside Conservation Area** includes a section next to the river that is open to the public, and, thanks to Tolland's Conservation Corps, a ¾-mile trail along the river is now open. The entrance and parking lot can be reached from Rt. 195 by turning onto Dimock Road near the bridge. From the parking lot, walk downhill and along a dirt road a short distance to a trail into the woods on the right. Follow this level trail to the river and upstream along the bank.

Where this trail emerges onto an old road, look for stone abutments of the Peck bridge and a view of the former Peck mill site across the river in Willington (both structures date from the late 1700's). North of there, follow the old road past majestic trees and over small brooks. Look for a clearing on the right, and walk to the river's edge for a view of one of the large glacial boulders in the river that are a paddler's despair or delight.

Continue north along the old road through a mountain laurel grove to Newcomb Brook. The trail currently ends at the brook, but will continue north sometime in the future. For a trail guide and history of the area, visit the Parks Guide on the Alliance website.

This new trail offers an opportunity to expand the Willimantic River Greenway's **Midriver Trail** into Tolland. The Midriver Trail currently extends for three miles from Mansfield's River Park (through UConn's Spring Manor Farm and Mansfield's Mellow Meadow Park) to Coventry's Riverview Trail Park. The Alliance plans to extend the Midriver Trail from Riverview Trail Park to the King Riverside Conservation Area along local roads (Riverview Drive and Jones Crossing Road). A guide to the Midriver Trail on the Alliance's website will be updated when the extension into Tolland is completed.

## Riverwatch

**COVENTRY/MANSFIELD** As part of state budget cutting efforts, many **stream-flow gauges** were proposed to be discontinued, including the two gauges on the Willimantic River (South Coventry and Mansfield Depot). The Alliance joined with other river groups to protest this, and at the time of this publication, funding for the gauges had been restored. The Mansfield Depot gauge is already in the process of being moved from its location next to the University of Connecticut well field to a site by the Merrow Bridge. This new site will allow the gauge to measure water flow in the river upstream of the wells and provide real-time data about the amount of water in the river.

The University will use data from this gauge as an indicator of when the river's flow is so low that continued water withdrawals from the well field could threaten aquatic life in the river downstream of the wells. This warning system is comparable to the stream-flow gauge on the Fenton River that indicates when the flow is too low to use the University wells next to the Fenton River.

**STORRS** The Storrs campus of the University is starting to green up. A "**green roof**" was installed in early September on the Gant Building's plaza. Trays of drought-tolerant sedum plants were laid out on a section of the plaza, which has a dedicated drain pipe. By monitoring this pipe, several researchers at UConn are measuring the effect of these plants: how much they can slow runoff of rain and how well they filter out pollutants from the runoff. Another green roof is planned for one of the new classroom buildings on campus.

One goal of these roofs is to help reduce excessive stormwater runoff into Eagleville Brook, which is piped under the Gant building. The brook comes to the surface near Hunting Lodge Road and eventually enters the Willimantic River at Eagleville Lake. The rapid runoff from impervious

surfaces into the brook has caused erosion and has carried pollutants that affect its water quality. These problems have resulted in a lack of aquatic life in the brook. The University and the town of Mansfield are working with the Ct. Department of Environmental Protection on ways to reduce this excessive runoff by eliminating as much hard surface on campus and on nearby areas as possible. A green roof is one way to accomplish this.

**Other first steps** already in place on campus include porous parking lots, rain gardens, and swales to slow the runoff and encourage water to filter into the earth rather than running directly into the brook. A "pervious concrete" parking lot was recently installed next to the UConn field house. It is made of larger stones than usual and without sand. This design lets rainwater pass through the pavement into the ground. No storm drains are needed, which means that rainwater is not going directly into Eagleville Brook. A "pervious asphalt" parking lot at the Towers dorm complex was installed at the same time.

This is a **first-in-the-nation project** to test reduction of impervious surfaces as a way to bring life back to a watercourse. The University's CLEAR program (Center for Land Use Education and Research) is completing an analysis of the impervious surfaces in the Eagleville Brook watershed and a list of recommended solutions. Many acres of roof and asphalt remain to be addressed, but the process has begun.

**COVENTRY** Coventry residents have proposed that two roads near the Willimantic River be designated as "**scenic roads**": Riverview Drive and Jones Crossing Road. The Willimantic River Greenway's Midriver Trail will follow these roads to connect between trails in Coventry's Riverview Trail Park and the King Riverside Conservation Area in Tolland. The Alliance is submitting testimony to the Coventry PZC supporting these designations to preserve the natural character and historical



**Willimantic River Alliance – Membership Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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 State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
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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 Individual	\$ 5.00
Family	\$10.00
River Steward	\$15.00
Patron	\$ 50.00
	\$ 250.00 (Lifetime Member)

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



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 newsletter and website [www.willimanticriver.org](http://www.willimanticriver.org). Our email address is [info@willimanticriver.org](mailto:info@willimanticriver.org).

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 2009**

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