



# Willimantic River Review

Fall 2010

## Water Trail Update

The Willimantic River Water Trail project is rolling along. For the past year, the Water Trail Committee has worked with John Monroe of the National Park Service. Launch sites were evaluated and meetings with town officials addressed the Committee's recommended improvements. With input from the Committee, John created the *Willimantic River Paddling Guide* that describes launch sites and river features. Maps and photos illustrate this appealing and useful guide. The Alliance is updating our website's Paddling Page with revised launch sites and new maps geared to paddling difficulty. John's guide has been added to the site as a pdf document so it can be viewed or printed.

What's next? The Committee is now planning signs and kiosks for the launch sites and for river landmarks. Members will continue to work with towns and the DEP on launch site improvements. The Willimantic River project is a "pioneer" effort that will guide John and The Last Green Valley staff/volunteers as they develop water trails on the Quinebaug and Five Mile rivers. It is expected that next fall, the Willimantic River and these rivers will be nominated for designation as National Recreation Trails by the National Park Service.

## Well Water Woes

Low rainfall since June is affecting stream flow in the river as well as groundwater levels in aquifers under riverside wells. In Storrs, UConn has depended on the Willimantic River well field since wells next to the Fenton River were shut down in late June. Both well fields now have guidelines for water withdrawals based on the amount of water flowing past a water gauge upstream of these wells.

Since late July, low flow in the Willimantic River has triggered water conservation advisories (first voluntary, now mandatory). These restrictions affect

UConn, as well as homes, schools and businesses in Storrs that use UConn water. Current restrictions (Stage 3 drought advisory) allow various uses, such as limited lawn watering. A Stage 3 alert is triggered by stream flow at 12 cfs (cubic feet per second) or less for two weeks at the Merrow stream gauge. As the drought continues into September, the river's flow is dropping further (now averaging 8 cfs). The Alliance is advocating for additional measures to address this continuing drought condition.

Hope the October rains come early this year!

### Get involved!

Time to get involved! The Alliance is looking for additional representatives for its Board of Directors, especially from the lower river area. We meet eight times a year to discuss river-related issues, and plan the Alliance's advocacy actions, workshops and recreational events. We welcome your input whether or not you wish to join the board. Our meetings are at the Tolland Town Hall at 7:00 p.m. on the fourth Wednesday. Call 860-455-0532 to confirm the meeting date.

## Riverwatch

The drought highlights a need to plan carefully for withdrawals from well fields. Potential increases in water use are now being considered in the watershed. **Tolland** has applied for permits to double its wells' withdrawals from a riverside aquifer to 511,000 gallons per day. The increase for the Tolland wells would provide water for additional development in Tolland near the Route 195/Interstate 84 interchange and possibly in South Willington by Route 32.

### Riverwatch *continued*

The Four Corners area at the junction of Routes 195 and 44 in **Storrs** needs a new water source to promote commercial development and to replace contaminated wells. Options include a well next to Cedar Swamp Brook (a river tributary), a new well by the Willimantic River, or water from Shenipsit Lake on the west side of Tolland.

Meanwhile, **UConn** is preparing its 2010-2014 Water Supply Plan outlining projected water needs and how they will be met. Because there have been three water conservation alerts in recent years (2005, 2007, 2010), it is important for the Plan to address seasonal low water levels in late summer. The Alliance recommends that the Plan include additional mandatory conservation measures for a Stage Three drought advisory to insure reliable water supply being available during the low-flow period. The Plan also needs to include specific conservation actions for a Stage Four drought advisory to maintain adequate stream flow during a long-term drought. This will provide for better protection of the river during future seasonal droughts.

Additional water withdrawals and more frequent droughts could have a combined negative impact on the waterways in the river's watershed. A **coordinated regional approach** to address these issues is needed to insure the health of the river and a dependable water source for institutions, companies and residents.

In **Willington**, a travel service center was proposed for Exit 71 on I-84. This large area of impermeable surface would be in the immediate watershed of Roaring Brook, a Class 3 Wild Trout Management Area. The brook empties into the Willimantic River at the top of the Cole Wilde Trout Management Area, a popular year-round fishing area. The Alliance shares a concern with other conservation groups about the potential for pollution and erosion in these premier waterways,

especially since there are already two large paved facilities at this exit creating runoff into Roaring Brook tributaries. The Willington Inland Wetland and Watercourse Commission denied the application in September.

### River Heroes

In July, several trash bags and other items were dumped into the river in **Willimantic**. Fortunately, the water was low enough so it did not wash the trash downstream. When Jean de Smet heard about it, she called on family and friends to help clean it up. Because the trash was at the bottom of a 20-foot-high wall, this project required strength and ingenuity. They climbed down to the river, filled buckets with trash, then hauled up the buckets with ropes. Thanks to Jean and company for helping to keep the river clean!

#### Get outside!

It's time to enjoy the great outdoors! Visit the Willimantic River Greenway Parks and Trails Guide at [www.willimanticriver.org](http://www.willimanticriver.org) to discover 25 public access sites along the river. Or visit the website's Paddling page for detailed information about the river's Water Trail for canoes and kayaks.

### Calendar

The Alliance is now posting events on its **blog**. You can link to it from our website's Events page and find the latest posting.

### Walktober 2010

Explore along the Willimantic River during Walktober, a month-long series of walks and other outings sponsored by The Last Green Valley. Walks along the river are listed below. For the other events, visit [www.thelastgreenvalley.org](http://www.thelastgreenvalley.org).

**Sunday, October 10**

**Run of the Mill Walk** the mill site of the Willimantic Thread Company where the textile industry thrived for 130 years. Mile-long walk passes by mill housing and views of the Willimantic River. Meet at 2:00 p.m. at the Windham Textile and History Museum, 411 Main St. in Willimantic, two blocks from the Frog Bridge. Visit the museum afterward. Sponsored by the museum. Information: 860-456-2178

**Saturday, October 16**

**Visit the HEEP!** Tour UConn's Hillside Environmental Park (HEEP) with Ray Frigon of Ct. DEP. At a scenic lookout learn about the former landfill's remediation, then tour wetlands (with dry feet) to discover park trails and views. Meet at 10:00 a.m. for 2-mile walk on hilly terrain. Directions: In Storrs at Rt. 44 junction, go south on Rt. 195 for 1.5 miles. Turn right at traffic light onto N. Eagleville Rd. and travel 0.5 miles to second traffic light. Turn right on N. Hillside Road and follow signs to parking lot. Sponsored by the Alliance, Ct. DEP and UConn Office of Environmental Policy. Information: 860-429-7174.

**Friday, October 29**

**Growing the Greenway** Explore the growing connections of the Willimantic River Greenway. A 1.2-mile walk on the Midriver Trail passes through Joshua's Trust's Taylor Preserve, rambles down Coventry's Riverview Trail, continues on scenic Riverview Drive, and ends in Tolland's King Conservation Area. Speakers will highlight special features along the way. Carpool to return to start. Registration at least one week ahead is required by calling 860-930-7515. Directions: In Mansfield at junction with Rt. 195, go south on Rt. 32 for 0.8 miles. Turn right onto Merrow Road, cross RR tracks and bridge, then turn right onto Riverview Drive. Park on right. Sponsored by the Alliance, Joshua's Trust, and towns of Coventry and Tolland.

**Many Thanks!**

To **John Monroe** of the Rivers and Parks Program at the National Park Service, who has facilitated the Water Trail project with expertise and enthusiasm. We could not have done it without him!

To the **Water Trail Committee** members, who are working through the many stages of this project with good heart and good humor: Larry Diamond, Jim Hayes, Cynthia MacDonald, Paul Pribula, Meg Reich, Betty Robinson, Vicky Wetherell.  
To Lois Bruinooge and Bill Reid at **The Last Green Valley** for their support.

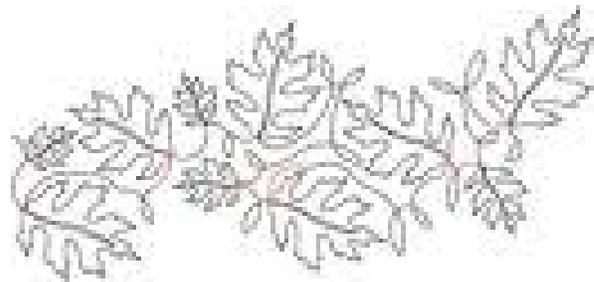
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Inquiries or submissions for the Spring 2011 Edition may be submitted to:

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or [info@willimanticriver.org](mailto:info@willimanticriver.org)

View previous newsletters at  
[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 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.

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