



Willimantic River Review

Spring 2007

President's Message

As a boy in New York City, I often envisioned living in a place with beautiful forests and rivers. At the time I did not know that this vision was of the Willimantic River watershed. Here, in our back yard is a great secret, and secrecy is its greatest threat.

The wonderful Willimantic River Greenway offers diverse opportunities for recreational pastimes. We have worked with many partners to create great trails for hiking and have plans for more. Canoeists and kayakers have the choice of open lake, lazy back waters, and exhilarating quick water. There are even plans for a whitewater park in the City of Willimantic. Fishing is always popular, as this is trophy trout water. And throughout the year the river's scenic beauty provides a respite from the day-to-day world without betraying its proximity to major population centers. Yes, we have a rare combination of solitude and access.

But this jewel, like most natural areas, is under pressure. Our communities are sprawling. The river is expected to not only supply fresh water, but also carry waste water away. Clearly, a firm balance needs to be maintained, and it is the mission of the Willimantic River Alliance to help keep this balance by building community awareness and promoting active stewardship of this sensitive resource.

As the President of the WRA, I reach out to our members, as well as residents, officials, and partner organizations, to help us elevate this awareness. And please, *Support and Enjoy Your River!*

Larry Diamond, President

Spring Paddling Tips

Water levels can make or break a canoe/kayak trip on the river. Before going out, check the USGS Willimantic River real-time stream gauge (in South Coventry) at the Alliance website's Recreation page, Paddling section. If the water level is at 4.2 feet, the river above Eagleville dam is deep enough for boats. The water below Eagleville dam is usually passable, but the ride can be rocky if the water level is below 4.2 feet on the gauge.

You can also check the water level on the Merrow Road bridge between Mansfield and Coventry. A level of 2.1 on this gauge equals 4.2 on the on-line gauge.

Safety tips: state law requires that between October 1 and May 30 each person must wear a life jacket (PFD), and year-round there must be a PFD aboard for each person. Bring an extra rope and paddle, and tell someone where you plan to launch and take out. If you are a beginner, the safest place to try river paddling is in the slow current between Plains Road bridge (Mansfield/Coventry) and Eagleville Lake. For launch sites and a river map, check the website's Paddling section.

Fishing Season Opens

The river is stocked with trout, and the first day to try for a big one is Saturday, April 21. Fishing licenses and the 2007 Ct. Angler's Guide are available at all Town Clerk offices. Year-round fly fishing (catch-and-release) is available in the Cole Wilde Trout Management Area that extends from the mouth of Roaring Brook downstream to the Rt. 74 bridge. Access is on the north side of this bridge or from North River Road in Tolland and also from the westbound I-84 rest stop in Willington.

Riverwatch

Stafford's wastewater treatment plant discharges into the river just below its headwaters in Stafford Springs. When the plant's **permit was recently renewed** by DEP, the Alliance requested an extension of the period when wastewater is treated with ultraviolet light to destroy bacteria. This request was granted, so the treatment will be in effect from April 1 to October 30. Stafford voters recently approved **funds to improve the treatment plant**, which has been subject to a DEP administrative order requiring an upgrade. The plant had been cited in 2003 by DEP for exceeding metal limits. Now in the design phase, the upgrades are slated to be completed by 2010.

Stafford's Water Pollution Control Authority recently approved the **extension of a sewer line** from Stafford Springs along Route 190 for three miles to Johnson Memorial Hospital. The resulting expanded uses at the hospital, a proposed retirement community, and new commercial uses along Route 190 will significantly increase the outflow of the treatment plant. The plant is permitted to treat three million gallons per day (MGD); the current use is 1.6 MGD. Construction would be complete in mid-2008.

In Mansfield, Eagleville Brook flows from UConn's Storrs campus into Eagleville Lake, an impoundment in the Willimantic River. **Sections of this brook lack aquatic life** due to a variety of possible causes, including flushes of stormwater runoff after rainfall. The Ct. DEP submitted a Total Maximum Daily Load analysis to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency with proposals to address this problem. The Alliance provided comments and suggestions for this analysis. DEP has received recognition from EPA for its innovative approach, using reduction of impervious surface (and its runoff) as a measure of progress in solving this complex water quality impairment to the brook. The Alliance has offered assistance with the upcoming Water Quality Improvement Plan for the brook's watershed.

The Greenway Grows

In 2003, the Alliance nominated the river as an official state greenway. Since then, nine riverside towns have completed or initiated greenway projects.

TRAILS: The 2-mile Highland Trail in **Stafford** was cleared and blazed. It begins at the Witt Middle School parking lot on Highland Terrace and climbs to

ridgetop views of the river valley. The **Ellington** Conservation Commission is considering options for extending this trail.

The Midriver Greenway Trail continues to grow. **Tolland** is planning an extension of this trail from the Coventry line north through the King property. **Coventry** is considering options for extending this trail south from the Brigham Road/Plains Road bridge to Eagleville Dam. Eventually, the Midriver Greenway Trail will be 5-to-6 miles long.

Windham received a \$1.2 million grant to build a section of the East Coast bikeway across new pedestrian bridges over the river and through Willimantic. Design work will begin in 2007.

BOATING: **Willington** is developing a design for a canoe landing at the former Peck's bridge and mill in South Willington. In **Mansfield**, the River Park design is complete and construction will begin on a canoe launch and parking lot on Plains Road in 2007.

PARKS: **Windham** dedicated its new park, The Garden on the Bridge, which will offer flower gardens along with scenic views of the river and restored mills. The Willimantic Whitewater Partnership is purchasing the Boland property, a key parcel in the proposed riverside park in Willimantic.

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION: Tolland received a DEP Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant to purchase development rights to the 174-acre King property. This preservation project will protect the river's water quality and provide a half-mile of riverside access for fishing and walking.

Many Thanks to

Willimantic River Yacht Club for sponsoring 29 annual races on the upper river and for your continuing stewardship by sponsoring work days to keep the boating passage open. The Alliance hopes to resume the race next year. If you can help with clean-up days or the race, send us an email. **Marianne Piche** and **Bruce Rich** for serving on the Alliance board and for their help with Alliance events and projects. We wish you the best in your new locations! **Betty Robinson** for leading AMC canoe/kayak outings on the river for many years. We hope to see you on the river again next year!

Calendar

Sunday, April 22

Earth Day Celebrate at the Mansfield Community Center from 1 to 3 or at the UConn Co-op Bookstore's Sustainable Book Fair and Conference on the Storrs campus. Exhibits, talks and demonstrations. Visit www.mansfieldct.org or www.bookstore.uconn.edu for more information.

Saturday, May 5

Paddle Down the Upper River Canoe or kayak with the Willimantic River Yacht Club for 8 miles from Tolland to Mansfield. For experienced paddlers with their own boats. Bring water and lunch. Life Jackets required. Call 872-8683 for the time and meeting place. Sponsored by Tolland Recreation Dept.

Sunday, May 20

Fourth Annual Riverfest is sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce as a celebration of the river. Bike, hike, and canoe/kayak trips begin at 8:30 and converge at the Railroad Museum beside the river off Bridge Street in Willimantic. There is a fee to cover insurance costs. Register for these trips at Bridge Street, then shuttle to the beginning of the trip (paddling trip is 12 miles starting at Eagleville Dam). Be sure to join the free Riverfest activities from 12 to 4 with food, music, kayak demos, and conservation events and exhibits. For more details visit www.windhamrec.com or call 465-3046.

Saturday, June 2

Ct. Trails Days Nature/History Walk An easy mile-long walk in Nye-Holman State Forest along the Willimantic River Greenway. Deborah Nye-Corgan will share the history of her ancestor's 1721 riverside farm and how it became a state forest. We will look for birds, wild flowers and remains of the farm. Meet at 10 a.m. at the Forest entrance in Tolland next to the Rt. 74 bridge. Sponsored by the Alliance. Call 742-7532 for information.

Sunday, June 3

Ct. Trails Days Hike on new two-mile loop trail in Stafford Springs. Moderate uphill climb, then easy ridge-top walk to scenic views of Willimantic River valley. Then join the family fun at the Hyde Park Festival from noon to 8. Meet at Witt School parking lot on Highland Terrace at rear of Hyde Park. Hike not suitable for young children. Hike sponsored by Stafford Conservation Commission and the Alliance. Call 684-5822 or visit www.staffordct.org for information. For other Trails Days events visit www.ctwoodlands.org.

You Can Help

Put up Greenway signs, assist with an Alliance exhibit during events listed in the Calendar, or join the AMC trail crew on the Spring Manor Trail. Call 455-0532 or e-mail info@willimanticriver.org. Thanks!

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View previous newsletters at
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 newsletter and website www.willimanticriver.org. Our email address is 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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