



# Willimantic River Review

Spring 2008

## New Parks and Trails Guide

It's time to enjoy the great outdoors! The Willimantic River Alliance invites you to discover riverside outings at scenic and historic places. Wondering where to go? The Alliance has completed a **new online Parks and Trails Guide** to the Willimantic River Greenway. This comprehensive guide is available on the Recreation page of the Alliance's website [www.WillimanticRiver.org](http://www.WillimanticRiver.org)...just in time for Spring, 2008!

Twenty-five public-access sites offer a variety of ways to enjoy the river, ranging from hiking along a high lookout in Stafford to strolling at Windham's Garden on the Bridge. Activities include walking, biking, canoe/kayaking, and discovering natural and historic features along 25 miles of riverfront. Each park or trail has a web page including directions, trail notes, photos and links to related sites. The trail notes tell you where to go and what you will see along the way. All of the sites are in Greenway towns: Stafford, Tolland, Willington, Coventry, Mansfield, Columbia, Lebanon and Windham/Willimantic.

The Parks and Trails Guide was created by members of the Alliance and designed and produced by staff of the Windham Council of Governments (WINCOG). A Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor mini-grant provided funding for this project.

## 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 River Park's launch (by the Plains Road bridge in Mansfield) and Eagleville Lake.

**Canoe and Kayak Maps:** For launch sites and maps of river features, 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 19. Fishing licenses and the 2008 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 or from the westbound I-84 rest stop in Willington.

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View previous newsletters at  
[www.willimanticriver.org](http://www.willimanticriver.org)

## President's Message

This was another great year for the Willimantic River Alliance. As always, we have been an active voice regarding water quality issues in the watershed, and we are also making important strides in enhancing recreational opportunities. Our website now has a fantastic new guide for land-based exploration along the river. Please enjoy this feature, as well as the boating guide on the site.

There is a new wave of interest in water-oriented activities throughout the state. Of note is the emergence of a new group that will tie together the organizations, clubs, outfitters, guides, and others who have a stake in our waterways. This new organization is the Connecticut Water Trails Association, and the Willimantic River Alliance is proud to be involved. In coordination with other activities throughout the state, we will be hosting an outing on Eagleville Lake on Saturday, June 14 to celebrate the launching of CWTA. Please join us at the new canoe/kayak launch at River Park in Mansfield for a guided paddle at 10:00 AM!

As WRA's activities expand, we reach out to members who are willing to take an active role in this all-volunteer organization. We are extraordinarily efficient with the funding we obtain (membership dues and grants), and our track record has been substantial and impressive. We encourage membership input and support as we move into a new era of statewide visibility. For those interested in becoming more involved in promoting and preserving this fragile resource, there are committees that need staffing and open positions on the Board of Directors. Please feel free to contact me at [info@WillimanticRiver.org](mailto:info@WillimanticRiver.org). Things are happening at the WRA, and in the coming months you will see a new logo as well as a larger general presence. Best of all, a long, wet winter has left us with good water levels, so grab your canoe/kayak, fishing rod, and hiking boots, and support and enjoy your River!

Larry Diamond, President

## Riverwatch

The recent drought lasted six months (July, 2007, through January, 2008), and impacted all rivers in eastern Connecticut. On July 27, 2007, the University of Connecticut's Fenton River wells were closed down to prevent damage to that river, as required by state

agencies. The Willimantic River wells were the only water supply for the campus and Storrs area until the end of January. When students returned in the fall, the Willimantic River's flow at the well field dipped to 3.4 cubic-feet-per-second (cfs), just above the 3.0 cfs level that closed the Fenton wells. (This 3.0 closure signal was determined on the basis of the Fenton River Study.) So the campus and UConn's water customers had a close call with not having water or else living with severe conservation restrictions. Fortunately, both the Fenton and Willimantic Rivers have returned to normal levels, and a wet winter/spring means plenty of groundwater for now.

During the drought, the University's active pursuit of short-term, voluntary water conservation efforts was helpful. UConn is also researching long-term conservation measures to reduce its own water demand (which is currently 85% of the total demand). WRA sees the need to go beyond these measures, and we continue to recommend active research into an additional water supply.

UConn is about to select a contractor to conduct a Willimantic River Study, which will analyze the river's flow and also groundwater availability to UConn's well field next to the river. Low-flow conditions will be a focus, especially since two drought periods have occurred recently (August to October 15, 2005, and the drought just ended in January, 2008). The projected completion date for this study is late in 2009, but another low-flow event will be needed to gather all of the data. Thus, the results of this study may be delayed beyond 2009. Meanwhile, requests for additional uses of UConn's water are pending. WRA has recommended that UConn delay awarding additional water contracts until the river study is completed. This will prevent potential negative impacts on the river and insure a reliable source of water for new water customers. WRA representatives will continue to attend UConn's Water and Wastewater Advisory Committee meetings and advocate for the river.

In March, WRA participated in a Water Forum sponsored by the Mansfield League of Women Voters. WRA urged private well owners to consider their role in groundwater conservation and protection, noting that "We all live downstream." Even people with private wells draw their water from groundwater shared with and affected by the actions of others.

## Calendar

**Saturday, May 3**

Paddle Down the Upper River Canoe or kayak for 8 miles from Tolland to Eagleville. For experienced paddlers with their own boats. Bring water and lunch. Life jackets required. Call 429-3206 for the time and meeting place.

**Thursday, May 15**

"Old Town" Tales Presentation by local paddling expert and author, Sue Audette, about the 110-year history of this premier canoe/kayak maker and new developments in paddling equipment. 7:30 p.m. at the Buchanan Center next to the Mansfield Library in Mansfield Center (on Rt. 89 a half-mile from junction with Rt. 195). Sponsored by the Alliance. For information, call 455-0532.

**Saturday, May 17**

Fifth Annual Riverfest is sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce as a celebration of the river. Both a canoe/kayak paddle and a 5-mile run begin at 9:30 a.m. and later converge at the Railroad Museum beside the river off Bridge Street in Willimantic. There is a fee to cover insurance costs. Register for these events at Bridge Street. Paddlers will be shuttled to the beginning of the trip (12 miles, starting at Eagleville Dam). Be sure to join the free Riverfest activities from 12 to 4 at the museum with food, music, kayak demos and conservation events and exhibits. For more details, call Windham Recreation Dept. at 465-3046 or The Chamber at 423-6389.

**Saturday, June 14**

Ct. Water Trails Celebration along the Willimantic River Blueway. Paddle from River Park in Mansfield to Eagleville Lake with Eric Thomas and Larry Diamond. This flatwater trip for canoes and kayaks will begin at River Park's new launch site. Time: 10:00 a.m. to noon. Choice of short or long trip.

Bring your own boat. Life Jackets required for all participants. Bring water, lunch optional. Moderate to heavy rain cancels. Directions: From Route 44 in Mansfield, travel south on Route 32 for three-tenths mile to a right turn onto Plains Road. In two-tenths mile, the park entrance is on the right by the bridge. Sponsored by the Willimantic River Alliance and Mansfield Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the Ct. Water Trails Association. For information, call 742-9908.

### Many Thanks to

WINCOG staff members **Dagmar Noll** (for design and production) and **Jana Butts** (for map updates) of the new Parks and Trails Guide.

**Diane Wright** and **Skip Copeland** for their helpful contributions to the WRA board. We wish you well in your new endeavors.

**Willington Conservation Commission** for making Peck's Mill a unique canoe/kayak destination.

### Wise about Water

For a water conservation tour of your home, visit [www.h2ouse.org](http://www.h2ouse.org) which has many useful tips for saving water.

**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](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.

**Spring 2008**

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