



# Willimantic River Review

Spring 2010

## Water Trail Celebration

As part of The Last Green Valley's "Source to Sea" project in 2009, three Water Trails were developed along the Quinebaug River. This year TLGV is expanding its effort to other rivers in northeast Connecticut, and the Willimantic River Alliance is participating by formally designating the **Willimantic River Water Trail** from Stafford to Windham.

Although paddlers have enjoyed the river for many years, this project will improve access to the river and provide better information about water features. With help from John Monroe of the National Park Service, a steering committee has inventoried current and potential launch sites and is drafting an updated Paddler's Guide. This guide will be added to our website's Paddling page during the summer.

Your suggestions for the trail are welcome! Join us at our **Water Trail Open House** on April 28 to share ideas and preview the new Paddlers Guide. Or come to River Park in Mansfield on **National Trails Day** (June 5) for an official ribbon cutting, celebration and family paddle along the river. Check the Calendar inside for details.

## River Study Results

When the University of Connecticut's wells draw water from the aquifer adjacent to and under the river, they reduce the river's flow next to the wells and, to a lesser extent, downstream for two miles to Eagleville Lake. The **Willimantic River Study** was proposed to find out how much flow is needed to sustain aquatic life in the river and how withdrawals by the UConn wells could affect that necessary amount of flow.

In 2008, UConn contracted with Milone & MacBroom to perform this study, which is nearing completion. M & M found that, for most of the year, there is enough water for both wells and stream flow at UConn's current level of water usage. Problems have occurred during low flows in summer and early fall when warm weather and returning students create high water demands. The February, 2010 draft study recommends low-stream-flow thresholds that could trigger water

conservation actions at UConn and the surrounding Storrs area. If the new Merrow in-stream USGS gauge upstream of the wells drops to 15 cfs (cubic feet per second passing by the gauge), then water conservation measures should begin. If the gauge drops as low as 8 cfs then water withdrawals should be reduced or an additional water source should be used. (In the Fall 2007 drought, stream flow by the wells was as low as 8 cfs.)

The study recommends potential solutions to address the seasonal low-flow/high-demand period. 1) Reduce UConn's need for well water by creating a reclaimed water facility (recycled water system) to supply the 500,000 gallons per day needed by the central utility/cogeneration plant on warm days. 2) Create additional water sources, such as drilling new wells or piping water from the Shenipsit Reservoir in Tolland. 3) During low flows, supplement the river's flow by releasing additional water from impoundments (reservoirs) upstream in Stafford and Ellington. Any of these measures would help preserve an adequate flow for aquatic life in the river.

The Alliance was represented on the study's Technical Advisory Group by Meg Reich. Recently, WRA submitted a letter of support for the study's recommendations. This study (and the Fenton River Study) will provide a scientific basis for UConn's upcoming update of its Water Supply Plan and will help protect the natural features and wildlife in both rivers.

## Riverwatch

\*Ct. DEP has proposed the first **Connecticut Stream Flow Standards and Regulations**. During the public comment period, WRA submitted a letter supporting the proposal as an important tool to maintain the health of the state's rivers. We also submitted suggestions for changes that could improve the effectiveness of the proposed regulations.

We raised an **important question**: Would those who have a current diversion permit (such as Tolland's well next to the Willimantic River) be required to participate in and comply with a "collective impact assessment" for the whole river? The proposal exempts current permit holders from the proposed regulations, but to effectively protect a river, the regulations should not address each diversion or dam in isolation. WRA recommended that a collective impact assessment must include ALL diversions. There was loud opposition to the proposed standards and regulations from vested interests, such as industries and water companies that divert water from the state's rivers. DEP will consider all of the comments and update the proposal before it goes to the state legislature for consideration.

\*The Willimantic River Alliance is represented on the new **Mansfield Four Corners Sewer and Water Advisory Committee**, which is researching improvements to the commercial area at the junction of Rts. 195 and 44 in Storrs. Failing septic systems and contaminated wells have caused DEP to advise sewer upgrades for the area. This new group is also looking into the need for a public drinking water supply. Most of the land is in the river's watershed, and this project could impact Cedar Swamp Brook (a tributary to Eagleville Lake). To ensure protection of these waterways, the Alliance is advocating for an environmentally responsible plan.

\*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 of the month. You can always contact us at [info@willimanticriver.org](mailto:info@willimanticriver.org).

## The Greenway Grows

**STAFFORD** The Norcross Wildlife Foundation has purchased 244 acres on the hillside above Staffordville Lake. This protects the immediate watershed of Furnace Brook, which joins Middle River in Stafford Springs to form the Willimantic River headwaters. NWF has preserved 8000 acres in Connecticut and Massachusetts, much of it within the river's watershed.

**TOLLAND** Last fall, Tolland purchased the 28-acre Becker property along the river. This parcel is on South River Road next to River Park, and it adds an additional 1500 feet of protected river frontage. The property will not be open to the public until a privately owned gravel removal operation has been completed.

**COVENTRY** Riverview Drive extends along the river from the Merrow Bridge to Jones Crossing Road. The east side of this road is the protected open space of Riverview Trail Park. When the Coventry Planning and Zoning Commission designated this as a scenic road, one of the commissioners cited WRA's letter of support as a factor for his favorable (and deciding) vote.

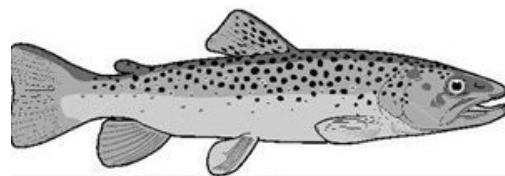
## Spring Paddling Tips

**Water levels** can make or break a canoe/kayak trip on the river. Before going out, check the USGS Willimantic River stream gauge (in South Coventry) at the Alliance website's Recreation page, Paddling section. **Launch sites and maps** are also in this section.

**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 at River Park's handicapped-access boat launch on Plains Road (off of Rt. 32 just south of the Rt. 44 intersection in Mansfield Depot).

## Fishing Season Opens

The river is stocked with trout, and the first day to try for a big one is **Saturday, April 17**. Fishing licenses and the 2010 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 between Tolland and Willington. It extends for three miles from the mouth of Roaring Brook downstream to the Rt. 74 bridge. Check the Alliance website's Recreation page, Fishing section, for a link to a TMA map.



## 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, or check out the website's **Parks and Trails Guide** and explore one of the 25 public access areas along the river.

### Saturday, April 24

**Upper Willimantic River Paddle** Canoe or kayak down this beautiful stretch of river for 8 miles from Tolland to River Park in Mansfield. Sponsored by AMC Ct. Chapter. For experienced paddlers with their own boats. Bring water and lunch. Life jackets required. Contact Betty at 860-429-3206 or [pbrobinson@snet.net](mailto:pbrobinson@snet.net) to register.

### Wednesday, April 28

**Water Trail Open House and WRA Annual Meeting** Bring your suggestions for the water trail, preview the new Paddling Guide, and have some pizza! 6:00 p.m. at Willington Pizza (on Rt. 195 a half-mile north of Rt. 32). Annual meeting at 7:00.

### Saturday, May 15

**Lower Willimantic River Paddle** Canoe or kayak for 7 miles from Eagleville Dam to the Rt. 66 rest stop. Sponsored by AMC Ct. Chapter. For experienced paddlers with their own boats. Bring water and lunch. Life jackets required. Contact Betty at 860-429-3206 or [pbrobinson@snet.net](mailto:pbrobinson@snet.net) to register.

### Saturday, May 22

**Willimantic Riverfest** Family paddling down the river from Eagleville Dam to Willimantic. Sponsored by The Chamber of Commerce and Willimantic Whitewater Partnership. Information: [www.windhamchamber.com](http://www.windhamchamber.com) or 860-423-6389.

### Saturday, June 5

**Water Trail Celebration and Family Cruise on the River** Ribbon cutting and celebration at 10, followed by an easy flatwater trip for canoes and kayaks from River Park to Eagleville Lake. Choice of short or long (two mile) round trip. Bring your own boat.

Life jackets required for all participants. Bring water, lunch optional. Moderate to heavy rain cancels. Time: 10 a.m. to noon. Meet at River Park on Plains Road in Mansfield. Sponsored by Willimantic River Alliance and Mansfield Parks and Recreation Department. For information, call 429-3015 x 204.

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Inquiries or submissions for the Fall 2010 Edition may be submitted to:

WRA, P.O. Box 9193, Bolton, CT 06043-9193  
or [info@willimanticriver.org](mailto:info@willimanticriver.org)

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

## Web Wise

**Eagleville Brook** has suffered from excessive stormwater runoff from the UConn campus and nearby development. The Environmental Protection Agency and the Thames River Basin Partnership websites offer good information about the brook's problems, its TMDL project, and efforts to reduce stormwater impacts. The Alliance website has links to these sites on the Conservation page under Current Status and Issues, Impaired Waterbodies List.

For local **natural resource information**, you can't beat a new website sponsored by Ct. DEP and UConn's CLEAR project. [www.cteco.uconn.edu](http://www.cteco.uconn.edu) offers maps with your choice of overlays showing a variety of data, from watersheds to critical habitats.

**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 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.

**Spring 2010**

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