



Willimantic River Review

Spring 2012

NRT Decision Soon

During the past two years, the Alliance has established an official 21-mile-long Willimantic River Water Trail from Stafford to Columbia. We coordinated this effort with riverside towns and the Ct. Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP).

As a next step, the Alliance and The Last Green Valley have applied to the National Park Service for designation of the Willimantic River and Quinebaug River Water Trails as National Recreation Trails (NRT). This application proposes improvements to the Water Trail's nine public launch sites, including signs, kiosks, and better water access. Maintaining the Water Trail would be shared by the Alliance, Ct. DEEP and the towns of Mansfield, Stafford, Tolland, and Willington. The Alliance greatly appreciates their support.

We await the NRT announcement by National Trails Day on June 2, when the Alliance is hoping to celebrate with our partners and the watershed community!

Stream Flow Regs Approved

After several years and three Ct. DEEP proposals, the Ct. legislature finally approved stream flow regulations in December, 2011. These will promote sufficient flow rates to allow aquatic life to survive in river and streams, especially during low-flow conditions.

Through many discussions between river advocates, Ct. DEEP and water users, a compromise agreement was reached: the regulations will apply only to dam releases as a first step. Ct. DEEP will begin stream flow classifications this year, starting in the Thames River Basin, which includes the Willimantic River. (Visit the Alliance website for more details.)

Although compromises had to be made, the limited regulations are a significant step forward. Future negotiations will address groundwater withdrawals by streamside wells. Many thanks to Margaret Miner of Rivers Alliance of Ct. for her unwavering advocacy on behalf of the state's rivers during negotiations.

A Message from the President

This may prove to be an important year for the Willimantic River, its watershed, and the Alliance. We are hoping for a National Recreation Trail designation. This would elevate all issues regarding the river, whether recreational, environmental or economic. There is no downside to this: everyone benefits, including towns, property owners and the many outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy the waterway every day.

To meet the expectations for the Water Trail, the Alliance needs greater participation from our members and the community. We are a grassroots, all-volunteer organization that welcomes participation in many areas that will help us improve our ability to deliver on our mission. Among these areas are Event Planning, Educational Programming, Water Trail Management, Publications & Website, Membership Development, and Fund Raising. We have openings for Board members and for committee members. If you feel a connection to the river, please consider sharing your energy and insight with us, or help support the Alliance with an annual donation. Most important, grab a paddle, rod, boots or camera, and spend some time with the jewel we all share. –Larry Diamond

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 2012 Ct. Angler's Guide are available at all Town Clerk offices and online from Ct. DEEP. 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.

Riverwatch

In **Willington**, a travel service center has been proposed again off Exit 74 west of I-84. After Willington's Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission denied permission in 2010, the applicant has returned with a modified proposal. The Alliance submitted comments opposing this application again, citing the potential impact of stormwater and pollutant runoff into 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 is especially concerned since there are already two large paved facilities on the east side of this I-84 exit.

Last fall, two groups used Rapid Bioassessment (RBA) inventories to assess water quality in the watershed. Shannon Rose and her students at E.O. Smith High School's Depot Campus tested water quality in **Cedar Swamp Brook** at Mansfield's Shelter Falls Park. With assistance from Ct. DEEP and WRA, students collected samples of organisms that live under stones on the stream bottom. After the samples were sorted, students found two Most Wanted species and 6 Moderately Wanted species, indicating that this stream is healthy. At **Heron Cove Park** in Tolland, Cynthia and Glen MacDonald used the same technique. They found three Most Wanted species in the river by the park. WRA appreciates these volunteer efforts and encourages other individuals and groups to form a RBA team to test other streams next fall. For information, contact The Last Green Valley Water Quality Monitoring Coordinator at Jean.Pillo@conserveCT.org.

In March, Alliance representatives used the Ct. DEEP's Envirosphere at a Girl Scout Thinking Day event in **Tolland**. This interactive exhibit

encouraged over 100 girls to try several ways to "pollute" a watershed and discover the impact that our daily actions can have on a river. The discussion highlighted ways to prevent water pollution.

The Town of **Tolland** is still negotiating a permit for increased withdrawals from the town's wells at River Park. The Town of **Mansfield and UConn** are in a joint search for more water to serve the Storrs area, either from new wells or from reservoirs in Tolland or in southern Mansfield. To prepare an Environmental Impact Evaluation, two test wells were drilled near the Willimantic River in Mansfield's Eagleville Preserve. These wells could not supply enough water to meet the projected need of over 400,000 gallons per day, but they might be used in combination with other new wells. The Alliance will continue to monitor these potential increases in groundwater withdrawals from riverside areas.

The Bolton Lakes Regional Water Pollution Control Authority is installing sewers for homes around the **Bolton Lakes** in Bolton and Vernon. Phase One is slated to be connected to the Manchester treatment plant this spring. This four-phase project to replace lakeside septic systems will improve water quality in the lakes and their outflow into the Hop River, which empties into the Willimantic River in Columbia.

NEW PARK SIGNS

Last year, the Alliance requested that the Ct. DOT put up signs along Rt. 32 so it would be easier to find parks and launch sites along the river. Now these signs point to River Park and Merrow Meadow Park in Mansfield. Many thanks to those who helped with this project: Mansfield town officials, Ct. DOT staff, and Eric Thomas, Ct. DEEP Thames Basin Watershed Manager.



WRA on the Web

It's time to enjoy the great outdoors! Visit the Willimantic River Greenway Parks and Trails Guide at 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 21-mile canoe-kayak route.

Calendar

The Alliance posts upcoming events on its **blog**. Go to our website's Events page for access.

Wednesday, April 25

WRA Annual Meeting and Open House Join us for pizza at Willington Pizza House on Rt. 32 in South Willington from 6 to 7 p.m. to share news and photos. **Margaret Miner of Rivers Alliance of Ct.** will share her insights about the latest issues. Who will receive "Spirit of the River" honors this year? Annual meeting precedes at 5:30.

Saturday, May 5

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 the AMC Ct. Chapter. For experienced river paddlers with their own boats. Bring water and lunch. Life jackets required. Contact Barry at 860-705-3828 or barrygorfain@att.net to register.

Saturday, June 2

Family Cruise on the Willimantic River Celebrate National Trails Day on the river. 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.

Spring Paddling Trips

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** for the 21-mile Water Trail 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).

Flood Facts

This year's dry spring (so far) follows the wettest year on record in 2011. Such swings in precipitation cause the river's water levels to rise and fall dramatically. For a perspective on extreme events, note these Flood Facts. Hurricane Irene's rains in August, 2011, caused a high flow of 3,035 cubic feet per second (cfs) past the Coventry, Ct. USGS stream gauge. The highest flow in recent memory was 12,400 cfs in October, 2005 (following a serious drought) when the river's level rose to just under many bridges. In comparison, the September, 1938 Hurricane's peak flow was 15,500 cfs. Since records have been kept, the all-time high flow was 24,200 cfs in August, 1955, when many bridges along the river were washed out.

Contributors: Vicky Wetherell, Meg Reich
Design and Layout: Dagmar S. Noll

Inquiries or submissions for the Fall 2012 Edition may be submitted to:

WRA, P.O. Box 9193, Bolton, CT 06043-9193
or info@willimanticriver.org

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 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. 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.

WILLIMANTIC RIVER ALLIANCE

PO Box 9193
 Bolton, CT 06043-9193

Non-Profit Org
 US Postage
PAID
 Permit No. 5
 Willimantic, CT 06226

Spring 2012