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7 Rivers Festival Highlights Wild and Scenic Rivers

Outdoor programming for all ages shows appreciation for South County’s natural waterways

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A Great Blue Heron spotting
PHOTO BY THOMAS JAMES TETZNER

Posted Tuesday, May 31, 2022 8:43 am

By Megan Monte

South County is revered for its beaches, but just inside its coastline lies equally essential waterways: its rivers. Seven of these rivers are so remarkable that the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) is celebrating them this summer in an expansive two-day festival, filled with free outdoor events and adventures.

In no small feat, the Wood, Beaver, Pawcatuck, Green Fall-Ashaway, Chipuxet, Queen-Usquepaugh, and Shunock rivers earned Wild and Scenic River status under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Established in 1968, this act protects select free-flowing rivers to ensure people can enjoy and benefit from them now and in the future. For a river to earn this ranking, it must demonstrate remarkable value and plans and entities must be in place to support and protect it. After 10 years of community effort led by the WPWA, these seven waterways were officially granted the federal designation in 2019.

To commemorate the accomplishment, the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council – formed shortly after the rivers achieved the status – created the 7 Rivers Festival, happening June 25 and 26.

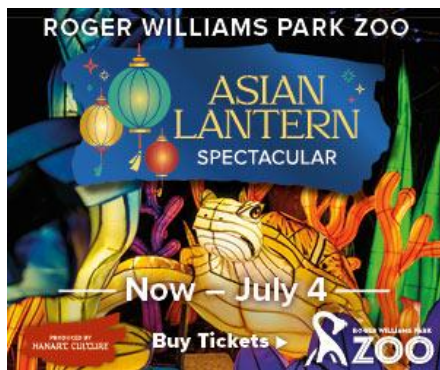
Wild and Scenic Rivers coordinator Kassi Donnelly describes the festival's mission: "The biggest goal is local pride. It's a really big deal that we have this designation, and it's really amazing that we have such natural resources in our midst. The more that we [acknowledge these resources], the better we'll be able to protect and enhance these areas."

A total of 12 towns, including some in Connecticut, are involved in the festival, which will feature a variety of free programming surrounding the waterways. The Watch Hill Conservancy and South Kingstown Land Trust will each offer guided walks; fly tying and fishing will be run by the RI Department of Environmental Management; the Exeter Library will host a rock-painting event; and KNEAD Doughnuts in Westerly will offer free donuts to festival goers. Along with a variety of other events, including kayaking opportunities, 7 Rivers Festival will have something for everyone.



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"It's not one giant location. There's a lot of small events happening all over the place," Donnelly says, emphasizing the festival's accessibility and variety. "This is a wonderful way to connect with fellow people who care about the outdoors."

While events are free, some require registration. Those looking to support the WPWA can consider membership, and people interested in serving on the Stewardship Council are invited to reach out via email.

For details, visit [WPWildRivers.org](https://wpwildrivers.org/) (<https://wpwildrivers.org/>)

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