



## **THE DRAGONFLY EXPRESS: WINTER 2024**

A WOOD-PAWCATUCK WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS PUBLICATION



**ABOVE & BELOW:** A closer look with the Stewardship Council while we are in a time of transition. A glimpse of past stories, meet our new members, and find out what's happening in the watershed!

February 12, 2024

Dear Reader,

I am writing to introduce our new newsletter the Dragonfly Express, dedicated to the preservation and protection of our seven nationally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers and their watersheds. As Chair of the Stewardship Council, I am excited about the opportunity to share the story of the Stewardship Council, its membership and this incredible three hundred square mile watershed. The Council is funded by the National Park Service. It includes volunteer representatives from the twelve towns in the watershed, and representatives from our partner organizations including Save the Bay, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, CTDEEP, RIDEM, and NPS. Knowledge and experience has been shared freely, benefiting the watershed and the towns.

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed is teeming with stories as it is with life. I am incredibly lucky to live near the headwaters of the Wood River. The Watershed is a sole source aquifer.

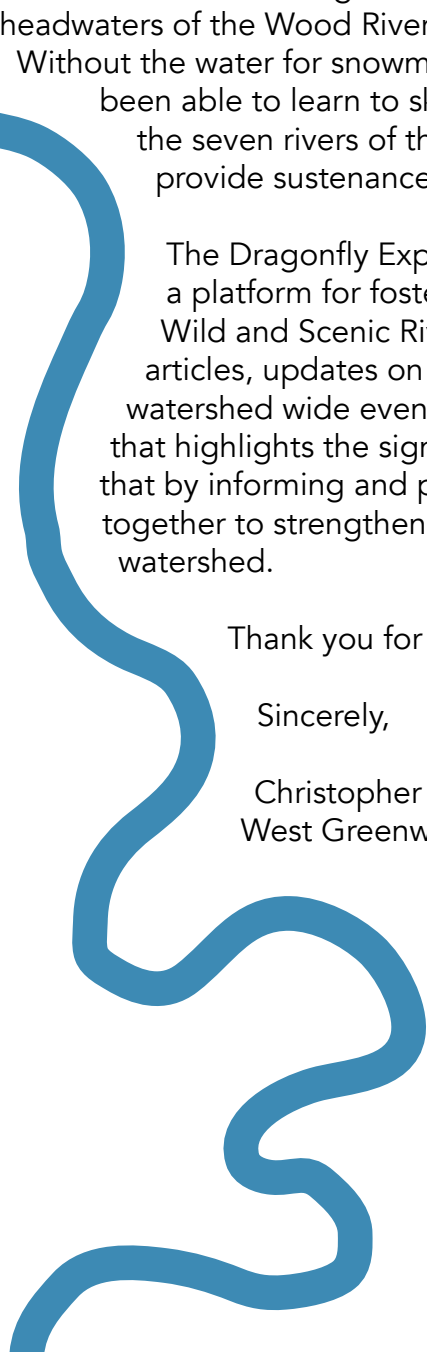
Without the water for snowmaking at Pine Top Ski Area, I would never have been able to learn to ski. From their headwaters down to the Bay, the seven rivers of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed continue to provide sustenance, opportunity, and recreation.

The Dragonfly Express aims to serve as a valuable resource and a platform for fostering awareness about the importance of our Wild and Scenic Rivers. Our publication will feature insightful articles, updates on conservation initiatives, success stories, watershed wide events from our partners, and engaging content that highlights the significance of these natural wonders. We believe that by informing and partnering with our community, we can work together to strengthen the long term health and vitality of our watershed.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Christopher Grube, Chair and  
West Greenwich Representative



## Life's Journey

By J.L. Leigh

Life is like a river.  
Free flowing and clear spirited.  
With river rhythms extolling inviting harmonies,  
As we drift along in prevailing currents,  
Swirling into a restful eddy,  
We reflect upon life's journey.  
Searching for the next line of travel,  
To pick up the quick water's vitality,  
In a river scoured by the currents of time,  
A rock garden of turbulence advances toward us.  
Bridled with determination,  
We pry, draw and post our vessel,  
And bypass lingering river obstructions,  
Tranquil water's await our call.  
Around the river bend,  
A distant light beacons our passage to an end.

*James is a teacher, poet, kayaker, canoeist, and was Stonington Town Representative to the 3-year Wild and Scenic Rivers Study Group*



## The Kingfisher

By Hilaire Cote

This piece was designed and carved as part of a new and growing Wild & Scenic Green Fall River portfolio of paintings, sculpture, photographs and found objects created by community artists.

Hilaire and his wife Kathi live right on Spalding Pond in a home and grounds they designed and built. Hilaire's workplace includes his first-floor huge woodcarver's studio; Kathi's special place is her stunning orchid-filled attached greenhouse.

# The Stewardship Council 2023-2024

## Executive Committee

Christopher Grube, Chair  
Chip Heil, Vice Chair  
Ahren Cohen, Treasurer

## Members Representing Towns:

Bob Maietta, Charlestown, RI  
Justin Andrade, Charlestown, RI  
Nan Quinlan, Exeter, RI  
Sharon MacLean, Exeter, RI  
Clifford (Chip) Heil, Hopkinton, RI  
David Augustyn, Hopkinton, RI  
Ahren Cohen, North Kingstown, RI  
Madeline Jeffery, North Stonington, CT  
Elaine Caldarone, North Stonington, CT  
Antonia Bryson, Richmond, RI  
Denise Poyer, Richmond, RI  
Fred Wagner, Stonington, CT  
Christopher Grube, West Greenwich, RI  
Patricia Lardner, West Greenwich, RI  
Richard Smith, Westerly, RI  
Tom Halavik, South Kingstown, RI  
Ali Gretchner, South Kingstown, RI

## Member Agencies and Partners:

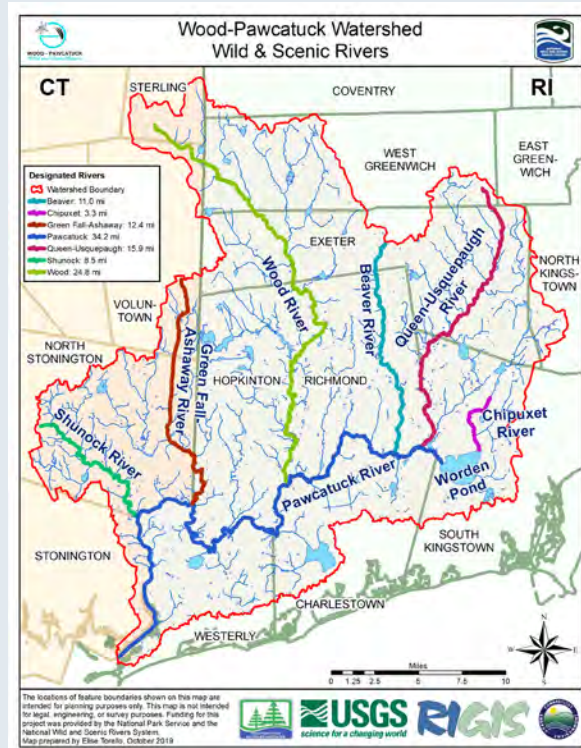
Eric Thomas, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection  
Corey Pelletier, RI Department of Environmental Management  
Jamie Fosburgh, National Park Service  
Lauren Bonatakis, National Park Service  
Catie Alves, Save the Bay

## Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinator:

Casey Merkle, Westerly, RI



**A Stewardship Council was established in early 2019 with representatives from the twelve towns in the watershed, along with state agencies and other non-profit conservation organizations.**



**The Council's mission is to help preserve, protect and enhance the special environmental, cultural, and recreational values of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed and its Wild and Scenic Rivers and tributaries in Rhode Island and Connecticut for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.**

## Thank you, Eric and Pete!

The Stewardship Council would like to express their heartfelt gratitude for your dedicated and tireless efforts as members of the Stewardship Council.

Your commitment to conservation and strengthening partnerships within our watershed has not gone unnoticed. Your passion for environmental protection and your unwavering dedication to the principles of stewardship are truly inspiring. It is evident that you invest significant time, energy, and expertise to ensure the well-being of our Wild and Scenic Rivers for current and future generations.

We recognize Pete August for his fortitude and leadership on the Stewardship Council through the study and facilitation of the Wild and Scenic designation process. And, Eric Thomas, newly retired from CT DEEP after 37 dedicated years of service, for his invaluable contributions to Connecticut's Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. We wish you both luck on your next adventures!

Sincerely,  
The Stewardship Council



# WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Ali Gretchner  
South Kingstown, RI



I have been fortunate enough to have lived in South Kingstown for the past 20 years. Despite the two decade time period I've spent calling this place my home, I was only made aware of the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Council two short months ago. I saw that a town representative position needed to be filled and I was so excited to learn more. I have always been passionate about nature and sustainability, so I thought if this is an opportunity to make a difference, I'd be a fool to pass it up. I'm looking forward to getting my feet wet, literally and figuratively, and deeping my roots in the beautiful town of SK.

Tom Halavik  
South Kingstown, RI



I'm a lifelong Rhode Islander, and am a South Kingstown resident going on 12 years. I've been a biologist of 43 years, 22 with NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service as a Fisheries Researcher and 21 as Senior Coastal Fish and Wildlife Biologist with USFWS. I'm semi-retired, skipping boats for DEM, URI and USFWS, on various conservation projects. I have hiked, fly fished and canoed nearly the entire Wood-Pawcatuck watershed and in 2011 received the WPWA Salomon Award for exemplary conservation and preservation in the watershed. My passions? Family, adventure, travel, camping, boating and inspiring others to cherish this unique state and its incredible natural resources and beauty

Sharon MacLean  
Exeter, RI



I am a resident of Exeter, RI, for 34 years now and felt the need to do more for my community after retirement from NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service where I studied the pathobiology of marine and estuarine fishes on topics ranging from contaminant effects to infectious diseases. In addition to being active in the Exeter Historical Association and on the Exeter Historical Cemeteries committee, I was selected by the Town Council to serve on the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council. I look forward to contributing to this important and very worthwhile effort. I enjoy open-water swimming, sailing,

kayaking, wandering in the woods, exploring new places, and Rhode Island has it all. I'm excited to help restore natural river flows and create community spaces for enjoyment and education of the public about our wild and beautiful rivers, all while learning so much more about the amazing history of our watersheds.

Denise Poyer  
Richmond, RI



I have worked for the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) for 25 years, retiring in 2019. As their Program Director, I developed all of WPWA's educational and recreational programs. I was responsible for WPWA's water quality monitoring and scientific research programs. I have an undergraduate degree in Wildlife Biology and Environmental Management and a master's degree in Environmental Education from the University of Rhode Island, specializing in watershed education.

My last position at WPWA was Project Coordinator for the Wild and Scenic Study Committee. My favorite part of working at WPWA was the opportunity to introduce people to the natural wonders of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. In my spare time, I sharpen my botany skills and lead nature hikes and paddle trips for the RI Wild Plant Society and the Narragansett Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club, as well as WPWA.

As an avid outdoors woman, my adventures have led me through the mountains of northern New England. In addition, I share my skills as a facilitator at leadership development training and other instructional workshops as an instructor for the AMC Mountain Leadership School, which teaches participants how to lead others safely in the mountains. I've presented at local, regional, and national conferences. I serve on the RI Environmental Education Association board, the RI Trail Advisory Committee, and the Richmond Rural Preservation Land Trust. I also have my ACA Certification for kayak instruction. For leisure, I enjoy hikes with my husband, Ed, and golden retriever, Sierra.

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## STAFF

Casey Merkle  
Westerly, RI



I'm the Coordinator for the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council. I have a MA in Nature-Culture-Sustainability Studies from the Rhode Island School of Design, and a BA in Biology with a focus in Aquatic Ecology from Lawrence University, in Appleton, Wisconsin. I'm interested in building and maintaining cooperative organizational capacity to achieve equitable outcomes in project planning, design, and implementation across the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed. You can catch me on hikes, riding my blue bike, growing food, or out catching (and missing) waves. I'm also a certified bike safety instructor.

# Measuring Stream Flow at Pendleton Hill Brook, Grindstone Hill Road

By Madeline Jeffery, North Stonington



generously donated for the water gage and bridge crossing by a friendly neighbor; those same embankments have been permanently protected for the past 25 years as part of an 80 acre preserve by a local North Stonington land trust.

Pendleton Hill Brook flows with another beautiful North Stonington brook, Wyassup Brook, into Spalding Pond, into nearby Green Fall River, then into the Ashaway and Pawcatuck Rivers and out to the Bay and Sound. What a glorious trip!

Grindstone Hill Road in North Stonington crosses over Pendleton Hill Brook, home to one of Connecticut's 138 Flow Station Gages. It was built 66 years ago by USGS after a methodical location search. Notes from 1958 tell of the brook's embankments, being





**FEATURE ARTICLE: NATURE AT WORK IN EXETER  
BY NAN QUINLAN, EXETER**

North Stonington loves its beautiful forested brooks, which for so many years were the community's work horses. They are now at rest as they flow through this same community's back yards, farm lands, and woods.

Visit "[Gage at Pendleton Hill Road of Clarks Falls](#)" # **USGS-01118500** for daily, weekly, monthly, data reports from 1958-1922 and more.



## **Nature at Work in Exeter**

By Nan Quinlan, Exeter

Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council members along with our partner, Save the Bay and their volunteers, joined Exeter Library Staff and Exeter residents for two demonstration projects to exhibit how native plants support wildlife in the watershed, particularly pollinators, and how installing a simple Rain Garden aids in preventing the addition of pollutants in the ground.

The first project took place at the Exeter Library in an area alongside the parking lot. Volunteers planted hardy native plants that can survive in the hot sun and in cold temperatures. Many different types of pollinators from bees to butterflies visit the garden. The library is planning to conduct workshops on growing natives in the home landscape.

**FEATURE ARTICLE: NATURE AT WORK IN EXETER  
BY NAN QUINLAN, EXETER**



ditch, pollutants were removed before the water made its way to streams and rivers.

Carefully planted native shrubs and flowers not only help in the removal of pollutants but attract pollinators to the garden. The result enhances the well-maintained Town Hall landscape with flowers all season long.

Would you like to be featured in our quarterly newsletter? Share your ideas with us at [wpwildrivers@wpwa.org](mailto:wpwildrivers@wpwa.org)!

The second project, a Rain Garden, took place at the Exeter Town Hall. Stewardship Council members along with our partner, Save The Bay and volunteers, Exeter Town Hall staff, Exeter town maintenance staff and Exeter residents designed and implemented a plan to capture rainwater off the Town Hall roof at two locations. The water was channeled to a shallow ditch, and by passing through the soil and roots of the native plants placed along the



**PHOTOS COURTESY OF MADELINE JEFFERY AND NAN QUINLAN**

# What's happening watershed-wide?

Upcoming events February-March.  
Follow the links for more information

## **Friends of Pachaug Forest**

February 10, 10:00am-12:00pm  
[Annual Members Meeting at the Ekonk Community Grange](#)  
Sterling, CT

March 23, 8:30am-5:00pm  
[CT BOATING/PWC SAFETY COURSE at Pachaug Outdoor Club](#)  
Griswold, CT

## **Ocean Recovery Community Alliance**

February 25, 1pm-3pm  
[Cleanup at Westerly Town Beach](#)  
Westerly, RI

## **RI Audubon**

February 10, 1:30pm-3:30pm  
[Winter Beach Walk with Audubon](#)  
Kingstown, RI

February 15, 2:00pm-3:00pm  
[Collecting Baseline Data in a Changing World at Westerly Library](#)  
Westerly, RI

March 2, 9:00am-4:00pm  
[Birds and Brews](#)  
Exeter, RI

March 22, 6:30pm-8:30pm  
[Woodcocks and Wine](#)  
Exeter, RI

## **RI DEM**

February 12, 12:00pm-1:00pm  
[Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance](#)  
Online

## **RI DEM continued...**

March 2, 9:00am-3:00pm  
[Connecting in the Garden, Growing Together Again at URI](#)  
Kingston, RI

March 22  
6:00pm-8:00pm  
[Carolina Vernal Pool Night](#)  
Richmond, RI

## **RIFCO**

February 17 & February 24, 9am-12pm  
[Woodland Owners Workshop \(WOW\)](#)  
West Greenwich, RI

## **RI Land Trust Council**

March 9, 8:30am-5:00pm  
[RI Land and Water Conservation Summit](#)  
Kingston, RI

## **RI Natural History Survey**

February 25, 2:00pm-4:00pm  
[RI Nature Video Festival](#)  
Providence, RI

## **RI Wild Plant Society**

February 21, 2:00pm-3:30pm  
[Beechwood Lecture: Soil Testing and Drought Tolerant Turf Options](#)  
North Kingstown, RI

## **Save the Bay**

Multiple dates  
[Volunteer Clean-ups](#)

## **South Kingstown Land Trust**

February 24, 6:00pm – 8:00pm  
[Full Moon Hike at Weeden Farm](#)  
South Kingstown, RI

March 1, 9:00am-11:00am  
[Guided Hike at Alewife Brook Trail South](#)  
Kingstown, RI

**Tomaquag Museum**

February 26, 12:00pm-1:00pm

[Virtual Lunch and Learn: Language](#)

Reclamation

Online

February 27, 7:00pm-8:00pm

[Monthly Book Club: The Seed Keeper](#)

Exeter, RI

March 25, 12:00pm-1:00pm

[Virtual Lunch and Learn: Girl Power](#)

Online

March 26, 7:00pm-8:00pm

[Monthly Book Club: Blood Sisters](#)

Exeter, RI

**Westerly Land Trust**

February 8, 10:00am-12:30am

Thursday Hike: Mount Misery

Voluntown, CT

February 15, 10:00am-11:30am

[Thursday Hike: Wahaneeta Preserve](#)

Westerly, RI

February 20, 10:00am-11:30am

[Genuine Geologists: Barlow](#)

[Nature Preserve](#)

Westerly, RI

February 22, 1:00am-12:00pm

[Thursday Hike: Bradford Preserve](#)

Bradford, RI

February 25, 11am-1pm

Volunteer Stewardship Day:

Cottrell Family Preserve

Email [mdoherty@westerlylandtrust](mailto:mdoherty@westerlylandtrust)

Westerly, RI

February 29, 10am-1pm

[Thursday Hike: Charlestown Moraine](#)

[Preserve and Schoolhouse Pond](#)

[Preserve](#)

Charlestown, RI

February 29, 5:30pm-8pm

[Houseplants 101 with Plants by the Pool](#)

Westerly, RI

**Stewardship Council & RI Wild Plant Society**

March 28th, 10:30am-12:30pm

Winter Walk ID, Location TBD

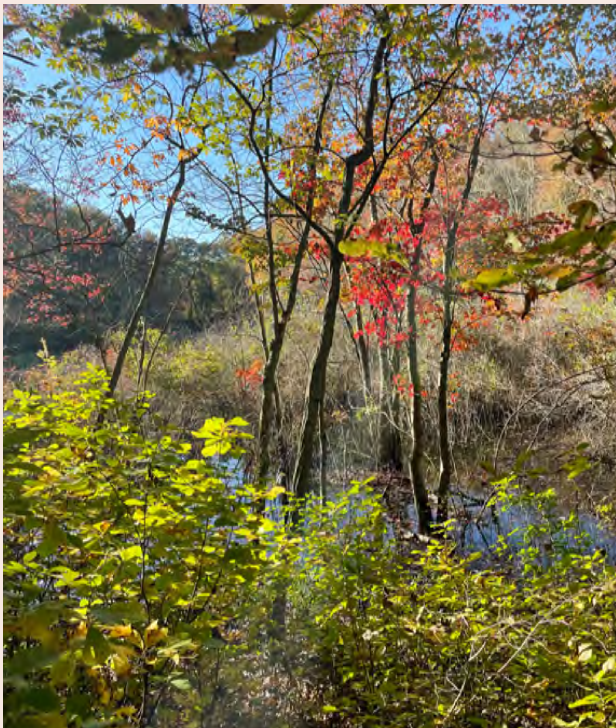
Email [wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org](mailto:wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org)

Want to be included in our shared calendar of events? Email [wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org](mailto:wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org) to find out more.

# 7 Rivers Highlight: Green Fall River

By Casey Merkle

We would like to give special attention to one of the seven rivers in the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed, Green Fall River.



Flowing peacefully through the northern forested areas and quiet villages of its southern course, visitors will find a variety of bird species here. American woodcock, prairie warblers, blue-winged warblers and brown thrasher, just to call out a few.



These photos are from a lovely hike located in North Stonington off of Puttker Rd. The trail takes you up and down, along slow-moving and seemingly still water, through vernal pools, and over entangled roots. The Sheets Family Forest Preserve Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc is sure to bring you a smile this fall with the bright oranges and yellows raining down.

## Wyassup Lake, North Stonington, CT

Have you been to this spot?



14 Located in Pachaug Forest just north of Wyassup Lake, there is a sweet, little shelter. Inside, look up and you will see a notebook tucked into the roof - somehow it's secure and hasn't moved for 3 years! Notes like friends wishing other friends happy birthdays, poems about the scenery, descriptions of snow falling, temperature logs, and more are held inside its pages. Time for a little hydrological appreciation of Wyassup Lake! The babbling brook flowing south from this lake is Wyassup Brook,

which will lead you to Spaulding Pond and Burch Pond. From there, Wyassup Brook continues to flow west for a spell, reaching one of our 7 Wild and Scenic Rivers, Green Fall River.

Back to the beginning, Wyassup Lake we see you... if you squint really hard, you'll catch a glimpse of Lake Wyassup's shimmer.



Visiting Wyassup Lake: [Directions](#) and [parking information](#).

Do you have a photo of a special place in the Green Fall River watershed you'd like to share? Send us your story and photos to [wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org](mailto:wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org).

# River Reads

Recent research, news, resources, and success stories in the watershed

## Assessment of climate change effects of drought conditions using the soil and water assessment tool (Tulungen & Pradhanang, 2024)

Several rivers and watersheds in RI are stressed because of extensive reliance on groundwater resources, particularly in the southern part of RI, and the minimal storage capacity of local aquifers. Southern RI experiences seasonal peaks in water demand due to summer tourism, amplifying water stress. [Read more...](#)

## DEM Announces Brush-Clearing Project to Lessen the Threat of Uncontrolled Wildfire at Arcadia Management Area

The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is announcing that it will conduct a project of thinning dense tree cover and removing underlying brush at the state's largest recreation area, Arcadia Management Area starting this month, weather permitting. [Read more...](#)

## Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Water Trails

Dreaming of paddling out on the river? Winter is the perfect time to plan and study your routes for this spring. Check out our story map for all the places to explore in the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed.

[Map my paddle route here...](#)

## A Win for Students, Grasslands, and Brook Trout

Thanks to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Community Grants Program, students, grasslands, and brook trout get a win for 2023! North Stonington's Wheeler Middle School were taught watershed science by Project Oceanology and traveled to Barn Island for a hands-on experience collecting water quality data and recording biodiversity. The Town of Richmond completed a grassland restoration project along the Beaver River. And, Westerly Land Trust installed a beautiful sign along Mastuxet Brook highlighting the importance of coldwater stream habitat for brook trout.



Read more about each project on our [website](#).

Have a topic you want to see covered in our newsletter? Send us your ideas to [wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org](mailto:wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org)!

THANK YOU

