



Chipuxet River: A closeup of a purple pitcher plant in the Great Swamp Management Area. The Chipuxet River slowly winds through this area, becoming part of the large complex wetland supporting many aquatic species.



**WOOD - PAWCATUCK**  
*Wild and Scenic Rivers*

**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.**

## **Stewardship Council 2023-24**

### **Executive Committee**

Christopher Grube, Chair  
Chip Heil, Vice Chair  
Denise Poyer, Secretary  
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  
William Gay, Voluntown, 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:**

Corey Pelletier, RI Department of Environmental Management  
Jamie Fosburgh, National Park Service  
Lauren Bonatakis, National Park Service  
Catie Alves, Save the Bay  
Harvey Perry, The Nature Conservancy

### **Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinator:**

Casey Merkle, Westerly, RI

April 15, 2024

Dear Reader,

We welcome the spring and the spring welcomes us! How exciting to hear the spring peepers announce their return, birds chirping in the meadows, and to feel the shifting winds bring about change to our “Wild and Scenic Rivers” and entangled watershed.

On behalf of the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council, I would like to thank you for flowing with us along this journey. In 2019, the Stewardship Council was established with representatives from twelve towns in the watershed, along with state agencies, and other environmental nonprofit organizations. We are celebrating a five-year milestone, looking back on the successes and challenges since our “Wild and Scenic Rivers” designation.

The Stewardship Council has been busy fulfilling their mission to preserve, protect, and enhance the values of our watershed and its “Wild and Scenic Rivers”. Our Projects Committee closed the second round of Community Grants after carefully considering 18 competitive proposals, 10 of which were selected, ranging from land conservation and environmental education, to community engagement and improvements to public river access.



**RED MAPLE FLOWERS NEAR THE CHIPUXET RIVER  
IN THE GREAT SWAMP MANAGEMENT AREA**

Additionally, the Information and Education Committee recently released Seven Rivers Unbound: A Wild and Scenic Journey through the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed, a podcast exploring how scientists, artists, hikers, and many others enjoy and conserve our shared watershed and its Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers.

This newsletter dives into highlights from the first round of Community Grants, celebrates our newest member, and shares what’s happening across our watershed this spring. Enjoy and hope to see you out on the water soon!

Sincerely,

Casey Merkle  
Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinator

## NEW PODCAST!

### Seven Rivers Unbound: A Wild and Scenic Journey through the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed

Explore the Wood-Pawcatuck's Wild and Scenic Rivers through Seven Rivers Unbound! Learn how scientists, artists, hikers, birders, and so many others enjoy and conserve the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed and its federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers.



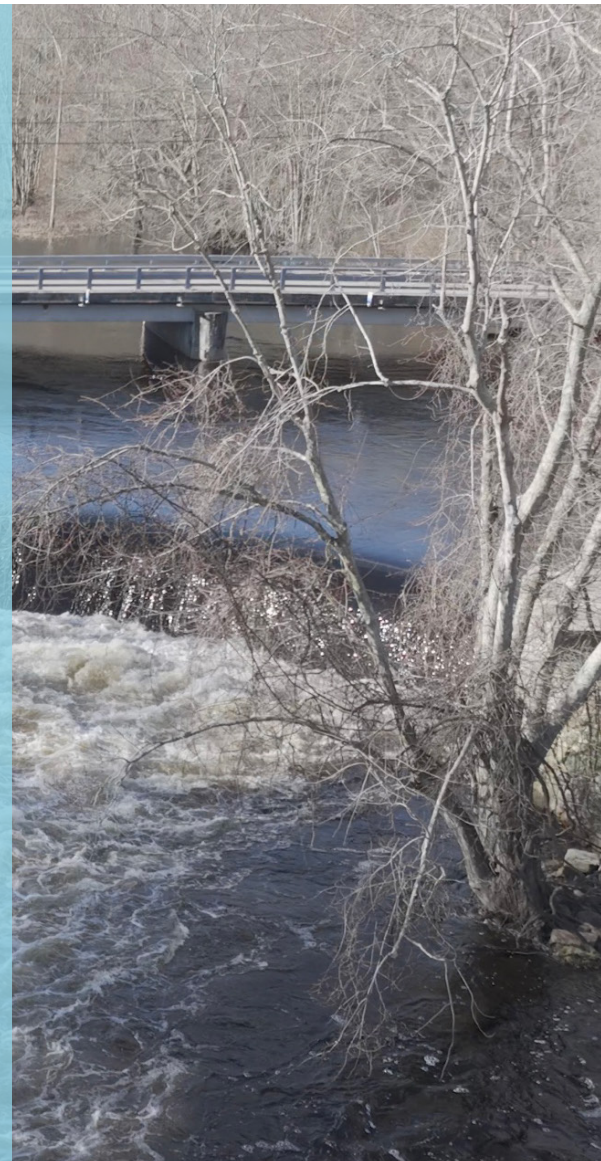
This podcast is sponsored by the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council. Subscribe through our [website!](#)

### Circus Lot, Town of Stonington Update:

The Town of Stonington is one step closer to having a beautiful park right on the Pawcatuck River. On February 26, Stonington residents overwhelmingly approved the town's purchase of the "Circus Lot" from the Town of Westerly. The town can now proceed with transfiguring the parcel into the Pawcatuck Riverside Park.



Circus Lot  
Conceptual Master Plan  
November 26, 2013



# Community Grants Highlight

Celebrating our partners' successes from the Community Grants program.

## The Unexpected Trout

By Hugh Markey, October 2023

The parking lot at Rotary Park in Westerly is buzzing as harried parents and grandparents bring children to tennis lessons. Others watch over kids who prefer to enjoy the elaborate playground equipment. Overhead, small planes buzz by as they land and take off at the Westerly Airport, just across the street. A half dozen people from Westerly Land Trust (WLT) and Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers (WP Wild Rivers) gather under a tree at one corner of the property. They're here to tour the nearby Mastuxet Brook and see one of the signs funded by a WP Wild and Scenic Rivers grant.

[Read more here...](#)



## 2023 Grants

- Westerly Land Trust
- Town of Richmond
- Charlestown Land Trust
- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Education Mapping Service
- Hopkinton Land Trust
- North Stonington Sustainability Committee & Project Oceanology

## 2024 Grants

- New England Sailing and Science & Westerly Middle School
- Town of Stonington
- Town of Westerly
- Westerly Land Trust
- Wheeler High School
- RI DEM
- Avalonia Land Conservancy
- Southeastern Rhode Island Conservation District

# Meet our Stewardship Council

## **William Gay, Voluntown**

Town Representative



Meet our newest member, William Gay. He has lived in Voluntown, CT for over 30 years and loves Pachaug State Forest!

**Words to live by:** Honesty, Compassion, Tranquility

### **First, tell us a little bit about yourself:**

I'm a retired veterinarian and ran the Pachaug Animal Hospital for almost 35 years. I retired 4 years ago. Currently, I live with my wife in Voluntown. We moved there in 1979.

Originally, I'm from Cleveland, Ohio. Following my career and job opportunities in my field brought me out here. It was rather random, but I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. I really enjoy living in Voluntown. Pachaug Forest is 60% of the town and I know a lot of people here. It's gotten more traffic through it over the years, but we're an out of the way place. People leave it alone. I'm not an isolationist, but I do like a sense of peace and tranquility.

In Pachaug, I'll go horseback riding and hiking. About a year ago, we sold our two horses. I hit the ground really hard twice in one month, and felt the universe was telling me not to do it anymore. I'll still ride

with my friend, every once in a while. There's really great spots for hiking around Voluntown, along RT 49. If you head north and see the "smoky bear", you'll find small dirt roads that go all around the forest. I find so many spots with water, small ponds, trails... it's never ending!

### **Why did you join the Stewardship Council?**

Primarily, when I saw the call for a Voluntown Representative in our Town's newsletter. I approached Casey about it and I thought it would be interesting. I'm looking to contribute to preserving what I love so much, which includes Pachaug Forest.

### **How do you want to see yourself as a Stewardship Council Member? What do you want to contribute?**

I'm not familiar with what the needs are, yet. I'm trying to learn about what is going on... learn what is needed and

look for the issues that need to be addressed throughout the watershed. However, I know that I want to connect with my town boards. To start, I'm going to a planning board or conservation commission meeting to understand the issues facing Voluntown better.

### **If you could have a conversation with your nearby river, what would you say?**

I'd like to thank the Green Falls River for giving my kids (now in their 40s) a place where they discovered nature, explored nature along the trails. The river is not as accessible here, but the pond is a big area. My son still goes there and floats around to relax... I thank the river and the pond for their contribution to my family life. The hours of horseback riding in that area, seeing the running water, listening to the streams...

Thank you!

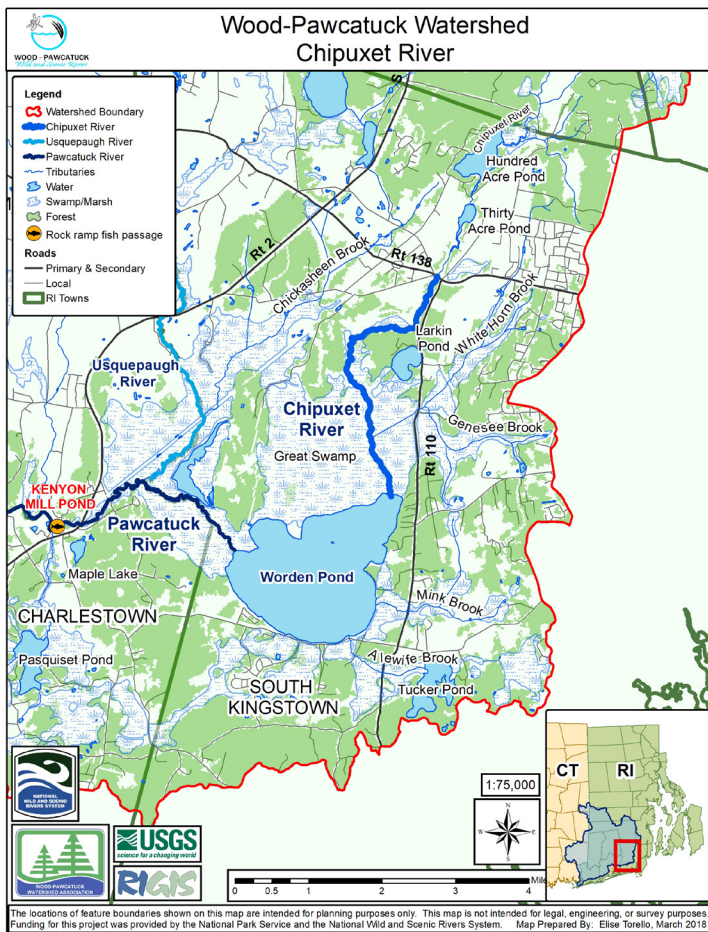
If you are looking to help our Wild and Scenic Rivers and the Stewardship Council, please email [wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org](mailto:wpwilddrivers@wpwa.org) for more information.

## 7 Rivers Highlight:

# Chipuxet River

The Chipuxet River begins in North Kingstown, RI and runs through agricultural fields and two impoundments. The river then flows under Rt 138 at a popular river access point called Taylor's Landing, where you will find a USGS stream gauge. From there, it flows slowly for 4 miles to Worden Pond through the Great Swamp Management Area, mixing with this large, complex wetland.

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- The Chipuxet River watershed is 36.0 square miles
- The river is fed by groundwater held in sand and gravel
- Public water supply wells provide all the drinking water for the University of Rhode Island and Kingston village
- Great Swamp Management Area is a National Natural Landmark filled with a large variety of wetland plants, amphibians, and reptiles
- South County Bike Path crosses the Chipuxet
- Outwash plains feed rich agricultural fields



## Artist Highlight



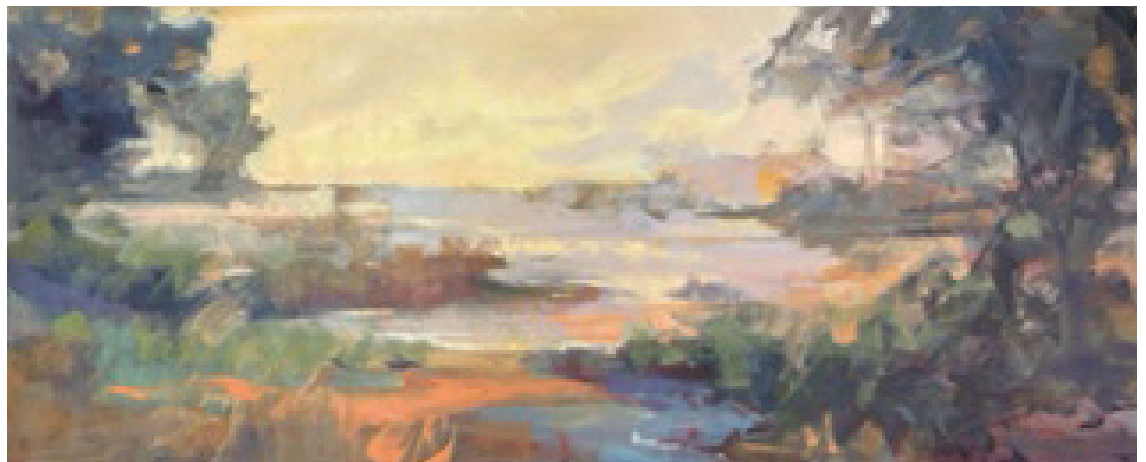
### Meet Trish Hurley

Trish is a Rhode Island landscape painter, working plein-air and much larger at her studio at the Mill in Shady Lea in North Kingstown, RI.

Her work can be seen in galleries throughout the United States. Check out her instagram for more beautiful examples of her work.

1. Upstream, acrylic, 57x28
2. Autumn Paddle, acrylic, 41x37
3. Shallow Stream, acrylic, 38x52
4. Golden Light, acrylic, 78x32

Instagram: @TrishHurley12



# What's the deal, Hydrilla?

By Tom Halavik, South Kingstown

**Hydrilla** (*Hydrilla verticillata*), has been found in two water bodies in South Kingstown; Indian Lake and Worden Pond. The presence of this species is concerning, because it grows at an aggressive rate, outcompeting many other native aquatic plants. Hydrilla can successfully reproduce by seeds or roots. It can grow a whole new root



**FRAGMENTS OF HYDRILLA ON THE BOAT RAMP AT WORDEN POND. PHOTO COURTESY OF RI DEM**

system to generate a new plant from just an inch of stem and a few leaves. It tolerates a wide range of temperatures, pH, salinity, and light conditions.

We all have a responsibility to prevent the spread of hydrilla to other water bodies. Recreational users should clean boats, trailers, canoes, kayaks, SUP's, fishing equipment, waders/boots, and anything that can carry seeds, stems, leaves, and plants before leaving Worden's Pond (and Indian Lake). These efforts will help contain the spread of hydrilla and protect our native aquatic plants that depend on our Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers ecosystem.

**FEATURE ARTICLE: HYDRILLA**  
**TOM HALAVIK, SOUTH KINGSTOWN**



**WORDEN POND BOAT LAUNCH. PHOTO BY ASHLEY SCHIPRITT**



**FLOATING DOCK AT WORDEN POND BOAT LAUNCH. PHOTO BY ASHLEY SCHIPRITT**

Boaters should always follow the **CLEAN DRAIN DRY** approach described below. Take the pledge to help protect our waterbodies:

- **CLEAN** off visible aquatic plants, animals, and mud from all equipment before leaving water access.
- **DRAIN** motor, bilge, livewell, and other water containing devices before leaving water access.
- **DRY** everything for at least 24 hours OR wipe with a towel before reuse.
- **DISPOSE** of unwanted bait, worms, and fish parts in the trash.



**STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!**<sup>™</sup>

Be A Good Steward.  
Clean. Drain. Dry.

[StopAquaticHitchhikers.org](http://StopAquaticHitchhikers.org)

# What's happening watershed-wide?

Upcoming events April-June. Follow the links for more information

## **Avalonia Land Conservancy**

April 13, 9am-12pm

[White and Red Oak Planting at the Herman E. Sheets Family Forest](#)  
North Stonington, CT

April 20, 9am-12pm

[Earth Day Expo](#)  
Groton Public Library, Groton, CT

April 21, 10am-12pm

[Honoring Earth Day with a Wild Flora Walk at the Benedict Benson Preserve](#)  
North Stonington, CT

June 1, 10am-12pm

[An Exploration for the Birds](#)  
North Stonington, CT

## **Friends of Pachaug Forest**

April 20, 8:00am-1:00pm

[Children's Fishing Derby](#)  
Driscoll Pond, Voluntown, CT

April 27, 8:30am-5:00pm

[Earth Day Cleanup](#)  
Hopeville Pond State Park Pavillion  
Griswold, CT

May 18, 9:00am-2:00pm

[May Trail Maintenance](#)  
Pachaug State Forest, Chapman Field  
Voluntown, CT

## **North Stonington Garden Club**

May 11, 9:00am-12:00pm

[Plant Sale](#)  
North Stonington, CT

## **Ocean Recovery Community Alliance**

April 20, 9am-11am

[East Matunuck State Beach Cleanup](#)  
South Kingstown, RI

April 28, 12pm-2pm

[Misquamicut Beach Cleanup](#)  
Westerly, RI

May 19, 5pm-9pm

[Wuskenau Town Beach Cleanup](#)  
Westerly, RI

## **RI Audubon**

April 26 through May 31, 8am-10am

[Friday Morning Bird Walks](#)  
Exeter, RI

April 20, 9am-4pm

[Transforming the Landscape: Audubon Native Plants and Pollinators Symposium](#)  
Providence, RI

## **RI DEM**

April 17, 7pm-8:30pm

[Sky Dance Night](#)  
Exeter, RI

## **Rhode Island Flood Mitigation Association**

May 23, 8:00am-4:30pm

[Annual Conference](#)  
South Kingstown, RI

## **RI Wild Plant Society**

April 17, 2:00pm-3:30pm

[Beechwood Lecture: Gardening with Ferns](#)  
North Kingstown, RI

May 2, 10am-12pm

Botanizing Walk Ben Utter Trail, Arcadia  
Management Area, West Greenwich, RI

May 11, 9am-2pm

[Spring Native Plant Sale](#)  
Casey Farm, South Kingstown, RI

### **Save the Bay**

Multiple dates

[Volunteer Clean-ups](#)

### **South Kingstown Land Trust**

May 1, 6pm-8pm

[Potluck Lecture: Arboricultural Oddities with Charles Yurgalevitch](#)

South Kingstown, RI

June 13, 9am-11am

[Walk & Talk: Plants & Trees of the DuVal Trail with Charles Yurgalevitch PhD](#)

South Kingstown, RI

### **Tomaquag Museum**

April 22, 12:00pm-1:00pm

[Lunch & Learn: "Water is Life"](#)

Online

April 23, 7:00pm-8:00pm

[Monthly Book Club: Colonization and the Wampanoag Story](#)

Exeter, RI

April 27, 11:00am-5:00pm

[Spring Thaw Powwow](#)

Pizzitola Sports Center, Providence, RI

June 8, 12:00pm-4:00pm

[Strawberry Thanksgiving](#)

Ningret Park, Charlestown, RI

June 24, 12pm-1pm

[Lunch & Learn, "Land Back"](#)

Online

### **Westerly Land Trust**

April 17, 10:00am-11:30am

[Eco Warriors](#)

Barlow Nature Preserve, Westerly, RI

April 21, 11:30am-2:00pm

[Clean-up Crews & Brews](#)

Westerly, RI

April 24, 10:00am-12:00pm

[Walden Book Club](#)

Westerly, RI

April 25, 10:00-11:30am

Flora Whiteley & Cottrell Family Preserve

Westerly, RI

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

## Explore "Wild and Scenic Rivers" by boat!



Enjoy guided paddles in beginner locations, with boats and gear provided. Locations will be across the watershed, highlighting outstanding natural and cultural values. The watershed was nationally designated in 2019, one of only 16 such river systems on the east coast.

Guides from the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association and Water Wanderers, LLC are happy to provide these kayak trips free to the public, thanks to the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council.

Join one, or all of these paddle trips taking place: May 16, 18, 19, 23, 25 and/or 30 depending on weather.

**Pre-registration required.** Check in the coming weeks for details and registration [here!](#)

# River Reads

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

## Centring Fish Agency in Coastal Dam Removal and River Restoration

“Several rivers and watersheds in RI are stressed because of extensive reliance on groundwater resources, particularly in This article considers the agentic capacity of fish in dam removal decisions. Pairing new materialist explorations of agency with news media, policy documents, and interviews related to a suite of dam decisions in a New England, USA watershed, we identify the ways that river herring seem constrained through technocratic discourse to particular human-defined roles in dam removal discussions. We suggest, meanwhile, that existing human relationships with salmonids like brook trout might serve as a bridge for public stakeholders and restoration managers to recognise the agentic creativity of fish in dam removal and river restoration decision.” [Read more...](#)

## DEM Reminds Boaters and Anglers to Clean Off Gear After Invasive Hydrilla Plant Found Infesting Worden Pond

“The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) announces that the highly aggressive invasive plant, *Hydrilla verticillata*, has been found at Worden Pond in South Kingstown, the largest lake in Rhode Island and a popular recreational resource.” [Read more...](#)

## House commission: DEM lacks resources to properly fight wildfires

Better communication between state and local fire chiefs is key to protecting Rhode Island forests from fires, draft report says. [Read more...](#)

## Beavers Can Help Mitigate Mega Fires in California

Yes, beavers can help stop wildfires. And more places in California are embracing them. [Read more...](#)

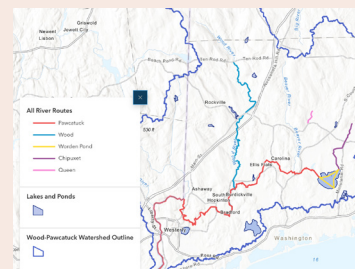
## Dam Atlas

Knowledge, Strategies, Tools, and Maps to help communities make decisions about dams. This project focuses on dams in the Narragansett Bay Watershed. [Understand more about dams here...](#)

## 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...](#)

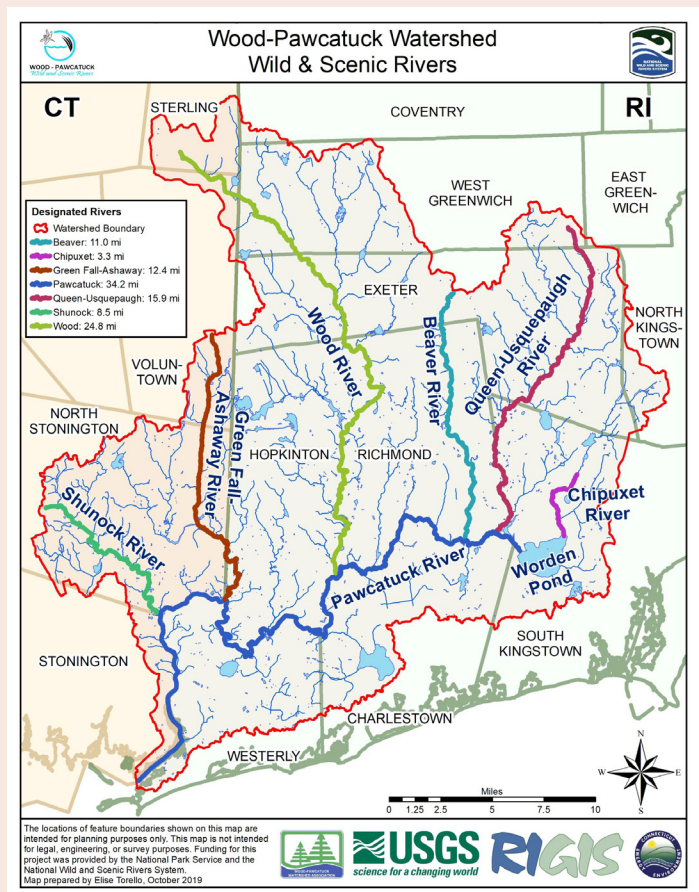


Have a topic you want to see covered in our newsletter? Send us your ideas to [wpwildrivers@wpwa.org](mailto:wpwildrivers@wpwa.org)!



**AERIAL PHOTOS OVER POTTER HILL DAM  
 COURTESY OF CORTLANDT MEYERSON | CORTLANDTMEYERSON.COM  
 @DRONEDEPLOYED**

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**THANK YOU**