

# THE DRAGONFLY EXPRESS: SUMMER 2024

A WOOD-PAWCATUCK WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS PUBLICATION



## MONARCH PERCHED ON NEW YORK IRONWEED

PAWCATUCK RIVER, WESTERLY, RI



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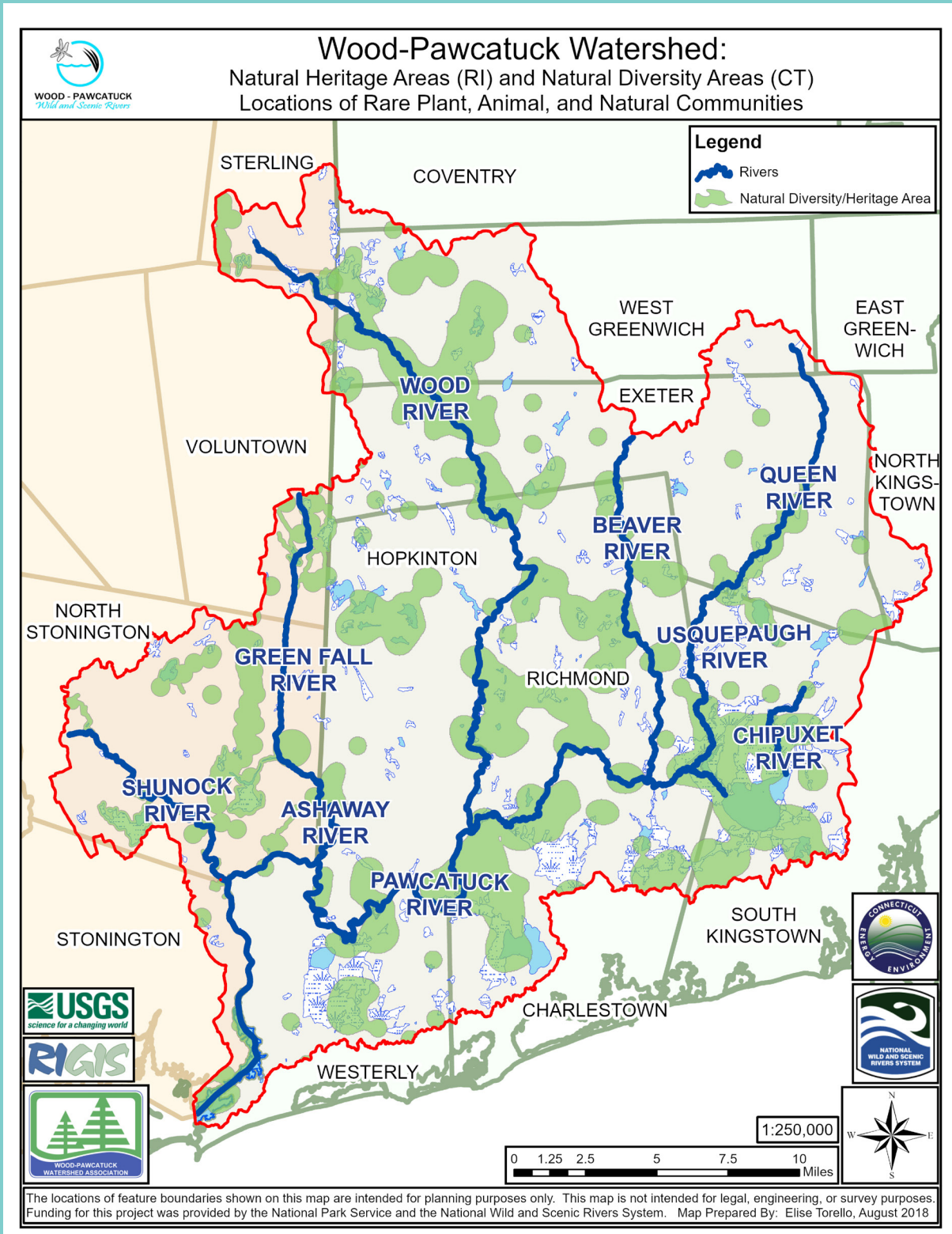
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# Cheers!

The Stewardship Council is hosting an event at Grey Sail Brewing in Westerly, RI on **Sunday, September 22** to celebrate our Community Grants Program and our partners.

Celebrate with us and meet the wonderful people who care for our Wild and Scenic Rivers!

Grey Sail will have wood fired pizza and beverages (including non-alcoholic) available for purchase.

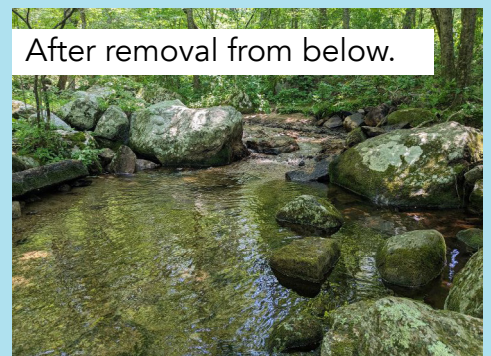


## Good News for Wild Brook Trout in Breakheart Brook/Pond Watershed

By Bob Maietta, Charlestown Town Representative

On June 17, 2024 Rhode Island Trout Unlimited (Chapter 225) and RIDEM Biologist (and Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council member) Cory Pelletier spearheaded an obstruction removal project in an unnamed tributary to Breakheart Pond, located in Arcadia Management Area in Exeter, RI. The tributary which enters the southeastern side of Breakheart Pond is documented to support a wild brook trout population and the removal of the obstruction is suspected to restore connectivity between the upper and lower sections of the tributary and Breakheart Pond. A "grip-hoist" purchased by Rhode Island Trout Unlimited via a Stewardship Council Community Grant in 2022 was instrumental in the project as was labor from volunteers representing Trout Unlimited, EA Engineering, and Save the Bay. Thank you to all who participated. A true team effort and a job well done.

The Stewardship Council remains committed to supporting the protection of wild brook trout in the watershed through the removal of all derelict dams or other man made migratory obstructions located on wild brook trout streams as well as the cessation of stocking hatchery reared trout in the Upper Wood River Watershed.



# Small River Stories

By Madeline Jeffery, North Stonington Town Representative

## Green Fall River

In Voluntown, Green Fall River runs within CT Pachaug Forest's 26,477 acres. Its Green Fall Pond sees tremendous seasonal uses of all kinds. Its sudden steep riverine drop, encased by 400 foot high rock formations is a work of earthly art. This Green Falls lineament fault is part of the embryonic rifting of Pangea, when oceans and continents banged and split.



Green Fall River, photographed by Mark Starr

## Ashaway River

Along the Ashaway River, a group of pale, yellow Ashaway Line and Twine buildings has sat since the early 1800's, seemingly quiet, removed, their machinery heard from the street, humming away. Renowned for their output of suture lines, their famous tennis strings boast names like Dynamite, Crossfire, MonoGuts, along with racquetball lines called Powerkill and Superkill. All proudly travel far from their river home.

## Shunock River

Shiny, new green and white Shunock River signs, alongside National Park Service Wild & Scenic signs now sit on either end of the stone bridge in North Stonington Village. We thank First Selectman, Robert Carlson, who helped with the signs' placement and installation. More village residents are opting for wild flowers and less mowing.



## Pawcatuck River

In downtown Westerly: a fresh new Riverfront Renewal Resiliency Project that shows off a green streetscape design that will open more downtown walking. This plan will seriously reduce business and private flooding and upgrade much needed stormwater pollutant filtering.

In Pawcatuck, Stonington: known as 'Circus Lot,' plans continue for a new 5.6 acre park right on the River. The land formerly owned by Westerly and recently sold to Stonington, with plans for people to enjoy both land and water that include fishing, a kayak launch, paths, benches, and a children's area. It is known as the 'Circus Lot' because in the early 1900's, it was a Wild West Traveling Show stopping place.

## **Wood River**

Good news from Chris Grube and his family in West Greenwich. They recently bought a camp right on the banks of the Wood River! Chris already tells about kayak trips from his riverside dock all the way to Sterling and back, and about the good fishing off his dock. When all is more settled, he will welcome the Stewardship Council to picnic at his river heaven camp!

## **Chipuxet River**

The Chipuxet River segment of three miles is really special, it is considered "Wild" by the National Park Service, a status shared by only three other stretches in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed: the 5-mile Usquepaugh, 5-mile Pawcatuck, and 13-mile Wood River segments. Altogether, the watershed has 24 "Wild" miles out of its 110 river miles. "Wild Rivers" are defined by the National Park Service as those whose "rivers or sections of rivers are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watershed or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted."

## **Beaver River**

Stands of bright red Cardinal flowers have been spotted along the Beaver River's embankments and other waterways, including brooks. Their unexpected burst of color, their being practically in the river, is startling. Exeter Town Rep Nan Quinlan, a renowned gardener, revels in the beauty of the watershed's native flowers. She does a great thing; she collects seeds from native flowers and, using her winter gardening theories, has seedlings ready for planting in spring.

## **Queen-Usquepaugh River**

At a 2017 the Wood-Pawcatuck Study Group meeting focused on the Queen-Usquepaugh River's rich dragonfly and damselfly species, North Stonington Town Rep and artist Richard Seager whipped out his pen to create the dragonfly logo still in use today. "A group needs a logo," he insisted. Impressed, W&S's first president, Jon Erickson, launched the Dragonfly Express as the group's first masthead. How can one not be dragonfly impressed with 36 of Rhode Island's 40 Odonata species found right here in this watershed?



Send your small river stories to [coordinator@wpwildrivers.org](mailto:coordinator@wpwildrivers.org)!

# Community Grants Highlight

Celebrating our partners' successes from the Community Grants program

## Investigative Adventures on Green Fall Pond

Thanks to a small Community Grant awarded to Jen Welbourne, a teacher at Wheeler High School, students gained hands-on experience in water quality sampling and kayak safety. "The most satisfying part was seeing students enjoy themselves on Green Fall Pond, away from their phones," said Jen.

Jen plans to continue water quality monitoring and student-led research annually, aligning with science standards and local environmental issues. She hopes to establish an environmental club to encourage student involvement with volunteer opportunities and local issues.

Keep an eye out for the next grant cycle in October. Email [coordinator@wpwildrivers.org](mailto:coordinator@wpwildrivers.org) with any questions! We have Stewardship Council Town and Partner Representatives eager to help! For more information, visit: <https://wpwildrivers.org/wild-and-scenic-community-grants/>



Students making their own watershed model



Students paddling on Green Fall Pond

# Meet our Stewardship Council



**Catie Alves, Ph.D.**

**Save the Bay**, Partner Representative

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

I'm the South County Coastkeeper with Save The Bay, where I collaborate with various stakeholders to conduct long-term watershed monitoring, advocate for green infrastructure, and improve climate resilience. A big portion of my job is visiting, monitoring and protecting some of the places that I grew up exploring -- all throughout South County. I lived out of state for about a decade, where I studied biology at Connecticut College and

obtained a Ph.D. in ecology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I recently settled down in Charlestown with my husband, and we've been having fun kayaking, gardening, and cooking with our daughter.

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

I first heard about it when I joined the team at Save The Bay as the organization was instrumental in the process to achieve the national designation. I serve on the council because I believe it is important to have diverse stakeholder groups with varying expertise collaborating to protect our natural resources.

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

I see myself providing general support to the Council while trying to advance some of our longer-term goals related to water quality monitoring and advocacy. I love learning from the Council Members, especially the Town Representatives. I want to guide meaningful and sustainable projects that benefit the entire watershed.

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

I would thank her (the Pawcatuck) and ask her how she's doing. It's one thing for people to categorize the "health" of an ecosystem by our own metrics, but I'd love to learn more about the Pawcatuck River from her own perspective.

## **In what ways are you still the same person as you were as a child?**

I've always been a big feeler so I still am very expressive, passionate, and caring -- if I care about something then I will give it my all.

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

## Artist Highlight

### Christine McIntyre-Hannon



In fifth grade, Christine dreamed of being a zoologist but shifted to art due to her passion for painting and drawing. Her love for wildlife led to a senior project on endangered species and later to a commissioned mural of the Wood River, depicting its above and underwater ecosystems. Inspired by museum exhibits, she created a scientifically accurate landscape highlighting local species.

∞ Her mural aims to raise awareness, especially among young visitors. When asked what her favorite species in the mural is, she replied a Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*). "It's just an odd, and cute animal that I think captures the attention of viewers easily," Christine explains. That a painting of a turtle can make someone stop and appreciate the curious creatures in our watershed is a wonderful thing.

Christine's drive to protect nature is still strong; she recently convinced a neighbor to preserve a vernal pool.



A snippet of the mural located at the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, Hope Valley, RI





Wood Turtle courtesy of RI DEM, photo by Peter Paton



Research process in Christine's studio



Close-up of Brook Trout from the mural

Christine is always eager to teach and mentor, and available for painting, drawing and art business workshops. Visit her website for more information: <https://hannonartworks.com/contact>



Over 100 different species are highlighted in the mural including the Wood Turtle, American Eel, King Fisher, Great Blue Heron, Cardinal Flowers, Twelve-spotted Skimmer, and more!

# Paddle Battle with Water Chestnut

## Spalding Pond, North Stonington

By Elaine Caldarone, North Stonington Town Representative

In August 2023, large mats of water chestnuts (*Trapa natans*) were discovered in Spalding Pond, North Stonington, CT. This highly invasive aquatic plant was imported to the USA as an ornamental water-garden plant and has since escaped to our quiet, shallow watercourses. Water chestnuts form dense floating mats that can severely impact a pond, displacing



Collecting water chestnut at Spalding Pond

native plant species and altering the habitat for fish and wildlife by limiting light. If the water chestnut population is large enough, water oxygen levels can be greatly reduced during their decomposition which increases the chance of fish kills.

These annual plants do die off in the winter but not before they have dropped their spikey seeds into the bottom of the pond. And a water chestnut is a prodigious reproducer: one seed can produce 15 plants in one growing season - and each of those plants can produce 20 seeds. If left unchecked, one seed can result in almost 4 million plants three years later!

To prevent further damage to the pond, Wild and Scenic Rivers' members and friends spent over 30 hours removing the plants that had germinated. Removing the plants involved pulling the floating rosettes by hand into our kayaks while wearing long gloves to protect us from the seed's sharp spines. Altogether we filled three small dump trucks with plants which we then composted off-site.



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Because seeds can remain viable in the sediment for up to 12 years, Council members have been harvesting newly germinated plants throughout this summer too.

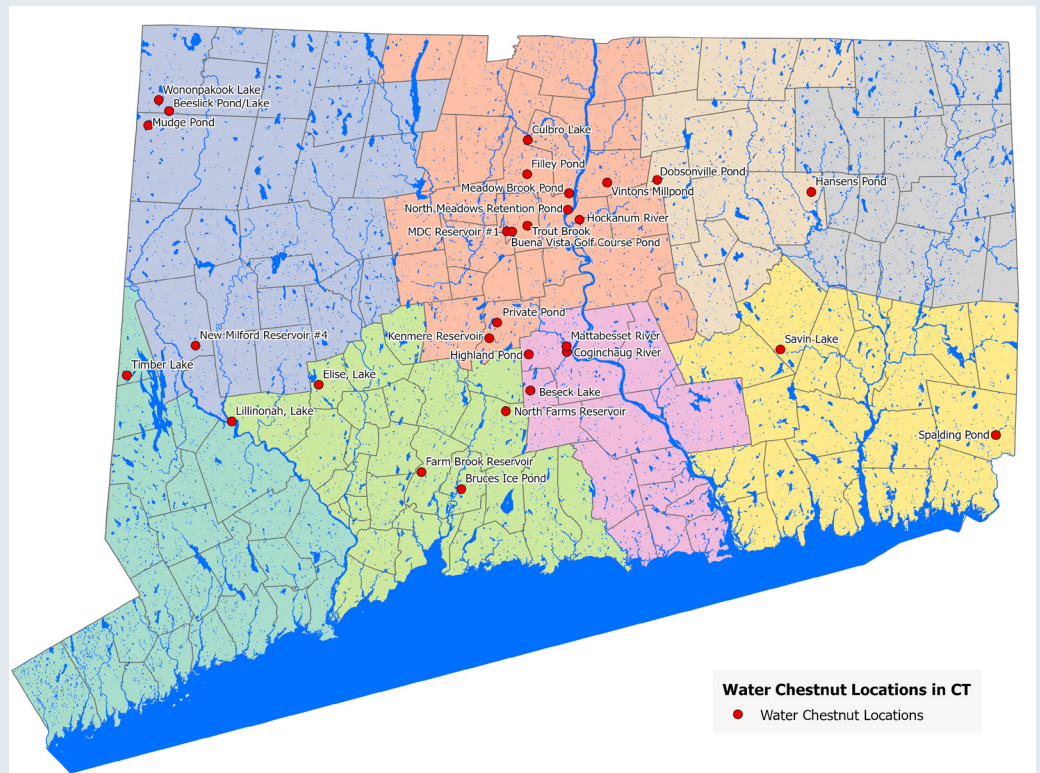
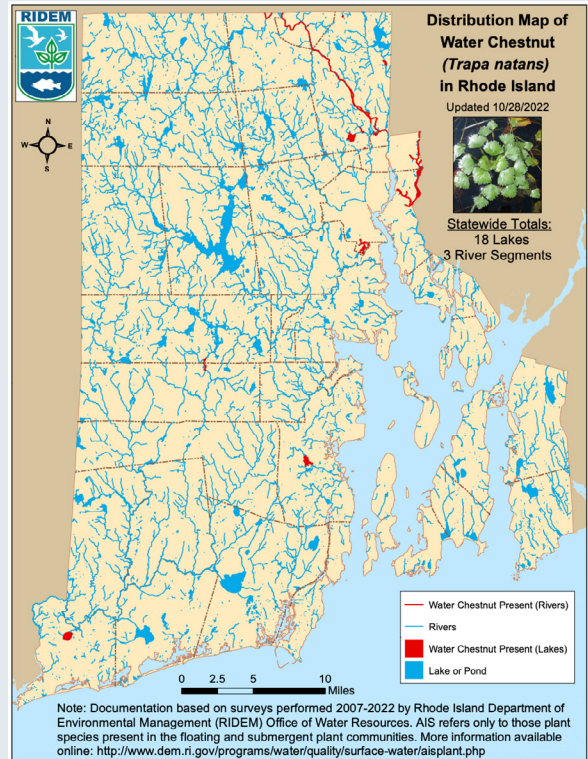
Rhode Island: If you think you might have water chestnuts in your RI watercourse, email photos and location to [katie.degoosh@dem.ri.gov](mailto:katie.degoosh@dem.ri.gov). The RI DEM 2024 Freshwater Fishing Regulation Guide contains an excellent article describing the department's efforts to eradicate the water chestnut in RI waters: <https://www.eregulations.com/rhodeisland/fishing/freshwater/keeping-our-waters-clear>

Connecticut: Sightings of water chestnuts in CT should be sent to Greg Bugbee, [Gregory.bugbee@ct.gov](mailto:Gregory.bugbee@ct.gov)

Water chestnut distribution maps:

RI: <https://dem.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur861/files/2023-06/tranat.pdf>

CT: <https://wpwildrivers.org/water-chestnut-distribution-map-ct/>



# Summer Flowers on the Wood River

By Denise Poyer, Richmond Town Representative



Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)

Take a paddle on the Upper Wood River and you will have no doubt why it was designated a Wild and Scenic River. More than any other segments of rivers in the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed, the Upper Wood River contains a dizzying array of native plants and wildlife, maintaining a healthy and vibrant ecosystem.

I always enjoy paddling the Wood River

from the Arcadia Management put-in off Rt. 165 in Exeter to the Barberville Dam and WPWA headquarters on Arcadia Road in Hopkinton. While it's beautiful year-round, summer brings dazzling flowering plants. Though low flow can make some sections tricky to navigate, this summer, thanks to regular rains, we could float over the shallow spots. So, in mid-July, a friend and I set off on our favorite river trip.

It was a cool, overcast Tuesday with light drizzle throughout our paddle. Just after launching, we bumped over shallow riffles and spotted our first bright red Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*). This wetland plant blooms between mid-July and September, with individual flowers opening from bottom to top on its spike, called a raceme. As we continued, we enjoyed the sight of Turk's-cap lilies (*Lilium superbum*) with their bright orange petals drawn back, and bushes of sweet pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*) lining the banks. The sweet-smelling pepperbush has spikes of white flowers and seeds resembling peppercorns,



Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) and Pink meadowsweet (*Sagittaria latifolia*)



Arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*)

which persist through winter. Rub the flowers in water and it may produce suds, purportedly as a soap substitute.

Other common blooms included dusty purple Joe-pye weed (*Eutrochium maculatum*) and white-flowered boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*), with leaves that are believed to “set” bones.

We also caught glimpses of the last blossoms of buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) and swamp rose (*Rosa palustris*). Near the water’s edge, we found purple-spiked pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*), water smartweed (*Polygonum amphibium*) with pink and white blossoms, and arrowhead

(*Sagittaria latifolia*) with small, elegant white flowers that have three equal petals. Pink meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), and a delicate, lavender Allegheny monkeyflower (*Mimulus ringens*), and New York ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) adorned the banks near Frying-pan Pond.

In this area, we also saw American Black Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) ripening with clusters of purple berries and orangey dodder (*Cuscuta sp.*), a parasitic plant that forms a delicate net over low vegetation. Wildlife was scarce, but just below Frying-Pan Pond, we watched a pair of American robins (*Turdus migatorius*) chase away a large great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*).

The Upper Wood River route is challenging, with twists, turns, and obstacles requiring strong paddling and navigational skills. For an easier option, try an up and back paddle from the launch at Barberville Dam, heading upstream toward Frying-pan Pond. Maps and more information are available at <https://WPWildRivers.org/maps/>.

Submit your native plants and wildlife photos to [coordinator@WPWildRivers.org](mailto:coordinator@WPWildRivers.org)!



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WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS**

**WPWildRivers.org**

## **Stewardship Council 2024-25**

### **Executive Committee**

Antonia Bryson, Chair  
Elaine Caldarone, Vice Chair  
Denise Poyer, Secretary  
Ahren Cohen, Treasurer

### **Members Representing Towns**

Charlestown, RI: Robert J Maietta  
Charlestown, RI: Justin Andrade (alt)  
Exeter, RI: Nan Quinlan  
Exeter, RI: Sharon MacLean (alt)  
Hopkinton, RI: vacant  
Hopkinton, RI: Dave Augustyn (alt)  
North Kingstown, RI: Ahren Cohen  
North Kingstown, RI: vacant  
North Stonington, CT: Madeline Jeffery  
North Stonington, CT: Elaine Caldarone (alt)  
Richmond, RI: Antonia Bryson  
Richmond, RI: Denise Poyer (alt)  
South Kingstown, RI: Tom Halavik  
South Kingstown, RI: Ali Gretchner (alt)  
Sterling, CT: Kim Gunn  
Sterling, CT: vacant  
Stonington, CT: Fred Wagner  
Stonington, CT: Sara Baker (alt)  
Voluntown, CT: William Gay  
Voluntown, CT: vacant  
West Greenwich, RI: Chris Grube  
West Greenwich, RI: vacant  
Westerly, RI: vacant  
Westerly, RI: vacant

### **Member Agencies and Partners**

RI Department of Environmental Management: Corey Pelletier  
CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection: vacant  
National Park Service: Jamie Fosburgh, Lauren Bonatakis  
Save the Bay: Catie Alves, Ph.D.  
The Nature Conservancy: Harvey Perry  
Westerly Land Trust: Marc Doherty and Jenn Fusco  
Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association: Chris Fox

### **Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinator**

Casey Merkle

**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.



**In March 2019**, after thousands of hours of community effort over a ten year period, Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut residents celebrated the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed receiving a National Wild and Scenic River designation. The watershed is now considered a Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers System under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Less than 1% of the 3.6 million miles of streams in the U.S can claim this designation!



**THANK YOU,  
THE STEWARDSHIP  
COUNCIL**



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