

THE DRAGONFLY EXPRESS: WINTER 2025

A WOOD-PAWCATUCK WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS PUBLICATION



WOOD - PAWCATUCK
WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

WPWildRivers.org

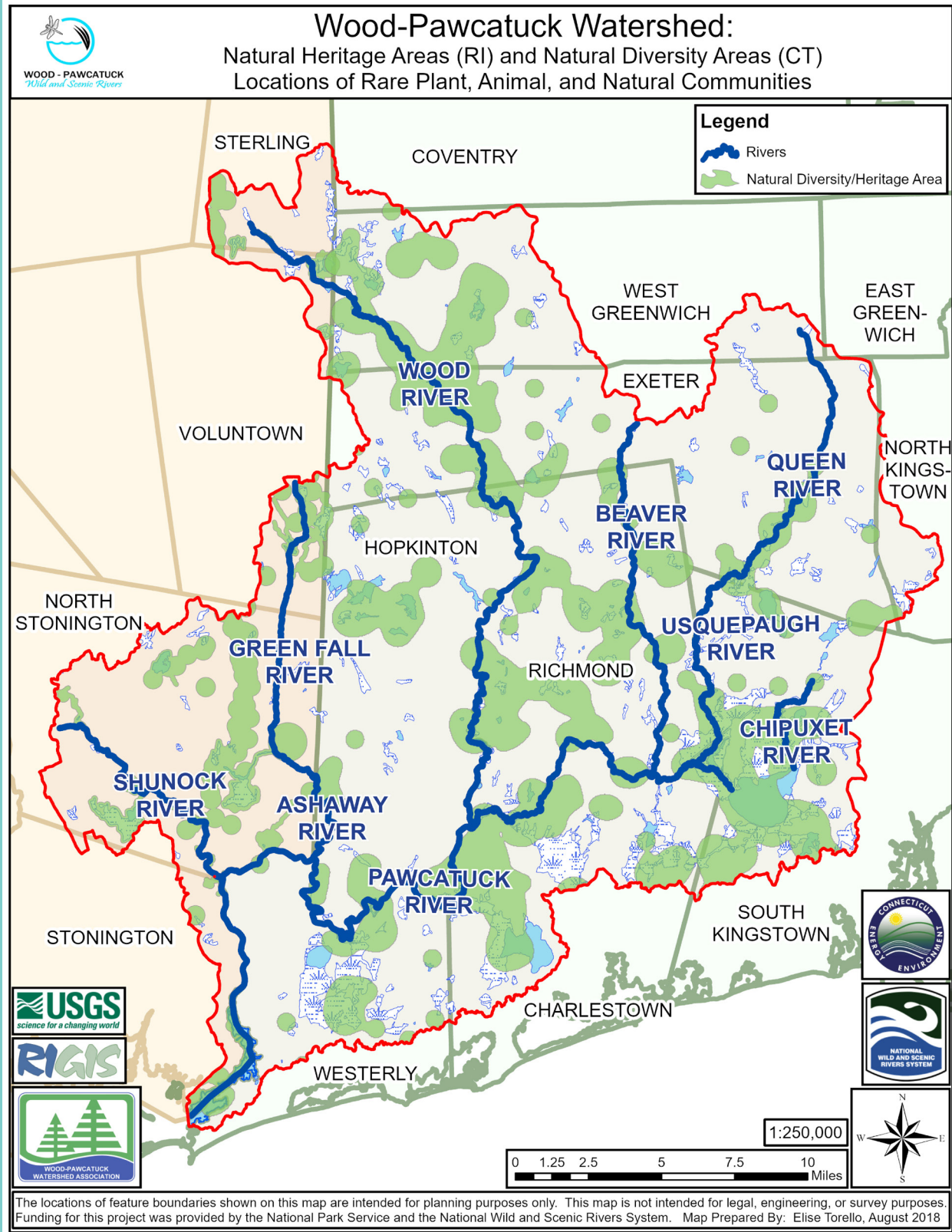
↑ **GREEN FALL RIVER LOOP,**
PACHAUG FOREST

VOLUNTOWN, CT

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Dear Readers:

Welcome to the Winter issue of the Dragonfly Express, a newsletter written by members of the Wood Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council. The Council is entering its sixth year of operation, with the first five years a blend of activities celebrating the watershed, building relationships with partner organizations, and helping towns recognize the values of the Wild and Scenic designation.

Notably, in 2022, the Council mounted the watershed-wide Seven Rivers Festival, a weekend celebration which highlighted each town, enlisted support from business and nonprofits, and informed and educated the public about our treasured resources. We have also developed a successful grants program, installed signage on the rivers, created rain and native plant gardens, restored riverbanks, helped towns identify necessary improvements to their development regulations, held paddle events and art exhibits, and created maps supporting environmental stewardship. We were able to accomplish all this due to the remarkable commitment of our volunteer members, expertly assisted by our coordinator and indispensable National Park Service support.

As we look ahead to the next five years, we are embarking on a new and promising relationship with our partner The Westerly Land Trust, benefitting from their established infrastructure and resources, and particularly from their enthusiastic expert personnel. We have multiple new members whose commitment and dedication to the watershed is helping to lift our ability to achieve our goal of implementing measures from our Stewardship Plan and protecting our rivers.

Let's move forward together to build on our record. We need ambition tempered by good judgment, passion tempered by realism, and commitment to our goals. Please enjoy this issue, and thank you for your work and support.

Sincerely,
Antonia Bryson, Chair

WINTER HIKES

Look out for upcoming monthly hikes led by members and partners of the Council.

Thursday, January 23, 10am - 12pm: Cottrell Family Preserve, Westerly, RI

Friday, February 14, 10am-12pm: Valentine's Day Hike at Breakheart Pond Loop, Exeter, RI

Thursday, March 20, 10am-1pm: Grills Preserve, Westerly, RI

Email coordinator@wpwildrivers.org for more details and to register.



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GIVE US A LISTEN!

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.

Our podcast is sponsored by the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council. Listen wherever you get your podcasts!

Episode 6



Mini BioBlitz with the Westerly Land Trust

Episode 5



Bat Biology with Jen Brooks

Episode 4



Dragonflies in the Great Swamp

More Good News for Wild Brook Trout in the Upper-Wood River Watershed

By Bob Maietta, Stewardship Council Town Representative
Charlestown, RI

Rhode Island Trout Unlimited (Chapter 225) has been awarded three grants to study the feasibility of removing the Breakheart Pond Dam in West Greenwich. A \$38,000 Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) grant will fund Phase I, including preliminary data collection and restoration planning. An \$85,000 US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) grant will support Phase II, and a \$190,000 Southeast New England Program (SNEP) Watershed Implementation Grant (SWIG) will fund Phase III.

This is excellent news for the Upper Wood River Watershed. Breakheart Pond is a major source of warm water entering lower Breakheart Brook, the Flat River, and the Wood River. Warm water is a key stressor to Rhode Island's wild brook trout. The dam also obstructs upstream movement of fluvial fish species and is in a state of disrepair, making its removal both timely and critical. Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council (WPWSRSC) is delighted to hear this news and is committed to supporting Chapter 225's effort in this regard.

The Council thanks Trout Unlimited for their continuing efforts to support the protection of wild brook trout in the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed. The Council continues to support the removal of all derelict dams or other man made obstructions located within the watershed, especially those which contribute warm water to streams containing wild brook trout populations.



Explore this area with us on Friday, February 14, 10am-12pm for a Valentine's Day Hike at Breakheart Pond Loop, Exeter, RI.

Stonington, CT Reclaims the Circus Lot from Westerly, RI

By Danielle Chesebrough, Stonington First Selectman

Editor's Note: The Town of Stonington has received multiple grants from the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Community Grants program, and the Stewardship Council is thrilled to share updates on this project.

In a significant move to enhance community resources and environmental stewardship, the town of Stonington, Connecticut, has successfully reclaimed the Circus Lot, a 5.6-acre parcel of land located along the Pawcatuck River, from the town of Westerly, Rhode Island. This acquisition marks a pivotal step in transforming the underutilized property into a vibrant public park.

The Circus Lot, named for its historical use as a site for traveling circuses in the early 20th century, has long been a point of interest for Stonington residents. The land, which had been sold to Westerly for use as a well site,

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Circus Lot
Conceptual Master Plan
November 26, 2022



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was no longer serving its original purpose. According to a reverter clause in the deed, Stonington had the right to repurchase the property for \$35,000 if it was no longer in use.

The town of Stonington has ambitious plans for the Circus Lot. Preliminary concept plans envision a community park that offers a variety of recreational opportunities for people of all ages and abilities. Proposed features include walking trails, fishing areas, a kayak launch, a recreational field, and a playground. The park aims to provide public access to the water, enhance public safety, and serve as an example of how municipalities can repurpose neglected properties within flood zones.

Environmental restoration is also a key component of the project. The site, currently dominated by invasive species, will undergo significant ecological rehabilitation. Plans include removing invasive plants, restoring the riparian zone along the river, and enhancing upland woodland and riverine grassland habitats. These efforts will improve the environmental quality of the area and provide educational opportunities for the community.

The purchase of the Circus Lot has been met with enthusiasm from Stonington residents. At a recent town meeting, community members expressed their support for the project, highlighting the potential benefits for local families and the broader community. The town has already conducted environmental assessments and secured initial funding, paving the way for further community engagement and development.

As Stonington moves forward with this project, the Circus Lot is poised to become a cherished community asset, offering a space for outdoor recreation, environmental education, and community gatherings. The successful acquisition of the property from Westerly represents a collaborative effort to enhance the quality of life for residents and preserve the natural beauty of the Pawcatuck River.



↑ PAWCATUCK RIVER FROM MARGIN ST, WESTERLY, RI

Small River Stories

By Madeline Jeffery, Stewardship Council Town Representative,
North Stonington, CT

When Denise Poyer told the Stewardship Council about her October trip as part of the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Partners 3-day Gathering in Jay, Vermont, she ended with a bit about the host Vermont rivers, the Upper Missisquoi and Trout. "It was a beautiful New England spot," she said with a big smile, "and the river was great. But, you know, it doesn't begin to compare to our own **Wood River** right here at home!" Small cheers.



↑ **MISSISQUOI RIVER, JAY PEAK, VT**

Our watershed has a river called **Queen!** Just who was this Queen, this woman, and had she really existed? Yes, she was very real. She was Queen Quaiapan, a Niantic sachem, and a powerful leader of the Narragansett tribe in the mid -17th century. Queen Quaiapan was either captured or killed during King Philip's war with the colonists. Her story is a historical one to be studied, to be sure, and is a part of the river that has her name.

A brand-new North Stonington dairy barn is about to be built from ECCD and NRCS grants and resources! Valley View Farm is owned and operated by the Learned family and construction will begin this Summer. Engineers are finalizing the barn plans and State archeologists are preparing to dig excavation pits. Milking robots for 120 cows, solar-powered barn cleaners, and a manure storage facility will treat and lessen manure's pollution of the **Green Fall-Ashaway Rivers.**

There is a small green park right on the **Shunock River** in North Stonington Village. It boasts a White Oak tree whose lineage can be traced to the famous CT Charter Oak. For many years, acorns had been collected and nurtured from that famous Charter Oak. Its lineage oak saplings were given to Connecticut towns in 1976 to celebrate the country's Bicentennial. The colonists had hidden the CT Royal Charter in a White Oak tree rather

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than surrender it to the British; the charter's mysterious disappearance and reappearance is a great New England story.

The **Beaver River's** name is imaginative. It is mostly undeveloped, heavily forested through preservation lands, with privately owned river frontage, and management and archaeological areas. Justin Andrade, a Wild and Scenic Charlestown Town Representative, says, "When I tell people I am a part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers group, the question I get asked the most is: 'And where can we swim and fish?' Where can we? Where do we?"



↑ A SCION TREE OF CHARTER OAK
PHOTOGRAPH BY: BETTY PERKOWSKI

Just pull into Mechanic Street in Pawcatuck, CT, it soon becomes River Road with the **Pawcatuck River** on the left and in constant river view for several miles. The latest river news is that the partially restored 1899 William Clark Thread Mill has just received a huge CT grant to finish converting its 4-story buildings into 53 apartments, 11 of which will be affordable. Its 5.4-acre contaminated, brownfield site will become a private park and garden. (Anyone who has ever sewed with needle and thread knows Clarks cotton thread!)

The **Chipuxet River** boasts its own USGS Flow Station Gauge: "Chipuxet River@West Kingston RI-01117350". It is the second Station this writer has visited within the watershed. Another flow station is in North Stonington, CT: "Pendleton Hill Road at Clarks Falls #USGS-01118500". This website (<https://dashboard.waterdata.usgs.gov/app/nwd/en/>) will take you to an interactive map where you can click on gauges throughout the watershed. You will be mesmerized by the facts, guides, and data, whether for one day or many. There is an expanding need for clean water in this region; learning what it is all about through the flow station gauge is the place to be.

Have a story about our watershed to share?
Email Coordinator@WPwildrivers.org.

Watershed Artist Highlight

Barbi Beyer

Singer-songwriter and music educator
Charlestown, RI

The incredibly talented musician Barbi Beyer from Charlestown, RI, has a unique gift for infusing energy and inspiration into those she meets, even during the toughest times.

One of her songs, "Grandfather Tree", beautifully captures the spirit of connecting with nature and truly listening.



↑ **BARBI AND HER PARTNER, STEVE TURINO**

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Barbi's pivotal moment that sparked her journey into music was the same moment that led to her song, "Grandfather Tree". At the time, she was living in Wakefield, RI, with Steve, her husband and another exceptional musician. To grow comfortable with the idea of moving to a more quiet and remote property in Charlestown, RI, she spent time wandering through the land. Thoughts of doubt and questioning her self-worth sent her towards the pull of a wolf (stand-alone) oak tree. As she stood in front of the magnificent oak tree, her arms reached



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around. She describes the experience, "Halfway around the trunk, I started to feel an immense feeling of settling down and grounding... the tree received my emotion, tears, and desire for peace in myself." Upon returning from her visit, she picked up her guitar and wrote "Grandfather Tree". The song has continued to open up many doors for her career in music.

A significant milestone in her career came in 2016 when she performed with a full band at River Fire in Wakefield, RI. By then, she had written enough original songs to bring them fully to life on stage. When asked about the connection between her songwriting and nature, she shared, "Nature is somewhat a mirror to the types of songs that I write, which tend to be about the human struggle." She reflected on how nature has a unique way of transforming solitude into self-reflection, revealing that embracing life's experiences—even the difficult ones—is essential to finding peace.

If she were to have a conversation with her nearby waterway, she'd ask... "may you continue to flow and thrive. And, nurture all those who are alive in your beautiful ecosystem, the plants and the birds, and may you continue to flow with the support that you need, and to those who are cherishing your presence."

⇒



Barbi shows no signs of slowing down, having written over 100 songs. You can find her music on YouTube under Just Love Band and follow them on social media for updates on upcoming shows. It's always a treat to see her perform live at the Pumphouse Acoustic Lounge every Wednesday night.

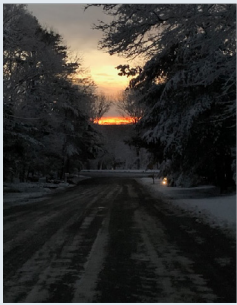
↑ **BARBI AND THE GRANDFATHER TREE**

Embracing Winter:

Short Essays from Stewardship Council Members

Transitioning into Winter

By Nan Quinlan, Stewardship Council Town Representative,
Exeter, RI



As the frost drops over the land, the more-than-human world grows quiet. Birds stop singing at sunset, and crickets no longer chirp into the night. Leaves begin to fall, releasing light to the forest floor not seen since spring. Vines and other invasives have wound themselves round my holly tree branches and into my pines, leaving me scratching my head on how I missed them in spring and summer when they were just starting to grow.

The transition to winter begins subtly at first. Plants begin to fade with the reduced sunlight and cooler temperatures. The last tomatoes are picked, the lawn doesn't seem to grow as fast, and colorful creatures search for winter homes under rocks and among the roots of my honey suckle and trumpet vines. This year, the Winter Solstice began with a startling red, orange, and purple sunrise. As I walked up the hill to get a better view, the only sound was the crunching of my boots on the season's first snow. All around, nature's blanket was covering and protecting the life underneath.

I look forward to winter to "nest and rest", which includes daily trips in nature to listen



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and observe. The mental and physical benefits of being out in nature are well known: quieting the mind, reducing blood pressure, lowering the heart rate, de-stressing, and boosting our mood. However, it is a two-way street. We receive these benefits from being in nature, and in return, we come to understand the importance of taking care of the land.

I invite you to take some time this winter to get into nature. There are so many wonderful spaces in our watershed to walk and observe. Smell the earth rebuilding under decaying leaves. Listen with anticipation to a river or stream tumbling over rocks and nature-made dams that pull you to discover their source. Feel the icy water. In nature, we see things as they are right now. We are present, fully attentive, and mindful of the land and how important it is in our lives.

Nan Quinlan is the Exeter Town Representative on the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council. She is also an Outdoor Mindful Guide certified by the Kripalu School of Mindful Outdoor Leadership.



↑ CHIPUXET RIVER, SOUTH KINGSTOWN

Sowing Winter Blues into Greens

By Casey Merkle, Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinator

One way I embrace the winter blues is to make space for green. I start seeds outdoors in containers during the winter to grow plants, a process called winter sowing.

Last winter, I spent a few days with the Rhode Island Wild Plant Society (RIWPS) sowing seeds. The workshop was set up on private land near the Wild and Scenic Queen River. Inside an industrial-sized greenhouse, we bustled past each other through narrow aisles. On a few workbenches were heaps of dark, damp soil. Outside the greenhouse, an assemblage of recycled containers, soil, sand, wood, and landscape material protected the seeds from predators, like curious birds or a hungry chipmunk. Keeping the seeds outside in containers to “overwinter”, allows them to experience the seasonal shifts: frost and fading light.



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The seeds – gathered from roadsides, backyards, or trusted online sources – carry stories. A friend recently gifted me a winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) branch she had snipped from an unassuming roadside. She sent resources from the RIWPS on how-to grow it from seed. It’s not difficult, but it requires a long-term commitment. It’s a slow, patient process, mirroring winter’s stillness.

As I rest like a fox slumbering in their den, the seeds transform the blues of winter into promises of green. To get involved with the RIWPS or learn the art of winter sowing, visit their website (<https://riwps.org/>).

2025 Eco-Friendly Tips

By Ali Gretchner, Stewardship Council Town Representative (Alternate)
South Kingstown, RI

As we approach 2025, living sustainably is more important than ever. Climate change, deforestation, pollution, and resource depletion threaten our planet, but adopting eco-friendly practices can make a significant impact. Whether through small changes or lifestyle shifts, here are some steps to live more sustainably:

Shop consciously. After the holiday season, consider using gift cards or extra cash to support small businesses with certifications like Fair Trade or B Corp. Opt for second-hand goods when possible to reduce demand for new products and conserve resources.

Educate yourself. Stay informed through documentaries like Buy Now: The Shopping Conspiracy, which highlights the environmental impact of corporate spending. Learning to repair items—such as sewing or DIY skills—can also extend the life of your belongings and reduce waste.

Farm your food. Spring will be here soon, making it a great time to grow your own food or support local farmers' markets. Starting seeds indoors now can prepare you for a productive garden, reducing your reliance on store-bought produce and lowering food miles.

There are seemingly endless choices we can make to have a positive impact on our planet, and that can be overwhelming. So, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council encourages you to try one change at a time. You can choose from the suggestions in this article or do some research and implement your own findings. Let's enter 2025 prioritizing more sustainable individual actions so that collective efforts and systemic changes can flow. Every small ripple counts, and together, we will create a more sustainable future for generations to come.



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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: Harvey Buford
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: Tom Ryan
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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