



**Wood-Pawcatuck
Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council
Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)**

Wednesday, May 28, 2025

Westerly Land Trust,

449 Westerly Bradford Rd, Westerly, RI 02891 and via Zoom

Abbreviations: Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council (WPWSRSC or Council), Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), National Park Service (NPS), Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RI DEM), Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA), Save The Bay (STB), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Westerly Land Trust (WLT), Information and Education (I&E)

Attendance:

Justin Andrade, Charlestown, RI
Bob Maietta, Charlestown, RI (I&E Committee, Co-Chair)
Sharon MacLean, Exeter, RI (I&E Committee)
Nan Quinlin, Exeter, RI (Projects Committee)
Harvey Buford, Hopkinton, RI (I&E Committee)
Juliet Lamb, Hopkinton, RI
Ahren Cohen, North Kingstown, RI (Council Treasurer)
Elaine Caldarone, North Stonington, CT (Council Vice Chair, Projects Committee Chair, I&E Committee)
Madeline Jeffery, North Stonington, CT (Projects Committee, I&E Committee Co-Chair)
Antonia Bryson, Richmond, RI (Council Chair, Advisory Committee Co-chair)
Denise Poyer, Richmond, RI (Council Secretary)
Tom Halavik, South Kingstown
Fred Wagner, Stonington, CT (Advisory Committee)
William Gay, Voluntown, CT
Chris Grube, West Greenwich, RI (Advisory Committee Co-Chair, I&E Committee)
Tom Ryan, West Greenwich, RI
Bob Madison, Westerly, RI
Fred Sculco, Westerly, RI Resident (Advisory Committee)
Chris Bellucci, CT DEEP
Lauren Bonatakis, NPS
Corey Pelletier, RI DEM
Catie Alves, STB
Harvey Perry, TNC
Colleen Sullivan, WLT
Chris Fox, WPWA
Casey Merkle, Council Coordinator

Meeting Convened at: 5:02 pm

Secretary's Report: Minutes of April 23, 2025 meeting were approved as amended.

Town Representative Updates:

1. Stonington, CT - Fred Wagner

- a. Opened with much gratitude to the National Park Service, this year celebrating its 106th anniversary, for its sustained support of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council. Special thanks to Jamie Fosburgh and Lauren Bonatakis, our primary point persons.
- b. Stonington is bounded on the south by the Long Island Sound, on the west by the Mystic River, on the north by North Stonington, and the east by the Pawcatuck River.
- c. The southern part of town was originally part of Massachusetts colony and was known as Southerton; Mystic was known as Mystak. Stonington was established in 1666, Leon Chesebrough being one of the founding members. Today the wife of his great grandson (many, many times over) is the First Selectman on the Town Board of Selectmen.
- d. Mystic experienced a significant economic upturn in 1791 due to seal hunting and whaling in Patagonia, and a major shipbuilding industry on the Pawcatuck River. Currently, Stonington is home to the only remaining commercial fishing fleet in Connecticut.
- e. Stonington survived several bombardments from British ships during the Revolutionary War, but the war of 1812 is when Stonington drove off three British ships commanded by Sir Thomas Hardy.
- f. The town boasts the oldest lighthouse museum in the US, having been built in 1840 and housing the Stonington Historical Museum since 1925.
- g. The design for a town park at the Circus Lot was reviewed with a video presentation. Installation of an irrigation water system is needed.

2. Voluntown, CT – William Gay

- a. Its original name was Volunteer Town because land was given to the colonial soldiers who volunteered in the King Phillip's War in the mid 1670's. The population of Voluntown is about 2600 and its area is 39.8 square miles, 66% of which is the 28,000 acres of Pachaug State Forest.
- b. The entire Voluntown portion of the Green Fall River lies within Pachaug State Forest and is accessible by forest roads. As such, it is overseen by the Connecticut DEEP and is entirely on protected land.
- c. Green Fall Pond was created by damming the river in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps. There is a popular camping and swimming area on one end of the pond. In the early 1990's, there was a proposal to use the Green Falls River area as a disposal site for low level nuclear radiation waste. It was a short lived effort due to potential damage to the aquifer and the public outcry.
- d. In 2017, an area adjacent to the Voluntown-Sterling Transfer Station on Brown Rd. in Voluntown was designated to be used as a burial site for up to 6 million

dead chickens by the State's Avian Influenza Monitoring System. They would be covered by tarps and dirt up to 10 feet deep. Porter Pond, part of the headwaters of the Wood River, is only 1/2 mile from this site, so there could be contamination of the watershed by polluted water runoff. The threat is lessened now but this needs to be monitored.

- e. Almost all residences of Voluntown have private wells and recently the Town notified residents of a proposal to develop a more reliable communal water source for the small village area of Voluntown. The source of Green Fall River is about 3 miles from there so we need to be kept informed.

Committee Updates:

1. Executive Committee (Antonia Bryson, Richmond)

a. Election results:

Chair – Antonia Bryson
Co-Chair – Elaine Caldaron
Secretary – Denise Poyer
Treasurer – Harvey Buford

- b. Bylaws review - Many thanks to all who responded with comments/suggestions. The Executive Committee will review these and revise the Bylaws accordingly, then present the revision at the next general Council meeting (June 25).

c. Budget Status

- i. Lauren Bonatakis (NPS) provided an update of the funding from NPS to Wild and Scenic. The Congressional Continuing Resolution passed in March maintains the FY 24 level for the FY25 (current year) budget. NPS cannot spend, nor establish cooperative agreements. We should assume no additional funds this year and reprioritize our spending. There has been no communication concerning the FY26 budget. A glimmer of hope; Wild and Scenic in Florida revised its Fiscal Year 2025 funding and it was approved. Not sure if it was received.
- ii. Large amounts of NPS money cannot be moved between categories. All of what the Council receives from NPS is under the contract category, so shifting funds from one contract to another is permissible.
- iii. Antonia pointed out the need to freeze spending. She provided a table of the 25th of May expenditures. All committees, including the Executive Committee, are asked to review the table and identify funds that can be released to cover the essentials.
- iv. The recommendation is to secure the Coordinator's position and essential expenses, e.g., WLT, insurance, printing, internet, etc.
- v. The Committees are requested to rank the importance of projects such as, water quality monitoring, and provide feedback to the Executive Committee, keeping in mind some projects may be eligible for other grants.

- vi. The Executive Committee will consider the responses and develop a proposal for spending into next year for the full Council to consider.
- 2. Projects Committee (Elaine, North Stonington)
 - a. No updates.
- 3. Advisory Committee (Antonia, Richmond)
 - a. Budget input – see Budget Status above
- 4. Information & Education Committee (Co-Chair Madeline Jeffery, North Stonington & Co-Chair Bob Maietta, Charlestown)
 - a. Planned merchandise purchases were put on hold.

Working Group Updates:

- 1. Kenyon Mills Working Group (Denise Poyer, Richmond)
 - a. Two proposals were received in response to the Request For Proposals. Funding of \$40K from the lawsuit settlement with Kenyon Mills, known as Brookwood, has restrictions, the subsequent funding may not have restrictions.
 - b. Chris Fox noted that the consent order did not address interest earned on the principal; it can be used as seen fit.
- 2. Wild Brook Trout Working Group (Bob Maietta, Charlestown).
 - a. The Working Group is planning to send an introductory letter to the Deputy Director of RIDEM, copy to Wild and Scenic Chair, outlining the mission statement, who are the members and what will be coming in the future. The Working Group's need is for policy support from RIDEM.

Partner Updates:

- 1. CT DEEP – Chris Bellucci
 - a. Doug Thompson, a fluvial geomorphologist, is looking at the head waters and upper Wood River for indications of sedimentation impacts.
 - b. Budget uncertainty is impacting CTDEEP's grants program. Also, a significant longterm collaboration with USGS now is losing 170 yrs of experience due to federal buyouts and early retirements. CTDEEP expects short term impacts.
- 2. NPS – Lauren Bonatakis
 - a. see Committee Updates: 1.c. Budget
 - b. The Wild and Scenic office is losing 4 senior staff members, including Jamie Fosburgh, creating a major gap in institutional knowledge and probably leading to a shift in staffing. At this point Lauren is staying where she is.
 - c. Lauren was included on a site visit for bridge replacement projects with Rhode Island Department of Transportation. More details will be provided to Harvey Buford, Madeline Jeffery and Bob Maietta.
- 3. RI DEM - no report
- 4. STB – Catie Alves
 - a. Two summer interns have been hired to perform water quality analyses and be involved with the Southeast New England Program (SNEP) network.

5. WPWA – Chris Fox
 - a. A fishway for Potter Hill is in the planning stage.
 - b. There is a Project Partners meeting upcoming for the Hillsdale culvert project.
6. TNC - no report
7. WLT - no report

Good of the Order:

1. Hydrilla update
 - a. Casey secured a \$10K RIDEM grant for supplies and equipment to slow-down the spread of hydrilla in Worden's Pond by creating a 'clean' channel marked by buoys. A permit is needed.
 - b. A RIDEM boat cleaning station is up and running at Worden's Pond. Volunteers are sought to help educate boaters on how and why to use it.
2. Avalonia Land Conservancy (ALC)
 - a. ALC would like to join WPWS. It was agreed that the Chair should ask ALC to make a presentation to the Council.

Public Comment: none

Adjourn: 7:03 pm

Next Meeting: June 25, 2025, 5pm-7pm