WINTER 2026

# DRAGONFLY EXPRESS: THE RIVER'S EDGE

A WOOD-PAWCATUCK WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS
STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL PUBLICATION



↑ *BREAKHEART BROOK, ARCADIA MANAGEMENT AREA*

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WOOD - PAWCATUCK
*WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS*
STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM

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Christopher Fox, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

**In 2019**, because of their outstanding scenic, ecological, recreational, geological and cultural values, all seven rivers and major tributaries in the Pawcatuck Watershed were designated by Congress as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This national designation is a huge honor! Less than 1% of the 3.6 million miles of watercourses in the U.S. can claim this distinction! The Beaver, Chipuxet, Green Fall-Ashaway, Pawcatuck, Queen-Usquepaugh, Shunock and Wood Rivers can all proudly use the official title of 'Wild and Scenic River'.

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

# ANNOUNCEMENTS



Observing Dragonfly nymphs, courtesy of Casey Merkle



Identifying Dragonfly nymphs, courtesy of Casey Merkle

Seven Rivers Unbound: Season 2 Episode 1

**Dragonfly Nymphs and the National Park Service at Mastuxet Brook**

In this exciting podcast episode, listeners will discover the incredible "superpower" of dragonfly nymphs, their ability to help detect mercury in our waterways.

Dragonfly nymphs spend most of their lives beneath the water's surface, sometimes one to five years, quietly gathering clues about the health of our ecosystems before transforming into the flying, wonderful insects we know and love. Fun fact: they catch prey with a lightning-fast, extendable jaw, which is shaped like a tiny built-in grappling hook.

The summer of 2025 marked the first time the Stewardship Council has collected dragonfly nymphs for sampling as part of the nationwide Dragonfly Mercury Project. Three local sites were selected for sampling, linking our waters to a much larger effort to understand mercury contamination across the country. To learn more, explore the data, and view the site map, visit:

https://geonarrative.usgs.gov/dmpdatadashboard/



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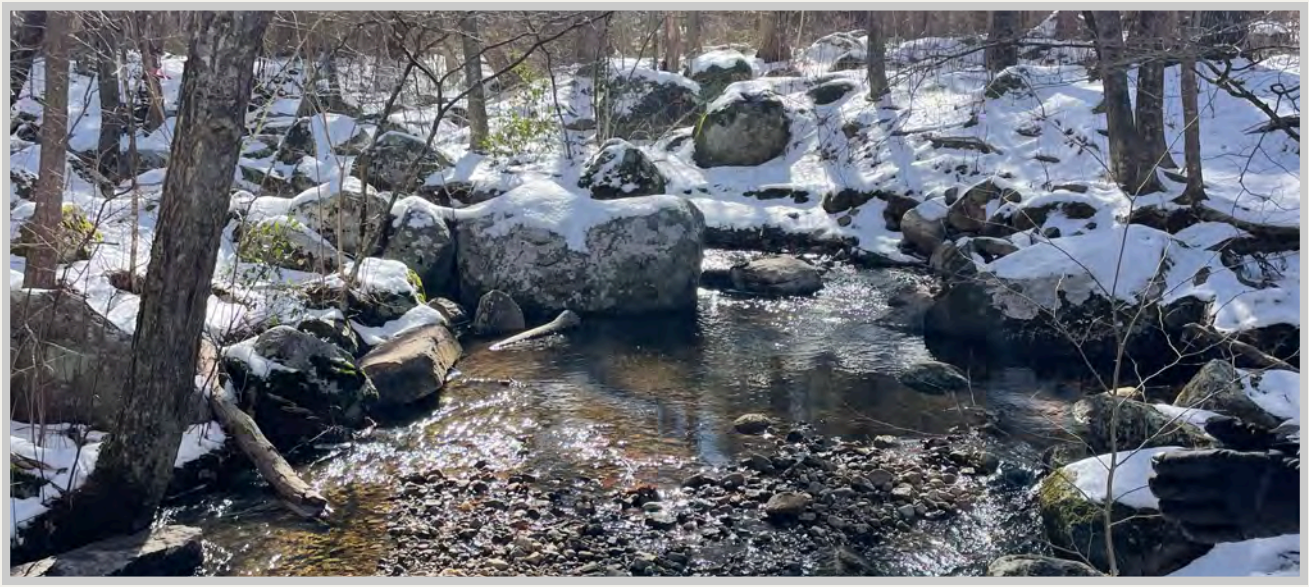
**Community Grants in Action: Improving trails in the Westerly Town Forest**

Thanks to the Stewardship Council's Community Grants program, Boy Scouts from Ashaway Troop #121 put their skills to the test restoring an important bridge in the Westerly Town Forest. The bridge restoration project was planned, developed and led by Jared Minnick, a 17-year-old troop member, to fulfill his Eagle Scout project requirement. Once weathered and worn, the bridge is now safe and sturdy, welcoming hikers to enjoy trails along the Wild and Scenic Pawcatuck River. This project showcased youth leadership, teamwork, and community spirit as nearly 200 volunteer hours were dedicated to restoring the bridge. All involved learned valuable skills while giving back. We're happy to invest in projects that improve river access and encourage youth leadership in making a lasting impact.



Westerly Town Forest, courtesy of Casey Merkle

Additionally, new trail markers have been installed in the Westerly Town Forest. Markers, which were manufactured by a 9th grade welding class at the Providence Technical Academy, were painted and placed by Westerly Conservation Commission members. Nearly 60 volunteer hours were spent on this project. In September, Gail Barrington, a member of the Conservation Commission, and Bruce Fellman, a local naturalist, led a public walk through the forest, following the newly marked trails. Special thanks to the Westerly Department of Public Works for their efforts to clear trails in preparation for the walk.



Breakheart Brook courtesy of Casey Merkle

**Chimes at Midnight**
Written by Bob Madison

Falstaff: We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.
Shallow: That we have, that we have, that we have; in faith, Sir John, we have.

Most of us have probably spent a lot of time letting ourselves be mesmerized by the sound of moving water. Once, in New Hampshire, I camped beside what the poets might call a “babbling brook” after a difficult summer’s day of hitch-hiking from Westerly to Twin Mountain. After the day on the highway, I was suffering from heat exhaustion and I thought the sound of the stream would be therapeutic. My head ached as I pitched my tent near an attractive fall. It was still light, but I turned in to sleep. The sound of the rapids grew louder: what had sounded soothing was now a pounding in my head. In a few hours I’d had enough and moved my camp a hundred yards upstream, to a spot where the would-be river was nearly silent.

Fast forward several decades—and I find myself canoe-camping in winter at the Carolina Management Area. The land is low here, on both sides of the river. In winter the water level can be pretty high, so I was sleeping only a foot or so above the river, and probably only a single canoe length from the water’s edge. Of course, it gets dark early in winter and so you’re off the water around four o’clock. That leaves plenty of time for watching and—when the light is gone—listening.

One thing about winter canoeing is that it can be very lonely: the chilly and tired paddler yearns for companionship. Mine came in the form of a mink, moving like an inchworm down the far edge of the river. Then it was gone. Much later that night I woke to the sound of bells—fairy bells, tinkling bells. It was, I grasped after a moment of wonder, the sound of the ice at the edges of the river, the water-ice grating ever-so-gently against the ice still attached to the shore. I hadn’t even noticed ice when I made camp—was it newly-formed or just so insignificant I had ignored it? Of course, I never found out—but I remember the chiming of the ice as clearly as any English poet remembers the night-sounds of a country churchyard—the Chimes at Midnight.

## What's the Big Deal with Riparian Buffers?

Written by Denise Poyer

One of the most critical ways to protect our Wild and Scenic Rivers, or any water feature for that matter, is to care for the river's edge by leaving banks filled with native plants and trees. These riparian buffers, or the plants growing along a river's edge, provide many positive benefits. First, they stabilize the banks. The Pawcatuck Watershed has mostly sandy streambanks. Roots from trees and bushes help hold the sand and soil together so it is not constantly eroding into the stream.



Art by Cows and Fish: Riparian Management Society

Riparian buffers also protect rivers from excessive runoff. Runoff happens when heavy rains meet bare soil. Heavy raindrops hit the ground running, grabbing dirt and soil with them on their way into the stream. When plants line the river's edge, leaves of all sizes and heights intercept rainfall. As raindrops land on leaves, the force is dramatically slowed, allowing water to gently reach the ground beneath. This process helps rainwater infiltrate into the ground instead of rushing directly to the nearest waterway.

A huge benefit of riparian buffers is the habitat they provide for local birds and animals. Bushes and trees offer shelter, nesting sites, and food resources for numerous bird species. Many fruit-bearing plants thrive in wet areas, including blueberries, blackberries, elderberries, cranberries, grapes, and dogwoods. Insects proliferate in the water and among downed trees and decaying vegetation, attracting warblers and other songbirds, swifts and swallows, and woodpeckers. Tall trees near the water's edge provide nesting cavities for woodpeckers, ducks, swallows, and even eagles and great blue herons. Mice, voles, and shrews burrow into leaf litter for protection and food, while fish shelter among roots and reeds in shallow sections of the river.

At its core, the river's edge is where protection begins. Healthy riparian buffers connect land to water, slow the impacts of storms, and create space for wildlife to thrive. By caring for this vital space, whether through planting native species, leaving natural vegetation in place, or simply allowing rivers room to flow, we help ensure that our Wild and Scenic Rivers remain resilient, living systems for generations to come.



Chipuxet Falls, Courtesy of Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

## Revealing the River's Edge through Mudlarking

Written by Casey Merkle

Storyteller and artist Mary Hendrickson is drawn to the places where land and water meet. Living near the Mystic River in Stonington, CT, she has spent years exploring how rivers hold memory, especially in communities shaped by industry, immigration, and development. Her storytelling practice began in the early 2000s, influenced by writers Helen Clark, Lara Maiklem, and Ted Sandling, and has since become deeply rooted in place-based art making and a process called mudlarking.

Mudlarking is the careful exploration of riverbanks and shallow waters for objects revealed by erosion, tide, and changing water levels. During the COVID years, Mary had a particular adventure through Clarks Falls, an important area along the Green Fall River. Before modern trash collection, waterways and nearby river edges absorbed what communities discarded. Through careful exploration of these shallow edges, Mary uncovered worn, everyday objects including, glass fragments, ironstone, medicine bottles, pottery shards, and small personal items, revealed by erosion and changing water levels. She values these items' weathered surfaces, believing they "know the stories" of the people who once handled them.




**Green Fall "Painting 3"**

**Glass Shard Embossed 'Rubifoam'**
E.W. Hoyt and company of Lowell, MA., were the makers of 'Rubifoam for the Teeth'. It cost twenty-five cents and was noted for its delicious flavor. The company promoted cleaning teeth to prevent tooth decay.

**Purple Transparent Glass Shard**
Old glass left in the sun turns light purple in an occurrence not yet understood. Ultra violet light starts an electron exchange with manganese and iron ions that turns the glass purple.

**Transferware Pottery Shard**
This kind of pottery has its pattern transferred to the ceramic body from a print made on a copper plate. Transferware can be seen on ironstone, earthenware and porcelain china.

**Crazed Pottery Shard**
The word "crazed" is referring to the little lines that develop on old pottery. It can be caused by temperature and humidity changes or moisture damage. It also occurs in many cases with the ceramics age.

# ARTIST HIGHLIGHT: MARY HENDRICKSON




**Green Fall "Painting 1"**

**Medicine Bottle**
The Charles Osgood Co., Norwich CT. Osgood's Indian Cholagogue (Pronounced Kah-la-gog). For the promise to cure bilious diseases.

**Press Patterned Cobalt Blue Glass**
Possibly Sandwich glass. Cobalt blue glass is made by incorporating cobalt oxide into the molten glass mixture. Patented in 1825 by John P. Backwell, molten glass is pressed into a mold using a plunger.

**Dale Hall Works Plate Shard**
Founded in 1790 in Burslem, England, the first version of this company was built by Joseph Stubbs. In the late 1930's it became part of the Royal Doulton Group.

**Pink Ceramic Chip**
Possibly Lu-ray Pastels by Taylor, Smith and Taylor Co., the color may have been called Sharon Pink. The company was first introduced in 1938 and discontinued in 1961.

**Possibly Rockingham Ware**
An earthenware of mottled brown with patches of the clay surface showing. It was an inexpensive-mass produced ceramic popular from the mid 19th to early 20th century.

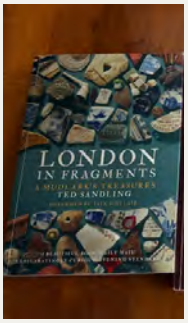
Mary has an artistic eye for what comes after the process of mudlarking through arranging her collection of items. The paintings above include a selection from mudlarking in the Green Fall River. Each item is intentionally chosen and paired with others, to create integrity in the work. The pieces hold on to each other on the paper, as they simultaneously hold onto a story. She is doing the digging, the weaving, and the communicating, all through the art of mudlarking.

Mary's work carries a deeper message than what appears on the paper. She is an explorer and admirer of the river's edge, a space that has increasingly disappeared as wetlands are filled and shorelines hardened. Her work reminds us that what enters a river does not simply drift away. Plastics and pollutants persist, shaping ecosystems long after their use. Through her storytelling, she invites us to slow down, look closely, and partake in the collective care for our rivers, so their stories can continue flowing towards a happier tale.

Mary's book recommendations for more mudlarking adventures: London in Fragments by Ted Sandling and Mudlark by Lara Maiklem (pictured right).

Follow Mary's work:

www.marykanehendrickson.com
@mysticmudlarker






## 7 RIVERS HIGHLIGHT: WOOD RIVER

**Meet the Wood River**
Written by Casey Merkle

Between ecosystems and recreation, the Wood River is a foundational and trusted source in our watershed. It's cold, clear water gives fisheries a chance at survival under a star-filled sky. Walking the edge of the Wood River will show you just what you need to know. It is a place where the landscape feels timeless and alive, especially at Stepstone Falls where water rushes over large slabs of bedrock.

The Wood River's headwaters start in Sterling, CT and travel south to meet with the Pawcatuck River in the village of Alton, on the border of Hopkinton and Richmond, RI. The river and its tributaries support a rich mosaic of wetlands, including swamps, marshes, Atlantic white cedar swamps, bogs, fens, and vernal pools. These are critical to native reptiles, mammals, and several state-listed species of freshwater mussels, dragonflies, and amphibians.

Wild Brook Trout depend on the Upper Wood and its flowing cold water. Its forested banks and cool waters offer trout refuge even in the height of summer, making it a favorite among fly fishers. Canoeists and kayakers come for the feel of a peaceful river, with its gentle bends, currents, and some Class II rapids. There are hundreds of trails that wind through nearby state management areas and conservation lands, including the Rhode Island North-South Trail.

For thousands of years, Indigenous people have cared for and been drawn to the Wood River. The Mohegan Tribe established winter camps along the upper reaches near Bailey Pond in Sterling, CT. And, the Narragansett Tribe lived and traveled throughout the river corridor in what is now called Rhode Island. The Narragansett and Mohegan people have long and ongoing relationships with rivers and lands across Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Today, the Wood River continues to support the highest number of different plant and animal species of any river in New England, clean water, and a deep sense of connection.



Saw Mill on the Wood River courtesy of WPWA



Paddlers on the Wood above Alton Village courtesy of WPWA

## 7 RIVERS HIGHLIGHT: WOOD RIVER

- One of New England's most biologically rich rivers, home to rare wetlands, wildlife, and wild brook trout.
- Flowing through conserved forests and open spaces that preserve scenic beauty, habitat, and dark night skies.
- Clean, cold water sustains sensitive species and supports local drinking water supplies.
- A cherished destination for fishing, paddling, hiking, birding, and experiencing a truly wild river.
- A river shaped by thousands of years of human presence and still culturally meaningful to the Narragansett and Mohegan peoples today.

- The Wood River is part of one of the most biodiverse river systems in New England, with exceptionally rich plant and animal life.
- Within the watershed, about 87% of the land is undeveloped or agricultural, and about 75% is forested.
- 24 miles designated as "wild," among the highest totals of any Partnership Wild and Scenic River in the U.S.

The Wood River is basically a celebrity - check out this article, Two Years into Wild and Scenic Designation, Wood River Shines



**Introducing Juliet Lamb**
Written and Edited by Casey Merkle

As Coordinator I love getting the chance to learn more about the people on the Stewardship Council and I hope you do, too. So we're back with a membership highlight, for our newest member, Juliet Lamb.

After one exciting day on the Shunock River with Juliet and her two children searching for dragonfly nymphs, I learned that she speaks fluent French and doesn't mind getting boots in the mud. We also bonded over similar tastes in music. To understand more about her career and interests related to the Stewardship Council, I had her answer a few questions.



Name: Juliet Lamb, PhD
Role: Hopkinton Town Representative
Joined the Stewardship Council in 2025

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

"I was born in England but grew up on Cape Cod. My high school was inside the National Seashore, so it seemed natural to go into conservation biology as a career. My first job post-college was captive-breeding and releasing Harpy Eagles in Panama, and my second was studying puffins on islands off the coast of Maine. I spent five years on that project, where I fell in love with seabirds and eventually met my husband. We continued following seabirds around, from the Orkney Islands of Scotland (my favorite place in the world!), to the Gulf of Mexico where I completed my Ph.D. on the ecology of pelicans, to the Mediterranean coast of France, before eventually settling in Hope Valley with our kids, now 7 and 5. I work as a marine scientist with The Nature Conservancy, but I will always regret being born too late to be a lighthouse keeper."

**How did you first hear about the Stewardship Council and why do you serve on the council?**

"After the 2024 elections, I started looking for ways to channel my political frustration and sadness into something positive by getting more involved with my community. I found the Stewardship Council vacancy on my town website. It seemed like a good fit for my background as an ecologist, as well as an opportunity to contribute to conservation of the Wood River, which is literally in my backyard."

**How do you want to see yourself as a Stewardship Council Member? What do you want to contribute or have contributed already?**

I've been easing into Stewardship Council duties by helping with website updates and identifying potential sites for rain gardens. The rain gardens project feels especially rewarding-- my day job involves tackling a lot of complex, global conservation challenges, so it's refreshing to feel like I can take actions that will make an immediate positive difference. I'd like to find ways to help others in the community feel empowered to contribute to river conservation through concrete, manageable actions.

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

I definitely talk to my river more than I should! I think I'd ask it for advice on letting go of things outside my control, and embracing the stillness and slower pace of winter. I'd probably ask what interesting birds have been around lately.



Paddlers on the Wood River approaching Frying Pan Pond courtesy of WPWA



Wood River near Rt 165 courtesy of WPWA

Juliet brings the same curiosity and care to life that she brings to protecting the Wood River. When she's not working to ensure the river can be enjoyed for generations to come, she's playing French horn with not just one, but multiple orchestras. And, she's always learning something new, whether that's tackling Greek alongside her mythology-loving older son, discovering new music, or lacing up her skates to glide across local ponds in winter. At home, she shares her quiet moments with her cat whose "peak snuggling" is reached during the cold months. Juliet looks ahead to tapping maple trees, a sign that spring is just around the corner!

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## Pawcatuck Watershed Map

Wild and Scenic Rivers and Tributaries highlighted in blue

