



Willimantic River Review

Fall 2005

WRA Goes Non-Profit

After ten years of advocacy for the river and its watershed, the Willimantic River Alliance incorporated as a nonprofit organization on June 23, 2005. In a riverside ceremony at Nye Holman State Forest in Tolland, the incorporation papers were signed by members of the original steering committee: Mark Paquette, Naomi Pomper, Paul Pribula, Meg Reich, Eric Thomas, and Vicky Wetherell. As the group gathered for a photo, a great blue heron flew to a nearby riverbank to be included in the picture, which seemed to be a sign of approval!

The group then moved across the river to the Track Nine Diner (now owned by Jim Hayes) for the first meeting of the board of directors (pictured at right): Ingrid Aarestad, Larry Diamond, Jim Hayes, Mark Paquette, Mike Powers, Meg Reich, Vicky Wetherell, and Diane Wright. The directors elected officers: President, Vicky Wetherell; Vice-President, Meg Reich; Secretary, Mark Paquette; and Treasurer, Naomi Pomper. Under its new name, Willimantic River Alliance, Inc., the organization is applying for IRS approval as a tax-exempt organization so it can receive tax-deductible contributions.

The Alliance was previously sponsored as a program of the North Central Conservation District (formerly the Tolland County Soil and Water Conservation District). Past grants to the Alliance were administered through WINCOG (Windham Region Council of Governments). The generous support of both these organizations has made it possible for the Alliance to accomplish many projects in the watershed in the past ten years. The Alliance's new nonprofit status offers opportunities to directly apply for grants and also a formal nonprofit structure for its ongoing activities to promote and preserve the river and its watershed.

For Your Information

Got a question about the river or the Alliance? Check out the Alliance's website, which was launched in May. We are excited about the many useful features at www.willimanticriver.org: maps of the watershed, locations of public lands and historic sites; recreation in the Greenway (including canoeing/kayaking, fishing, parks, and trails); conservation issues and resources, how to report problems; watershed news and events; and volunteer opportunities.

The Alliance has received a Partnership grant from

the Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc. to create a Canoe & Kayak Guide for the website with a map of launch sites and river hazards/features. This will be available in Spring, 2006. The website already offers information for paddling trips, including a link to the USGS online water-level gauge, a guide to the 13 boat launches on the river with directions and launch conditions, and a recommended area for first-time river paddlers. This website is for you, so send your suggestions to info@willimanticriver.org.



MANY THANKS TO

Keith Johnson, John Morey, Betty Robinson, Art Runnels, and Bob Schoff for marking and clearing the greenway trail from Lynch Landing to Plains Road in Mansfield.

The Quinn family for their enthusiastic support of the greenway and for trail access across Lynch Landing.

Dagmar Noll for creating a great Alliance website and for offering to maintain it.

Contributors: Vicky Wetherell, Meg Reich, Eric Thomas,

Inquiries or submissions for the Spring 2006 Edition can be submitted to:

*WRA at P.O. Box 9193, Bolton CT 06043-9193
by March 15, 2006.*

E-mail: info@willimanticriver.org.

Web: www.willimanticriver.org

Greenway Progress

The Midriver Trail System

In a cooperative effort, Coventry has extended Riverview Trail to the north, and Mansfield has expanded its trails to Plains Road in the south, so it now possible to take a 3-mile hike along the river from Riverview Drive to Plains Road.

On July 14, the Town of Coventry dedicated **Riverview Trail Park**, 30 acres of wooded floodplain between Riverview Drive and the river bank. A riverside trail now extends a half-mile north from the Merrow Road bridge. Several benches offer pleasant spots to rest and enjoy peaceful views of the river.

The town received this property in 1988 as an open space conveyance from the subdivision that created the new Riverview Drive. When the Willimantic River Greenway was launched in 2003, Coventry made a commitment to improve public access to this area. Since then, Eric Trott, Coventry's Director of Planning and Development, has coordinated the many projects that made this trail possible. Next year Coventry plans to extend the trail and publish an interpretive brochure linked to numbered signs along the trail. This is a scenic stretch of the river, so plan to visit soon! For more information about this park, see News and Events at www.willimanticriver.org or contact Eric Trott at 742-4062. The Alliance will cosponsor a walk on this trail on October 16 (see Walking Weekends events.)

The **trail link to Plains Road** was completed in May. The town of Mansfield acquired a 10-acre parcel along the river at the Plains Road Bridge in 2004 and has received a DEP Recreational Trails grant to develop a riverside park there, including a canoe launch and green space. This spring a group of the Alliance's Willimantic River Rovers cleared a trail connecting Depot Road (at the former Reynolds School) to this future park area. The Quinn family generously granted a trail license across Lynch Landing to the town to make this trail connection possible.

Funding Success in Windham

After a flurry of grant rounds, the Windham section of the river is going to benefit from funding for improved public access to the river and for greenway links. The Willimantic Whitewater Partnership has received several grants to research the feasibility of removing parts of former mill dams in Willimantic to create a **whitewater park** for kayaks and to provide

access to the upper river for migratory fish. Other grants will aid Windham's efforts to create a **waterfront park** in Willimantic. The town received a grant to complete the Willimantic section of the **East Coast Greenway**, a rails-to-trails project extending from Florida to Maine. The grant for work on the East Coast Greenway includes converting two former railroad trestles into footbridges across the river and extending the East Coast Greenway trail across Willimantic to link up with the North Windham section of the trail. These are long-term projects, which in combination with the existing Willimantic River Trail between Bridge Street and Route 66, will create a wealth of public recreation opportunities in this part of the Willimantic River Greenway. For more details, visit www.willimanticwhitewater.org.

River Watch

Willimantic River Streamwalk to Be Updated

The Eastern Ct. Conservation District (ECCD) recently received a grant to review the 2000-01 Streamwalk data and revisit sites along the river where water quality problems were identified and assist with planning remedies. The Alliance is assisting ECCD, and we are asking volunteers to contact Greg Smith (860-887-413m /ext, 3009, or greg.smith@nacdn.net) at ECCD to join the field trips or help resolve problem areas, including clean-up projects. For more information on the Streamwalk project, visit the Alliance website's News and Events page at www.willimanticriver.org.

Alliance Receives Award

The Willimantic River Alliance received a conservation award from Joshua's Trust at the Trust's annual dinner in April. Each year the Trust recognizes an organization that promotes the conservation purposes of the Trust. The Alliance's advocacy for the Willimantic River Greenway was cited as one reason for the award. Mark Paquette accepted the award for the Alliance.

Upper River Forum

The Alliance is planning a forum for towns and conservation organizations in the upper Willimantic River watershed to explore opportunities for regional conservation and connections. November 17 is the tentative date. Visit the Alliance's website for final details.

QSHC Walking Weekends

Sponsored by the Quinebaug & Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor (Walks in the Willimantic River Watershed)

Saturday, October 8

12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. Willimantic's Railroad Heritage in Willimantic. Equipment displays and demonstrations, and a walk near the river and the old New Haven RR yard highlight this easy 1-hour stroll for all ages. Optional museum tour follows. Sponsored by Ct. Eastern Railroad Museum. From Rt. 32 (Main St.) at Chamber of Commerce, go over RR tracks and take immediate right up dirt road to museum entrance. Park at lower gate. *Also offered on Monday, October 10 at 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m.*

Saturday, October 15

3:00 p.m. Run of the Mill in Willimantic. Visit a typical mill village including the river, bridges, mill buildings and worker and manager housing on a 1.5-hour slow stroll with director of the Windham Textile and History Museum, which sponsors this event. Meet at the museum on Rt. 66 (Main St.) Two blocks east of the frog bridge. Park across the street.

Sunday, October 16

1:00 p.m. Willimantic River Greenway Walk in Coventry and Mansfield. Explore the new Riverview Trail and Merrow Meadow Park in the greenway along the river with naturalist Sue Craig Harrington. Visit a floodplain and discover wildlife along the way in a 2.5-hour family learning experience for adults and children over 6. Sponsored by Mansfield Parks Advisory Comm., Coventry Rec. Dept. and Willimantic River Alliance. From Rt. 195, take Rt. 32 south 8-tenths of a mile; turn right on Merrow Rd., cross railroad tracks. Merrow Meadow entrance is on the left before the bridge

Visit www.thelastgreenvalley.org for information on 90 other walks offered on these weekends in northeast Connecticut.

Willi River Ramble

(For a complete version of this walk and other Rambles, visit the Recreation page at www.willimanticriver.org.) Take a walk on a scenic trail at Coventry's Riverview Trail Park. This 30-acre park offers excellent wildlife and

bird watching opportunities. The half-mile-long riverside trail is dry and mostly level, but watch for rocks and stumps underfoot. Because it is in a floodplain, the trail may not be accessible during high water. Directions: From Rt. 195 in Mansfield, go south on Rt. 32 for 8-tenths of a mile and turn right onto Merrow Road. Cross the Willimantic River bridge into Coventry, turn right immediately onto Riverview Drive and park on the right. The park sign and trail entrance are by the bridge. The trail begins behind the Riverview Trail Park sign and leads down to the river's edge. Turn left to follow the trail upstream through a floodplain forest of maple and arching hornbeam trees, which shade a bench overlooking the river. Across the river, the bank rises steeply to the site of the former Merrow mill, which burned down in 1887, but the mill workers' houses remain along Merrow Road in Mansfield.

Upstream, the river curves away toward the east side of the valley, and the trail enters a dry sandy terrace with towering white pines mixed with hickory and oak trees. A bench under the pines offers a peaceful spot to sit and listen to the wind rustling in the trees. (The numbered posts will be used with a future interpretative brochure.)

The valley is wider here, and the river is divided into a braided pattern of narrow channels and low islands. The main river channel is now on the far (east) side of the valley, so the trail leads through ferns alongside one of the narrow channels and then crosses it on a footbridge. Beyond the bridge, the trail leaves the braided area and again follows the bank of the main river channel, which has curved back to the west side of the valley. At a bench under the maple trees, there is a scenic view up the river, where you may see ducks feeding or a great blue heron fly by. By this bench, the river runs noisily over cobble-sized rocks. Just upstream is a smooth-as-glass pool over a deeper bottom, then another rocky riffle beyond. This is the river's natural sequence of pool, riffle, pool, riffle. Trout prefer such a habitat, where agitation in the riffles adds oxygen to the water, and pools offer a cool hide-out on warm summer days. If you enjoy trout fishing, this is a good spot to try.

The trail continues upstream through ferns along the bank. Watch for muskrat tunnels underfoot and signs of former beaver activity. Another bench marks the current end of the trail with a view of the next bend, where the trail will be extended in 2006. For now, you can return to the parking lot along the trail. *Thanks to Eric Thomas and Eric Trott for their assistance with this Ramble.*

Willimantic River Alliance

Founded in 1996, the Alliance has a mission “to protect and preserve the Willimantic River through cooperative and educational activities that promote regional awareness, stewardship, and enjoyment of the river and its watershed.” As a coalition of citizens, officials and local agencies, the Alliance sponsors events such as regional forums and outings and publications, including a website and biannual newsletter.

The Alliance is promoting development of the Willimantic River Greenway, an official state greenway along the river’s 25 miles from Stafford Springs to Willimantic. This regional project aims to connect recreational, historical and natural resource features along the river. These connections are being created by the nine riverside towns through natural resource preservation and recreation projects, such as linking trails and improving access to the river.

The river’s watershed includes seventeen towns: (in Ct.) Andover, Ashford, Bolton, Columbia, Coventry, Ellington, Hebron, Lebanon, Mansfield, Stafford, Union, Tolland, Vernon, Willington, Windham, and (in Mass.) Monson, Wales.

Alliance meetings are posted on the News and Events page at www.willimanticriver.org.

Fall 2005

C/O WINCOG
968 Main Street
Willimantic CT 06226

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Willimantic River Alliance – Membership Form

Name _____
Address _____
Town _____ State _____ Zip _____
E-Mail _____ Phone _____

Contact me about volunteer opportunities for the WRA

Mail completed form and check to:

WRA at P.O. Box 9193, Bolton CT 06043-9193

Regular Members	Annual Dues	Corporate Members *	Annual Dues
Senior/Student	\$ 5.00	Conservator Charter	\$ 50.00 \$ 500.00 (first year, \$250. thereafter)
Individual	\$10.00		
Family	\$15.00		
River Steward	\$ 50.00		
Patron	\$ 250.00 (Lifetime Member)		

* Corporate members will receive a certificate, advertising discounts & mailings. Charter members will also be listed in all Alliance publications.