



Eastern Connecticut Conservation District  
Upper Natchaug Healthy Watershed Initiative Meeting #2 Notes  
December 20, 2019 at the Union Town Hall



Attendance: Jean Pillo, Maura Robie, ECCD; Eric Thomas, Traci Iott, Rebecca Jascot, Sarah Hurley, CTDEEP; Paul Stacey, Footprints in the Water, Inc.; Gwen Haaland, Bill Dubinsky, Loretta Wrobel, Ashford Conservation Commission; Mike D'Amato, Willington ZEO, Emily Perko, North Central Conservation District; John Barber, Witches Woods Lake; Steven Babbitt, Charles MCAughtry, Thames Valley Trout Unlimited; Eric McPhee, CT DPH Drinking Water Division; Paul Pribula, Joshua's Trust; Bill Reid, The Last Green Valley; Gary Hoehne, Naturally Natchaug social media volunteer; Michael Turgeon, Troy Quick, Windham Water Works; Delia Fey, Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments; Meg Reich, Mansfield resident; Charles Vidich, Ashford resident.

Meeting participants were welcomed by Jean Pillo and asked to evaluate their motivation for participating in the project. Examples given were a small stream that meets cold water temperature criteria and has a good diversity of pollution sensitive bugs; Willimantic Water Works won a contest for best tasting water from small water companies in CT; the Natchaug is the brew-shed for the Willimantic Brewery.

Traci Iott of CT DEEP gave a presentation on CTDEEP Analysis of Natchaug River Water Quality & Watershed Stressors.

- Connecticut is using a new approach called Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) as the basis to address the existing goals of protecting and restoring Connecticut's waters. This approach is based on six key elements: Prioritization, Assessment, Protection, Alternatives, Engagement and Integration.
- After their evaluation process, the Natchaug River watershed was prioritized as a healthy watershed that is relatively healthy with very good water quality, which needs to be maintained and protected.
- Streams above the Willimantic Reservoir in Windham are Class AA and groundwater water quality goal for the watershed is Class GAA. Class AA streams have restrictions on types of discharges allowed.
- Overall, land cover in the watershed is 74.3% forest, 7.9% urban, 4.6% agriculture, 10.8% wetlands and 2.4% open water.
- In the 300 foot riparian corridors, only 68.7% of the land cover is forest, indicating an opportunity for improvement.
- Regulated sources – septic systems are a potential water quality source issue.
- Ag sources are scattered but present.
- Impervious cover is overall low, but pockets of development along rivers are a concern.
- Water quality analysis - Individual analysis for each parameter for each of 8 monitoring stations were presented. Certain chemicals interact in a synergistic manner. For example chloride and nutrient synergy has negative impact on water quality. A review of the data from the 8 monitoring stations focused on Chloride, metals and nutrients in both wet and dry weather.

The full presentation can be viewed and/or downloaded at <https://conservect.org/eastern/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/15-03-Natchaug-Protection-Plan-Update-Dec-20-2019.pdf>.

#### Follow up commentary

- Are numbers of larger farms declining while smaller farms are rising? DEEP staff responded that seems to be the case. Eric T. mentioned high levels of P from farms.
- Someone expressed concerns about large size of septic tank going in at Mansfield's new school. They mentioned concerns about cleaning products.
- Septic inspections programs recommended through towns, especially for campgrounds.
- Public education needed on septic systems, she's concerned about PFAS contamination persisting in the environment (chemicals in non-stick and fire foam). Governor has a task force to make high-level recommendations & DEEP is involved. Windham Water Works sampled water coming in to plant and found none.
- Someone asked if Yale Forest was involved in this project. Jean did get data from them and they're interested in being involved.
- There's an initiative through TLGV – forest management and water quality.
- DEEP asked all if anyone has more current data layers to submit to them.

#### Breakout group discussion

Workshop attendees were divided into 3 groups and asked to make a list qualities that describe a healthy watershed. Example given; A healthy watershed has natural land cover.

#### Responses included

- A healthy watershed has forests managed to be resilient when challenged with climate change.
- A healthy watershed is full of life.
- A healthy watershed has natural habitat and diversity
- A healthy watershed has low turbidity and solids.
- A healthy watershed has low impervious cover.
- A healthy watershed has usable swimming holes.
- A healthy watershed has contiguous protected lands for wildlife, habitats and stormwater infiltration.
- A healthy watershed has colder water and healthier fish.
- A healthy watershed has edible fish
- A healthy watershed is free flowing.
- A healthy watershed has people who care [about healthy watersheds].
- A healthy watershed has native vegetation as buffers around streams and rivers.
- A healthy watershed has an open-space prioritization plan.
- A healthy watershed supplies clean drinking water.
- A healthy watershed incorporates and encourages [development] designs to minimize impact on waterbodies.
- A healthy watershed has water agriculture can safely use for irrigation.
- A healthy watershed has edible fish.
- A healthy watershed is safe for dogs to drink from.

Due to time restraints, the planned step 2 of this discussion (What opportunities to maintain these healthy watershed conditions) was postponed and it was agreed the discussion will continue via an email dialog. These concepts will be incorporated into the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan.

#### Other discussion

- Need to motivate landowners through education RE forest management
- Need for more consistent and up-to-date wetlands and watercourse regulations for all towns
- Raise awareness of non-point source pollution
- Transform land use regulations from lot cover requirements to impervious surface maximums
- Development incorporates/encourages designs to minimize impact on waterbodies.
- Maintain and protect riparian corridor canopies to minimize storm discharge
- Need better management of state and town highway stormwater management and runoff.
- Investigate and promote salt reductions program (or salt alternatives)
- Education on unpaved road management
- Evaluate snow stockpile and disposal process
- Review State and town maintenance schedules of catch basins and culverts for sand and other solid debris
- PFAS education for fire departments
- Concern of thermal pollution on small streams due to development up to the stream buffer.
- Review of municipal development regulations
- Education on replanting in riparian corridors
- Evaluate stormwater runoff from parking lots
- More low impact development and green infrastructure
- Evaluate home and commercial ground water withdrawal
- Education on low impact development
- Education on water conservation
- Educate farmers on new irrigation techniques
- Education on the impacts of drawdowns
- Review regulations on exporting water from the watershed through bottling
- Consider distances from water courses when locating new well.

Discussion on topics for project required workshop tabled until the Natchaug value surveys are completed and results compiled. Topics will be vetted through the stakeholder groups to select most needed topics.

Next meeting will be following the development of the draft Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan.