

ECCD OUTLOOK

A publication of the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, Inc.

Summer 2020 Edition

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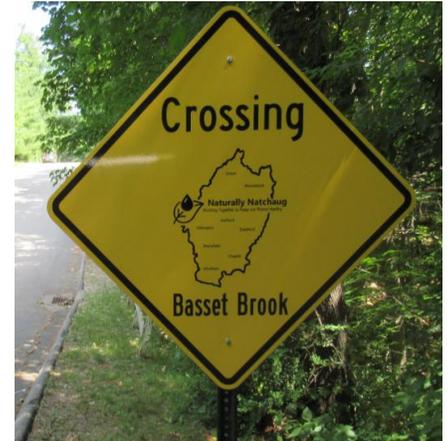
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MT. Hope River Implementation Project – Perry Hill Estates

With its MT. Hope River Implementation Project, ECCD continues its efforts to improve the water quality of Mt. Hope River and the Natchaug River watershed. The Natchaug River watershed provides drinking water to the Towns of Windham and Mansfield. Basset Brook is a tributary of the Mt. Hope River, which itself is a tributary of the Natchaug River. The project is located within the Mt. Hope River drainage basin in Ashford, CT at Perry Hill Estates, an apartment complex managed by Axela Management Group. In 2012, DEEP developed a Mount Hope Watershed Summary for the Connecticut statewide bacteria TMDL, citing recreational impairment for non-designated swimming and other water contact related activities.



In 2014, ECCD developed the *Mount Hope River Developed Land BMP Management Matrix* (the Matrix) and conducted a bacteria trackdown along the Mount Hope River (CT 3206-00_02). The Matrix recommended remedial actions including stormwater retrofits and community outreach. Through the Mt. Hope River Implementation Project at Perry Hill Estates, ECCD acted upon recommendations from the Matrix – retrofitting stormdrains with catch basin filters, constructing dumpster pads, installing rain gardens, installing pet waste stations and conducting outreach to residents at Perry Hill and other apartment complexes in the watershed. ECCD also coordinated two workshops for the general population as part of the project; one was on home well water testing given by CT Department of Public Health, and the other on Septic System Care and Maintenance, given by Andy Coleman of Skips Waste Water Service. Both workshops were recorded and available to view via links on ECCD's website www.ConserveCT.org/eastern.

ECCD's work in the Mt. Hope River watershed underscores a more comprehensive effort by the District and many partners to retain the healthy watershed designation of the Natchaug River. Currently, District staff is drafting the Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan (NHWIP). The Basset Brook stream-crossing sign featured above, with the *Naturally Natchaug* slogan and logo, was created to brand NHWIP and highlights the value of Basset Brook as a first order headwater stream. As a headwater stream, Basset has no tributaries, or permanently-flowing streams feeding into it. Protecting headwater streams and the lands providing rainwater to them is essential to protecting downstream resources, as in this case, by which drinking water for residents of Windham and Mansfield is protected.

Keeping the landscape natural, preserving forests, protecting riparian ecosystems and, as with the Perry Hill Project, controlling and treating contaminated stormwater, are all important actions about which watershed citizens should be aware and strive to achieve. For drinking, swimming and fishing, our connections to the Natchaug are natural, so too should be our willingness to protect it. Join the effort; *Naturally Natchaug* now and forever! Funded by CT DEEP through an US EPA Clean Water Act § 319 non-point source program. For more information visit, Naturally Natchaug on Facebook, @NaturallyNatchaug on Instagram, or the ECCD webpage at <https://conservect.org/eastern/current-projects/>.

Niantic River Watershed Plan Update

The Niantic River Watershed Committee (NRWC), which represents the four Niantic River watershed towns of East Lyme, Waterford, Salem and Montville, is pleased to announce the completion of its update to the 2006 *Niantic River Watershed Protection Plan*. NRWC received funding from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut (through the Peter Grayson Letz Fund for Animals and the Environment) and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (through the Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source grant program) to conduct the update.

The update to the 2006 Plan is needed because the Niantic River does not meet Connecticut water quality standards for swimming, recreational shellfishing and healthy habitat for aquatic species. As a result, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection has identified the Niantic River as one of eight priority restoration estuaries in Connecticut.

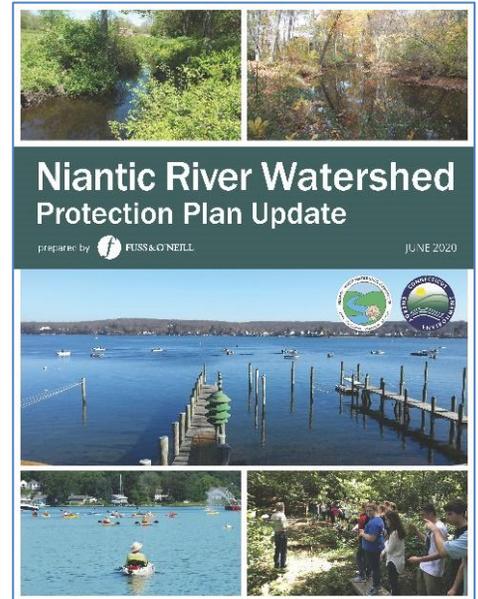
Over the last fourteen years, NRWC, in collaboration with its many watershed partners including ECCD, has successfully completed many of the 2006 plan recommendations, but additional work is needed to restore the water quality in the river.

NRWC retained the consulting firm Fuss & O'Neill of Manchester, CT to lead the process and prepare the updated plan. As part of the update process, NRWC hosted a series of stakeholder meetings to solicit input from watershed partners and the general public about issues of concern and potential actions to address those concerns. The update includes an assessment of progress that has been made on completing the 2006 plan recommendations, as well as an evaluation of uncompleted recommendations. The plan addresses issues which were not in the public realm when the initial plan was prepared, including sea level rise and climate change. The update provides a new ten-year timeframe for the implementation of actions throughout the watershed to protect and improve water quality in the Niantic River, Niantic Bay and Long Island Sound.

The 2020 Niantic River Watershed Protection Plan Update can be found at the Niantic River Watershed website at www.nianticriverwatershed.org.

The Niantic River Watershed Committee was founded in 2008 by the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District with funding from the Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source grant program administered through CT DEEP. Since 2008, ECCD has coordinated the watershed committee.

For more information about NRWC and the Watershed Plan Update, contact Watershed Coordinator: Judy Rondeau at 860-774-9600 x 13 or judy.rondeau@comcast.net.



ECCD Nears Completion of First Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan in Connecticut



The Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan (NHWIP) is in its final stages of development. According to EPA, a Healthy Watershed Plan is a cost effective, non-regulatory approach to preserve healthy watersheds. ECCD has completed nine other watershed plans for the purpose of reducing pollution, but this is the first plan focused on preventing pollution. And, it is the first time in Connecticut that EPA has funded the development of a healthy watershed plan.

The Natchaug watershed spans 8 municipalities in eastern CT: Ashford, Chaplin, Eastford, Mansfield, Union, Willington, Windham and Woodstock, and includes the drainage areas of the Natchaug, Mount Hope and Fenton Rivers. The three rivers converge at Mansfield Hollow Lake. Below Mansfield Hollow Lake is the Willimantic Reservoir, the source of drinking water for parts of Windham and Mansfield.

For the current effort, having previously completed the *Lower Natchaug River Abbreviated Watershed-based Plan* (2014), ECCD is focused on the watershed above the reservoir.

While not entirely pristine, DEEP has designated the Natchaug watershed as one of the healthier watersheds in Connecticut. Comprised of 174 square miles, the watershed is 74% forested and less than 10% developed. Developed areas, with high percentages of impervious surfaces, contribute significantly more polluted runoff than forests. Forests are highly valued for their ability filter water naturally. Assessments done by DEEP and volunteer monitoring groups, such as The Last Green Valley Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program, have determined that large areas of the Natchaug watershed contain cold water stream habitat suitable for native brook trout and slimy sculpin, two fish used as indicators of cold water stream habitat. In Connecticut, native brook trout and slimy sculpin have disappeared from large portions of their former range, but can still be found in the Natchaug watershed.

To initiate and facilitate the plan's development, ECCD organized and conducted a series of stakeholder meetings with local stakeholders and conservation professionals. At the inaugural meeting, ECCD staff conducted a survey to assess local perspectives on natural resource priorities, as well as to gauge concerns related to stresses on those resources. Concurrent with ECCD's planning activities, DEEP staff has been working on a nutrient management assessment for the watershed. At the second meeting, DEEP presented preliminary data about nutrient loads in the watershed. At the third meeting, to solicit input from local communities, the draft NHWIP was presented. Ultimately, responsibility to successfully implement the plan falls upon local communities. A fourth stakeholder meeting, not yet scheduled, will include a public review of the DEEP analysis focused on developing nutrient budgets for each of the smaller drainage areas within the watershed. In the future, ECCD's Natchaug Healthy Watershed Implementation Plan will be combined with DEEP's nutrient budget plan (also known as a Total Maximum Daily Load analysis), resulting in a comprehensive assessment of the Natchaug watershed.

Implementing the NHWIP will depend upon voluntary compliance. Municipal officials and individual citizens must strike a balance between community growth and natural resource conservation. Success in implementing the plan's recommendations will depend largely on an educated population that can fully appreciate the natural resources that surrounds it and the economic value of those resources. Therefore, to raise awareness, ECCD has been and continues to conduct a major outreach campaign including workshops, e-newsletters and social media postings on Facebook (Naturally Natchaug) and Instagram (@NaturallyNatchaug). A Naturally Natchaug storyboard featuring short video segments will be completed soon. It is being produced cooperatively with the Thames River Basin Partnership (TRBP), in place of TRBP's annual Floating Workshop. ECCD thanks volunteer Gary Hoehne for his outreach assistance, including the development of the Naturally Natchaug logo. The logo brands conservation efforts that will keep the Natchaug watershed natural and healthy, now and forever. With US EPA Clean Water Act § 319 non-point source program funds, CT DEEP has funded the project.

Jean Pillo Change of Address

Jean Pillo, Watershed Conservation Project Manager for ECCD, has moved her office to the Brooklyn Agriculture Center at 139 Wolf Den Road in Brooklyn, CT. ECCD wants to thank the Connecticut Audubon Society for hosting Jean at the Pomfret Center for 14 years and wish them well with their staff expansion for new educational programming. Jean's phone number at her Brooklyn office is 860-774-9600 ext 24.

Virtual Thames River Basin Partnership Floating Workshop

Due to the limits on public gatherings, the Thames River Basin Partnership Floating Workshop, originally scheduled for June 12, had to be cancelled. Since this year is the 20th anniversary of this annual event, a virtual Floating Workshop is under development. Stay tuned for an announcement when the final product is completed and the event goes live online, through the wonders of ZOOM.

Little River Waste Storage Design and Innovative Field Equipment Project

ECCD continues its efforts to protect and improve water quality in the Little River watershed, which is of extreme importance since the Little River provides drinking water to the Town of Putnam. This summer, the District received funding to design a roofed waste storage facility and free-stall barn for Elm Farm, as well as to acquire innovative field equipment for Elm Farm and Valleyside Farm, both of which are located in Woodstock.

Development of the design is preliminary to constructing the roofed facility. Construction of the free-stall barn is expected to begin in the spring of 2021. Once built, Elm Farm's herd will be housed under cover, protecting manure from washing down slope into Mill Brook, within the Little River watershed. The facility will also make it easier for Elm Farm to manage its herd, as well as provide an opportunity for visitors to the family store, *Farm To Table Market* (which is directly adjacent to the future free-stall barn), to experience a local dairy operation up close.

Acquisition of the innovative field equipment for Elm Farm and Valleyside Farm supports the District's mission to promote innovative technologies that improve the environment. More importantly, however, use of the equipment will have a direct and positive impact on water quality in multiple waterbodies in northeast, CT. For Valleyside Farm, ECCD purchased manure injectors. Manure injectors are used to inject manure into the ground, as opposed to spreading it on the surface. Manure spread on the surface of the ground is easily mobilized by rainfall, which carries it into brooks, rivers, lakes and ponds. Injecting manure subsurface will prevent excess nutrients and pathogens contained in the manure from contaminating surface waters.

For Elm Farm, ECCD purchased precision planting equipment (PPE). PPE is highly technical instrumentation that uses global positioning systems (GPS) and geographic information systems (GIS) to assist farmers to understand the planting environment of their soils. PPE records and saves data such as soil moisture, organic material content and soil compaction. The data is compiled over multiple years and is specific to every acre that is being planted. This information informs farmers about how much fertilizer needs to be applied, whether conditions are suitable for planting, how much seed needs to be planted and the amount of down-pressure needed to plant the seed at the correct depth. PPE also allows farmers to plant their corn into a living cover crop.



Lucas Young of Valleyside Farm studies the monitor in his tractor, linked to GIS, as he makes real-time decisions while planting corn using precision planting equipment. ECCD assisted Valleyside to purchase the PPE in 2017 and has assisted Elm Farm purchase the equipment as well.

By planting corn into a living cover crop, the cover crop can remain on the field for 2-3 weeks longer, protecting the soil from erosion for an extended period of time and allowing the uptake of nitrogen and phosphorous by the cover crop. Not only does this conserve soil, but it protects surface water from deposition of sediment, which is harmful to water quality and the ecosystem.

Farms are essential to producing food and fiber locally and ECCD continues to support our dairy farms through these challenging times. Both of the farms participating in this project have opened farm stores. *Valleyside's Woodstock Creamery* is located at 210 Child Hill Road, Woodstock, CT and Elm Farm's *Farm to Table Market* is located at 324 Woodstock Rd, Woodstock, CT.

We encourage you to visit these farms to enjoy some ice cream and purchase a variety of locally-grown products while enjoying a day in the countryside of Woodstock.

Bee the change you want to see in the world, plant a ‘Bee Lawn’

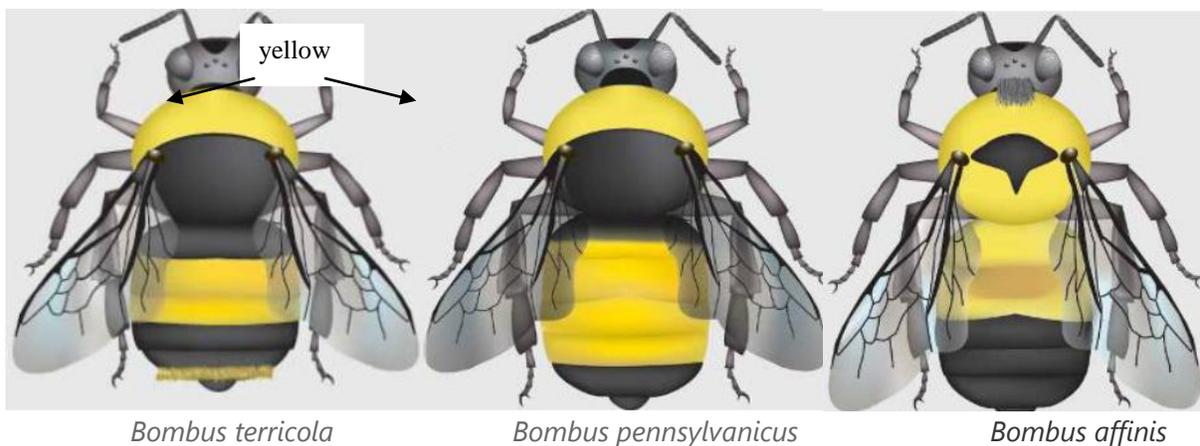
You probably know that honey bees are an important pollinator of crops and that Colony Collapse Disorder is threatening their survival, but did you know there are four types of significant Bumble Bees that are in decline in CT: Rusty Patched Bumble Bee (*Bombus affinis*), American Bumble Bee (*Bombus pennsylvanicus*), Yellow Bumble Bee (*Bombus fervidus*) and Yellow Banded Bumble Bee (*Bombus terricola*)?

Because bumble bees are able to fly in cooler temperatures and lower light levels than many other bees, they are vital pollinators for many plants. Bumble bees eat pollen for protein and nectar for a sugar rush. An impressive way to collect pollen that is unique to bumble bees is “buzz pollination,” by which a bee grasps in its jaws the pollen producing structure (anther) of the flower and vibrates its flight muscles very rapidly to free trapped pollen. Some plants such as tomatoes, blueberries, peppers, and cranberries require buzz pollination.

Major threats to bumble bees include the spread of pests and diseases, habitat destruction and alteration, pesticides, invasive species, natural pests or predator population cycles and climate change.

The good news is that states can affect change, as Minnesota's legislature proved by passing a bill to allocate \$900,000 annually to pay homeowners to turn their lawns into bee-friendly habitats filled with wildflowers, clovers and native grasses. The *Lawns to Legumes* program includes workshops, coaching, planting guides and cost-share funding for installing pollinator-friendly native plantings in residential lawns. Even relatively small plantings of native flowers can create critical habitat corridors, especially for at-risk species.

To read more about *Lawns to Legumes* and find resources for DIY planning projects, go to: www.bwsr.state.mn.us/121. Also, **bee** sure to maintain and replant rain gardens with native pollinator-friendly plants. Check with your town to see if it has a Pollinator Pathway, if not, learn how to start one at: www.pollinator-pathway.org/.



(Article sources: Xerces Society, IUCN Red List, version 2/2020, Science.howstuffworks.com, <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/121>, NPR.org)

The Last Green Valley Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program Impacts from Covid-19

Since it began in 2006, under a cooperative agreement between ECCD and The Last Green Valley, ECCD staff has been providing Coordinator Services to TLGV for its volunteer water quality monitoring program. This year has been a year of special challenges for the program due to Covid-19 group size restrictions. As a result, any monitoring requiring a group effort from a boat has been paused for this season, and other programs have been modified. Safety guidelines for the volunteers were carefully considered and implemented. For example, volunteers not from the same household cannot drive in the same vehicle to monitoring locations and everyone is required to wear a mask, even outdoors. Required training was conducted online. Despite these restrictions, many return volunteers were eager to help collect data, and several projects are underway.

ECCD and TLGV wholeheartedly thank the dedicated volunteers who make this program a success.

Outreach Support to ECCD

We extend our many thanks to the following supporters of conservation for their generous assistance and outreach!

- ✧ 2019-20 Water Quality Monitoring Volunteers
- ✧ Alexander Lake Conservation
- ✧ Andrew Tate Memorial Fund
- ✧ Brooklyn Fairground
- ✧ Burr Farm, Inc.
- ✧ CT Audubon Society
- ✧ CT Dept. of Energy & Environmental Protection
- ✧ Fidelity
- ✧ Grayville Farms
- ✧ Green Team of Frito Lay-Pepsico, Dayville
- ✧ Groton Open Space Association
- ✧ Gungywamp Land, Inc.
- ✧ Lisbon Conservation Commission
- ✧ Ocean State Job Lot
- ✧ Pfizer
- ✧ Plainfield Conservation Commission
- ✧ Rand-Whitney
- ✧ Retired Senior Volunteers
- ✧ The Last Green Valley, Inc.
- ✧ UConn Extension System
- ✧ Uklejas’s Tree Farm
- ✧ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- ✧ Valleyside Farm, LLC

Town Support

We would like to thank the following towns for their 2019-20 contributions to ECCD, which help to support regional conservation throughout eastern Connecticut.

Ashford, Brooklyn, Columbia, Eastford, East Lyme, Franklin, Hampton, Ledyard, Lisbon, Mansfield, Norwich, Pomfret, Preston, Putnam, Scotland, Sprague, Sterling, Thompson, Voluntown, Waterford and Woodstock.



Thank you for your acts of kindness that follow:

♥ ♥ ♥ ECCD wishes to express its respectful appreciation for donations ♥ ♥ ♥ fondly made on behalf of others in the name of conservation.	
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ECCD Gives Thanks to Our Supporters

We extend our sincere appreciation to you for supporting natural resource conservation in eastern Connecticut. Your donations truly enhance our outreach and education, while keeping our 36 towns and coastal shorelines evolving into greater health and beauty through sound stewardship.

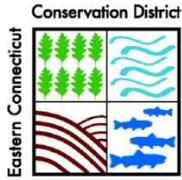
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