

Currents & Eddies

Fall 2026

Connecticut River Conservancy

As the 2026 field season comes to a close, the Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) is happy to share new river stories and project highlights with you.

Across the watershed, CRC staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters have been hard at work restoring rivers, monitoring water quality, removing invasive species, advocating for stronger protections, and expanding opportunities for people to connect with local waterways. From dam removal and habitat restoration projects that improve river health and resilience, to community science programs and recreational events that deepen personal experience with nature, this year's highlights reflect a shared commitment to ensuring cleaner water, healthier habitats, and more resilient communities for generations to come.

Volunteers continue to play an essential role in everything from water quality monitoring and aquatic invasive species management to river cleanups as part of the 30th annual Source to Sea Cleanup. These events bring thousands of people together each year to care for local waterways. In this screen-dominated age of distraction, these are the real-world human activities that nourish our spirits and ecosystems alike.

At the same time, CRC is laying the groundwork for new ways to engage people with the river's stories, history, and future, including watershed-wide initiatives and collaboration that will carry momentum into our 75th anniversary celebration in 2027. Together, these efforts remind us that meaningful conservation is built not only through restoration projects and scientific data, but through enduring partnerships, shared stewardship, and a collective belief that healthy rivers benefit everyone.

The updates within these pages are not a full accounting of CRC's programs and accomplishments in 2026 (the Annual Report in a few months will do that!) since the field season is not over just yet, and our staff have much data still to gather. But even the nearing-completion stories are worth telling so that you can see what we've been up to, and how these programs come together to advance tangible progress towards cleaner, healthier rivers for all.

The Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) restores and advocates for clean water, healthy habitats, and resilient communities to support a diverse and thriving watershed.

WILD AMMONOOSUC DAM REMOVAL

Restoring 71 miles of free-flowing aquatic habitat in the White Mountain National Forest.



Wild Ammonoosuc River below former dam.

The Wild Ammonoosuc Dam in Landaff, New Hampshire, is officially gone! Its removal in August 2026 restores a free-flowing stretch of one of the Connecticut River's most important cold-water tributaries. Built in 1929 as part of a water supply system for the village of Woodsville, the 10-foot-high concrete dam had not been used for decades but continued to block fish passage and disrupt natural river processes. The project included removal of the dam and associated infrastructure, management of impounded sediments, and restoration of the adjacent floodplain, allowing the river to once again flow naturally through the White Mountain National Forest. A planting of over 500 native trees and shrubs is also scheduled for this fall to further stabilize the riverbank.



Wild Ammonoosuc Dam before removal.





Wild Ammonoosuc Dam during the removal process.

The Wild Ammonoosuc is part of the larger Ammonoosuc watershed, a roughly 60-mile river system that begins on the slopes of Mount Washington and flows west to the Connecticut River. It has long been recognized for its high-quality habitat, outstanding recreational value, and ecological importance.



Wild Ammonoosuc River after dam removal in Sept. 2026.

The removal reconnects approximately 71 miles of mainstem and tributary habitat, opening access to some of New Hampshire's highest-quality cold-water streams. The project is expected to benefit eastern brook trout, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in New Hampshire, by improving access to spawning habitat, increasing genetic exchange among populations, and providing connections to cool-water refuge areas that help fish withstand warming temperatures. Returning the river to a free-flowing condition will also improve sediment transport, oxygen levels, and overall ecosystem resilience, while supporting other native aquatic species that depend on connected river systems.

The project was made possible through a partnership among the Woodsville Water & Light Department, Connecticut River Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Dam Removal and River Restoration Program, New Hampshire Fish and Game, American Rivers, and the U.S. Forest Service. Funding support was provided by the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund, U.S. Forest Service, and NH State Conservation Committee Conservation Moose Plate Grant Program. Lynch Construction Co. and Base Flow LLC contractors also provided engineering and construction work.



Learn more at ctriver.org/dam-removal.



Old culvert (4 feet wide).



New culvert (14 feet wide).

CULVERT UPGRADE & ADVOCACY ON THE NULHEGAN RIVER

The Connecticut River watershed is full of outdated and undersized culverts that prevent fish passage and are not equipped to handle the increased volume of water during flood events. This year's culvert upgrades will create a lot more room for fish and water in the Nulhegan River within the Nulhegan Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Northern Vermont (as in almost-Canada north!). CRC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service replaced two old, undersized, and perched culverts with larger ones for fish and aquatic organism passage, as well as flood resiliency.

Senator Welch and his staff joined a paddle on the Nulhegan River along with representatives from the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, Vermont Fish & Wildlife, Essex County Natural Resources Conservation District, Vermont River Conservancy, Northern Forest Canoe Trail, and the Connecticut River Conservancy as part of a partnership in support of studying and reporting on the Nulhegan River and Paul Stream for potential addition to federally recognized Wild & Scenic Rivers.





Left: Nulhegan River. Right: Senator Peter Welch of VT with CRC Conservation Scientist, Fritz Gehardt.

The Nulhegan River is a 15.1-mile-long tributary of the Connecticut River in northern Vermont. Adding Wild & Scenic protections would support water quality, ban any new dam construction, and require management plans. Achieving federal designation is a multi-year process. In the Connecticut River watershed, sections of the Deerfield River are undergoing similar efforts in hopes of joining others downstream that are already federally designated including the Westfield River, Upper Farmington River, Lower Farmington and Salmon Brook, and Eightmile River. Thanks to Senator Welch and all involved for continuing to advocate for our rivers.

COLD RIVER BIOSTABILIZATION

Our Cold River biostabilization bank restoration project in Walpole, NH, used nature-based engineering to address a severely eroding riverbank along the flash-flood-prone Cold River.

The landowner has lost 30-40' of riverbank on this site over the past 5 years. Crews regraded the unstable bank, installed large woody materials including 22 rootwads and logs, and created a stable floodplain bench designed to absorb the force of high flows. The toe of the bank will be much more protected from future flooding events. The steps and the bench above the bank will be planted with native trees and shrubs, which will grow roots to further stabilize the bank long-term. This is part of multi-year, multi-site biostabilization work on the Cold River. You can watch a video about this project at youtube.com/@connecticutriver.





Top: Creating the bench and steps above the bank.
Bottom: Installed rootwads visible along the bank.

Learn more at ctriver.org/dam-removal and ctriver.org/river-restoration.





Left: Volunteers remove water chestnut from Lake Warner. Center: water chestnut. Right: Great blue heron on a branch amid water chestnut on Addison Pond in CT.

COMMUNITY EFFORT, LASTING IMPACT: TACKLING AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES ACROSS THE CONNECTICUT RIVER WATERSHED

Across the Connecticut River watershed, the Connecticut River Conservancy's (CRC) Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Program protects waterways through invasive species removal, prevention, monitoring, and public engagement.

In Connecticut and Massachusetts, hundreds of volunteers worked alongside CRC staff and partners to remove invasive water chestnut (*Trapa natans*), which can choke waterways, limit recreation, and degrade habitat. In Connecticut sites including Keeney Cove, Floating Meadows, Whalebone Cove, and Addison Pond, volunteers and staff removed an estimated 218,000 water chestnut rosettes while restoring access and improving ecological conditions. Keeney Cove alone accounted for more than 25,000 pounds of removed material, with 135 volunteer participations contributing over 470 volunteer hours.

In Massachusetts, work at Lake Warner, the Oxbow, Oxford Marsh, Bachelor Brook, Log Pond Cove, and the Fannie Stebbins Wildlife Refuge resulted in the removal of more than 130,000 plants and over 20,000 pounds of biomass. New and longstanding collaborations, including Friends of Lake Warner & the Mill River, The Venture Out Project, Mass Audubon Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, and Chicopee 4Rivers, helped expand the program's impact.

One of the season's most notable successes occurred at Lake Warner, where volunteers and staff worked alongside Friends of Lake Warner & the Mill River to combine volunteer handpulling with a new Truxor aquatic vegetation harvester!

In Vermont and New Hampshire, CRC focuses primarily on prevention and early detection. Working with state agencies, NH Lakes, and local partners, staff conduct courtesy boat checks, boater surveys, and aquatic plant monitoring to detect emerging threats such as hydrilla before they become established. Training and support from programs like Vermont Invasive Patrollers, the Vermont Public Access Greeter Program, NH Lakes Lake Host Program, and state Weed Watcher initiatives strengthen these efforts.

CRC also supports the Windham County Natural Resources Conservation District's Kayak for Conservation program, where years of dedicated hand-pulling have dramatically reduced water chestnut populations near Vernon, Hinsdale, Rockingham, and North Walpole.

Whether removing invasive plants in the south or preventing new infestations in the north, CRC's AIS Program demonstrates how local action creates watershed-wide impact. Thanks to volunteers, partners, municipalities, and state agencies across all four states, the Connecticut River is becoming more resilient to invasive species threats and better protected for future generations.



This article is an abbreviated version of a more detailed writeup available at ctriver.org/post/ais-2026

More information available at ctriver.org/aquatic-invasive-species







PILOTING MACROINVERTEBRATE SURVEYS TO ASSESS WATER QUALITY & BIODIVERSITY

CRC is growing our capacity to study the ecology and biodiversity of rivers and streams, with an eye to also fostering connection, stewardship, and interest in our watershed community. At the intersection of water quality and ecology are aquatic macroinvertebrate communities. What is an aquatic macroinvertebrate? It is an organism that lives in the water, is large enough to be seen and collected without special equipment, and does not have a backbone. Macroinvertebrate communities are composed of a wide variety of organisms, from crustaceans like crayfish and amphipods (scuds), to mollusks like snails, or the most numerous group typically found: aquatic insects, often in the larval or nymph stage of their life. Benthic macroinvertebrate surveys offer insight into the health of aquatic ecosystems. Community composition, species diversity, and abundance all provide information about water and habitat quality. Some species, like mayflies and stoneflies, are more sensitive to degraded water conditions, while others, like worms and midges are tolerant of poor water quality. Many other commonly found groups, including dragonfly and damselfly nymphs, bivalves, and crayfish fall somewhere in between. Changes over time in macroinvertebrate community metrics can provide a lot of useful information about the state of the water body and how it is reacting to and recovering from perturbances.

Learn more about this year's macroinvertebrate surveys at ctriver.org/post/macroinvertebrates-2026

YOUR LOVE FOR THE RIVER CAN LAST FOR GENERATIONS

Some of life's most memorable moments happen on or near the Connecticut River. Whether it's paddling a tributary, watching a bald eagle soar overhead, casting a line in a favorite fishing spot, or simply pausing to enjoy the view, the river leaves lasting memories.

A gift in your will or estate plans can help ensure future generations enjoy the same healthy, thriving river and watershed.

You don't need to be wealthy to make a meaningful difference. Many supporters simply include CRC in their will, designate CRC as a beneficiary of a retirement account, or leave a percentage of their estate.

Your future gift can help:

- Protect clean water throughout the watershed
- Restore habitat for fish and wildlife
- Advance solutions for healthier rivers and communities
- Preserve the river for generations to come

The Long River Society recognizes supporters who have included CRC in their will, estate plans, or beneficiary designations. **Already included CRC in your plans?** Join the Long River Society and let us say thank you. Anonymous gifts are always respected.

To learn more, contact Susan Heitker, Chief Development Officer at 413-490-9197 or sheitker@ctriver.org, or visit: ctriver.org/more-ways-to-give

GETTING TOGETHER BY THE RIVER



Mixed photos from 2026 paddles & events.

Watershed-wide community engagement events in 2026 have ranged in variety and format, including learn to fish events, guided nature walks, environmental education, the Wild & Scenic Film Festival, our annual paddling series, and many more. CRC staff enjoy creating opportunities that bring people together on or near the water.

This year, CRC was accepted as a project partner in the National Parks Service Community Engagement Program! The Community Engagement Project is a multi-year cooperative agreement between the American Alliance of Museums and the National Park Service. We are delighted to have the opportunity to collaborate directly with the National Park Service and their community partners, build on our previous successes, and enhance opportunities to engage in meaningful experiences together. This program allows CRC to facilitate community engagement events in the Greater Springfield area in MA and the Greater Hartford area in CT, focusing on environmental education and outdoor recreation in order to connect residents to the river.

Thanks to this program, our Learn to Kayak and Community Paddle events in both CT and MA were a success with CRC staff and board members welcoming 64 participants on the river at 2 events in Springfield, MA, 1 event in Windsor, CT, and 4 events in Wethersfield, CT. With the additional support of the Neag Foundation, we've also had the pleasure of welcoming 4 different Connecticut-based youth groups on environmental education boat tours out of Wethersfield, CT. The joy folks express when they are together outdoors near or on the river is powerful and contagious. We are thrilled to strengthen the currents of stewardship and community resilience in our watershed.

ANNUAL CELEBRATION ABOARD THE GOODWIN NAVIGATOR



Annual Celebration boat tour (top); guest speaker Leila Philip (bottom left); Ken Sprankle receiving Bud Foster Award (bottom right).

This year's Annual Celebration was held at Goodwin University in East Hartford, CT. The event combined brunch, Board of Trustees updates, a special talk by author Leila Philip titled *Hidden Hydrology: How Rivers, Beavers, and Wetlands form Watersheds,* and two boat tours on the Connecticut River aboard the R.V. Good Navigator with Captain Bill Keyt. The weather was picture perfect as we enjoyed sights of the Hartford skyline, scenic riverbanks, and local wildlife including an active osprey nest.

After brunch we had the pleasure of honoring Ken Sprankle, a renowned Fishery Biologist, with CRC's Bud Foster Award. This award is granted annually to those showing outstanding devotion, service, and accomplishment in the Connecticut River watershed. Additionally, we recognized three extraordinary volunteers for their contributions: Kathy Malin, Joan Plummer, and Jeremy Shrauf.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE *30th* ANNUAL SOURCE TO SEA CLEANUP

The 30th annual Source to Sea Cleanup was held in September, and once again volunteers throughout the Connecticut River watershed came out in full force! The trash tallies and photos were still coming in as this publication went to print, but so far over 140 different groups are documented including over 1,000 volunteers and an estimated 50,000+ lbs. of trash removed from our waterways.

Group types included families, businesses, school groups, community groups, nonprofits, museums, and conservation commissions. Even a nor'easter didn't stop some of you from rolling up your sleeves and getting your feet wet for the sake of cleaner, healthier rivers. THANK YOU to everyone who contributed, whether as a Group Leader, volunteer, sponsor, in-kind donor, ride-giver, truck-lender, trash-mover, snack-provider, or vibe-lifter. This event is community stewardship in action. Stay tuned for many more cleanup details in our next Cleanup Chronicle.



Mixed photos from 2026 Source to Sea Cleanup events.

ADVOCACY & POLICY: PROTECTING OUR RIVERS AT THE STATE & FEDERAL LEVEL

This year, CRC championed river protection close to home by engaging directly in state policy and regulatory decisions across the watershed. We mobilized supporters to participate in legislative sessions, advocated for stronger protections for clean water and healthy habitats, and helped advance policies related to pesticide restriction, cyanobacteria, water quality, wildlife habitat corridors, and bottle redemption reform. We also worked to reduce chloride contamination from road salt, encouraged public participation in watershed planning efforts, and continued our long-term advocacy to ensure hydropower facilities operate in ways that better protect river health, recreation, fish habitat, and communities throughout the Connecticut River watershed.

At the federal level, CRC expanded its advocacy to address policies with watershed-wide impacts. We joined partners in defending strong environmental safeguards during hydropower relicensing proceedings and spoke out against proposed changes to federal grantmaking rules that could undermine conservation and restoration investments in local communities. Most recently, we rallied supporters across four watershed states (NH, VT, MA, and CT) to defend the federal Roadless Rule, which protects hundreds of thousands of acres in the Green and White Mountain National Forests and helps safeguard the headwaters, drinking water supplies, wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities that sustain the Connecticut River watershed from source to sea.

Connecticut River Conservancy
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Learn more about the watershed

Visit ctriver.org for information about CRC's programs and how we're addressing threats to your rivers.

Report a problem on the river

Get in touch with our River Stewards at ctriver.org/advocacy to address river issues you've come across.

Volunteer or join a river-friendly event

Visit ctriver.org/events to see events and activities year-round that are both on the water and on land, in-person and virtual.

Stay informed with river news

Sign up for CRC's e-news at ctriver.org/email for the latest updates, events, and state-specific action alerts.

SUPPORT A CLEANER, HEALTHIER CONNECTICUT RIVER

Thank you for all you do to contribute to cleaner, healthier rivers. The work of the Connecticut River Conservancy and our many regional partners is vital and ongoing. From removing old dams and invasive species to advocating for better policies and testing water quality in our lab, we take a watershed-wide approach to just about everything we do. And your support makes this possible!



Connecticut River Conservancy staff in spring, 2026

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION FOR CLEANER RIVERS. VISIT CTRIVER.ORG

If you'd like to support our work on the Connecticut River, please consider making a contribution.

To donate, please return the enclosed envelope with your gift, or support us online at ctriver.org/donate.

You can also contact Susan Heitker, Chief Development Officer, at sheitker@ctriver.org or 413-490-9197 to get in touch or become a sponsor.

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