



# Connecticut River Corridor Management Plan Retrospective

As the Connecticut River Joint Commissions and our five Local River Subcommittees look forward to creating a new management plan for the River, we are gratified to see all that has happened as a result of the first edition, published in 1997. Tallying the list of actions taken on the federal, state, local, public and private levels resulted in a six-page, single-spaced list of achievements for the River—and those were just the actions we knew about.

*Here are a few highlights:*

## FEDERAL ACTION

- ❖ The Connecticut River was named an American Heritage River in 1999, and EPA sponsored a Connecticut River Navigator.
- ❖ The Federal Partners, led by EPA, established Action Teams to work on Water Quality, Erosion and Buffers, Fisheries and Wildlife Habitat, and Flow. The agencies presented a public forum on Connecticut River fisheries, the Army Corps began to work more closely with the hydro power company on flood control releases, and FEMA started work on new flood plain mapping.
- ❖ EPA conducted two sediment studies in 1998 and 2000, presenting their results to the public, and provided funds to CRJC for the Sustainable Riverbanks projects.
- ❖ Local citizens worked with EPA and Vermont to investi-

gate the Elizabeth Mine and agree upon a course for treatment of this difficult source of water pollution.

- ❖ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service surveyed riverbank erosion in all riverfront counties in NH and VT, with CRJC support, and designed CRJC's riverbank restoration projects.
- ❖ National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration provides funding for the Partnership Program, Scenic Byway, and Sustainable Riverbanks riverbank restoration at Hook Farm, Birch Meadow, and Fort at No. 4.
- ❖ The Army Corps of Engineers conducted a reconnaissance of erosion and habitat restoration opportunities on the Connecticut River.
- ❖ USFWS & Conte Refuge opened education centers, established a cost-share grant program, and embarked on an invasive species education and control initiative.

## STATE ACTIONS

- ❖ NH Department of Environmental Services provided funds for RPCs to help towns implement the Plan, started a bio-monitoring program in 1997 on Connecticut River tributaries, provided the state's first Americorps assistant to the lower watershed, and provided funds for CRJC to develop riparian buffer fact sheets and reprint erosion guidance. DES provided funds for Grafton County Cooperative Extension to demonstrate riparian buffers and test their effectiveness on several riverfront farms, supported

## Status of Water Quality Info on the Connecticut River

INFORMATION about water quality is much more accessible to the public than it was in the 1990s, although we are discovering that data for the Connecticut River and its tributaries are spotty.

Vermont is in the midst of basin planning studies, and has yet to publish information for its tributaries north of the Stevens River. New Hampshire has conducted a complete house-cleaning exercise on its water quality data while working with EPA to assemble them for GIS-based web posting. After discarding all the data over five years old (for rivers; 10 years

for lakes) and those that might otherwise be unreliable, DES was left with data for only about 10 percent of the state's rivers. There was only enough usable information to assess 8 percent for aquatic life.

On the Connecticut, 152 of the 275 miles of the river in New Hampshire have been assessed and much (136 miles) is safe for swimming and other forms of contact recreation. Seventeen miles of the river, from the mouth of the White River in Hartford to Blow-Me-Down Brook in Cornish, are considered unsafe for swimming, primarily due to combined sewer overflows in Lebanon and Hartford.

There is, however, incomplete information on 45 miles of the river, and a full 55 miles need to be reassessed to see if these river miles will support contact recreation.

Paul Currier, administrator of the Watershed Management Bureau at NH DES, hopes that partnerships can be developed with watershed organizations to fill these information gaps. DES has a small program for rivers with a couple of staff and summer interns. The good news is that volunteer water quality monitoring is welcomed and encouraged by the states as a way to surmount this problem. 🌊

## Management Plan Retrospective

Claremont citizens on volunteer water quality monitoring of the Sugar River, and installed non-point pollution control devices in the watershed of Clark Brook with NRCS and Grafton County Conservation District.

- ❖ NH Dept. of Agriculture enacted a two-year grant program for agricultural nutrient management services.
- ❖ NH Fish & Game installed a river temperature monitor at the North Stratford gage, hooked up by satellite to the Internet, and helped with a fish tissue toxin study.
- ❖ NH Division of Historic Resources started a program of small grants for historic barn owners and a barn preservation easement program.
- ❖ NH Office of State Planning supported the Connecticut River Scenic Byway program and provided a River Byway brochure.
- ❖ The State of NH conserved 171,500 acres of former International Paper Company land at the River's headwaters, and designated the Cold and Ashuelot Rivers into the NH Rivers Program.
- ❖ Dam removal task forces were established in both states, and one dam was removed on the Ashuelot River.
- ❖ VT Agency of Natural Resources responded to water quality concerns in the Black River and provided funds for phosphorus reduction at Springfield. ANR initiated a Basin Planning Program, beginning with the White River, provided funds to reprint CRJC's boating guide, and offered assistance to river towns with car-top boat access. The state purchased Lyman Falls State Park with help from the Vermont River Conservancy and CRJC.
- ❖ VT Agency of Transportation provided planning assistance for car-top boat access at Stratford/Maidstone Bridge, and support for the Connecticut River Byway program.
- ❖ VT Office of Travel & Tourism provided staff support for Byway web site development, Byway exhibit preparation, and Council activities.
- ❖ The State of Vermont conserved 20,000 acres of former Champion timberland at West Mountain.

## CRJC ACTIONS

- ❖ Directed the Partnership Program to provide funds to implement recommendations of the Plan. To date, \$658,700 has gone to support 180 local projects in answer to the Plan.
- ❖ Revised and published "Challenge of Erosion in the Connecticut River Valley" and "Riparian Buffers in the Connecticut River Valley" series of fact sheets.
- ❖ Initiated "River Valley News," published twice each year.
- ❖ Published "Instream Flow Uses, Values, and Policies in the Upper Connecticut River Watershed" and sponsored a conference on Flow.
- ❖ Expanded web site to reflect interests and concerns expressed in the Plan.
- ❖ Published pamphlet "Boating on the Connecticut River in NH & VT," posted river maps and boat speed cautions at

launch sites with help of local subcommittee members, and sponsored new car-top access at Mt. Orne Bridge.

- ❖ Published book, *Proud to Live Here*.
- ❖ Established the Connecticut River Byway Council and promoted designation of Connecticut River Byway, sponsored Byway marketing research, supported establishment of waypoint centers, provided exhibits to waypoint communities, created the Byway web site, initiated "River Byway News," published twice each year, and arranged for signage study for Byway communities and routes.
- ❖ Funded erosion inventories of the entire Connecticut River in both states and initiated Sustainable Riverbanks project, to demonstrate new, state of the art—and affordable—riverbank restoration techniques at three top priority sites.

## REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIONS

- ❖ Distributed riparian buffer guidance to their member towns.
- ❖ Assisted with model ordinances, incorporating the Plan into local master plans and zoning ordinances.
- ❖ Assisted with GIS mapping and natural resource inventories.
- ❖ Hosted workshops for town officials on putting the river plan into action.
- ❖ Established or supported tributary watershed associations on Mill Brook, the Ottauquechee River, and others.

## CITIZEN INITIATIVES

- ❖ More than 175 citizens representing 49 riverfront towns participated in creating the first edition of the *Connecticut River Corridor Management Plan*.
- ❖ Citizens formed new watershed organizations: Tributary Trails (on the Israel's, John's, Ammonoosuc Rivers), Oliverian Brook Council; Mascoma Watershed Conservation Council; Sugar River Watershed Association; Cold River Local Advisory Committee; Ashuelot River Local Advisory Committee; Stevens Brook Association; Passumpsic River Watch; White River Partnership; Lull's Brook Association; Mill Brook Association; Friends of the West River; Black River watershed Action Team, Connecticut Lakes Association.
- ❖ Citizens started or expanded other organizations, often with grants from CRJC: the Elizabeth Mine Study Group; the Purple Loosestrife Coalition; Upper Valley Trails Alliance; Connecticut River Birding Trail; and Connecticut RiverFest.

## BUSINESS INITIATIVES

- ❖ New England Power Company negotiated and signed a Settlement Agreement with state and federal agencies, CRJC, and others for a new license at Fifteen Mile Falls, conserving land around the project and initiating the Mitigation & Enhancement Fund.

# Bird's Eye View

## Action on the Connecticut River Corridor Management Plan



Photo by Hayden Mulligan

View south, down the central Connecticut River Valley, with the Lyme-East Thetford Bridge in the foreground, and Mt. Ascutney just left of center in the distance.

- 1 Grant Brook**—High quality waterfowl habitat and adjacent agricultural lands and stream corridor protected by the Upper Valley Land Trust.
- 2 Wilder Wildlife Management Area**—Public Service Co. of NH, Audubon Society of NH, and NH Fish and Game Department installed an osprey nesting platform.
- 3 Hewes Brook**—The Lyme Conservation Commission restored a riparian buffer and built the town's first public river access.
- 4 Riverfront Farm**—The Upper Valley Land Trust won the first farmland protection grant offered in many years, protecting prime agricultural soils in Lyme.
- 5 Moose Mountain**—The Nature Conservancy worked with the Hanover Conservation Council to study biodiversity here and throughout the town.
- 6 Girl Brook**—The Hanover Conservation Commission is studying the brook's hydrology and erosion problems with a grant from the Fifteen Mile Falls Mitigation & Enhancement Fund.
- 7 Mt. Ascutney**—Windsor and West Windsor landowners worked with the Upper Valley Land Trust to add to protected land on the slopes of this valley landmark.
- 8 White River Watershed**—The White River Partnership enlisted farmers and other riparian landowners in stabilizing streambanks and restoring buffers.
- 9 Montshire Museum**—The Conte Refuge established an educational program and exhibits about the National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.
- 10 Blood Brook**—The Norwich Conservation Commission and Upper Valley Lake Sunapee RPC looked into water quality threats in the brook's watershed.
- 11 Ompompanoosuc River Watershed**—EPA worked with the State of Vermont, towns, the Elizabeth Mine Study Group, and other residents to agree on ways to end copper contamination from the abandoned mine.
- 12 Cedar Circle Farm**—The Connecticut River Byway website promotes farm stands and pick your own operations here in Thetford and along the Byway ([www.ctrivertravel.net](http://www.ctrivertravel.net)).
- 13 Riverbanks**—The Caledonia County Conservation District completed an inventory of erosion and riparian buffers on the Vermont bank of the Connecticut River, complementing a similar survey of the New Hampshire bank.

## Management Plan Retrospective

- ❖ NEP donated a zodiac boat to the Littleton Fire Department for water rescues on Moore Reservoir, and also to the Lebanon Fire Department.
- ❖ USGen provided information and programs for local river subcommittees and CRJC, and planted riparian buffers on large parcels of riverfront agricultural land in Charlestown, NH.
- ❖ USGen provided staff and a boat to help with EPA sediment sampling at Comerford, and worked with the Nature Museum at Grafton on the Watershed Center and Fish Ladder “Twilight Series” of programs at the Bellows Falls dam.



*River Commissioner Bob Christie of Lancaster kayaks beneath the Stratford-Maidstone Bridge. The historic bridge, soon to be restored and reopened, is the site of a future fishing and cartop boat access, sponsored by CRJC's Headwaters Subcommittee with help from the Vermont Agency of Transportation and many others.*

## TOWNS

*(see Every Drop Counts, p. 3, for recent actions)*

- ❖ Colebrook dedicated flood plain property to a riverfront park and new riparian buffer.
- ❖ Columbia restored its covered bridge and is working on protection of 11 acres at Lyman Falls.
- ❖ Stratford embarked on restoration of its historic railroad station as an interpretive center on rail history.
- ❖ Northumberland passed zoning to restrict development within the 100-year flood plain and to protect riparian areas.
- ❖ Guildhall is looking at how to manage its town-owned river access.
- ❖ Lancaster did a GIS inventory of scenic laid out a “river walk” along the Israel’s river resources in town.
- ❖ Lunenburg provided the site for a new public canoe access at the Mt. Orne Bridge.
- ❖ Monroe Consolidated School embarked on a year-round stewardship education project for students, teachers, and land-owners on 100 acres, with the help of a Conte Refuge grant.
- ❖ Littleton conducted a natural resources inventory, held an Enviro Fair, and started a farmer’s market.
- ❖ Haverhill, Cooperative Extension, and the Grafton County Conservation District set up a water quality monitoring lab.
- ❖ Piermont landowners conserved 50 acres previously approved for subdivision, including a half-mile of river frontage, prime agricultural land, and a beach area popular with boaters.
- ❖ Bradford adopted zoning protecting flood plains of the Waits and Connecticut Rivers from development.
- ❖ Orford’s historical society and NRCS staff offered programs on the town’s landscapes and historic barns.
- ❖ Fairlee and Orford worked to have their historic Samuel Morey Bridge restored.
- ❖ Thetford received a parcel with a half mile of Ompompanoosuc River frontage and set up a “Keeping Track” citizen study of wildlife.
- ❖ Lyme studied the cost of community services and price of development, and prepared guides to town-owned conservation properties.
- ❖ Hanover protected extensive frontage on Mink Brook.
- ❖ Norwich repaired the Gile Mountain Fire Tower on a popular local trail.
- ❖ Lebanon raised the percentage of land use change tax for conservation to 100 percent, and its Rotary Club sponsored a study of possible uses of the historic riverside Westboro Rail Yard property.
- ❖ Hartford protected 20 acres at Dothan Brook and the Connecticut River and updated its natural resources maps.
- ❖ Plainfield adopted a 100-foot shoreland setback, and its school held “River Days.”
- ❖ Hartland adopted a 200-foot setback from the river, to protect flood plain land.
- ❖ Cornish is working on prioritizing conservation lands.
- ❖ Windsor is exploring possibilities for redeveloping the historic area between the rail and the river.
- ❖ Charlestown enacted a building setback from the river and worked with FEMA to upgrade its flood plain maps.
- ❖ Weathersfield citizens held a river cleanup.
- ❖ Springfield citizens started a Black River watershed Action Team.
- ❖ Walpole voted to increase its conservation allocation of the land use change tax.
- ❖ Westmoreland is exploring current and potential means of shoreland protection.
- ❖ Westminster adopted river protections.
- ❖ Chesterfield residents explored the river to search for invasive exotic plants.
- ❖ Hinsdale celebrated a new trail that will eventually connect the Connecticut River at Mt. Wantastiquet with Mt. Monadnock.
- ❖ Brattleboro is working on plans for redeveloping its waterfront near Union Station. 🌿