Conservation Times

Newsletter of the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc.

January 2026

Promoting Stewardship of New Britain's Batterson Park Pond

This past year the Conservation District was excited to partner with New Britain ROOTS on a new project focused on Batterson Park Pond, different from the food justice work we've done together in the past. Goals of the project were to connect urban youth and Batterson Park Pond area residents with their local water resources; build awareness about environmental concerns, including human impacts on water quality both locally and downstream; and enhance engagement in stewardship. Other partners included Friends of Batterson Park, CT River Conservancy, and CT DEEP's Urban Fishing program. The project was funded in part by the Long Island Sound Futures Fund.

Together, we planned and held a series of activities with local youth who are part of a ROOTS program, engaging them in hands-on activities and stewardship actions. Activities included a kayaking clinic and trip, fishing, aquatic plant exploration, and community pond cleanup.

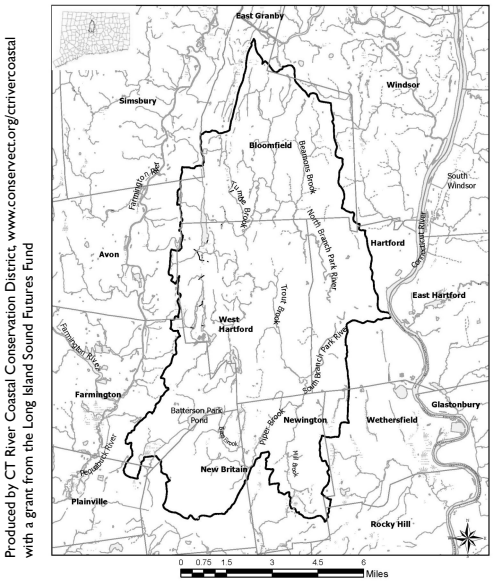
Also, we conducted outreach to pondside neighbors to raise awareness about the pond and water quality concerns. This was aimed at improving the pond and its use as a community resource, and ultimately, making the pond safe for swimming. We developed a handout about Batterson Park Pond, and assembled and mailed an information packet to 24 neighbors focused on simple, safe and environmentally sound practices they can adopt to enhance pond stewardship.

As a follow-up, we plan to host a gathering with pondside neighbors, answer questions, and share ways we can assist, including providing free consultations to recommend practices specific to their yards. We look forward to future activities focused on Batterson Park Pond!

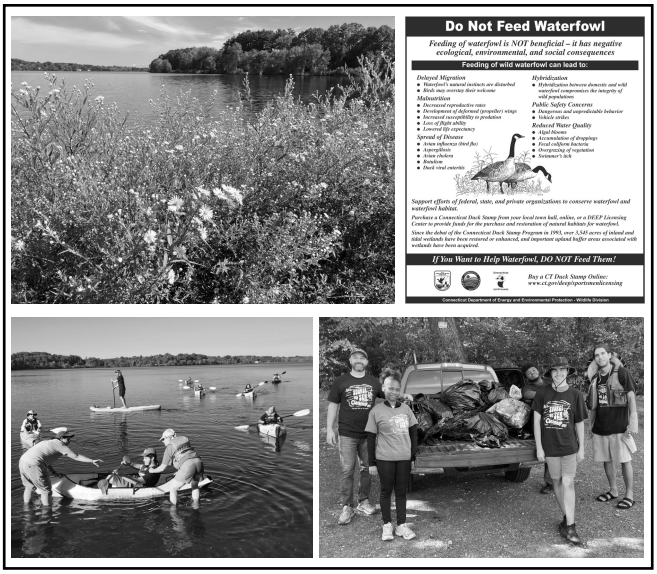
Interesting Facts about Batterson Park Pond

- Batterson Park Pond is a 165-acre waterbody in the Park River Watershed, which is located in New Britain and Farmington but is owned by the City of Hartford
- The pond was used originally as a drinking water reservoir
- The pond's watershed—the area of land that drains to the pond—is over 2,500 acres
- The pond forms the beginning of Bass Brook, which flows north into the South Branch Park River, then the Park River, then into the Connecticut River, which ends in Long Island Sound
- Substantial urban land uses, including nearby highways, degrade incoming water quality, which carries pollutants into the pond

Park River Watershed



Produced by CT River Coastal Conservation District, www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal with a grant from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund



Tips to reduce your impact on our streams, rivers, ponds and lakes…and all the way downstream to Long Island Sound

- Pick up after your pets!
- Don't feed waterfowl, which encourages them to congregate.
- If you live along a pond or a stream, plant a buffer of native plants, or just keep these areas natural and let the vegetation grow.
- Direct gutter downspouts to rain barrels or areas where water can soak in like lawns or rain gardens.
- Test your soil before fertilizing your lawn, and use organic alternatives if fertilizer is needed. Also, sweep up fertilizer from sidewalks and driveways before it washes away in the next rain.
- Look for safe alternatives to toxic pesticides and herbicides that are harmful to humans, pets, or the fish and other critters that live in streams and ponds.

Other Suggestions

- Participate in local river cleanups and water monitoring programs!

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to this project, including New Britain ROOTS staff and youth; CT River Conservancy staff; the CT DEEP Urban Fishing Coordinator; Friends of Batterson Park members; and staff from the CT Agricultural Experiment Station.

Upcoming Workshops with Native Plant Trust

The District will be co-hosting two workshops with Native Plant Trust (NPT) in the spring and fall as part of a partnership we entered into last year. Based in Massachusetts, NPT is the nation's first plant conservation organization and the only one solely focused on New England's native plants. Their mission is ***conserving and promoting New England's native plants to ensure healthy, biologically diverse landscapes.*** Both workshops will be presented by Kathy Connolly, with Speaking of Landscapes. Kathy is a landscape designer, writer, and speaker who emphasizes earth-friendly designs, use of native plants, and low-impact land care techniques. Workshop registration will be through NPT, www.nativeplanttrust.org

The first workshop, about native groundcovers, will be held on Saturday, June 6, 2026, 1:30-4:30 pm. This class will explore seven ways that all plants compete for space and survival, and how we can leverage native plants' natural competitive strategies to our advantage. Sample plants will be available to learn firsthand how to identify some of these competitive traits. We are happy to offer a number of competitive native ground-covers in the District's plant sale this year, including Field pussytoes, Foamflower (photo on right), Hayscented fern, Lowbush blueberry, Partridgeberry, Wild ginger and Wild strawberry. See page 4 of the newsletter for information about our native plant sale!

The second workshop, about foundation gardens and the many ways they can support nature and human wellness, will be held on October 3, 2026. Stay tuned for more details about this class.

New Expanded Edition of Invasive Plant Guide Published

Our popular guide to invasive plants, *Invasive Plants In Your Backyard! A Guide to Their Identification and Control*, has been updated and expanded, and hard copies are available! The new edition of our guide includes the following new plants: shrub honeysuckles, Callery pear (also referred to as Bradford pear), Japanese honeysuckle, and Chinese and Japanese wisteria. Also newly incorporated are Pale swallowwort (now combined with Black swallowwort), and Common buckthorn (now with Glossy buckthorn). Technical support for developing the updated version of the guide was provided by the CT Invasive Plant Working Group.

You may be familiar with our guide to identifying and controlling invasive plants, first published in 2009. This new guide is our 5th edition. Each time we ran out of hard copies we published a new version due to demand, and have now distributed over 40,000 copies!

This practical, easy-to-use guide was developed to help landowners identify and control non-native invasive plants in their yards. Invasive plants thrive outside of their natural range, threatening the health of our native plant and animal communities. Controlling invasives is a challenge, but the benefits are great! The updated guide provides detailed identification and control information on thirty common backyard invasives, along with recommendations for native alternatives.

Copies of the guide are available at our office, or you can download a PDF version of the guide from our website under the resources link. Contact our office at ctrivercoastal@conservect.org or 860-346-3282 if you would like to obtain a copy for yourself, a supply to distribute, or if you have questions.

The Elements Annual Environmental Film Series Turns 10!

Over ten years ago, the District came up with an idea to start an environment film series, pitched it to potential partners, and together we launched *The Elements: An Annual Environmental Film Series* in Spring 2015. Thanks to the dedication and interest of our collaborators and community members, the series has persisted! While our partners have changed since we first started, we now have a stable group of seven: Middletown Garden Club, Russell Library, The Rockfall Foundation, and Wesleyan University's Center for the Arts, College of the Environment, and College of Film and the Moving Image.

Since screening our first film in March 2015, we have shown a total of 35 films! Varied topics include urban farming, plastic pollution, soils, melting glaciers, food waste, overfishing, the clothing industry, conservation landscaping, the black food justice movement, water issues affecting indigenous people, and many more! Each screening is followed by a discussion facilitated by an expert in the film topic. Films are now shown three times a year, and our next film, *Last Paddle?* will be held in March at Wesleyan University—see the film announcement on page 4 of the newsletter for details. We hope you'll join us!

78th Annual Meeting Features Dam Removal Program and Tour

Our 78th annual meeting was held at the deKoven House in Middletown on Sunday, November 2. The meeting featured a program about dam removal presented by former DEEP fisheries biologist Steve Gephard, followed by a field trip to Highland Pond Preserve, where the dam had been removed recently. At the meeting we re-elected board member Denise Savageau, Old Lyme, for a three-year term as a regular member and elected new board member, Rodrigo Pinto, Moodus, for a three-year term as a regular member; reviewed our 2024-2025 accomplishments and activities; honored our conservation award winners (see details below); and enjoyed refreshments and conversation.

Many thanks to Steve Gephard, who gave a great presentation about dam removal and the Highland Pond Dam project. We learned about dam removal benefits, myths, and the general process, among many other facts about dams in CT and examples of dam removal projects in the state. He also debunked myths, like dam removal will result in stinking mudflats. After his presentation Steve led a field trip to the site of the former pond/dam at Highland Pond Preserve so we could learn firsthand about the project and see changes to the area to date, most notably the native vegetation that has grown in the former pond area due to the soil seed bank. If you're interested in having a look and observing the brook as it returns to its original state, the preserve is open to the public again now that construction is completed. You can also go on a nice walk there along a section of the National Scenic New England Blue Trail.

Congratulations 2025 Conservation Award Winners!

The awards ceremony is always a highlight of our annual meeting! Following are our 2025 awardees:

Tom ODell Outstanding District Service: ***Peter Picone, CT DEEP Wildlife Biologist & CT Envirothon Steering Committee Member,*** for long-standing contributions to the CT Envirothon as a Steering Committee member, as well as efforts to promote biodiversity and enhance habitat for wildlife through outreach and education about native plants and invasive plant management.

Environmental Professional: ***David Brown, Middlesex Land Trust Executive Director (retired)***, for contributions to regional land preservation efforts in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and leadership in completing the dam removal project at Highland Pond Preserve.

Project Award: ***School Farm and Land Lab, Amanda Thomson, Middletown H.S. Agriculture Science Teacher,*** for her vision for the school farm and land lab, and her dedication, persistence and hard work gaining support for and establishing this innovative learning resource for the Regional Agriculture Science and Technology Program.

District Professional: ***Kelly Starr, Natural Resource Specialist, CT River Coastal Conservation District,*** for her extensive contributions to providing conservation technical assistance to agricultural producers in partnership with NRCS, as well as being a leader in conservation planning work statewide.

(L to R) Executive Director Jane Brawerman, David Brown, Amanda Thomson, Kelly Starr, Peter Picone, and Board Chair Denise Savageau

District News and Events

STAFF & BOARD MEMBERS COMINGS & GOINGS

We were sorry to say goodbye to Kate Preston, who resigned from her Natural Resource position with the District this past summer, and is now working for CT Forest & Park Association. We wish her all the best! We were also sad to lose board member Ed Natoli, who retired from the Board last winter. Ed, from Salem, provided an important connection to the town and was also an avid supporter of our plant sale. For the good news, we were excited to welcome two new board members: Diana Martinez, Executive Director of Chicks Ahoy Farm, and the Founder of Cultivating Justice; and Rodrigo Pinto, CT DEEP Urban Fishing Coordinator. Both Diana and Rodrigo work in our Environmental Justice communities, and their urban-focused perspectives and experience add to the breadth of our board and benefit and broaden our conservation work. We do still have openings on our board, so please contact the district office if you're interested in learning more!

FILM EVENT: *THE LAST PADDLE?*, March 30, 2026, 7PM

Wesleyan University Goldsmith Family Cinema, Middletown, CT

The Last Paddle? is an inspiring and visually stunning film about the amazing lifetime journey of renowned river advocate Mark Angelo, who has paddled more than 1000 rivers in well over 100 countries. The film chronicles his life-long commitment to river conservation and restoration around the globe. A discussion will follow with CT River Conservancy board member and avid paddler, Tim Lewis. We hope you will join us for this last film in the 2025-2026 series. The Elements environmental film series, begun in 2015, is a collaboration between the Conservation District, Middletown Garden Club, Russell Library, The Rockfall Foundation, and Wesleyan University's Center for the Arts, College of the Environment, and College of Film and the Moving Image.

34TH ANNUAL PLANT SALE: May 1-3, 2026

Chester Fairgrounds, Chester, CT

Our CT native plant and plug sale will take place May 1-3, 2026 at the Chester Fairgrounds! The sale will be pre-order only again with scheduled pick-ups to reduce waiting time.

2026 offerings include a large selection of shrubs, ground covers, edibles, perennial flowers, ferns, grasses and sedges, including some new and some old favorites. Our ecoregional plants include a variety of potted trees and shrubs, and we are also selling a number of landscape plugs in multi-packs. Scarlet Oak, Carolina Rose, Bishop's Cap, Bottle Gentian, Showy Goldenrod, Wild Strawberry, Eastern Bottlebrush Grass, and Yellow Prairie Grass are just some of our many new plants!

We are excited to offer potted conifer seedlings again—Canaan Fir, Eastern White Pine, White Spruce, and new this year, Eastern Hemlock. Conifers sold in small pots rather than as plugs or bare-root seedlings have a larger root mass than plugs and do not require immediate planting.

ORDER DUE DATES: Conifer orders are due by March 27, 2026
All other orders are due by April 6, 2026

Order early for the best selection! You can shop in our webstore starting Feb. 27, 2026 at www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal/, download our brochure and order form, or phone (860) 346-3282 to receive a hard copy. Be sure to check our online offerings; some plants are only listed on our webstore.

We look forward to seeing you in May at the Chester Fairgrounds!

January 2025

The Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the sound use and management of our natural resources through technical assistance and education.

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Rodrigo Pinto, Moodus
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Executive Director
Kelly L. Starr
Natural Resource Specialist
Sandy J. Weiss
Program Administrator

The District serves the towns of Berlin, Chester, Clinton, Colchester, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Hebron, Killingworth, Lyme, Madison, Marlborough, Middlefield, Middletown, New Britain, Newington, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, Rocky Hill, Salem and Westbrook.

The Board of Directors holds bi-monthly public meetings on the fourth Tuesday at 6:00 PM, either virtually or at deKoven House Community Center in Middletown. All programs and services are offered on a non-discriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation and pregnancy), national origin, age, or disability.

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