

*The latest updates from the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed*



*East Branch of the Eightmile River, Salem | Early July*

## **Chairman's Column: The New Normal?**

*by Anthony Irving*

There is a change taking place in our watershed woodlands. Vegetative composition and growth patterns are in flux as non-native pests and diseases threaten the survival of tree species like beech, ash, and oak. In addition, thickets of exotic shrubs such as barberry and especially burning bush shade the forest floor, inhibiting seedling growth. And decades of browsing by an unnaturally large deer population has had an extreme impact on the forest understory. Fortunately, a new phenomenon is emerging, fostering the return of

our forests to a more natural state, and largely absent over the last few hundred years - specifically, the return of top carnivores and the resultant decline in

the deer population. Coyotes, bobcats, and bears are back in Connecticut's forests, and their presence signals a welcome rebalancing of the forest ecosystem.

Animals have four basic habitat needs: living space, cover, food, and water. The abundance and availability of these, relative to the successional age and composition of the vegetative component, determine population sizes and densities and what species will likely inhabit a particular area. Many species use a variety of landscape resources, making it difficult to neatly classify them by habitat type: mole salamanders spend most of the year underground in moist upland woodlands but migrate to vernal pools in the spring to lay their eggs. Conversely, wood ducks brood their eggs in large tree cavities, but upon birth, the mother and ducklings quickly return to the water. Bobcats, with their large territories, utilize a variety of upland and wetland habitats in their search for food. Generally speaking, the greater the diversity of habitats, the more species found.

*Continued on page 2*

---

### IN THIS ISSUE

**GREENWAYS**

**INVASIVE SPECIES UPDATES**

**FLYWAYS**

**GOODWIN TRAIL UPDATES**

**BLUEWAYS**

---

**The New Normal?** *continued from page 1*

With European settlement, Connecticut went from forest coverage of about 90% to as little as 30% by 1850. The land was cleared for agriculture, mostly pastureland. The remaining forest was cut extensively for charcoal, timber, and cordwood. Coinciding with forest loss, many keystone mammals, such as elk, wolf, and mountain lion, were extirpated due to habitat loss, trapping and hunting including bounty, market and subsistence. Other species, such as black bear, beaver, turkey, fisher, and white-tail deer, were threatened with near-extinction. With farmland abandonment, beginning around the Civil War, many of these old fields slowly reverted to scrubland and then young forestland, which was again cut. This halting process of the recovering forest is still ongoing, but what was once open is now mostly covered by young woodlands varying in age from 80 - 120 years, with some even older and covering over 60% of the state. Today, due to housing and commercial needs, the percentage of forest will never mimic pre-European levels and is even declining statewide; however, the 40,000-acre Eightmile River Watershed has been spared many of these development pressures and is around 80% forested. As forests began to recover so did deer populations as market and subsistence hunting declined. However, the population exploded without predatory pressure with deer overbrowsing the forest floor, consuming the seedlings, saplings, and herbaceous plants. Ongoing efforts were made by CT

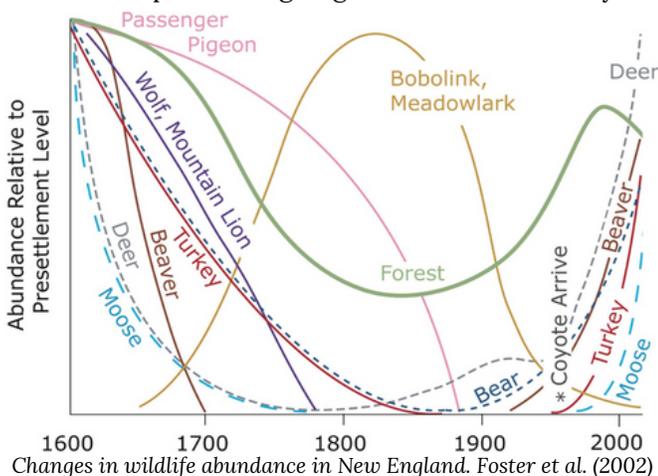
**Coyotes, bobcats, and bears are back in Connecticut's forests, and their presence signals a welcome rebalancing of the forest ecosystem.**

DEEP to control deer numbers through regulated hunting. Still, in the Eightmile River Watershed, it wasn't until about ten years ago that there was a noticeable decline in the deer population, which coincides with increased bobcat and coyote populations and, more recently, black bear. Coyotes, filling the niche created by the extinction of the eastern timber wolf, expanded into Connecticut from Canada and the mid-west in the 1950s and are larger and more wolf-like in appearance than the western coyote variety.

According to CT DEEP, deer populations peaked in the early 2000's and are in decline. Regulated hunting has been the primary source of population control; however, predation on fawns by coyote, bear, and bobcat is lowering recruitment into adulthood. A DEEP study in 2018 by Jennifer Kilburn et al. attributed 62.5% of fawn mortality in northwest Connecticut primarily to predation. Of that 40% by bobcats, 37% by bears, and 11% by coyotes. Andrew LaBonte, Wildlife Biologist at DEEP, says hunting is the primary source of population control on adult deer, but "the presence of predators will also help keep the balance."

As forests mature, creating more suitable habitats, other native species are also making a comeback, Beavers, once extirpated, began recolonization with targeted releases beginning in the 1950s but did not become common in the watershed until the 1980's. Beavers are habitat modifiers, creating large openings in the forest canopy, such as wetland meadows. These areas are rich in biodiversity and provide resources for wildlife. In 1975, DEEP released 22 live-trapped turkeys from New York, followed by the reintroduction of fisher in later years. These native species, both predator and prey, absent for centuries, have fared well in the watershed and across the state and are now quite common, adding to a more natural balance in our woodlands.

With the return of native wildlife, a new chapter is underway in the Eightmile River Watershed. In a healthy forest, a mix of herbaceous and woody plants creates both vertical and horizontal complexity,



providing habitat resources for the greatest variety of wildlife. The overabundance of deer made for a forest floor devoid of vegetation, curtailing the growth of a new generation of plants; however, with diminished deer numbers, the vegetative understory is rebounding. Still, the future health is hard to predict. While our watershed forests are rebalancing with the reintroduction of native wildlife and a declining deer population, ongoing disturbances by non-native plants, pests, and diseases and the effects of climate change threaten the welcome return of this natural order.



While harder to recognize in the winter, the effects of heavy deer browse can be seen in the sparseness of the forest understory. (Credit: Lucas Nathan, University of Connecticut)

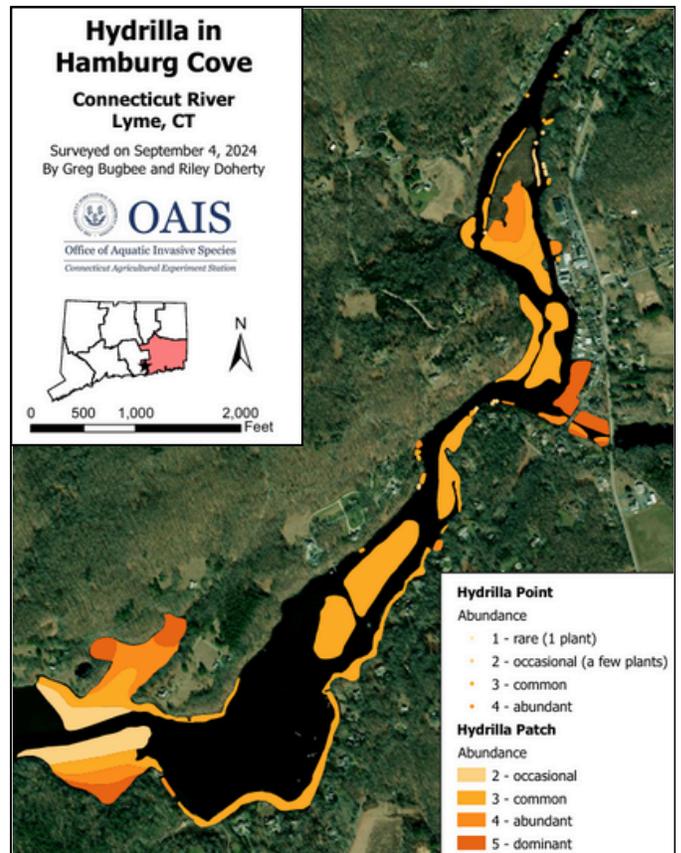
## Invasive Aquatic Species Update

by Pat Young

### Hydrilla

The widespread infestation of Northern Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata* subsp. *lithuanica*) is cause for much concern in Hamburg Cove. Earlier in the fall, the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee (ERWSSCC) hosted a meeting with Lyme officials, the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species and the United States Army Corps. of Engineers (USACE) to discuss management of this highly invasive species. In a subsequent meeting, while dependent on permitting constraints and funding availability, USACE representatives announced that its goal is to include Hamburg Cove as a new demonstration site for the 2025 season. ERWSSCC will work with USACE to host future public information sessions as needed.

To learn more about USACE and their work on managing Hydrilla, please use the link below. <https://tinyurl.com/USACE-Hydrilla>



### Water Chestnut

With the support of Connecticut River Expeditions, the Hamburg Yacht Club, and the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species, Eightmile River staff surveyed Hamburg Cove several times in the summer of 2024. All patches of water chestnut were successfully removed. Continual monitoring is needed as seeds can remain viable for up to 12 years in the sediment. Survey and removal efforts will continue in 2025.



Water Chestnut



Water Chestnut Harvest

## Greenways

by Pat Young

Greenways are often thought of in human terms. Areas that provide recreation paths such as walking and biking ways. Or in terms of the aesthetic, they provide “green space buffers”, preserving the rural landscape viewsheds. Connecticut, through its Greenway Council, offers an expanded definition of greenways including resource protection, such as river corridors, and larger areas of connected parcels of protected lands. These greenway corridors, whether along rivers or as permanent connections between larger unfragmented parcels provide essential wildlife functions.

There are many species which inhabit smaller tracts of land. Smaller native animals, such as skunks, racoons and opossums, can breed and successfully raise their young within areas that can be measured in acres rather than square miles. Larger native wildlife however, such as black bears, bobcats and coyotes, require much larger spaces. Both black bears and bobcats, which were either formally extirpated or facing extirpation in Connecticut, have rebounded as forest lands have recovered and legal protections were put in place. Both species require large tracts of land to meet their needs. Not originally found in Connecticut, coyotes expanded from the west and north and were first recorded in the 1950s.

Preferring forested habitats, a female black bear with cubs has a range of 5-7 square miles. The male has a significantly higher range, at 12-60 square miles, depending on resource availability. While there can be some overlap of male ranges, specific areas are not frequented at the same time.

Bobcats have a range of 8-20 square miles with males on the higher end of that range. Female ranges do not overlap, and their daily travel can be 1-4 miles. Bobcats prefer thick understory habitat for hunting and denning.

Coyotes have both territories and home ranges which can generally vary between 5-25 square miles depending on food availability. Territories are actively defended while home ranges are simply areas where coyotes live.

### 2024 Black Bear and Bobcat Reported Sightings

	BLACK BEAR	BOBCAT
EAST HADDAM	14	18
LYME	16	8
SALEM	25	9

If you see a Bear or Bobcat, please report it to CT DEEP. <https://tinyurl.com/CT-DEEP-Wildlife>

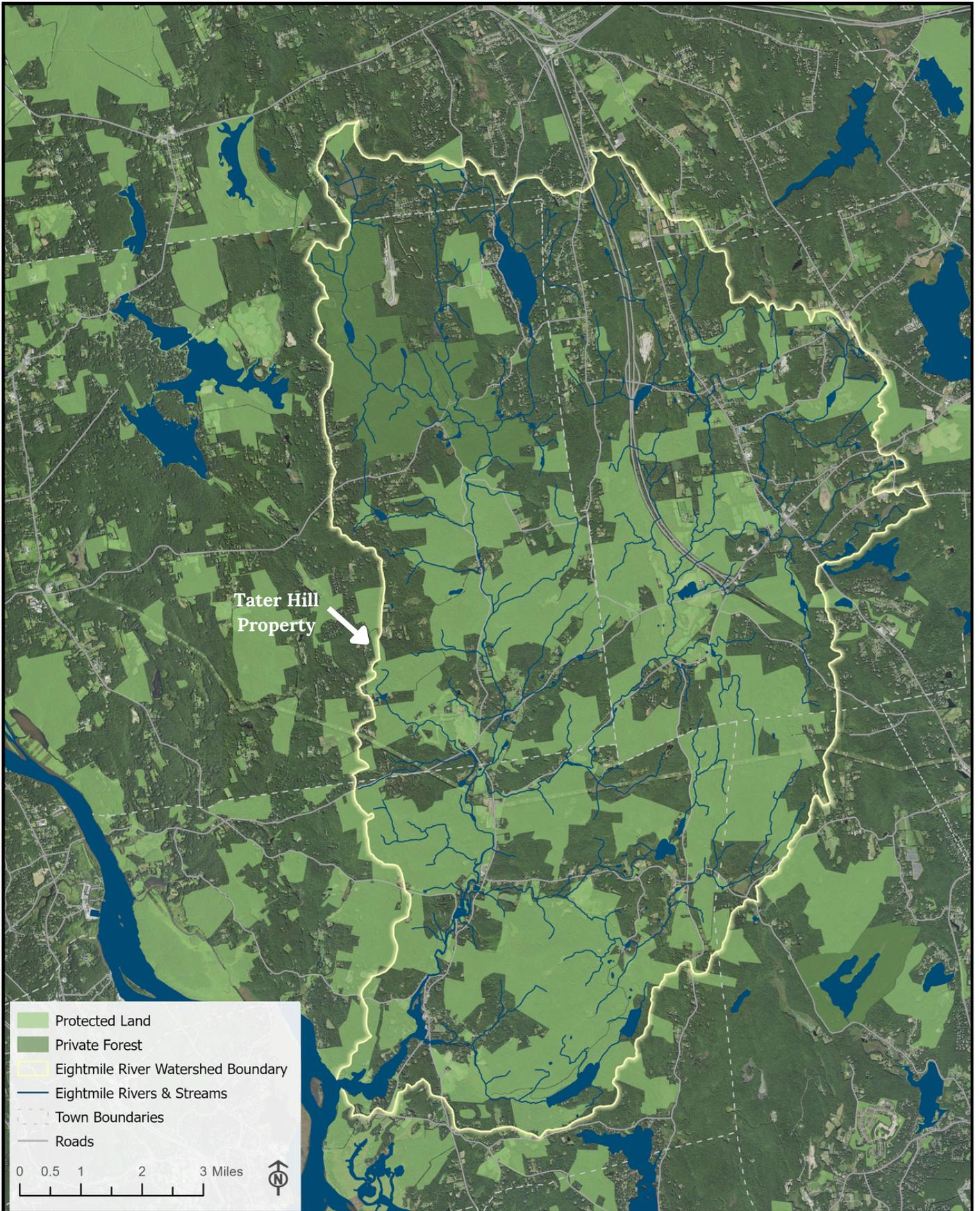
Connecticut is one of the most densely populated states in the nation with over 700 people per square mile. As native wildlife become accustomed to humans and domestic animals, interactions are likely to increase. The human population density is much lower in the Eightmile River Watershed at about 87 humans per square mile, but we are not without wildlife-human/domestic animal interactions. Our system of human transportation involves a network of roadways, often cut through what was originally unbroken landscape, bringing development deeper into historically intact tracts of land. This results in loss of connections between parcels to various degrees. In some cases, connections can be restored such as with the retrofitting of stream crossings to provide both aquatic and dry passage where possible. Other opportunities focus on providing permanent connecting parcels or greenways.

The Eightmile River Greenway was designated in 2001 by the CT Greenway Council and Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. The designation recognized the importance of the river system as part of a salmon restoration effort and ongoing cooperative efforts of the local communities in preserving the watershed. Greenway designation is important as part of the state Open Space and Watershed Acquisition (OSWA) grant program, adding extra points to applications when applicable.

*continued on page 6*

### Curious about Connecticut’s Greenways?

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/CT-GREENWAYS>



## Greenways *continued from page 4*

Every other year, the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee updates its preserved lands maps focusing on the watershed and surrounding areas. Watershed boundaries are important for understanding where water will flow. Unless aquatic however, animal movement does not necessarily follow these watershed lines, so appropriate planning should consider contiguous tracks beyond watershed boundaries. One function of the map is to highlight where future acquisitions should be targeted for permanent greenway connections such as with the recent focus on the “Tater Hill” parcels by the East

Haddam Land Trust. In the words of Pete Govert, Executive Director of the East Haddam Land Trust, “East Haddam Land Trust’s Land Acquisition Committee studies this map and frequently a bit of magic pops into focus, such as the “Tater Hill Properties”. With this focus, the Land Trust was able to preserve these properties which currently connect hundreds of acres, with the potential of doubling these connections over the next few years”.

With approximately forty percent of the Eightmile River Watershed permanently preserved, it is a prime area for native wildlife to remain, well, wild.

## Living with the Wild Ones

by Tony Irving



Black Bear, CT DEEP



Bobcat, CT DEEP



Coyote, USFWS

Top predators are returning to their former habitats in the Eightmile River watershed due to the high quality and extent of this 40,000-acre forested ecosystem. From river to ridgeline, these woodlands provide a variety of habitat types that are perfect for the success of our apex predators, creating a natural rebalancing that was disrupted due to their historical loss. But, the increased numbers of bobcat, coyote, and bear, although greatly beneficial to ecosystem health, pose the potential for confrontations with people. Bobcats are shy and secretive and are rarely seen. Bears and coyotes; however, are more curious and opportunistic regarding food availability. To minimize unfortunate encounters we need to observe some protocols to provide a safe place for all.

**Never feed or leave food waste around:** Don’t give a bear or coyote a reason to look to you for food. Once they know food may be available, they will likely return, which can lead to unpleasant interactions and may result in an animal being euthanized. Bird feeders attract bears. It is best to take down feeders in springtime when hungry bears emerge from their winter dens and make sure garbage cans are secure. Small pets are also vulnerable and should be kept inside

from dusk to dawn when coyotes and bobcats are most active. Overall, the risk of an attack is minimal; however, if these apex predators learn to associate food with people, the risk increases.

**Keep your distance:** Coyotes can be defensive of their territory and aggressive during winter mating season and springtime when pups are active. Sows are also protective of their cubs, but usually only when cornered. You will be lucky to see a bobcat, especially one with kits. In all cases, do not exacerbate a chance encounter by getting close. Attempt to frighten away bears and coyotes by shouting or making other loud noises and acting aggressively, such as waving your arms, throwing sticks, or spraying with water. Do not run or turn your back. Slowly back away and exit the area. If you are with pets, leash them, but do not pick them up, as this may trigger a confrontation.

Remember these top predators are critical to a balanced environment. Still, if we are to coexist successfully, we need to take sensible precautions to protect ourselves, and our wild ones. For more information, see CT DEEP’s Wildlife Fact Sheets at <https://tinyurl.com/CT-DEEP-Wildlife>

**The Eightmile Wild & Scenic River Coordinating Committee & Staff**

**Anthony Irving, Chair**

Lyme Land Trust

**Ed Natoli, Vice Chair**

Town of Salem

**Dave Gumbart, Secretary**

The Nature Conservancy

**David B. Bingham**

Salem Land Trust

**Richard Chyinski**

Salem Land Trust

**Anthony Griggs**

Town of Salem

**Kim Barber-Bradley**

Town of Salem

**Damian Rubino**

Town of Lyme

**Regan Stacey**

Town of Lyme

**Rich Sanders**

Town of Lyme

**Jennifer Burton-Reeves**

Town of East Haddam

**Bernie Gillis**

Town of East Haddam

**Rob Smith**

Town of East Haddam

**Pete Govert**

East Haddam Land Trust

**Ralph Chappel**

East Haddam Land Trust

**Liz Lacy**

National Park Service

**Christopher Bellucci**

CT DEEP

**Staff:**

**Patricia Young**

Program Director

**Abigail Bernstein**

Environmental Program

Coordinator

**Rhiannon Martin**

Environmental Intern

**2025 Events & Announcements**

**Upcoming Events**

**Winter/Spring and Summer Family Programs:** Check our website and Facebook page for family program announcements.

**Eightmile RiverFest at Devil's Hopyard State Park: October 18th-**Its our biennial celebration of the Eightmile River! Visit with local and state environmental organizations, learn about native wildlife, listen to great music and warm up with tasty soup and cookies.

[www.eightmileriver.org/upcoming-events/](http://www.eightmileriver.org/upcoming-events/)

**2023-2024 Education and Community Approved Grant Projects**

**Town of Lyme: \$3,500** for the creation of a conservation plan for the Hartman Park power line ROW.

**East Haddam Land Trust: \$51,200** for the acquisition of 14 acres of land supporting an important greenway connection.

**Salem Library: \$300** for education programming on native wildlife.

**Lyme Land Trust: \$1,050** for 3 Forest Bathing Programs in Salem, East Haddam and Lyme.

**East Haddam Historical Society: \$300** for birds of prey program

**Town of Lyme: \$6,500** for field browse research in support of the New England Cottontail-a species of concern.

**Town of Lyme: \$7,900** to develop a forest stewardship plan for Hartman Park.

**Salem Land Trust: \$500** for habitat management at Woodland Warbler Preserve.

Learn more about our Community Grant Program at [www.eightmileriver.org/community-grant-program/](http://www.eightmileriver.org/community-grant-program/)

**2023-2024 Expenditures**

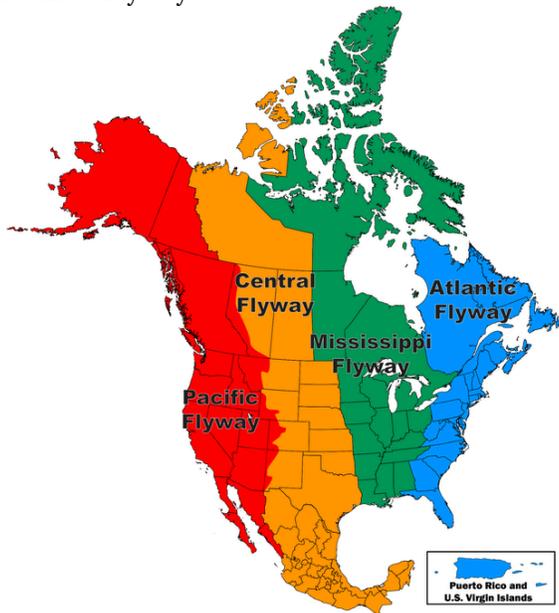
Staff	\$104,430
Benefits	\$9,522
Travel	\$2,106
Supplies	\$4,451
Contractual	\$23,430
Office	\$13,840
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$157,779</b>
Expenditures after 10/1/24	\$5,654
Approved Community Grants (not yet invoiced)	\$18,450
Approved Resource Studies/Projects (not yet invoiced)	\$13,100
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$194,983</b>

Thank you to the Lyme Land Trust for their continued support as ERWSCC's fiscal agent.

## Flyways

by Dave Gumbart

The Eightmile River is federally designated as a Wild & Scenic River, with important natural resources in its watershed that keep and maintain a healthy and productive environment for people, plants and animals. This includes clean water, healthy forests, easy access to nature for our enjoyment and a happy place for birds! Many of our local species are year-round residents, others arrive for nesting season, and some are just passing through during spring and fall migrations as they move through the air in the Atlantic Flyway.



Migratory Flyways—U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Whether small passerine birds (such as warblers or the scarlet tanager), larger raptors (broad-winged hawk, osprey) or waterfowl (green-winged teal, American black duck), the Atlantic Flyway provides ample opportunities to find food, breeding grounds or, in the fall, the destination to wintering sites further south. Birds are able to sense the magnetic fields of the earth, observe geographic features (the coastline as one obvious feature) and even use the constellations of the night sky to help guide them to their desired locations.

The Eightmile River Watershed lies near coastal Connecticut, and as birds migrate along the edge of the Atlantic Ocean in spring and fall, the Eightmile represents one of the important “landfall” sites during their flights. It’s a place to find food in the

spring, where the Connecticut River and its tributaries have early insect activity. And with the American elm, a seed source providing food when most other trees and shrubs are just getting their foliage leafed-out. In the fall, the Eightmile and southern Connecticut are a great stopover location, to provide ample feeding before the long, sometimes multi-day, flights many birds undertake.



Night-lights imagery by Earth Observation Group

One important consideration of the Atlantic Flyway is the safety it can provide. For the Eightmile River, a dark night sky affords safe passage, as there are few light hazards that can disorient birds; no cities or skyscrapers with the possibility of window strikes, and; plenty of trees and shrubs to rest and hide from potential predators. For those who enjoy birding, the Eightmile is a wonderful place to explore during spring migration, as small, colorful birds come to visit: in the right spots, observing a prairie warbler in an open field can be an inspiration. In the forests, you might get lucky and see a blackburnian warbler, with its orange throat ablaze, or hear the emphatic call of the ovenbird (“teacher, Teacher, TEACHER!”).

There are, without exaggeration, millions of birds that travel the Atlantic Flyway every year. With the thousands of acres of protected open space in the Eightmile River Watershed, our little corner of the universe continues to play an important role in the safe passage, necessary feeding and successful breeding of many bird species, large and small. So, while we may not be too close to Greenland, northern Canada or even South America, the Eightmile River is connected to all of these places by the Atlantic Flyway migratory route and the feathered friends who come and go, as they have for time immemorial.

## Dark Skies *by Alan Sheiness*

As an amateur astronomer and astrophotographer, I've had the privilege of observing the stars from Lyme, Connecticut, a town blessed with relatively dark skies. Hosting monthly public observing sessions, I've seen firsthand how awe-inspiring the night sky can be. But these beautiful views are increasingly threatened by light pollution.

Dark skies are essential not only for stargazing and astrophotography but also for the health of local wildlife. Many species, such as migratory birds and insects, rely on natural cycles of light and dark to navigate and thrive. Preserving our night skies goes beyond aesthetics—it's about maintaining the delicate balance of our local ecosystems.



*Bortle-Scale. Adapted from Cloudy Nights forum (BYoesle).*

While Lyme's Bortle 4 skies still offer a chance to appreciate the Milky Way and distant galaxies, light pollution is creeping closer to us. By raising awareness about the importance of dark skies through public events, we can inspire our community to take action. Simple changes, like using shielded outdoor lights, turning off lights when not in use, and supporting local dark sky initiatives, can make a significant difference.

Preserving our night skies is something we can all contribute to. As we look up at the stars, let's remember that their beauty and wonder are not just for us—they are part of the natural heritage we must protect for future generations.



*The moon. ( Alan Sheiness)*

### Want to learn more about Dark Skies?

The Lyme Land Trust offers astronomy programs. Check out [www.lymelandtrust.org](http://www.lymelandtrust.org) for more information and event dates.

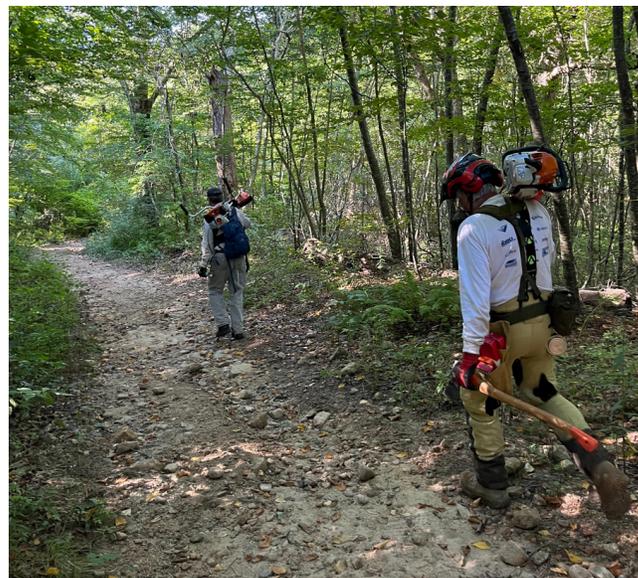
## Goodwin Trail Updates

*by Pat Young*



The Goodwin Trail is a 14 mile trail system that spans from Darrow Pond in East Lyme up through Chapal Farm Preserve in East Haddam. Eight separate parcels are joined together by this trail system. When the idea was first brought up by community members over ten years ago, the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee volunteered to act as the facilitating group, bringing the numerous land stewards together periodically to review necessary improvements, maintenance, signage and funding support.

Since its opening, community stewards have put in countless hours ensuring downed trees are cleared, bog bridges in floodprone areas are installed and trail sections are rerouted as needed to address erosion concerns. The latest effort took the group to East Lyme this past summer, where there has been significant erosion along an old roadbed section at the southern end of the trail. Several members of the East Haddam Land Trust with support from the town of East Lyme, volunteered to lay out a new parallel path which was completed in the fall of 2024.



*EH Land Trust volunteers working on the trail in appropriate safety gear.*

For trail maps and other information please visit [www.eightmileriver.org](http://www.eightmileriver.org) and look for Goodwin Trail links at the bottom of the home page.

## Blueways

by Abigail Bernstein

Connection of habitats is key, and rivers are no exception. Each river stands on its own but is also part of a larger system of connected rivers and streams. In Figure 1, you can see that even the streams at the very top of the watershed flow into one another and eventually into the Connecticut River at Hamburg Cove and subsequently Long Island Sound. The interconnectedness creates habitat connectivity and allows wildlife to travel throughout the landscape. From this lens, rivers can be viewed as blueways.

Blueways, oftentimes refer to recreational paddling trails. The Connecticut River, for example is a nationally recognized blueway and can be paddled from its headwaters in New Hampshire all the way to Long Island Sound. However, blueways can have different definitions in different contexts. Some rivers, such as the Eightmile, are not ideal for paddling in all sections but provide valuable passageways for wildlife. We define blueways as surface water flows and the adjacent lands that provide habitat and passageway for aquatic and terrestrial species.

Within each river segment and the larger river system, there are microhabitats with varying environmental conditions. Sections with groundwater influx may be cooler than adjacent sections with only surface water contributions. Deeper, slower moving sections may have lower dissolved oxygen concentrations than rocky, fast-moving sections. Each habitat fulfills a need for different species and individuals. Navigating between these habitats is necessary for survival.

Native brook trout, for example, require temperatures under 19°C for growth and generally cannot survive temperatures above 24°C. Access to cold refugia during warmer summer months is necessary. Migratory fish species, such as the American eel, require connectivity on a larger scale. They travel from their spawning grounds in the Sargasso Sea in the Atlantic Ocean to inland streams all along the East Coast, including the Eightmile River, where they grow into adults.



Figure 1: Eightmile River Watershed and stream complex within the larger Connecticut River Watershed.

Rivers also provide necessary habitat and passage for terrestrial species. The land adjacent to rivers and streams provides unique habitat, with characteristic vegetation and soils fulfilling many species needs. Species like the river otter and wood turtle require these areas to live, and hunt while other, more generalist species such as deer, opossums, or fisher may simply use the riverbank as a safe way to travel between different areas. These vegetated zones also maintain the integrity of the riverbank, offer shade, contribute woody debris for aquatic habitat, and filter stormwater runoff. Each of the three core watershed towns has adopted Overlay Protection Zones to preserve the integrity of this land, ensuring our rivers continue to serve as valuable blueways for both aquatic and terrestrial species.

Aquatic species movement along blueways can be restricted by natural obstacles and man-made structures. Natural features, such as waterfalls or large rapids can serve as barriers to movement. For example, Chapman Falls in Devil's Hopyard State Park serves as an upper limit for a number of migrating fish species due to its roaring waters and steep drops. Man-made structures, such as dams, bridges, and culverts can also restrict passage and alter habitat conditions preventing fish passage. Dams pose the biggest threat, oftentimes restricting passage completely. Culverts can allow

passage but can be narrower than the river channel and cause a bottleneck effect. Bridges generally maintain a continuous stream bottom and provide passage but can also restrict flow.

A component of Wild & Scenic designation requires that the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee and the National Park Service, review bridge and culvert replacement projects on specific river segments in the watershed. Connectivity is one focus of review.

The bridge reconstruction on MacIntosh Road in Lyme is a recent example with final plans including design elements to facilitate dry passage. A shelf was added underneath the abutments to allow terrestrial species to travel along the river without crossing the road (Image 1). To monitor the success of the MacIntosh Bridge dry-passage,



Image 1: Dry-passage shelf underneath MacIntosh Bridge.

wildlife cameras were installed during November and December to record critter movement. While a number of species were seen, the most common traveler was the opossum as seen in Image 2.

Options for improving aquatic connectivity include increasing bridge spans, widening, repositioning and redesigning culverts, and using native materials. Each of these modifications helps to restore natural river conditions and improves passage.

All rivers, regardless of land ownership and protection status are valuable resources for local wildlife. Addressing both aquatic and dry passage when updating infrastructure and safeguarding adjacent lands through land-use requirements ensures the preservation of these critical blueways.



Image 2: An opossum utilizing the shelf to travel along the river.

## River Herring *by Steve Gephard*



Moulson Pond Fishway. (Credit: Lyme Land Trust)

Alewife is one of the two species of “river herring” found in Connecticut. A close relative of the American shad, this species is also anadromous, beginning its life in freshwater, migrating to the ocean as a juvenile, feeding in the ocean, and upon maturity, returning to the freshwater system where it hatched to spawn. Although alewife will spawn in the mainstem Connecticut River, it specializes in lakes, ponds, and open water swamps in tributaries. Unlike trout that need fast-flowing water, alewives like still water in which to lay their eggs.

Historically, much of the headwaters of the Eightmile River watershed included red maple and cedar swamps, which were suitable for alewife spawning. Much of those areas were drained for agriculture but in their place came ponds behind milldams, which are a very suitable replacement for alewives. The problem is that the dams create migratory barriers.

A fishway was built at the first dam off Mt. Archer Road and that allows alewives into Moulson Pond, which is good spawning habitat. Three upstream barrier dams have been removed: Pizzini (East Haddam), Ed Bill Pond (Lyme), and Zemko (Salem). The Eightmile River is now mostly obstacle free. There is still suitable still water spawning habitat for alewife, mostly in the headwaters in Salem. The number of alewives entering the Eightmile each spring is less than desired due to a trawl fishery off eastern Long Island Sound that intercepts Connecticut alewives before they can ascend our rivers. Hopefully that will be resolved soon and increasing numbers of alewives can take advantage of the Eightmile River Blueway and its open and connected habitat.



Eightmile River Watershed  
2 Dolbia Hill Road-East  
East Haddam, CT 06423

Postal Patron



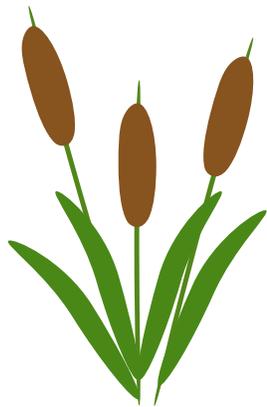
---

### Contact us

 [info@eightmileriver.org](mailto:info@eightmileriver.org)  
 [eightmileriver.org](http://eightmileriver.org) | [WanderOurWatershed.org](http://WanderOurWatershed.org)

### Follow us on social media

 [Eightmile Wild & Scenic River Watershed](https://www.facebook.com/EightmileWildandScenicRiverWatershed)  
 [@eightmile\\_wildandscenic](https://www.instagram.com/eightmile_wildandscenic)



# EIGHTMILE RiverFest

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2025**  
**DEVIL'S HOPYARD STATE PARK**