

## **Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee**

Meeting minutes, November 24, 2025, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, Burnham Brook Preserve

### Committee and Staff Members Present:

Anthony Irving (ERWSCC Chairman, LLCT)  
Abby Bernstein (ERWSCC Environmental Program Coordinator)  
Lauren Bonatakis (NPS)  
Kim Bradley (Town of Salem)  
Jennifer Burton-Reeve (Town of East Haddam)  
Rich Chyinski (Salem Land Trust)  
Melissa Czarnowski (DEEP)  
Bernie Gillis (Town of East Haddam)  
Pete Govert (East Haddam Land Trust)  
Anthony Griggs (Town of Salem)

David Gumbart (The Nature Conservancy)  
Ed Natoli (Town of Salem)  
Damian Rubino (Town of Lyme)  
Rich Sanders (Town of Lyme)  
Rob Smith (Town of East Haddam)  
Regan Stacy (Town of Lyme)

Guests: Alyssa McGurer (Salem Land Trust, potential new ERWSCC member), Micah McKenzie (ERWSCC intern)

### **Administration**

*Call to Order:* Chairman Anthony Irving called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

*Minutes:* Minutes of the October 6, 2025 meeting were reviewed. It was noted ERWSCC intern Micah McKenzie was present, but absent from the list of those attending the meeting. Rob Smith asked for a clarification regarding exact location of trail work on the Hand tract. It was confirmed this was done to connect trails to Devil's Hopyard State Park. **Gillis motioned to approve the minutes of the October 6, 2025 with this correction and confirmation noted. Smith seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

### **Executive Committee**

*Expenses to Date:* Abby Bernstein distributed the expenses to date spreadsheet and reported that all is in order. There is a small amount of funds remaining from the prior year's budget (several thousand). Lauren Bonatakis reported that the federal budget is still under continuing resolution. So far, it appears that ERWSCC's allocation will remain at current levels (210K).

### **Sub-committee Discussion/Updates**

*Outreach & Education:* Bernstein gave a report on RiverFest (including enthusiastic applause from the group for a job well done). Approximately 400 people attended. This year's effort to secure necessary state permits to use Devils Hopyard State Park as the RiverFest location required a new Special Permit (and, thus, a new permitting process). Having gone through this effort, it is expected future permitting will be easier. Tony Griggs stated the volunteer effort to provide cookies was appreciated, including "healthy cookies." Bernstein said the soups provided by the Moodus Sportsmen's Club were also a big hit (as per usual).

Applefest, in Salem, was attended by Bernstein, Pat Young and Ed Natoli. This event allowed ERWSCC to engage with a different community. It was a good networking opportunity, including discussion with the Town of Salem Economic Development Commission.

ERWSCC staff conducted a Stream Exploration Program with East Haddam Middle School Students in November. This was done in conjunction with non-profit group LifeForms and The East Haddam Conservation Commission as part of a Community Grant ERWSCC awarded to the Conservation Commission. LifeForms created an interactive, technology-forward presentation to introduce students to nature study and the critters they'd see out in the field, merging arts, technology and the natural world. The programming completed by LifeForms was part of the deliverable for the grant and still requires work for completion. Bernstein reported that the presentation was well received by students but due to technology issues, there was not time for the full presentation and more work is needed to work out the technological quirks. Discussion ensued relating to presentation. Gillis suggested LifeForms present to ERWSCC to give the board a more robust understanding of the program and technology. Bernstein stated she will coordinate a meeting.

Young and Bernstein had a display table at a farm market at Long Table Farm, in Lyme in November. A Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm, Young and Bernstein brought stream invertebrates for people to see. Griggs reported on the ERWSCC events calendar; it is featured on the ERWSCC website and features a number of local conservation-related community events. He invited ERWSCC member groups and their partners to submit calendar events to: [events@eightmileriver.org](mailto:events@eightmileriver.org). Anthony Irving suggested publicity for the calendar would bring it to more people's attention. Growing its profile may include use of social media.

Bernstein reported ERWSCC staff were again invited to help decorate a room at Gillette Castle State Park for the holidays. This year's effort included a waterfall and snake hibernaculum.

*Protection & Management:* Bernstein reported that it is hoped there will be active management to control Hydrilla in and around the lower Connecticut River in 2026 (including Hamburg Cove). The presence of rare plants in the proposed treatment area and Army Corps of Engineers funding constraints delayed initiation of the intended herbicide management regime in 2025. To ensure rare plants have multiple levels of protection and conservation, the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station had voiced capability to collect plant specimens (seed included) and propagate those plants for reintroduction to known locations following herbicide applications.

A working sub-committee to help complete the current review of Management Plan Tier I and II recommendations (and progress to date) is needed. A meeting will be planned in the near future. Bradley, Sanders, Griggs, Irving expressed interest in involvement.

*Science & Monitoring:* Fall stream assessments were completed by Three Rivers Community College students and ERWSCC staff. Preliminary results indicate excellent water quality on most sampling sites. Data collection on Hamburg Cove ceased at the end of October. ERWSCC is working with Riley Doherty on data review and interpretation. There was a verbal report from Lyme Harbor Master, Tom Reynolds, that there seemed to be less Hydrilla in Hamburg Cove in 2025, compared to 2024. Potentially attributable to higher volume of brackish water in the cove (i.e. higher salinity), owing to lower than usual freshwater levels in the Connecticut River (little rain through much of summer of 2025). Future years of data will inform these inferences.

*Project Review:* Lyme/Salem Road bridge replacement: no update. David Gumbart reported The Nature Conservancy is proceeding with a temporary bridge over the current Walden Preserve bridge over the East Branch of the Eightmile River. This bridge will accommodate all emergency, oil delivery and farm vehicles. Expected completion by mid-December. The Conservancy is acquiring a new, permanent bridge for installation in spring/early summer of 2026. The new bridge will require on-site review for potential wildlife impacts, including inventory for any turtles present (e.g. wood turtle, which is a state-listed species of special concern).

Jennifer Burton-Reeve reported the East Haddam Fish & Game Club is preparing an Inland Wetlands application to submit to the Town of East Haddam Inland Wetlands Commission, for the purpose of creating in-stream pools for improved fishing. Work is proposed on the upper section of the Eightmile River (AKA West Branch of the Eightmile River) upstream of the named segment. The club is working with a new contractor. One overarching goal of the club is to create the pools and ensure future streamflow is sufficient to minimize sedimentation. A presentation will be made at an upcoming Town I/W meeting, which is open to the public.

Bernstein reported a culvert replacement project is planned for 2027 in the Town of Lyme, for Cedar Pond Brook, off of Beaver Brook Road.

### **National Park Service/DEEP/TNC Updates**

*NPS:* Bonatakis reported that the federal government is operating on continuing resolution; this is currently scheduled to expire at the end of January 2026.

*TNC:* Gumbart reported a contractor project to build a new trail to the existing vista trail overlook is now complete. This will fully accommodate the all-terrain wheelchair owned by the Conservancy and allow the opportunity to enjoy a preserve highlight for anyone interested, beginning in the spring of 2026, when reservations will again be available.

*DEEP:* Melissa Czarnowski reported that there have been recent retirements at the DEEP, and it is hoped these positions will be rehired. A DEEP monthly newsletter with information and updates on DEEP news is available; Czarnowski will provide newsletter links to Bernstein, who can share that for ERWSCC members. Bradley reported that the CT Recreational Trails Grant Program is open for the next round of grant applications. The East Haddam Land Trust has already submitted an application; kudos to them. A focal point for grants this year is publicity and support for equitable accessibility.

Bernstein reported that signs for the Nehantic State Forest Section of the Goodwin Trail has been obtained from East Lyme and will need to be posted.

### **Partner Updates (Land Trusts, Towns)**

*Salem (Land Trust & Town):* Rich Chyinski reported land trust activity has been quiet recently. There is a subdivision planned for a large tract (176 acres) on Sullivan Road, within the Eightmile watershed. Griggs reported the application for the subdivision will be reviewed by the Planning & Zoning Commission this week. Currently, the plan is for 2 house lots, and potentially a vineyard. Griggs also reported the lot adjacent to Prime Cuts, immediately southeast of the 4 corners rotary, is slated for conversion to residential apartments.

*East Haddam Land Trust:* Pete Govert shared hard copies of the annual land trust calendar, a project supported in-part by a grant from ERWSCC. An invasive control project at the Ayers Preserve, discussed at an earlier ERWSCC meeting, may be moving forward with a new management regime. Govert and Cam Beard met with owners of Raptor Ridge Farm, who intend to manage a goat herd and offer grazing services to control invasive plants. As a potentially viable alternative to herbicide use, the land trust may bring a project to ERWSCC for a small grant in 2026. Fees are expected to be \$1200/acre.

*Town of East Haddam:* Gillis reported the new 1<sup>st</sup> Selectman for East Haddam will be Todd Gelston. It is anticipated there will be a positive relationship between the Town Hall and ERWSCC. Smith reported East Haddam will have a new Director of Public Works.

The new 1<sup>st</sup> Selectwoman for Salem is Sue Spang.

*Town of Lyme:* The new 1<sup>st</sup> Selectwoman for Lyme is Christy Zelek.

*Lyme Land Conservation Trust:* Time spent on a lawsuit on the Osborne property (where the land trust holds an easement) is currently a full two years and still ongoing. Irving shared thoughts that outreach to new owners of easement lands is needed, both to establish good relations and to avoid future problems relative to land use vs. easement covenants. A recent land trust retreat was held at the Bingham Camp location of the Salem Valley Corporation; discussions and planning were “very good.” Easement properties and new landowners of same were a significant part of the discussion.

### **Old/New Business**

Regarding 2026 ERWSCC meeting dates on the agenda, Bernstein reported the May meeting will be May 18, correcting a typo on the agenda. The May meeting also strays from the typical meeting schedule due to the Memorial Day holiday. The effort to produce the annual newsletter is underway.

Adjournment: Chairman Irving adjourned the meeting at 6:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted, David Gumbart, ERWSCC Secretary

