Housatonic River Commission

"to coordinate on a regional basis the local management and protection of the Housatonic River Valley in northwestern Connecticut"

Minutes of the June 9, 2026 Meeting

(*subject to approval at the next meeting*)

HRC Office, West Cornwall, and via Google Meet

Christian Allyn—North Canaan—A
Jack Anstine—North Canaan—A
Colter Rule—Canaan (Falls Village)—P
Mark Gozonsky—Canaan (Falls Village)—P
Robin Sweeney—Salisbury—P
Stacie Weiner—Salisbury—P
Jim Saunders, Secretary—Sharon—P
William R. Tingley, Vice-chair—Sharon—P
Phil Hart—Cornwall—P
Bruce Bennett—Cornwall—P
Jesse Klingebiel, Chair—Kent—P
Michael Benjamin—Kent—P
Marc Andreotto, Treasurer—New Milford—P
Robert Gambino—New Milford—A

Also present: Madeline Scherff, HRC Project Manager; Jackie Dias, NPS; and Drew Ransom, CT DEEP.

Mr. Klingebiel called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Mr. Tingley moved to approve the following changes to the Rules of Procedure: Article 4, Part B - Terms of office shall be for two years or until a successor is elected to complete the remaining term. Part C - Officers may succeed themselves for a maximum of two consecutive terms, following which they must wait at least two years before being re-elected to that office. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Mr. Benjamin, chair of the nominating committee, read the slate of officers.

Mr. Benjamin moved that the following officers be elected: Chair - Jesse Klingebiel, Vice-chair - William Tingley, Treasurer - Marc Andreotto, and Secretary - James Saunders. The motion was seconded and all four officers were elected unanimously.

(All terms are from June 2025 through May 2027.)

The May 12, 2026, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Mr. Andreotto reported a W&S account balance of $4,465.73 and a NHCOG-HRC subaccount balance of $10,543.72.

Mr. Klingebiel moved that the following invoice totaling $157.50 be paid for the Invoice Period 5/2/2026–5/31/2026:

5/31—Organiz. Development—393—Susan's May Hours—Susan Francisco $157.50

The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Communications

- Mr. Saunders reported that he has followed up again with DOT regarding signage approval, with no response and has contacted Representative Maria Horn's office for help. He also has a call scheduled with the Connecticut chapter of Trout Unlimited to discuss initiatives, projects, and fisheries input relevant to the Commission's access and signage work.

- The merchandise order approved last month is being finalized.
- Mr. Klingebiel welcomed new Cornwall commissioner Bruce Bennett.

- For new members' edification, Ms. Dias clarified that the NPS has the regulatory right to review and provide comments on any water resources project (including docks, bank work, etc.) within a quarter mile of the designated Wild and Scenic river. This includes work in wetlands or streams feeding into the Housatonic within that corridor.

Communications and Outreach

- The annual report is being redesigned this year with more visual detail.

Resource Protection

- Ms. Scherff noted that some subcommittees have had low attendance and discussed the option of combining Resource Protection with River Use and Access, or reinvigorating Resource Protection. Given that Mr. Rule and Mr. Bennett will join Resource Protection, subcommittees will remain as is. There may be times when the two subcommittees could work together.

- Mr. Rule raised the issue of hydrilla as a priority for Resource Protection. It has been identified as a serious and aggressive invasive threat. He has been in contact with the Twin Lakes Association and urged the Commission to be alert to the risk in the river. Ms. Dias noted that hydrilla is currently the subject of study on the Connecticut River and that the 8-Mile Wild and Scenic River has conducted significant monitoring; she suggested that HRC could pursue similar monitoring. Ms. Scherff added that she has reviewed the Connecticut River Conservancy's work on hydrilla and will bring more information to the upcoming Resource Protection subcommittee.

River Use and Access

Canaan Dam (North Canaan) - The dam poses safety hazards for boaters, and Mr. Tingley suggested removing enough of the structure and the logs backed up at the site to allow safe passage. There is no need for full removal, so the fishing habitat would be preserved. Dam ownership was in question. Ms. Scherff is scheduling a meeting with Julia Rogers (HVA) and a contact at American Rivers who has expertise in barrier removal. Ms.Dias noted that the NPS hydropower assistance program team will be visiting Bulls Bridge and Falls Village dams in August and could review the Canaan Dam site.

North Kent Road: - Ms. Scherff, Mr. Klingebiel, Mr. Benjamin, and Ms. Dias are meeting Monday with Pete Picone, DEEP Habitat Biologist (Western District), at the North Kent Road site, to understand DEEP's ownership of land along the corridor, hear DEEP's thoughts on site history and management strategies, and open a dialogue about future improvements.

Fisherman's Cove (Gaylordsville) - Ms. Scherff confirmed that New Milford is posting a town officer at Fisherman's Cove from 11 AM to 3 PM every weekend this summer, which will allow the site to be open.

FirstLight Power has proposed removing the porta-potty and dumpster from the site in their updated shoreline management plan, citing misuse. Concern was ex[ressed that lack of sanitation facilities is itself a barrier to responsible use.

Ruggles Landing - (North Canaan) - Ms. Scherff reported that the Friends group has drafted a proposed lease for the site, submitted it to DEEP, and is awaiting DEEP's comments. The originally planned June town vote has likely been delayed to August or early fall. HRC's conceptual designs (from Earth Tones) for the site were well received by the Friends group and Mr. Tingley noted that funding should be reserved to have Earth Tones engineer and design the riverbank work, given their expertise and prior interest in the project.

FirstLight - Ms. Dias reported that NPS provided comments to FirstLight on their updated shoreline management plan, which had omitted Wild and Scenic references. FirstLight has submitted a requested letter of support to FERC.

- NPS is scheduling a meeting this month with hydro power staff and some HRC members to discuss recreation specifically at Bulls Bridge and Fisherman's Cove.

- Mr. Klingebiel raised the potential of re-opening the recreational area under the Route 7 bridge in Gaylordsville (on Eversource property), an access point that has been closed for several years.

- The Commission noted that outdated "closed" signage remains at Fisherman's Cove despite the area being open, and needs to be addressed.

Steering

Community Grants:

- A new community grant proposal has been submitted by NCLC (Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy) for surveying work related to acquiring the McEver property in North Canaan for conservation purposes. Several questions arose and need clarification at the next Steering Committee meeting. It is not yet under formal review.

- There is approximately $20,000 remaining in community grant funding through September 2026, which will effectively allow one more grant award from the two proposals currently on the table (New Milford native plantings, where it was noted that the application does address plantings, and the NCLC proposal).

- Primary vs. Alternate Commissioner Language:

The discrepancy between the titles and duties of each of the two town commissioners needs clarification. Ms. Scherff and Ms. Francisco will review the issue.

Member Updates

HRC Member Updates

Towns

Canaan Falls Village - Mr. Rule mentioned invasive plants (primarily bittersweet) overtaking the canoe access area in Falls Village. He spoke with Lauren Richardson at FirstLight approximately two weeks ago; who expressed interest in addressing the invasives.

Salisbury - Ms. Sweeney noted that Salisbury is in the process of hiring a new Planning & Zoning member, as long-time ZEO, Abby Conroy, is leaving.

Cornwall - Mr. Rule investigated the rocks reported at a boat put-in site on River Road. He confirmed it is approximately 20–30 feet of stone, likely installed by commercial drift boat operators, to stabilize an eroding bank. Although the rocks do not impede the river, the Commission noted that this work was done without authorization, which is a violation. Cornwall commissioners were asked to investigate who installed the rip-rap. Mr. Saunders confirmed the Commission had visited the site a few years ago when it was still eroding dirt.

- Mr. Hart noted that the Northeast Building project in Cornwall Bridge has broken ground. They provided comprehensive maps to the Commission and served as a model for how applicants should engage with the Commission.

Sharon - Jamie Casey, former Sharon building official and a strong ally of HRC, has retired.

- The culvert/bridge reconstruction on River Road below the metal bridge in Sharon has been permitted; the Army Corps of Engineers is completing final designs.

- West Cornwall Road redevelopment is unlikely to proceed until next year.

- The Jasper Johns project in Sharon Center (four buildings) is underway; one building has been demolished.

- Sharon's First Selectman asked whether any recent RIO reports could be shared at a town commission meeting. Ms. Scherff noted that RIO just launched for summer 2026; the multi-year report from last year (referenced by Drew Ransom) may be a useful resource to share.

Partners

NPS - Ms. Dias reported that, regarding the West Cornwall Wastewater Treatment Plant, NPS met with DEEP water quality staff about effluent levels. A dye study is under consideration to assess how effluent mixes with the river; the river will turn green temporarily during the study. The outflow for the West Cornwall sewage treatment plant is proposed for just upstream of the Covered Bridge.

- NPS is planning a Wild and Scenic partnership in-person gathering, potentially hosted by the Farmington River, which HRC members are encouraged to attend. Travel and lodging may be covered by the NPS budget.

HVA - Ms. Scherff shared HVA updates:

- RIO (River Information and Outreach) stewards are active for the summer season. The first weekend of outreach was reportedly quiet at all sites.

- A Wild and Scenic educational paddle is planned for the upcoming weekend, launching from the Route 341 bridge in Kent (outbound and return due to low water).

- A crepuscular (twilight) hike is being planned for later in the season.

- The Bridge Exhibition event, co-hosted with Cornwall Conservation Trust and HVA, is planned for July 17th.

- The Blackberry River Feasibility Study: Scherff has reviewed a contractor proposal and is close to finalizing an agreement to begin this project.

Mutual Concerns

- Responding to Mr. Rule's mention of the Connecticut Federation of Lakes, Ms. Dias noted the existence of the Connecticut Rivers Alliance, a separate advocacy organization focused on rivers

- Town Funding: Ms. Scherff reminded commissioners that unspent town dues (paid annually by the seven HRC river towns) represent a funding source that has not been fully utilized, and encouraged the Commission to identify appropriate uses for it.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 p.m.

Recording Secretary,

Susan Francisco

CCC – Citizens Coordinating Council
CCT – Cornwall Conservation Trust
DEEP – Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
DOT – Department of Transportation
EnCon – Connecticut Environmental Conservation Police
EPA – Environmental Protection Agency
FERC - Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
GE – General Electric
HMSP – Housatonic Meadows State Park
HRC – Housatonic River Commission
HVA – Housatonic Valley Association
HVRHS – Housatonic Valley Regional High School
JKW – Japanese Knotweed
NCD – Northwest Conservation District
NHCOG – Northwest Hills Council of Governments
NPS – National Park Service
RIO - River Information and Outreach
TU – Trout Unlimited
ZEO - Zoning Enforcement Officer

Next regular meeting – July 14, 2026