

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 April 14, 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—A
TBD—Cornwall—
Jesse Klingebiel, Chair—Kent—P
Michael Benjamin—Kent—P
Marc Andreotto, Treasurer—New Milford—P
Robert Gambino—New Milford—P

Also present: Madeline Scherff, HRC Project Manager; Jackie Dias, NPS; Julia Rogers and Amanda Colley, HVA; and Jack Healy, Public Works Director, New Milford.

Mr. Klingebiel called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Colter Rule was introduced as the new alternate commissioner from Falls Village.

Amanda Colley was introduced as the newly hired Environmental Education coordinator at HVA.

The March 10, 2026, Meeting Minutes were approved with the following spelling corrections: ~~Colter Rule~~ Colter Rule, and ~~Julia Rogbers~~ Julia Rogers.

Mr. Andreotto reported a W&S account balance (remaining balance of FY2024–2025 funding) of \$24,591.19, and a NHCOCG-HRC subaccount balance of \$10,543.72, noting that all towns have paid the assessments for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

The remaining \$170K for the current year will be spent by September 30, 2026, and then the next allocation of \$220K must be spent by April 30, 2028. The Steering Committee will be developing a detailed spending plan.

Mr. Tingley moved that the following three invoices totaling \$421.16 be paid for the Invoice Period 3/4/2026–4/4/2026:

Susan's March hrs—Susan Francisco—\$165.00

Website 1-Month Weebly Subscription—reimburse Madeline Scherff—\$16.16

Website Advance 2-year Weebly Subscription—reimb. Madeline Scherff—\$240.00

The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Communications

- Ms. Scherff reported that the UConn Extension is hosting a training workshop on Saturday in East Haddam, focused on land use commissions, skills development, and interactions between municipal boards. The registration deadline is the following day.

Mr. Tingley moved to authorize reimbursement to up to five commissioners to attend the UConn Extension Training Workshop on land use commissions. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

- A virtual barrier removal workshop hosted by the River Restoration Network (a partnership including The Nature Conservancy, Save the Sound, HVA, and others) is scheduled for

Tuesday, April 28, 2026, 2:00–3:00 p.m. Ms. Rogers will attend and report back. Ms. Scherff will forward registration details to interested commissioners.

- Ms. Dias announced a virtual National Park Service Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers meeting on Wednesday, May 13, 2026, at noon. The meeting will provide updates on NPS activities and offer an opportunity for questions.

- Ms. Scherff reported that the Chair of Sharon's Conservation Commission contacted her requesting information about Wild and Scenic resources, as they are updating their Natural Resources Inventory. Relevant materials and the HRC website link were forwarded.

- Mr. Tingley described a communication from a landowner whose property along Guinea Brook in Sharon (approximately 3/4 mile north of the Route 4 and Route 7 intersection) was affected by limestone sludge runoff from a neighboring property. Ms. Dias confirmed this is primarily a Sharon inland wetland violation and outside HRC's direct purview, as it does not appear to have significantly reached the river.

Community Grant Application – Invasive Removal and Riverbank Restoration near Boardman Bridge

Mr. Healy (New Milford Public Works Director) attended to provide background on the proposed project, located in the Boardman Bridge area and Sega Meadows. The purpose is the removal of Invasive species (mugwort, garlic mustard, autumn olive, Japanese knotweed, burning bush, and potentially mile-a-minute vine, among others) along the trail and riverbank in advance of a planned \$4 million grant application to renovate the Boardman Bridge as a park and river-trail hub. They propose mechanical removal, with minimal to no use of herbicides.

Town employees will monitor the activity, including two certified tree wardens trained for ongoing monitoring. A detailed plant list and restoration plan have not yet been prepared.

Phase 1: engage a professional consultant for assessment and a removal plan; Phases 2 and 3: implementation.

Discussion centered on a discrepancy between the application amount (\$13,335) and the figure cited by Mr. Healy (\$10,010), and the aggressive project timeline (April 1–June 30, 2026).

Ms. Scherff will share written best management practice guidelines (no plastic netting, only straw (not hay) for erosion control, biodegradable coconut netting for bank stabilization, silt fences, etc.) with Mr. Healy and Victoria Carvalho, Grants & Compliance Specialist.

Mr. Klingebiel moved to approve the grant funding for the Town of New Milford's invasive plant removal proposal at the Boardman Bridge / Sega Meadows area, pending final details and approval by the Steering Committee, in consultation with Ms. Scherff and Ms. Dias. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

WILD AND SCENIC ZONING REVIEW PROCESS – OVERVIEW

Ms. Scherff presented a brief overview of the HRC zoning and permit review process, prompted by recent lapses in communication, particularly for new commissioners.

Key points:

- An applicant proposing a project within the Housatonic River Wild and Scenic historic river corridor must submit an application to HRC via the commission's website at least one week prior to the relevant HRC meeting. The application is sent to the Recording Secretary and the Executive Board and distributed with the agenda. Commissioners are expected to review materials before the meeting.

- HRC provides advisory comment only; the commission does not have regulatory authority.
- Commissioners were urged to build relationships with their town Planning & Zoning boards and Zoning Enforcement Officers and proactively monitor P&Z meeting minutes and agendas.
- Any project involving bed, banks, water resources, bridge replacements, or culverts should be immediately flagged to Ms. Dias (NPS) and Ms. Scherff.
- If towns flag a project directly to an individual commissioner, the commissioner should redirect applicants to the HRC website or to Ms. Scherff to ensure the full commission has the opportunity to review.

Subcommittee Reports

Communications and Outreach

_Ms. Rogers reported that HVA holds a significant collection of paintings by artist Woldemar Neufeld, who painted over 50 bridges along the Housatonic River from Pittsfield to Long Island Sound, originally commissioned for the Bicentennial. HVA Executive Director Tim Abbott has proposed an exhibition of paintings from the Wild and Scenic stretch, to be hosted at the Cornwall Conservation Trust (CCT) and HRC office space, approximately July through September 2026. All present supported agreeing to co-host the event and discussed having HRC printed materials available. Security protocols need to be in place.

- Follow-up by Mr. Saunders and Ms. Scherff with the DOT contact regarding placement of Wild and Scenic signage, has yet to receive a response.

- Mr. Saunders reported that he has been in communication with Trout Unlimited regarding a potential "trout lab" to introduce trout into the river. Any such program would not begin until fall at the earliest.

River Use and Access

The next meeting is being rescheduled from Tuesday at noon to Monday at noon. All subcommittee meetings (Resource Protection and River Use and Access) will be moved to Mondays, back-to-back. The Steering Committee will continue to meet on Tuesdays at 4:00 p.m.

Ruggles Landing (North Canaan) - There are ongoing delays with the Ruggles Landing project. Ms. Rogers reported that a meeting with the Friends of Ruggles Landing, the town, and the State of Connecticut is now on the calendar. A town vote will also be required. Tim Abbott has indicated an estimated timeline of around June. Ms. Scherff will reach out to Tim Abbott directly regarding HRC involvement.

Site Visits - Ms. Scherff and Ms. Dias conducted informal visits to North Kent Road and Bulls Bridge and will discuss observations and ideas with the Steering Committee and River Use and Access subcommittee.

Steering

Nominating Committee

Mr. Benjamin, chair of the Nominating Committee, met with Mr. Gozonsky and Ms. Sweeney on April 13, 2026 and confirmed that all four current officers are willing to serve an additional one-year term. The following slate was presented for a vote at the May 2026 meeting:

Chair: Jesse Klingebiel; Vice Chair: Bill Tingley; Secretary: Jim Saunders; Treasurer: Mark Andreotto

HRC Member Updates

Towns

North Canaan - The commission continues to lack a representative from North Canaan. Ms. Scherff has emailed the town twice and provided role descriptions to assist with recruitment, but has not received a response.

Canaan - the Falls Village Housing Trust has announced that funding is in place for clearing and site preparation of the River Road lot for a 14-unit, 28-bedroom development. Heavy equipment and clear-cutting are expected. This project is not within the commission's current purview.

Cornwall - Cornwall also lacks a confirmed commissioner. Ms. Scherff has made multiple attempts to contact the town. Reports suggest the town may have appointed a fishing guide who spends winters out of the area, but this appointment has never been officially confirmed. Ms. Scherff will follow up with the Cornwall town office.

Kent - Mr. Klingebiel reported that Kent School had previously proposed installing a ramp to their boating docks that would have involved digging into the riverbank. The school appears to have accepted that the project is not viable as proposed.

Sharon

- Mr. Saunders reported that the owner of property at 367 Route 7 (approximately one mile north of West Cornwall), currently used as a hunting lodge with no existing parking, has applied to install a driveway. The state supports the application.

- Mr. Saunders reported that the Bargain Barn building in Sharon is to be demolished and replaced by a building commissioned by Jasper Johns for a gallery of modern American art and his office.

Partners

NPS - Ms. Dias

- The commission will receive \$220,000, representing the final year of its Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service.

- There is a possibility of hosting a national or regional Wild and Scenic Rivers partners gathering. Based on commission feedback, a regional format (New England partners only) was preferred.

HVA - Ms. Rogers

- Amanda Colley joined HVA as Environmental Education Coordinator. She will supervise summer river steward interns, oversee the River Information and Outreach program, and work on educational programming in Wild and Scenic towns.

- River Stewards / Summer Interns - four river stewards/summer interns have been hired for the upcoming season and will be starting on May 27. HVA is now able to provide housing for interns.

- Ms. Scherff (in her HVA capacity) is serving as project coordinator for an HRC-funded feasibility study examining a potential recreational bridge over the Blackberry River near downtown North Canaan, which would create the first public river/Housatonic access point in North Canaan via a contiguous walking trail.

- Survey work at Macedonia Brook was recently completed, marking the first step toward design for a stream restoration project.

- A community cleanup at Bulls Bridge is scheduled for Saturday, April 25, 2026, at 10:00 a.m., meeting at the Bulls Bridge power plant. Trash bags, gloves, and poison ivy wipes will be provided. All interested commissioners and community members are welcome; contact Ms. Rogers for information.

FirstLight

- Ms. Dias provided a detailed update on ongoing issues with FirstLight (hydropower operator for the Falls Village, Bulls Bridge, and Stevenson dams, under FERC):

- First Light has filed an updated Shoreline Management Plan containing no mention of the Wild and Scenic designation, HRC, or associated requirements – despite First Light having been an active partner at the designation.

- FirstLight is required under its FERC license to provide public recreation access at its sites. Recent site closures may be in conflict with this requirement.

- A proposed battery storage facility on the Housatonic riverbank was mentioned – an emerging concern regarding environmental impacts.

- An April 22, 2026, meeting (Earth Day) has been scheduled with FirstLight representatives, NPS Hydropower Assistance Program staff, Ms. Dias, and Mr. Klingebiel. Commissioners interested in attending should contact Ms. Scherff.

Mr. Tingley noted that when Senator Murphy championed the HRC's admission to the partnership program, a clause was included to grant the dam operator the opportunity to operate as a run-of-river facility, ensuring that HRC would not advocate for dam removal.

Mutual Concerns

- Ms. Francisco announced that all scanned meeting minutes from 1977 to the present have been posted to the HRC website and are searchable.

- Mr. Tingley recommended the book *Puritan River* (1948, commissioned by the Library of Congress and authored by Powers), available online for free, as a historical and geological reference for the Housatonic watershed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:04 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

Next regular meeting – May 12, 2026