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 October 13, 2026 Meeting
(*subject to approval at the next meeting*)

HRC Office, West Cornwall, and via Google Meet

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

Also present: Julie Saxton, HRC W&S Program Manager; Jackie Dias, NPS; and Sarah Better, NHCOG.

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

The September 8, 2026, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Mr. Kingebiel welcomed two new members, Kurt Stampfle from North Canaan and Josh Tavlin from Salisbury, who introduced themselves. Both have experience on and around rivers.

Financial Reports

Mr. Andreotto reported a total available Wild & Scenic funds balance of $323,609.29 that must be spent by April 30, 2028. The local account balance is $13,321.97, with all towns having paid 2026 dues.

Mr. Andreotto moved that the following nine invoices totaling* $15,743.02 *be paid for the Invoice Period* 9/1/26-10/5/26*:

Date	Budget Line (Fiscal Year)	Invoice #	Description	Check Mailed To	Amount
10/5	NPS - Program Manager (25-26)		W&S Prog. Man. Julie S. 10/1-10/31	Julie Saxton	$3,500.00
10/1	Organizational Development (25-26)		1 yr PO Box subscription	USPS	$158.00
10/1	Organizational Development (25-26)	398	Susan's September Hours	Susan Francisco	$247.50
9/28	Visitor Use (25-26)	1348	Grant #2035 for Blackberry -Final	HVA	$250.00
9/28	LOCAL FUND (25-26)		72 miles @ $0.76	Jesse Klingebiel	$54.72
9/28	LOCAL FUND (25-26)		31.2 miles @ $0.76	Julie Saxton	$23.71
10/4	LOCAL FUND (25-26)		Ice Cream Truck for Oct 4th	Jim Saunders	$889.00
10/4	Community Outreach (25-26)		Dry Bags	Jim Saunders	$ 662.09
10/13	Community Grants (25-26)		first half of grant payment	Conundrum Farms	$ 9,958.00
				TOTAL	$15,743.02

***The motion was seconded and passed unanimously*.**

Remaining balances by year, as presented by Ms. Dias:

FY24: almost $24K remaining, including almost $10K for invasive plant management and small amounts from the stream crossing project, Ruggles, and the access survey.

FY25: about $10K each unspent for Ruggles and invasive species work.

FY26: roughly $36K-$37K in community grants, all obligated but awaiting invoices from grantees.

FY27: $220K anticipated. Mr. Andreotto confirmed the $200K federal award. The work plan allocates funds to community grants, program management, organizational development, general visitor management (the private property incentive/invasive project), and communications and outreach.

Commissioners were urged to promote community grants in their towns. A financial policy and a more specific internal budget to "pre-approve" routine expenses will be discussed at the Steering Committee meeting later this month.

Zoning Communications

- Zoning applications: Ms. Sweeney noted that the zoning application for the building at 11 Route 7, Salisbury, has been approved. Commenters wanted stronger follow-through on plantings, and Inland Wetlands will oversee that.

Communications and Outreach

- October event at Housatonic Meadows review: Thanks were given to all the planners and volunteers. Four of the seven towns' selectmen attended. Turnout overall was lower than hoped, and some towns had no representation. Suggestions: hold the event every two years; invite landowners contiguous to the river from New Milford to Canaan; and have commissioners personally visit town selectmen, zoning officers, and planning and zoning offices rather than relying on email invitations. Further ideas are welcome at the next meeting.
- Website: A homepage mockup was shown with a community grants call-out, the mission statement, and a data panel linking to USGS river discharge (Falls Village and Gaylordsville) and National Weather Service forecasts for northern Litchfield County. Members supported the idea. Commissioners were asked to check with their zoning offices and obtain copies of watershed applications.
- Jackets: Funds remain in the FY26 communications and outreach line. Jackets, at approximately $80 each, were proposed to increase visibility.

Mr. Saunders moved to spend up to $2,000 on L.L. Bean HRC logo-embroidered jackets for commissioners and a few staff/partners. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Resource Protection

- NPS landowner's guide: The National Park Service guide to living along a Wild and Scenic river is now linked on the HRC website. Ms. Dias reviewed the updated brochure (about 20 pages of dos and don'ts, including regional examples such as bank recontouring on the Missisquoi River in Vermont). About 1,000 printed copies are being shipped to her office. Distribution ideas: town hall information tables, local realtors, and zoning officers handing copies out with applications.
- Invasive plant management plan: Bruce Bennett had previously offered to lead the plan. Ms. Dias noted nearly $40K is available for invasive-related work (two reallocated $10K lines plus $20K in this year's work plan), and encouraged prompt spending.

- Road salt/salinity research: Drew Ransom had suggested funds be used for research. A salinity questionnaire to town garages is on hold, and HVA's long-term data may be useful. The state DOT maintains state roads across all seven towns. To be continued in subcommittee.

River Use and Access

- **Ruggles Landing (North Canaan)**: Mr. Allyn reported that a majority of selectmen support signing a lease with DEEP. The Board has asked for a public hearing to present the timeline, community role, and funding. Plan: attend the November 2 Board of Selectmen meeting (date to be verified), target a public hearing in January (before budget season), then a town meeting or Board action on the lease. Funds remain to advance site design (about $40K).
- **Helco Field (Sharon)**: Cornwall's first selectman was receptive to Sharon and Cornwall partnering on the site, which would require an agreement with Eversource. The site needs invasive plant and tick management.
- **North Kent Road (Kent)**: The first selectman favors installing a gate that stays closed unless someone is present and noted that the site holds only about eight cars and there are emergency-access concerns. Members proposed a one-page list of site enhancements drawn from the HVA access study, and possibly paying a seasonal attendant. Detailed discussion was deferred to the subcommittee.
- **Fisherman's Cove:** Ownership records conflict among DEEP, FirstLight, and Eversource, and a solicitor is reviewing.

Steering Committee

- The Steering Committee reviewed a $10K grant request from the Land Lab at Housatonic Valley Regional High School for a solar-powered irrigation system. Ms. Dias noted that the committee prefers US-made materials but does not require them if no comparable domestic option is readily available.

Mr. Rule moved to approve the $10,000 grant request from the Housatonic Valley Regional High School Land Lab for a solar-powered irrigation system. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

- Grantee reporting: The Commission is not receiving regular updates from grantees, although agreements require reporting. Interim activity reports (not final reports) will be requested.

Member Updates

Towns

- **North Canaan:** Mr. Allyn signed off on an outer-corridor zoning application involving a building within three inches of the corridor. There is positive interest in the proposed West Greenway path along the rail trail and a pedestrian/equestrian bridge across the river.
- **Sharon:** Ms. Dias reported that the River Road project contractor will seek a Pre-Construction Notification from the Army Corps. The project team found that groundwater undercutting beneath the road, not the river, is causing the erosion.

- **Cornwall:** Ms. Dias reported on the Wastewater Committee: the town is working on its first NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) permit since 1989 and is concerned about the 6–12-month state review time. PFAS testing of private wells in West Cornwall is planned, and results will be public without identifying individual properties.

- **Kent:** Mike reported that Kent's wastewater plant accepts septic pump-out waste under a grandfathered arrangement that is significant to the town budget. He is working with the sewer commissioners.

Partners

- **National Park Service:** FirstLight and a development partner propose a 2.6 MW DC solar project adjacent to the Shepaug hydroelectric station in Southbury, outside the Wild and Scenic area, and asked for comment. To be discussed at the Resource Protection subcommittee meeting

Concerns and Future Agenda Items

- November meeting: HVA reports
- Annual report: An updated version of last year's report was circulated.
- Mr. Saunders will draft language, for review and approval, to submit to member towns eliminating the primary/alternate distinction.

Mr. Tingley moved to adjourn the meeting - to Pie! The motion was seconded, approved unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:37 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
NPDES – National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
RIO - River Information and Outreach
TU – Trout Unlimited
ZEO - Zoning Enforcement Officer

Next regular meeting – November 10, 2026