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 September 8, 2026 Meeting
(*subject to approval at the next meeting*)

HRC Office, West Cornwall, and via Google Meet

Christian Allyn—North Canaan—P
Jack Anstine—North Canaan—A
Colter Rule—Canaan (Falls Village)—P
Mark Gozonsky—Canaan (Falls Village)—P
Robin Sweeney—Salisbury—A
TBD - Salisbury—
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—P

Also present: Julie Saxton, HRC W&S Program Coordinator; Jackie Dias, NPS; Sarah Better, NHCOG; Drew Ransom, CT DEEP; and Patrick Mulberry, architect.

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

The August 11, 2026, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Financial Reports

Mr. Andreotto reported a total available Wild & Scenic funds balance of $136,364.33. The local account balance is $12,921.97.

Mr. Andreotto moved that the following seven invoices totaling $12,834.24 be paid for the Invoice Period 8/1/2026–8/31/2026:

8/29	**NPS - Program Manager (25-26)**		**J Saxton September Invoice**	**Julie Saxton**	**$3,500.00**
8/31	**Organizational Development (25-26)**	**397**	**Susan's August Hours**	**Susan Francisco**	**$255.00**
8/31	**Website (25-26)**	**9/8/2026**	**Website hosting**	**NHCOG**	**$180.00**
7/31	**NPS - Program Manager (25-26)**	**#1343**	**final M Scherff payment->Jul 31**	**HVA**	**$2,850.00**
7/31	**Visitor Use (25-26)**	**#1344**	**RIO River Stewards program**	**HVA**	**$1,798.71**
7/31	**Visitor Use (25-26)**	**#1345**	**Grant #2035 for Blackberry -Final**	**HVA**	**$2,250.00**
7/31	**Communications & Outreach (24-25)**	**#1346**	**Grant #2036 HRC Educator Invoice #2**	**HVA**	**$2,000.00**
					$12,834.24

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

Communications

- Ms. Saxton reported a website inquiry from a fly fisherman from Ridgefield, Connecticut, concerned about declining insect populations and herbicide use along the railroad right-of-way near Housatonic Meadows. He asked whether the Commission could raise the issue with the railroad company and was told that the Commission previously helped secure state revisions to pesticide application rules, which the railroad may be ignoring or claiming exemption from.

- Ms. Dias noted that she understands DEEP is responsible for enforcing the pesticide regulation, to the extent it has authority to do so. However, DOT owns the railroad right-of-way and controls issues occurring on it.
- Mr. Bennett will provide Ms. Dias with DOT contact information.

Zoning Communications

- Mr. Mulberry (applicant's representative) presented the proposal: a residence/barn-style structure on a parcel in the southeast corner of Salisbury, on the river, near the Sharon town line.
- Key details provided:
  - Building height: 30 ft; classic New England barn style; weathered gray siding with dark shingles compatible with the siding (finish still being finalized).
  - Footprint: 4,400 sq ft, including porch and garage. Foundation: slab-on-grade (no basement).
  - Setbacks: approximately 150 ft from wetlands; 260 ft from the river; building is outside the 100-year floodplain.
  - Not visible from the river under most conditions; possible partial winter visibility from a long upstream straightaway.
  - Most glazing faces south, away from the river; riverside openings are largely non-glazed (garage/roll-up doors, normally closed) or a small transom window.
  - Approved septic plan with erosion control in place.
  - Existing riverbank vegetation will remain undisturbed; new native plantings will be added between the structure and the river buffer.
  - The Salisbury Inland Wetlands Commission reviewed the application over a five-month period, including a review by an outside consultant, LandTech, who prepared landscape/remediation recommendations incorporated as stipulations of approval. Their approval includes monitoring during construction and for three years afterward.
  - A public hearing before the Salisbury Planning & Zoning Commission is scheduled for September 21 (a special permit is required for construction within the river corridor).
- Discussion:
  - Mr. Mulberry confirmed that a stipulation of the wetlands approval is that riverbank vegetation will remain undisturbed and planned plantings will be noted.
  - Members agreed the review process (wetlands commission scrutiny, outside consultant, site visits) appears to have addressed most concerns the Commission would normally raise.
  - A letter will be sent to the Salisbury Planning & Zoning Commission with recommendations, including: building color preferences and minimal glass facing the river. It will suggest monitoring against future clearing or lawn creation near the riverbank. A copy of the specific stipulations the Town of Salisbury issued regarding land improvements/ riverbank protection will be requested.

Communications and Outreach

Fall Open House Event:

- **Community outreach event planning (Mr. Saunders):**
  - Housatonic Meadows secured for exclusive use by HRC October 4, 12:00–3:00 PM.
  - Commissioners are asked to personally call their towns' selectmen and Planning & Zoning/Wetlands Commission officers to invite them, followed by an emailed flyer.

- Purpose of the event is introductions and education about the role of HRC, so town officials have a personal point of contact going forward.
- An "open forum" period will be built into the invite at 2:00 PM for public Q&A with commissioners, to give the event more structure.
- Invite will note the 1:00–3:00 PM window; attendees asked to bring their own chairs.
- Ice cream truck will be present. If credit card is used to pay on site, reimbursement will be made with invoice and credit card statement documentation, per Ms. Better.

Mr. Klingebiel moved to approve expenditures up to $300 for event liability insurance coverage. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

- Publicity: agreed to promote the event in local newspapers (e.g., *Lakeville Journal*) and other local town publications, as well as town websites and Facebook pages, with commissioners submitting relevant outlets to Mr. Saunders and Ms. Saxton.

Mr. Benjamin moved to approve expenditures up to $1,000 for event publicity. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

- Educational materials to distribute: Partnership Wild and Scenic brochure (8-pager, color copies), maps from the recent management plan, and a "Let's Go Fishing" Junior Ranger activity booklet with wooden Junior Ranger badges (Ms. Dias/NPS to provide).

Mr. Rule moved to approve expenditures up to $100 to print color copies of materials/poster. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

- Agencies' logos will be added to materials to reflect the multi-agency partnership.
- HRC-branded hats: baseball-style cap design still in progress with Fat City (New Milford embroiderer); "Housatonic River Commission" with a river outline and "Wild & Scenic."

Mr. Tingley moved to approve expenditures up to $1,200 for approximately 30 HRC hats. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

- Name tags: Ms. Dias will bring adhesive labels and markers for attendees to self-label.
- Stakeholder participation: NPS and DEEP plan to attend; FirstLight and other partner agencies invited.

- Trout Unlimited has received a donated batch of trees ready for planting this fall and is seeking planting locations and volunteer help anywhere along the Housatonic watershed, including tributaries.
  - Mr. Saunders will connect Mr. Bennett (tree/nursery expertise) with TU's Connecticut contact.
  - Potential sites discussed: Cornwall access points and the new HVRHS Land Lab.
  - Ms. Rogers noted HVA could pair a tree-planting volunteer event with an educational component led by HVA environmental educator Amanda Colley, who will connect with the high school.

<u>Resource Protection</u>

- A subcommittee site visit addressed reported vegetation clearing at the West Cornwall put-in/pull-out; determined to be a non-issue (area had been cleared/maintained and looked fine).

- Mr. Gozonsky reported ongoing dialogue with FirstLight regarding invasive species (bittersweet, etc.) removal at the Falls Village put-in near the generator, and proposed inviting FirstLight to also address invasives at their Bull's Bridge holdings.
    - Specific problem areas near Bull's Bridge: mugwort near the Fisherman's Lot, and invasives along the Bull's Bridge trail (NPS land) and on FirstLight's island property.
    - Mr. Gozonsky will reach out to FirstLight regarding invasives cleanup and to flag the available donated trees.
- Mr. Bennett reported that an existing invasive species mapping survey (conducted approximately eight years ago) already covers the river corridor from the Massachusetts border through New Milford, including Kent, and can serve as a baseline for prioritizing control efforts.
    - The Blackberry River was noted as a particularly heavy source of knotweed seed, largely on private land. The covered bridge area in Sheffield is also heavily affected by invasives.
- Mr. Bennett referenced a prior draft grant proposal (developed by Maddy Scherff) to support private landowners in controlling invasives along the river, and will continue developing this proposal for a future meeting.
- He also raised a concern about a property north of the dam, in Salisbury, where the riverbank had been cleared to bare lawn down to the water's edge with no buffer.
    - Ms. Dias advised that if no wetlands permit was filed for the work, this could potentially be referred as a violation to the local wetlands commission and/or Army Corps of Engineers, and offered to look into the appropriate contact/channels.
- **Signage update:** Mr. Saunders reminded commissioners that River identification/Wild and Scenic designation signs (approximately 8–10 planned locations) have been produced and are on hand; installation requires DOT authorization. He has been coordinating with Senator Maria Horn's office and a DOT contact; process is ongoing.
- **Road salt/winter maintenance survey:**
    - Mr. Rule drafted a survey for town highway departments covering: salt usage volumes, pre-treatment practices, materials budgets, certification status, storage practices, and multi-year trends.
    - Plan is to distribute a finalized survey later this winter to the member towns
    - Long-term goal includes engaging neighboring watershed towns and revisiting a related study last conducted approximately 7–8 years ago.

<u>River Use and Access</u>

- Mr. Klingebiel, Mr. Benjamin, and Ms. Saxton conducted a site tour of access points in New Milford, Kent, and elsewhere along the corridor.
- **Ruggles Landing:** No project-specific update this month.
- **North Kent Road:** Monthly stakeholder meetings aimed at developing a long-term access solution have had low turnout over the summer; Ms. Rogers is looking into rescheduling for better fall attendance.
- **Fisherman's Lot** (between FirstLight and Eversource properties, near power lines):
    - A new gate has been installed, with signage prohibiting hunting, fishing, and unauthorized motorized vehicles.

- Ms. Rogers noted the site has historically been popular for trout fishing (especially when the river cools) and dog walking, and that the listed prohibited uses on the gate don't match the full set of uses historically associated with the site.
- Ms. Rogers also noted the site is used for a permitted hunting program, raising a question of whether current permit holders remain authorized under the new signage.
- Commissioners expressed concern that the "no trespassing"-style language discourages river users and represents a loss of public access; agreed a point of contact is needed to clarify Eversource's intent.
- Ms. Dias offered to reach out to Gillian Conlin at Eversource; Mr. Klingebiel asked to be copied.

- **GE Settlement Funds:** Mr. Ransom reported that remaining funds have been allocated:
  - Approximately $300,000 toward the McEver property acquisition near the Blackberry River.
  - Approximately $200,000 toward the White Hollow property acquisition across from the HVRHS on Route 7 (via a land trust, not a direct purchase by the town).
  - Additional properties funded in Woodbury and Roxbury.
  - Funds are understood, per updated guidance, to be usable only for access easements or direct property purchase — not for structure removal (e.g., at the Ruggles site).
  - This is understood to be separate from any potential DEEP funding under consideration for Ruggles Landing.

Member Updates

Towns

- **Falls Village:** Annual dues invoice has been reissued and is moving through the town's finance committee process.
- **Salisbury/Sharon:** Discussion of filling the second Salisbury commissioner position. First Selectman Curtis Rand has been encouraged to appoint Josh Tavlin (recommended by Mr. Gozonsky).
- **Sharon:** Ms Dias met with First Selectman Casey Flanagan, the head of the highway department, and the contractor for the River Road reconstruction project. NPS was asked to provide a letter outlining best management practices for bank stabilization consistent with Wild & Scenic standards and the project continues to evolve.
- **Cornwall:**
  - Cornwall is hosting an Agricultural Fair this weekend; Mr. Bennett will represent the Commission with available maps and materials.
  - Status of the wastewater treatment plant in West Cornwall discussion: still awaiting state water quality standards before modeling can proceed; sign-on support has grown.
- **Kent:** A landowner excavation near the Bull's Bridge power plant that initially appeared concerning was confirmed to be permitted septic system repair work (non-issue).

Partners

NPS - **Mileage reimbursement reminder:** Ms. Dias noted the current federal mileage reimbursement rate is approximately $0.767 per mile (as of July); commissioners were encouraged to submit invoices for reimbursable travel within the current fiscal year.

HVA

- **Blackberry River Pedestrian Bridge Feasibility Study:**
  - A contractor is assessing the feasibility/cost of a pedestrian bridge across the Blackberry River in North Canaan, connecting town land (an old railroad bed) to the McEver conservation property (245 acres under contract with the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy).
  - Goal is to give North Canaan — currently the only member town with no formal river access — a car-free connection to the Wild & Scenic corridor from the center of town.
  - Results expected before the end of the month.
- **Environmental Educator - Amanda Colley:**
  - Actively leading public programs and working with river stewards.
  - A crepuscular (dawn/dusk) hike along the Wild and Scenic stretch, is rescheduled for this coming Thursday.
  - Ms. Colley has been connected with staff at HVRHS, and will also be in touch with Mr. Bennett.
  - Ms. Colley and Ms. Rogers will report on the educator program and the RIO season at the November meeting.
- **Gallery updates:** Open gallery hours (Mondays, 3:00–5:00 PM) featuring bridges over the Housatonic drew many attendees in August. The final open-hours session is Monday, September 14.
- **Senator Murphy's cross-state walk:** Ms. Rogers joined part of Senator Murphy's annual walk (this year along the Route 8/Naugatuck River corridor) and encouraged his office, which is focused on shoreline access policy, to also consider inland waterway access issues relevant to the Wild & Scenic corridor.
- Ms. Rogers will be on leave for several months starting mid-October.

<u>Mutual Concerns and Future Agenda Items</u>

- Steering Committee agreed to shift its regular meeting time from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM on Tuesdays, to improve attendance.
- Members agreed that meetings are running too long and need to be more streamlined.

Mr. Gambino moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded, approved unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 9:07 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 – October 13, 2026