

in the mainstream

Norwalk River Watershed Association
Fall 2018 Newsletter

Special Report: The Dams of Norwalk River – Part 2

The River Runs Free^r

August 6th was a red-letter day for the Norwalk River and its aquatic “residents,” and for all of us — animal, vegetable and human — living within its watershed. That’s the day — years in the making — that work began to dismantle the 150-year-old Flock Process Dam in Norwalk.

As we reported in our spring newsletter, though abandoned, the dam continued to block the river and was falling steadily into a state of disrepair, posing a threat to property, people and the natural habitat. Like other dams upstream, the Flock Process Dam had never provided flood protection or any other ecological benefit. Its removal — a joint project between the City of Norwalk, Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service — was first targeted by the Norwalk River Action Plan 20 years ago.

Speaking on August 14th, Chris Malik of CT DEEP said the demolition process was going smoothly and he expects the project to be finished by its December deadline.



Flock Process Dam before...

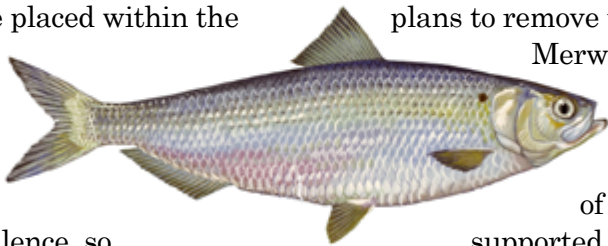


...and after

Photo: Alexis Chercheff

Why so long to remove a modest-sized dam? It turns out that dismantling it is only the beginning of the project. Once that happens, restoration work begins to protect the stream flow and help the river return to a more natural state. According to Malik, for this project the work involves “installing a boulder sill just above the dam site to stabilize the environment as much as possible.” In the breach area itself, he says, “boulders will be placed within the stream to break up the current and provide some turbulence, so fish can swim and rest in the eddies.”

Fish are often one of the big impetuses for removing a dam. The Flock Process Dam and the next two dams upstream have been preventing migratory fish, including sea-run trout, Alewife and Blueback Herring, from reaching their historic spawning habitats for over a century and a half. And when those fish return and thrive, the river thrives too.



But there are plenty of other good reasons removing the Flock Process Dam, the Merwin Meadows (Dana) Dam and the Cannondale (Cannon Pond) Dam was made a priority, including improved water quality, public safety, property protection and the return of recreational activities.* So we’re happy to report on progress at the two additional dam sites as well.

After a 10-year hiatus, Wilton is again pushing forward with plans to remove the dam at Merwin Meadows. In April, the Wilton Board of Selectmen supported Environmental Affairs Director Mike Conklin’s proposal to restart the demolition and river restoration project. Trout Unlimited is now spearheading efforts to update the existing engineering plan so the permitting phase can begin.

It’s too early to say exactly when the Merwin Meadows Dam will come down, but the search for funding is in high gear because of developments a mile and a half upriver at the Cannondale Dam.

After a spring storm opened a gap there, Trout Unlimited began making plans to expand the breach so it was fully open for fish passage. On August 15th, work was begun to safely take out a larger section of the dam by hand and jackhammer.

As they worked at Cannondale, Alexis Cherichetti, Norwalk’s Senior Environmental Officer, looked on. An advocate for the removal of the Flock Process Dam for over 10 years, she has a keen interest in seeing the river run freer. “Beyond Georgetown, the river’s natural steep gradient makes anadromous (or migratory) fish passage unlikely, so once we have these three dams down, the migratory fish runs on Norwalk River will be restored to their full antecedent length.”

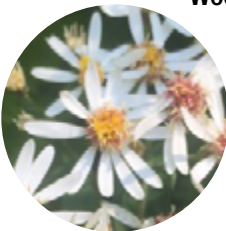
As the vision of a free-flowing river from Long Island Sound to Georgetown becomes a reality, it’s important to note that none of this would be happening without a lot of hard work and persistence by committed individuals and groups. And there’s a lot more to do! To learn how you can help advocate for more positive changes, see the action plan below.

Native Plants:

Bring Late-Season Pollinators to Your Yard with Wild Asters

Here in Connecticut, asters are some of our most common late season wildflowers, though their beauty is often overlooked. Ranging in color from purple to pink and white, they continue to add a beautiful flourish to our woods and meadows for weeks after many other native bloomers have packed it in. And that’s not just good news for us, but for our local pollinators too.

According to entomologist Doug Tallamy, more species of moths and butterflies take sustenance from asters than any other wildflowers except goldenrods. As they fade, their seeds and dried-out stalks and leaves provide food and shelter for birds, insects and small animals over the winter. What’s more, deer tend to steer clear.



Here are two good choices to consider adding to your pollinator garden:

- For dry shady spots, try **White Wood Aster** (*Eurybia divaricata*). Their white petals and dark green leaves make them an attractive ground cover to plant under shallow-rooted trees and in other tough spots. They grow 1 to 2 feet tall and bloom for up to two months.
- For damper, sunny areas, you can’t go wrong with the more showy **New England Aster** (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*). Sporting bright purple or deep pink flowers, these asters can grow up to five feet tall or more. Pinch them back in June, however, and they’ll be less likely to do the flop in September.



Fall Events

Saturday, Sept. 15, 10AM–1PM. River Cleanup at Oyster Shell Park. Volunteers needed! Register at info@norwalkriver.org.

Tuesdays at REI Norwalk – Join us for these NRWA/REI Classes – 7-8:30PM. Register at [REI.org/events](https://reiofct.org/events).
Sept. 18 – What Plants Are Invasive and Which Are Native?
Sept. 25 – Create Beautiful Gardens Without Pesticides
Oct. 2 – Local Butterflies & What to Plant to Attract Them

Saturday, Sept. 29, 10AM–12PM. River Path Clean Up. Along the NRVT in Silvermine. Register at info@norwalkriver.org.

Saturday, Oct. 6, 10AM–1PM. Trail Maintenance & Riverbank Habitat Restoration. Help remove invasives and plant native trees and a pollinator-friendly garden at Oyster Shell Park. Funded by a grant from REI. Register at [REI.com/events](https://reiofct.org/events).

Your Fall 2018 Watershed Action Plan

1. Help get the State Water Plan passed as written.

Contact your state representatives to urge them to support the Plan in the upcoming legislative session. It's the best platform Connecticut has at this time to improve water management for the public good. Under state law water is viewed as a public trust resource, and it's been that way for over 40 years. Now, however, special interests are seeking to change that in order to profit from this precious resource. Act now to get the Plan in its current form passed!

2. Join the effort to ban fracking waste in Connecticut.

Let your state representatives know you support a bill that would ban fracking waste permanently from CT. The Legislature failed to bring to a vote the bill to ban this waste before the 2018 legislative session ended. Until they act, you can help at the local level, too, by advocating a ban on fracking waste in your town. Redding, Norwalk and 48 other towns have already done it. Let's put pressure on the state by getting this done in all six of our CT watershed towns!

3. Protect CT's Bottle Bill and make it even stronger.

With the plastic pollution problem reaching truly monstrous proportions, it's time to get more serious here in CT. We're one of 11 states with bottle bills. That's good news, but now we need to both protect our bill and expand it. Urge your state representatives to help expand our 40-year-old Bill to include iced tea, sports drink and juice bottles.

For more information, visit norwalkriver.org

Membership Form

Becoming a member helps NRWA continue to protect local water quality, hiking trails, and wildlife habitats.

Riparian Society

Steward	\$1000+
Protector	\$500 – \$999
Patron	\$100 – \$499

Membership

Supporter	\$50 – \$99
Friend	\$30 – \$49
Other	\$_____

☐ My company has a matching gift program (company name) _____

Donate Online at norwalkriver.org

Or mail your tax-deductible Annual Membership gift of \$_____ to NRWA, Inc., PO Box 197, Georgetown, CT 06829. Please make check payable to NRWA, Inc.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

I would like to receive updates and events info. My email is: _____

Pollinator Pathway News

The Pollinator Pathway Just Keeps on Growing!

As New Canaan, Darien, and Pound Ridge begin work on new Pathways, here's what's going on elsewhere in our watershed...

In Norwalk: New pollinator-friendly gardens and trees are coming this fall thanks to a generous grant and volunteer workers from FactSet. They will be planting a garden and 8 trees at South Norwalk's Woodward Park. And thanks to a grant from our long-time supporter, REI Norwalk, volunteers will add pollinator-friendly native plants and trees along the Norwalk River Valley Trail just below the Maritime Aquarium on October 6, 10AM–1PM. Join us!

In Wilton: Girl Scouts are helping build the Pollinator Pathway by restoring pollinator habitat along the Norwalk River Valley Trail. They are pictured here battling mugwort and other invasives and planting purple coneflower, black-eyed susan, goldenrods, asters, and other natives at the Sharp Hill crossing. As part of their Silver Project, they also plan to restore the banks of a vernal pool with native ferns.

In Ridgefield: Emily May of the Xerces Society spoke at the Ridgefield Library in August, and plans are underway for a wine and pollinator garden tour this fall. Check for updates at Pollinator-Pathway.org.



Good News for Monarchs? Many people are reporting increased monarch butterfly activity this year, according to lepidopterist Victor DeMasi of Redding. "They seem to be on a bounce back," he says, but warns "they're not out of the woods yet!"