

in the mainstream

Norwalk River Watershed Association
Spring 2019 Newsletter

Advocacy in Action:

Aquarion Nixes Cannondale Water Diversion Plans

Aquarion Water Company announced on March 14th that it was withdrawing its controversial application to pump up to one million gallons of water a day from a well next to the Norwalk River in the Cannondale area of Wilton.

This great news for the watershed and its inhabitants — people, plants and animals — didn't just happen. It was the result of a powerful advocacy effort on the part of a vocal set of stakeholders including concerned residents of the Norwalk River watershed and nearby towns, the Town of Wilton, the Norwalk Mayor's office, and groups such as Trout Unlimited, Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound, Harbor Watch, Earthplace, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut and NRWA.

Resistance to Aquarion's water diversion plan had mounted since the company submitted a permit application to the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) on October 3rd. But the decisive factor was likely the overwhelming opposition expressed by



Photo: Good Morning Wilton

This crowd at the Wilton Library on February 26th helped reverse the tide on Aquarion's Cannondale Well water diversion application.

an overflow crowd attending a meeting hosted by DEEP at the Wilton Library on February 26th. The audience included representatives from the diverse range of stakeholders listed above.

In announcing its decision to withdraw its application, Dan Lawrence, Aquarion's Director of Engineering and Planning, acknowledged the decisive role public advocacy had played. "Over the past several months,

Aquarion has held a dialogue with both community stakeholders and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) on the proposed diversion permit for our Cannondale well. Given the feedback we've received and our ability to continue using our other water sources to ensure the reliable delivery of safe, clean, quality water to our customers,

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Water in Connecticut: Yours, Mine & Ours?

“Who owns the rain? Who owns our water?” asked Long Island Soundkeeper Bill Lucey before the crowd assembled to hear about Aquarion’s water diversion plans on February 26th. And he quickly supplied an answer: “Water is a public trust. We own the water.” That isn’t just his opinion. It’s written into the law of Connecticut.

Nevertheless, this principle is now being challenged by water utilities and business interests who are lobbying to remove language referring to the public trust statute from the State Water Plan.

The State Water Plan (SWP) is a comprehensive framework of policy recommendations and scientific information, four years in the making, designed to facilitate prudent planning for Connecticut’s invaluable water resources as we head into a future increasingly dominated by climate change and its impacts. The SWP itself does not include mandates or legislation.

Developed with broad stakeholder input at the cost of \$1 million, the SWP has been stalled in the legislature primarily over the public trust issue. For the SWP to take effect, the General Assembly must pass a bill to adopt it. As of this writing, a hearing date was yet to be set. While the public trust language remains intact for now, the challenge to it cannot be taken lightly.

What is so controversial about simply restating language already contained in Connecticut’s General Statutes, effectively the law of the land?

You be the judge. Here’s what the language says:

It is hereby found and declared that there is a public trust in the air, water and other natural resources of the state of Connecticut and that each person is entitled to the protection, preservation and enhancement of the same.

It is further found and declared that it is in the public interest to provide all persons with an adequate remedy to protect the air, water and other natural resources from unreasonable pollution, impairment or destruction.

These words have been enshrined in Connecticut law for nearly 50 years and underlie the state’s authority to manage water for the public good. In the process of drafting the SWP, the Water Planning Council received over 2,300 hand-written letters and over 4,600 petition signatures to urge inclusion of the public trust language. As the language itself makes clear, it’s our responsibility as citizens of the state to act on behalf of our natural resources, and against any actions that can be perceived as threatening them. The effort by special interests to remove the public trust language from the SWP, if successful, would undermine our ability to do so.

This is not the time to weaken environmental protections. It’s time to get the SWP in its current form passed before this legislative session ends on June 5.

Act to Protect Our Water

Check for updates on our Facebook page as we continue to monitor the State Water Plan. In the meantime, here’s what you can do to protect our water and its status as a priceless public trust resource.

- Ask your state legislators to support the State Water Plan this legislative session as written. NRWA sees the plan as a vital first step in balancing the needs of residents, industry, agriculture and the environment for our water resources.
- Support NRWA’s public education and advocacy efforts focused on water conservation and water quality.
- Start conserving water in your own home. For ideas on how to do this, visit norwalkriver.org.

Aquarion Nixes Plans

continued from cover

we will be withdrawing the permit application.”

In our opposition to Aquarion’s permit application, the NRWA had questioned the need for diverting water from the Norwalk River and its aquifer and proposed instead that the focus be on building up drought resilience through water conservation efforts and infrastructure repairs.

Aquarion’s decision is a victory for the public and the watershed, and it strongly reinforces the principle of water as a public trust resource. We believe Aquarion deserves a lot of credit for the thoroughness and transparency with which it sought feedback on its plans and greatly appreciate their response. And we are encouraged by its intention to build upon current conservation efforts across its service territory.

Says NRWA President Louise Washer, “I’m just so happy that they listened to our concerns and have decided not to do this. And none of this would have been possible without the voices of over a hundred concerned citizens who turned out to oppose the diversion plan.” Now we need to turn that energy toward raising awareness about the importance of conserving water, especially outside in the summer. Watering early or late in the day, installing smart meters on irrigation systems, reducing lawn size, and adding more native plants that use less water are good starts.

Want to get involved?

We need volunteers.

Contact us at info@norwalkriver.org.



This legislative session there are several bills on the table that would help protect our watershed.

State-wide ban on fracking waste (Bill SB-753)

If passed, this bill would permanently ban all oil and gas extraction waste from entering our state. Fracking waste has serious potential to pollute our drinking water, contaminate marine life, and destroy the local oyster industry which relies on clean water. Fortunately, SB-753 has been voted out of the environment committee. We want it to pass without any changes that would weaken the ban or preempt town ordinances.

Pesticide regulation (Bill SB-76)

If passed, this bill would allow municipalities to set their own pesticide limits, giving control to local entities who understand local needs.

Open space protection (Bill HB-5254)

Establishing a pilot program authorizing municipalities to impose a buyer’s conveyance fee on real property to fund the purchase and stewardship of open space. Like the pesticide bill, this bill simply allows towns the option to make their own policy.

Four bills relating to plastic trash:

Concerning single-use plastic and paper bags (SB-1003)

If passed, single-use plastic bags would be banned in the state and replaced by recyclable paper bags for a 10-cent fee.

Expanding the bottle bill (HB-7294)

The proposed bill would modernize the current bill by increasing the redemption value to 10 cents from 5, and by including non-carbonated beverages such as juices, teas, and sports drinks.

Prohibiting Styrofoam trays in CT Schools (SB-229)

Eliminating single-use plastic straws (HB-5385)

We have been working diligently to let our watershed town representatives know how crucial it is to get these bills passed into law. Please join us in our fight by calling or emailing your representatives.



Native Plants:

A Gift for Early Spring Pollinators

When you hit a woodland trail in late April or May, keep your eyes open for one of the overlooked delights of spring — a billow of pinkish-white blooms drifting out from an airy bush. If the tubular flowers appear at branch tips and have flaring petals with showy stamens, you are almost certainly looking at one of our native azaleas.

Wild azaleas are mostly found in the eastern United States, with several of them native to our area. Their beauty has been literally kept in the shadows because in nature they are shade-loving woodland plants, often receiving little sunlight.

But they're not just beautiful to us. Their delicate flowers — one of the few sources of pollen and nectar available in early spring — are a draw for

early bees, flies, butterflies and hummingbirds. The survival of bumble bee queens, the first of their species to emerge, hinges on early blooming shrubs like these. Good reasons to consider planting wild azaleas in your pollinator garden!

But take note — their habits are quite different from their exotic cousins. They are taller and more open in structure. They also lose their leaves in fall, but not before taking on a beautiful burgundy hue.

Consider these species when looking for native azaleas at local native plant nurseries:

- Pinxterbloom — *Rhododendron periclymenoides* (pictured);
- Mountain — *R. prinophyllum*;
- Swamp — *R. viscosum*;
- Pinkshell — *R. vaseyi*.

Pollinator Pathway News



First Annual All-Town Meeting: 25 Towns Attend!

From the early planning meetings around a kitchen table in Wilton two years ago, the Pollinator Pathway has blossomed into a 25-town, multi-state effort to connect corridors of safe pollinator habitat. As of 2019, with the launch of Redding's pathway and plans under way in New Canaan and Lewisboro, NY, NRWA is thrilled to have all seven watershed towns on the pathway. We are also excited to welcome neighbors in Westport, Darien, Greenwich, Newtown, Bedford, Pound Ridge, North Salem, and others.

In early March, NRWA co-hosted the first ever all-town meeting at Grace Farms in New Canaan, to provide town organizers the chance to meet and exchange ideas. Close to 100 attendees packed the room to hear CT State Entomologist Dr. Kimberly Stoner speak about declines in native bumble bee populations and how critical the work of restoring habitat is to their survival, and the survival of all pollinators. Restoring native plants and eliminating the use of pesticides in our yards and in our towns is key to protecting the birds, bees, and butterflies but also to protecting water quality and human health.

Find out about how to join the Pollinator Pathway and about the dozens of pollinator events coming up in all of the watershed towns at Pollinator-Pathway.org. Bee on it!

A list of local native plant nurseries is available at Pollinator-Pathway.org

Thank You to Our Generous Donors

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Woodcock Nature Center,
Event Space

Special Thanks to Intern

Amanda Barker

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 \$_____

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Donate Online at NorwalkRiver.org

Or mail your tax-deductible Annual Membership gift of \$_____ to
NRWA, Inc. PO Box 7114, Wilton, CT 06897. 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: _____

Spring Events



Vernal Pool Walk on the NRV.

Saturday, April 27, 1PM.

Join us to explore vernal pools and their many amphibious spring inhabitants. Meet at the parking area at the end of Twin Oak Lane in Wilton. Register for this free event by emailing us at info@norwalkriver.org

Undamming Our Rivers: The Return of Migratory Fish to the Norwalk River and Other CT Streams.

Wednesday, May 15, 7PM.

Join us for a talk at the Wilton Library by Steve Gephard, Supervising Fisheries Biologist at the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP). This talk serves as the NRWA 2019 Annual Meeting. All welcome. Register through the Wilton Library at wiltonlibrary.org

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