

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 February 10, 2026 Meeting (subject to approval at the next meeting) HRC Office, West Cornwall, and via Google Meet

Christian Allyn – North Canaan – A	William R. Tingley, Vice-chair – Sharon – A
Jack Anstine – North Canaan – P	Phil Hart – Cornwall – A
TBD – Canaan (Falls Village) –	TBD – Cornwall –
Mark Gozonsky – Canaan (Falls Village)– P	Jesse Klingebiel, Chair – Kent – P
Robin Sweeney – Salisbury – P	Michael Benjamin – Kent – P
Stacie Weiner – Salisbury – P	Marc Andreotto, Treasurer – New Milford – P
Jim Saunders, Secretary – Sharon – P	Robert Gambino – New Milford – A

(Acronyms listed on the last page)

Also present: Madeline Scherff, HRC Project Manager; Jackie Dias, NPS; Rob Phillips, NHCOCG; Drew Ransom, CT DEEP; Brian Wood and Brett Young, FirstLight; and David Mabbott, zoning applicant from Salisbury.

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

The January 13, 2026 Meeting minutes were approved with the following corrections to the corrections: Phil Hart, from Vice-chair to ~~Chair~~ commissioner; Barton Jones, from Secretary to ~~Vice-chair~~; commissioner to Secretary.

Treasurer and NHCOCG Financial Reports

Ms. Scherff reported on behalf of Marc Andreotto that the W&S account balance is \$51,371.74, and the NHCOCG-HRC subaccount balance is \$7,743.72.

Mr. Klingebiel moved that the following invoices be paid for the Invoice Period 1/1/2026-1/31/2026

Land & Community Grant—90% disbursement—21st Century Fund—	<u>\$21,069.45</u>
Blackberry Grant (HVA)—feasibility study, N. Canaan—90% disbursement—HVA—	<u>\$22,500.00</u>
HVA Educator Salary Grant—partial salary for educator (25% time dedicated to HRC)—90% disbursement—HVA—	<u>\$20,250.00</u>
Susan's January Hrs—Susan Francisco—	<u>\$240.00</u>
	NPS BUDGET <u>\$64,059.45</u>

The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

The 10% holdback policy was explained: invoices are paid at 90% until work completion, providing a financial check on deliverables.

Communications

Ms. Francisco has compiled and scanned all HRC meeting minutes from 1977 to the present. These are now in the HRC Google Drive, fully searchable. A shareable link will be prepared and shared with all HRC members. Hard copies are on file in the HRC office.

The need to address commissioner vacancies and re-engage less-active members was discussed. Ms. Scherff has reached out to Falls Village and Cornwall with vacancy notices and commissioner role descriptions, with written responses requested by the March meeting.

Mr. Gozonsky clarified that he should be listed as the Primary representative, not the Alternate, that seat remaining vacant.

Zoning Permit Application - Elm Drive, Salisbury

Mr. Mabbott discussed his application for a house and barn on recently purchased property at Elm Drive. The property is located in the Housatonic Outer Corridor.

Key points discussed:

- The river is visible from the property in winter but screened by foliage in summer.
- Tree removal is planned for road construction and the building site; safety removal of large pine trees near the existing cottage is also anticipated. No large-scale viewshed clearing is planned.
- Tree removal is not currently indicated on the Salisbury zoning plans.
- Invasive vines are being managed mechanically; no herbicides are planned.
- The project includes a two-story house and a two-story barn.
- Application is currently at the informal review stage with the Salisbury Zoning Board; formal submission has been made, and a hearing is scheduled for the following week. Torrington Health Department septic approval is pending.
- Ms. Scherff mentioned HRC's invasive plant rebate program as a potential resource for the applicant.

The commission found no clear impact on the river's scenic or ecological values.

Mr. Klingebiel moved that Ms. Scherff compose and send a letter of HRC support/no objection to accompany the zoning application for the Mabbott property. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Subcommittee Reports

Communications and Outreach

Ms. Scherff shared that the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation is re-petitioning for federal recognition under updated Department of the Interior guidelines that now allow re-petitions. Ms. Dias noted the likelihood that NPS would fund a contractor to develop relationship-building between Wild and Scenic Rivers and tribal partners. The HRC has no official role in the federal recognition process, but the commission agreed that being aware of all stakeholders involved in land management, including indigenous communities, is important

Resource Protection

Ms. Dias is working on a Wild & Scenic Section 7 determination for a culvert replacement on West Cornwall Road in Sharon (Pine Swamp Brook), approximately 0.1 miles from the river, and is negotiating best management practices with the Army Corps of Engineers. Mr. Ransom estimates a short timeline given the pre-cast concrete approach.

River Use and Access

- Ruggles Landing - The town of North Canaan may vote on a lease of the property.
- HELCO Field - Ms. Scherff and Bill Tingley will meet to discuss engaging Lisa from Earth Tones to look at the property. A letter to Eversource may follow to clarify HRC's interest in the site as a prospective access point.
- Visitor Use Management Pre-Season Roundtable: The subcommittee discussed scheduling an informal pre-season meeting with the towns to discuss visitor use challenges. It would need to be planned before the river stewards start their work.
- FirstLight Update - Mr. Wood reviewed an upcoming amendment to FirstLight's Recreation Management Plan, to be formally submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

Fisherman's Parking Lot (north of Route 7, New Milford): FirstLight proposes closing the gate on Memorial Day and reopening on Labor Day each year. Rationale: The site is designed as a fisherman's access to a critical thermal refuge. In summer, when water temperatures rise, the trout in the entire Housatonic congregate in this refuge. Heavy recreational use during this period stresses fish. DEEP

Fisheries has been consulted and is supportive. HRC, NPS, HVA, DEEP, and the State Historic Preservation Office will receive 30-day comment letters.

Mr. Wood noted potential solar projects in the area, and if they are within HRC's jurisdiction, HRC will be notified.

Steering – 2026-2027 Budget

HRC's FY27 Wild & Scenic allocation has been confirmed at \$220,000 (an increase of \$70,000 from the prior year).

- Supplemental funding opportunity: unspent NPS salary funds are being offered as supplemental grants to river partners. HRC may apply for \$5,000–\$30,000 per line item, with a very short two-week application turnaround. Funds must be spent by September 2027. The steering committee will evaluate possibilities and present them for a vote at the March meeting.

- The Project Manager's salary line in the budget required correction; Ms. Dias will coordinate with HVA for the distribution of the remaining \$10,000 across line items.

Mr. Saunders moved that the FY27 Budget of \$220,000 be approved as presented, with the additional \$10,000 distributed equally across line items. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

HRC Member Updates

North Canaan - both Christian Allyn and Jack Anstine are seeking replacements and will be working with the selectmen to find new town commissioners.

Canaan - Mr. Gozonsky noted that he had reviewed the 2025 River Access Report and expressed appreciation for the commission's thorough approach to visitor use and overcrowding issues.

Salisbury - Ms. Sweeney is connecting with past and current commissioners and is attending steering committee meetings.

Cornwall - Cornwall wastewater treatment plant: Ms. Dias noted that, if approved, the project would be the first new facility to be licensed in Connecticut since 1989. The state is working with the town and a contractor on permit requirements.

Kent - Ms. Scherff plans to meet with a Kent Land Trust staff member to discuss private land stewardship resources.

CT DEEP - Mr. Ransom reported that DEEP is hoping to start the annual Creel Survey on the Housatonic, originally scheduled for March 1, but delayed by snow blocking parking areas.

HVA - Ms. Scherff reported that Mike Jastremski will be leaving HVA at the end of the week, and Julia Rogers will be representing HVA at HRC meetings. She also noted that her title at HVA has changed from Grants Administrator to Conservation Projects Coordinator, and that she will be taking on more fieldwork, potentially including work on HRC-contracted projects.

NHCOG - Mr. Phillips provided updates from NHCOG, focusing on a supplemental funding process for the housing bill that led to a hiring process for two positions: a full-time housing-related specialist and a contract employee for municipal solid waste and recycling. He also reported that a regional plan of conservation development is due to expire in October 2027, and an RFP will be issued soon to manage the process, which will include public involvement.

Mutual Concerns

- Officer Elections: A nominating committee will be formed at the March meeting, prior to the June elections.

- Mr. Benjamin suggested developing a standard management guidance package of best practices to share with homeowners or others with development proposals. Ms. Dias will gather NPS resources, and the document can then be linked on the HRC website.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:18 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 – March 10, 2026

