

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 May 12, 2026 Meeting

(subject to approval at the next meeting)

HRC Office, West Cornwall, and via Google Meet

Christian Allyn—North Canaan—A
Jack Anstine—North Canaan—P
Colter Rule—Canaan (Falls Village)—P
Mark Gozonsky—Canaan (Falls Village)—A
Robin Sweeney—Salisbury—P
Stacie Weiner—Salisbury—A
Jim Saunders, Secretary—Sharon—P

William R. Tingley, Vice-chair—Sharon—A
Phil Hart—Cornwall—P
TBD—Cornwall—
Jesse Klingebiel, Chair—Kent—P
Michael Benjamin—Kent—P
Marc Andreotto, Treasurer—New Milford—P
Robert Gambino—New Milford—A

Also present: Madeline Scherff, HRC Project Manager; Jackie Dias, NPS; Julia Rogers, HVA; Drew Ransom, CT DEEP; Sarah Better, NHCOC; and Sarah Lang, Conundrum Farm.

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

The Conundrum Farm Community Grant Application was moved to follow the Treasurer's Report..

The April 14, 2026, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Mr. Andreotto reported a W&S account balance of \$24,136.43, and a NHCOC-HRC subaccount balance of \$10,543.72.

Mr. Andreotto moved that the following invoices totaling \$19,198.41 be paid for the Invoice Period 4/7/2026–5/1/2026:

<i>4/16—Project Manager— 1231—12/1/25-3/31/26 HVA—</i>	<i>\$11,402.12</i>
<i>5/1—Organiz. Development—393—Susan's April Hours—Susan Francisco</i>	<i>\$173.50</i>
<i>5/6—Commun. & Outreach—5062026—1 Management Plan Print order* HRC</i>	<i>\$390.54</i>
<i>5/6—Commun. & Outreach—5062026—2 LL Bean HRC merchandise* HRC</i>	<i>\$7,232.25</i>

****for preapproved spending with proof of purchase to follow***

The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Community Grant Application – Conundrum Farm

Ms. Lang detailed the plan to transition portions of annually tilled fields to perennial crop plantings to reduce soil disturbance and improve soil health. Kent School and other community groups will help with planting. Approximately 50% of the requested budget is designated for plant material and 50% for landscape fabric for both annual and perennial plantings. They anticipate a donation of wood chips from EverSource valued at around \$9K.

Questions were raised regarding the appropriateness of using federal Wild and Scenic funds to support a for-profit entity. Ms. Dias confirmed the expenditure is permissible because it serves a public benefit and aligns with Wild and Scenic Management Plan goals. Once plants are in the ground, they become Kent Land Trust property.

Mr. Rule moved that the grant application from Conundrum Farm in Kent in the amount of \$19,916 be approved. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Communications - none

Communications and Outreach

- Mr. Ransom offered to connect Mr. Saunders with the Candlewood Valley chapter of Trout Unlimited.
- Ms. Scherff will be ordering HRC merchandise and pamphlets per the pre-order approval.

Resource Protection

- Mr. Ransom reported that effective January 1, 2026, all bass in the Housatonic River upstream of the Bleachery Dam to the Massachusetts line are now catch-and-release only. The change was driven by declining bass population data and continued PCB contamination. New signage is posted along the river. DEEP will maintain signs.
- Ms. Dias reported she has been in contact with Housatonic River Wildlife Management Area (HWMA) and will propose June dates for a site meeting with herself and Ms. Scherff.
- Ms. Dias noted an upcoming meeting between the Cornwall Wastewater Treatment group and DEEP water quality staff.
- A meeting is planned to discuss North Kent Road access concerns.

River Use and Access

Ruggles Landing (North Canaan) -

Mr. Anstine reported that North Canaan First Selectman Jesse Bunce and Tim Abbott (HVA) met with CT DEEP reps. Further research should be completed by September regarding well capping and the building demo. Mr. Anstine will forward meeting dates to Ms. Scherff. Mr. Ransom noted new items under legal review for feasibility, which include: relocating the guardrail, installing a self-closing gate, constructing an ADA-accessible ramp to the water with a water station, and maintaining utilities at the site. Ms. Scherff noted that HRC has a strong conceptual plan for the property that could serve as an outreach tool.

HELCO Field - Mr. Saunders reported that Sharon is supportive, and it is hoped that Cornwall shares the same interest. Ms. Scherff will reach out to Lisa Tosi (Earth Tones), who conducted a site visit in December and has begun preliminary design thinking, to formalize a consulting contract so she can be compensated for planning work and to produce more formal plans for use as a communication tool with the town.

FirstLight - Ms. Dias and Mr. Klingebiel, along with other NPS staff, met with Andy Brydges and Brian Wood for updates.

Mr. Ransom recommended that HRC work to pursue reopening the FirstLight/Eversource-owned site below the bridge in Gaylordsville, which has been gated for over five years.

Fisherman's Cove/Guns Eddy: The first gate remains open (FirstLight's FERC license requires access from opening day of trout season through approximately the end of September). 'Area Closed – No Trespassing' signs were posted by the Town of New Milford following the governor's emergency shutdown after a drowning incident last summer. Mr. Ransom clarified that these signs are no longer valid. FirstLight is updating the recreational component of its FERC license to formalize a recreation plan and prevent recurring annual shutdowns.

Steering

(First Reading) Rules of Procedure Article IV Officers (B)

Current language: The terms of office shall be for **one year**, or until a successor **is chosen and qualified**. Officers may succeed themselves for a maximum of **three consecutive terms**, following which they must **wait at least one year** before being re-elected to that office.

Proposed language: The terms of office shall be for **two years**, or until a successor **is elected for the remaining term**. Officers may succeed themselves for a maximum of **two consecutive terms**,

following which, they must **wait at least two years** before being re-elected to that office.

Community Grants Review Process - OVERVIEW

Ms. Scherff presented a brief review of the community grants approval process. The process involves the applicant consulting with staff to determine eligibility (e.g., cannot fund direct construction), submitting a proposal (up to \$20K), and then being reviewed by the Steering Committee on a quarterly basis. The Steering Committee then moves the application for approval or denial at the monthly commission meeting.

While the Commission does not conduct direct site oversight, the contract may include reporting requirements, and Ms. Dias noted that this is consistent with standard grant practice for other Wild and Scenic rivers. Final funds are withheld until the project is satisfactorily completed.

New Milford Community Grant Application – Continued Review

An application from New Milford was pre-approved at the April meeting pending additional information. Mr. Andreotto summarized the applicant's written response: their plan was clarified to add erosion control and bank stabilization, which resulted in an increased funding request, and confirmed they will use hand-removal techniques for invasive species without chemicals. Mr. Andreotto also noted that there are no actual replantings planned for this stage, as the organization is still seeking grants for that purpose

Concerns raised: an invasive removal project without a committed replanting plan is not viable and should not proceed. There were concerns about the conditional pre-approval from the prior meeting: responses to substantive questions were only a few sentences, and there was an apparent lack of familiarity with Wild and Scenic requirements. The Steering Committee will discuss the application further.

HRC Member Updates

Towns

Canaan - Mr. Rule said that Mark Gozonsky has been in touch with their zoning and building officials, informing them of the commissioners' availability for consultation.

Cornwall - Mr. Hart reported that someone has dumped rock to facilitate access down to the river on River Road north of the Covered Bridge, beyond Push 'em Up Farm. This raised a concern that the rocks may cause downstream siltation or erosion during high water.

A second Cornwall commissioner still needs to be appointed.

Kent - Mr. Klingebiel reported that on the Kent School Community Service Day, students tended HVA and Trout Unlimited (TU) plantings along Macedonia Brook.

HRC review has been reinstated as a checkbox in the town's Planning and Zoning application process for properties in the river corridor.

Mr. Benjamin reported that Kent Land Trust closed on a large wetland property in South Kent within the Housatonic watershed for permanent conservation. While not directly within the Wild and Scenic reach, it represents a water-quality benefit for the broader watershed.

Sharon

The River Road culvert reconstruction project continues.

Partners

NPS - Ms. Dias announced a Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers (PWSR) Zoom lunch meeting on May 13 at noon.

HVA - Ms. Rogers reported that the River Steward program begins on May 30–31 (the first weekend after Memorial Day). HVA Environmental Educator Amanda Colley has been preparing trainings and site orientations.

Paddle Event: Ms. Colley is planning a public paddle along the Wild and Scenic stretch from Housatonic Meadows down to the center of Kent, subject to water levels and access.

Twilight Hike: A public twilight hike along the Appalachian Trail overlooking the Housatonic is also planned (approximately 6:00–8:30 p.m.), focused on wildlife active at dusk and the river's ORVs.

Bridge Exhibition: HVA is co-hosting the bridge paintings exhibition with HRC. A tentative date of July 17 was mentioned, but not yet confirmed.

HVA - Blackberry River Project Update (Ms. Scherff)

An application was submitted to the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program for planning support. Mr. Bunce will submit a letter of support from North Canaan.

CT DEEP - Mr. Ransom reported that the Natural Resource Trustee Council has been using remaining GE legal settlement funds to acquire properties along the Housatonic. Multiple parcels have already been purchased; an announcement detailing locations and public access implications is expected within the next few weeks.

CT DEEP is also investigating two parcels near the Bulls Bridge powerhouse currently listed for sale. Mr. Ransom noted the sites are unsuitable for residential development and could provide meaningful public river access in an underserved stretch. Bond funding options are being explored.

Mutual Concerns

Commissioners were reminded to use the links included in agendas to review supporting materials (invoices, grant applications) prior to meetings.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:33 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
NHCOP – Northwest Hills Council of Governments
NPS – National Park Service
RIO - River Information and Outreach
TU – Trout Unlimited

Next regular meeting – June 9, 2026