

Housatonic River Commission

"to coordinate on a regional basis the local management and protection of the Housatonic River Valley in northwestern Connecticut"

Krystian Segalla

Town Clerk

**Minutes of the July 14, 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—P

Stacie Weiner—Salisbury—

Jim Saunders, Secretary—Sharon—P

William R. Tingley, Vice-chair—Sharon—P

Phil Hart—Cornwall—A

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: Madeline Scherff, HRC Project Manager; Jackie Dias, NPS; Sarah Better, NHCOC, Julia Rogers, HVA, Drew Ransom, CT DEEP, and Amanda Branson, NCLC Director of Operations and Finance.

Mr. Klingebiel called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

The NCLC Community Grant discussion was moved to the start of subcommittee reports by consensus.

The June 9, 2026, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Mr. Andreotto reported a W&S account balance of \$4,274.63 and a NHCOC-HRC subaccount balance of \$10,543.72. All member town annual fees have been paid.

Mr. Gambino moved that the following five invoices totaling \$24,189.63 be paid for the Invoice Period 6/1/2026–7/1/2026

6/24	NPS - Program Manager	W&S Prog. Man. 4/1–6/30/26	HVA	\$8,551.59
6/30	Organizational Development	Susan's June Hours	Susan Francisco	\$225.00
7/1	Org. Development	Rent and Utilities 7/1–12/31/26	CCT	\$2,190.00
6/16	LOCAL ACCOUNT	Site Inspection Mileage	Marc Andreotto	\$21.75
7/14	HVA - RIO program	HVA		\$13,201.29

Mr. Gambino moved to approve blanket annual authorization for automatic payment of Google Workspace (Meet/Drive) costs of \$33.60 per month for fiscal year 2025–2026, since these are auto-invoiced to COG. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously

Communications

- Mr. Saunders reported CT DOT has approved moving forward to the encroachment permit stage regarding W&S signage. He thanked Rep. Maria Horn's office for their help.

- Mr. Rule had a communication from Steve Fitch in Falls Village, who raised concerns about Eversource security lighting at a staging area on Warren Turnpike in Falls Village (near the high school), citing impacts on birds, insects, and the surrounding natural environment. Mr. Bennett agreed to contact the Eversource land manager on HRC's behalf.

- With sadness, the Commission was informed that Salisbury commissioner Stacey Weiner has passed away after an illness. She was recognized for her long service, particularly during a difficult period involving the Amesville area. Salisbury will need to appoint a new commissioner.

- Ms. Scherff announced that she is departing her position with HVA and the HRC at the end of the month, and that this would be her last HRC meeting. She is taking a new position as an early-career biologist/ecologist with an environmental engineering firm in New York City. She reflected on two and a half years working with the Commission and offered to help ensure a smooth transition and to answer questions during the coming weeks.

The Executive Committee members will meet to discuss the future of the HVA/HRC position, with input from Ms. Scherff as needed.

Community Grants

Ms. Branson (NCLC) described the scope of a grant application related to the pending purchase of approximately 245 acres of the Bruce McEver property in North Canaan, which had previously been approved for subdivision. NCLC is under contract to purchase all of the undeveloped land; the owner will retain roughly 3–5 acres around his residence. The property includes about 1.5 miles of Housatonic River frontage, roughly split above and below the confluence with the Blackberry River.

The purchase is funded primarily (90%) through state and federal sources, which require a new Class A-2 boundary survey before closing. Survey costs are not covered by the state/federal funding, so money must be raised separately. NCLC is under contract with surveyor Matt Kiefer at a quoted price of approximately \$24,000 — about one-third of comparable regional quotes.

NCLC's grant application to the Commission requested \$20,000 toward the survey. It was noted that the state grant carries a public access commitment; NCLC looks forward to working with the Commission on future access planning, including a potential future portage route near the old Canaan Dam, and agreed to provide periodic project updates.

Mr. Benjamin moved to approve \$20,000 in community grant funding to NCLC for A-2 survey work associated with the Honey Hill/McEver property acquisition. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Communications and Outreach

- The River Use and Access Subcommittee will evaluate what signage will be effective at each individual access site.

- Art Exhibition - The Wild & Scenic river-themed art exhibition (featuring Woldemor Neufeld paintings with river use, access, and history write-ups, curated by HVA and Cornwall Conservation Trust) opens Friday from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. The exhibit is expected to remain on display through mid-September,

Resource Protection

Wild & Scenic Rivers Act Section 7 - Ms. Dias shared a presentation that reviewed Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act for newer members. NPS, as river-administering agency, must evaluate federally assisted or permitted water-resources projects within the river corridor (generally below the ordinary high-water mark or within a quarter mile along tributaries) for consistency with the Act and the river's

Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs). Early engagement (well before advanced design stages) was emphasized as most effective.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act emphasizes the importance of protecting free-flowing characteristics and outstandingly remarkable values. The presentation detailed the role of the National Park Service in evaluating projects, explaining that any water resources project involving federal assistance or permitting requires a Section 7 review to ensure the project does not negatively impact the river's designated values.

Ms. Dias explained that the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program operates within a unique mosaic of land ownership, including private, state, and federal lands, differing from traditional National Park Service-managed federal properties. While the National Park Service serves as the river-administering agency to uphold designation values, local stakeholders are responsible for the primary management of the river sections. Ms. Dias clarified that the NPS typically reviews construction or drainage work only when a federal permit, grant, or nexus is involved. Simple local infrastructure projects, such as installing drainage pipes for subdivisions, are generally not classified as water resources projects requiring NPS review unless they involve direct federal participation.

Ms. Dias emphasized the necessity of engaging in project reviews during the early stages, ideally at 30% design rather than 60%. This approach allows for meaningful input and prevents potential conflicts or costly design modifications for contractors, ensuring project goals align with the commission's responsibility to protect river values.

Resource Protection Subcommittee, as described by Mr. Bennett, is in the process of refining its scope and responsibilities:

- Identifying priority river resource values (including features such as rock outcroppings and historic sites) to monitor for change.
- Developing protection methods, including exploring the use of drone imagery to document conditions along the river (including invasive species mapping) in place of or in addition to existing HVA mapping, which is several years old for some areas.
- Addressing land- and water-based invasive species, including researching the impact of road de-icing chemicals (salts) on the river and adjacent habitat, and looking into a Westfield Wild & Scenic River brine pilot program as a possible model. A correlation was raised between roadside salt application (e.g., near town garages) and observed declines in insect hatches over the past five years.
- Japanese knotweed and mugwort infestations linked to town garage salt-storage areas (approx. 2.5 acres in Sharon) were discussed as an ongoing concern.
- Mr. Ransom offered to share historical fisheries data and background materials with the subcommittee.
- Members discussed the importance of educating local zoning and inland wetland commissions about the river commission's rules and corridor regulations. Plans were proposed to improve communication, potentially through an open house or direct presentations to these local bodies, to address the disconnect in understanding river oversight.

- Cleanup/restoration needs were noted at the River Road access point in West Cornwall (overrun with mugwort) and at a mugwort-affected area at the bend in West Cornwall. Mr. Allyn described a “cut and paint” herbicide treatment method for controlling mugwort and other invasive shrubs, and offered to share copies of the state's invasive plant management reference guide.
- Wild & Scenic funds could be used to support drone survey work and organized volunteer clean-up days, and such work could be phased (e.g., a few miles at a time) and need not occur in a single year.

River Use and Access

Canaan Dam - The committee reported on a site visit to the old Canaan Dam, which is currently a public safety hazard and an impediment to river navigation. Efforts are focused on identifying a safe portage route to bypass the debris and structural remnants of the dam, though the task remains complex.

North Kent Road - Ms. Rogers reported that visitation at North Kent Road reached approximately 200 people during the Fourth of July weekend. Concerns including trash, human waste management, emergency vehicle access, and noise impacts on neighbors necessitate the closure of the site Friday through Monday during peak season. A working group is being formed to meet monthly (town, law enforcement, and HRC/HVA/NPS representatives) to develop a longer-term solution for waste management and crowd control before next summer.

Steering

Steering Committee - Primary vs. Alternate Commissioner Language

Ms. Francisco reported on research into member-town ordinances governing HRC representation, most of which date to 1977–1978 and generally provide for one primary delegate (commissioner) and one alternate delegate (commissioner) per town, with some variation. In practice, the Commission has long operated on a one-person, one-vote basis for any delegate is present, which is not strictly reflected in most town ordinances. Members discussed whether to pursue formal amendment of town ordinances to codify two-vote-per-town representation (consistent with current practice) to avoid future disputes. Each commissioner should review their own town's ordinance, and the Commission can draft ordinance amendment language for towns to consider adopting.

Member Updates

Towns

North Canaan

The Board of Selectmen has yet to approve the state arrangement for the Ruggles Landing project; expected to take longer than hoped.

The town has acquired the Camp Brook Greenway and anticipates acquiring the South Greenway next year, and is interested in working with NCLC on a related trail connection.

Commissioner Jack Anstine is expected to resign as a commissioner; the town is seeking a new commissioner.

Canaan Falls Village - Mr. Gozonsky talked about volunteer invasive-species clean-up activities at specific access points, suggesting that the Commission could recommend that FirstLight fund this type of clean-up in an upcoming budget cycle. Ms. Scherff recommended that he be in touch with Henry

LaBalme regarding their phase II of clean-up/maintenance of plantings between the Hughes Library and the bend below the Covered Bridge.

Salisbury - Ms. Sweeney confirmed that an interim zoning official has been hired and she will be meeting with him soon.

Cornwall

Mr. Bennett talked about an ongoing concern regarding Housatonic Railroad herbicide use along the rail corridor: a 2024 state law restricts herbicide application, but the railroad's contracted vendor appears to be continuing a prior nine-herbicide regimen, including methyl bromide/method described as harmful to groundwater. The railroad has taken the position (through counsel) that the state lacks authority to impose the restriction. A multi-town herbicide working group is coordinating with state legislators and CT DOT (as right-of-way owner) toward a workable resolution; a prior enforcement referral resulted in a reprimand to the herbicide contractor for spraying into a pond.

Communication with the zoning enforcement officer resulted in a stop to apparent unauthorized clearing/soil disturbance near a riverbank; Mr. Allyn clarified that in Connecticut, invasive-plant removal by mowing or herbicide application (without soil disturbance) is now an as-of-right activity under state best-management-practice guidance, while soil disturbance can trigger wetlands/Army Corps jurisdiction.

Sharon

A new zoning enforcement officer has taken over the role after the previous officer's long tenure.

River Road: Members discussed the ongoing infrastructure issue at River Road, where a section of the road is failing into the river, necessitating complex engineering and cooperation with local property owners

It was noted that a bridge replacement project is planned for Kirk Road over an unnamed tributary of the Housatonic River. The commission will continue to monitor the progress of this project. NPS learned of the project after an April interagency coordination meeting; improving early communication on such projects was discussed as a goal.

Kent - Mr Klingebiel reported on riverfront property clearing activity across from the Kent School rowing docks involving heavy equipment that the Town ZEO was quick to respond to and follow up with the property owner.

Partners

NPS

A potential opportunity was raised to use an NPS "experienced worker" (retiree) program to conduct a River Use and Access assessment of the full Wild & Scenic corridor; more information to follow.

On Wednesday, August 12, NPS Hydropower Assistance Program staff will visit the area to tour FirstLight's Falls Village and Bull's Bridge properties and other sites as part of a broader regional trip; interested members are welcome to join.

Concerns remain regarding FirstLight's FERC-licensed recreation plan, particularly its approved Bulls Bridge portage route, which requires a roughly two-mile walk along Route 7; NPS hydropower staff have acknowledged this is a significant safety concern.

HVA

RIO Report

Ms Rogers reported that the New Milford Fisherman's Access Lot (also known as Gunn's Eddie) has seen reduced visitation this summer following the Town of New Milford's decision to station a police officer at the site on weekend days (approximately 11 a.m.–3–4 p.m.).

Closure of North Kent Road this past weekend led to an increase in visitation at River Road in Kent and at the New Milford “power plant” access site (including its designated picnic area), as displaced visitors sought alternate access to the southern stretch of the river. RIO stewards have added River Road to their destination stops.

A full, data-based RIO season report will be provided at the end of the season.

HVA Programs

A recent paddle trip on the Wild & Scenic stretch in Kent led by Amanda Colley was well attended and went smoothly.

An upcoming crepuscular (dawn/dusk) wildlife hike along the Appalachian Trail, led by Amanda Branson, will be publicized shortly.

A river steward intern is working with Amanda Colley to develop a flora-and-fauna educational pamphlet specific to the Housatonic River.

Personal Update - Julia Rogers announced that they will be taking maternity leave this fall and will be absent for a few months.

The Blackberry River Feasibility Study

Ms. Scherff confirmed that the contract with the engineer for the Blackberry project has been signed and that Julia Rogers will serve as the point of contact for the project moving forward.



Recording Secretary,
Susan Francisco

The meeting was adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

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 – August 11, 2026