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 November 10, 2026 Meeting
(*subject to approval at the next meeting*)

HRC Office, West Cornwall, and via Google Meet

Christian Allyn—North Canaan—P
Kurt Stampfle—North Canaan—A
Colter Rule—Canaan (Falls Village)—P
Mark Gozonsky—Canaan (Falls Village)—P
Robin Sweeney—Salisbury—P
Josh Tavlin—Salisbury—P
Jim Saunders, Secretary—Sharon—P
William R. Tingley, Vice-chair—Sharon—A
Phil Hart—Cornwall—A
Bruce Bennett—Cornwall—P
Jesse Klingebiel, Chair—Kent—P
Michael Benjamin—Kent—A
Marc Andreotto, Treasurer—New Milford—P
Robert Gambino—New Milford—A

Also present: Julie Saxton, HRC W&S Program Manager; Jackie Dias, NPS; Drew Ransom, CTDEEP; and Tim Abbott and Amanda Colley, HVA.

Mr. Klingebiel called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

Resource Protection was moved ahead of Communications and Outreach on the agenda.

The October 13, 2026, Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

Financial Reports

Mr. Andreotto reported a total available Wild & Scenic funds balance of $307,154.15 that must be spent by April 30, 2028. The local account balance is $13,242.54.

Mr. Andreotto moved that the following two invoices totaling* $3,762.50 *be paid for the Invoice Period* 10/1/2026-10/31/2026*:

Date	Budget Line (Fiscal Year)	Invoice #	Description		Check Mailed To	Amount
11/2	**NPS - Program Manager (25-26)**		**W&S Prog. Man.**	**11/1-11/30**	**Julie Saxton**	**$3,500.00**
11/1	**Organizational Development (25-26)**	**399**	**Susan's September Hours**		**Susan Francisco**	**$262.50**

***The motion was seconded and passed unanimously*.**

2027 Meeting Schedule

Mr. Rule moved to approve the 2027 Meeting Schedule. Meetings will be held at 7 p.m. every month on the second Tuesday of the month at the HRC Office and via Google Meet.

Jan 12 Feb 9 Mar 9 Apr 13 May 11 Jun 8

Jul 13 Aug 10 Sep 14 Oct 12 Nov 9 Dec 14

***The motion was seconded and passed unanimously*.**

Received For Record
11/17/2026
3:00pm
Krystian Segalla
Town Clerk

Communications

Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) Reports

- River Information and Outreach (RIO) program: Ms. Colley reported that four river stewards (Jackson, Wade, Daphne, and Laura) completed 478 site assessments at 10 sites over 12 weekends from May to August, with 4,069 visitor observations and 51 bags of trash removed. Great Falls had the highest visitor use.
- Visitor use trends: Picnicking and socializing were the most common activities. The Fourth of July peaked at 630 visitor observations, including 200 people and 100 cars at the North Kent Road access, which was subsequently closed because of heavy use and trash.
- Education: A public paddle from the Kent School dock drew nine participants. Timber rattlesnake programs in Sheffield and Kent drew 85 registrants and about 60 attendees. Ms. Colley and Ms. Dias are developing a junior ranger booklet, and intern Laura developed a flora and fauna pamphlet for the river.
- Challenges: The lack of trash bins and portable toilets at informal access sites was discussed. There is potential outreach to municipalities. Ms. Colley noted that the stewards also did trail building as part of their internship curriculum.

Blackberry River Feasibility Study and North Canaan Trail

- Mr. Abbott presented the Tighe and Bond report on a $25,000 grant-funded feasibility study of restoring a 100-foot pedestrian/possible ATV bridge across the Blackberry River on the old rail bed in North Canaan. Title searches confirmed that the town owns the rail bed, and the 1906 concrete abutments are in good condition for retrofitting.
- Challenges include vegetation removal on the discontinued rail bed, FEMA floodplain permitting, and searches for rare species, like bog turtles. Bridge construction is estimated at $2.2 million to $2.47 million.
- Ms. Dias noted that Federal Highway Administration funding may be available for rail-to-trail projects within Wild and Scenic designated areas. She will look into it.
- The project is doable, permittable, and worth pursuing further. Mr. Abbott will bring the preliminary data to the North Canaan Selectmen without imposing any obligations.
- The initial trail would be a half-mile out-and-back and could connect residents of Wongum Village. Parking on Route 44 is unfeasible; Honey Hill and a possible closure near the transfer station were discussed as options.

Subcommittee Reports

Resource Protection

- Invasive plant conference: Mr. Bennett and Mr. Gozonsky attended an invasive plant conference at the University of Connecticut and met Jess Toro, a contractor specializing in invasive removal.
- Japanese knotweed: The group discussed the extensive infestation threatening the river from Lee to Sheffield in Massachusetts. The group discussed whether Wild and Scenic funds or other grants could be used upstream in Massachusetts to reduce downstream impacts in Connecticut. Concerns were raised that removal could conflict with Natural Diversity Database protections for rare species and vascular plants in floodplain forests.
- Consensus: The Resource Protection Committee will meet with Mr. Abbott to negotiate mandates and explore extending mapping into Massachusetts with the Housatonic River Basin Association.

Housatonic River Sustainable Corridor Rebate Program

- Mr. Bennett proposed reviving the program originally initiated by Maddy Scherff. Four components need funding and structure: professional development for Ms. Saxton on green stormwater infrastructure, program documentation, printed materials, and support for trial properties such as land trusts.
- It was noted that rebates require participants to pay upfront, which could discourage participation.
- Consensus: Mr. Bennett and Ms. Saxton will review FY2026 grant funds and work out details at the subcommittee level before submitting a formal proposal.

Communications and Outreach

- It was agreed that photographs of the recent outreach meeting at Housatonic Meadows State Park could be posted to the website.
- Communications budget: Ms. Saxton reported that $230 remains of the original $2,000 allocated a year and a half ago for website maintenance and development.

Mr. Saunders moved to allocate $2,500 in communications to continue Julie Saxton's work as web developer for the HRC. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

- Jackets: Mr. Saunders said they have reconsidered and proposed purchasing L.L. Bean puffer jackets for the 14 commissioners and key stakeholders, in place of fleece, for better warmth and durability.

Mr. Saunders moved to spend up to $2,000 on L.L. Bean HRC logo-embroidered jackets for commissioners and a few staff/partners. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

River Use and Access

- Regarding Ruggles Landing, Mr. Abbott reported that a February North Canaan public hearing depends on receiving a final draft agreement from DEEP and executing a contract with the town and the local friends group. Draft agreements from state agencies have been delayed for several months.
- The conceptual plan includes a 2-acre park with carry-in canoe and kayak access, a picnic area, and a 200-acre conservation area with flat water to the breached dam.

Steering Committee

- Payment procedures: Mr. Klingebiel presented the steering committee's proposal to revise several aspects of invoicing and expenditures (expenditures, grant disbursements, reimbursement procedures) to streamline the process.

Mr. Klingebiel moved to approve the Invoices and Reimbursements Revised Policy as follows:

Once an expenditure has been approved by the Commission with a specified not-to-exceed amount, the subsequent receipt of an invoice does not require a second vote of the full Commission, provided that:

1. ***The invoice is for the expenditure previously authorized;***
2. ***The amount does not exceed the approved not-to-exceed amount;***
3. ***The goods or services have been received, or the authorized work has been performed;***
4. ***The invoice is adequately documented; and***
5. ***The expenditure remains consistent with the applicable budget and any conditions of the original approval.***

For grant expenditures, the initial payment of up to 50% of the approved grant amount may be made upon receipt of a signed Memorandum of Understanding, without requiring receipts. Final payment requires submission of supporting receipts, along with the required final report and presentation, as applicable.

The invoice shall be submitted to the Fiscal Agent for processing and payment, with the NPS.

Representative and Treasurer shall be copied on the submission. The W&S Program Manager shall retain the applicable invoice and supporting documentation and shall identify the Commission action authorizing the expenditure, including the meeting date or other authorization reference, when appropriate. The Treasurer shall review expenditures as part of the regular financial review and reconciliation process. In the Treasurer's absence, the Chairperson shall fulfill this role.

Submission of an invoice to the Fiscal Agent does not constitute a new expenditure authorization. It confirms that the expenditure has been previously authorized and that the invoice is eligible for payment under this policy.

An invoice that exceeds the approved not-to-exceed amount shall not be paid without additional authorization. If the final cost is expected to exceed the approved amount, the proposed additional expenditure shall be brought back to the Commission for approval before the additional funds are committed.

The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Fiscal Year 2027 Budget

- Updates included close to $70,000 for community grants, a proposed $5,000 increase to the RIO program, open visitor use management funds, $20,000 earmarked for research, standard communication expenses, and de minimis costs to the Northwest Council of Governments as fiscal agent.
- Ms. Dias calculated that leftover funds from prior fiscal years (access surveys, stream crossings, education, and visitor use management) could be repurposed to provide $22,000 for Ms. Colley's educational role with HVA and the commission.

Mr. Klingebiel moved to approve $22,000 to help fund Ms. Colley's HVA continuing education role. The motion was seconded and passed.

Member Updates

Towns

- **Salisbury**: Ms. Sweeney reported that, regarding the Route 7 project, all planting remediation plans were accepted, and the original designer and their company will do the plantings.
- **Sharon**: Mr. Saunders shared two River Road updates. For the first project, Sharon retained a contractor and worked with an engineer on a solution without involving the property owner. For the second, near the metal bridge, a property owner received a wetlands permit the previous day to remove invasive plants and plant native trees along River Road.
- **Cornwall**: Mr. Bennett thanked HVA for having created the map of property owners along the river, which has proved useful for local zoning.
- **Kent:** A condo project in town is proceeding slowly after passing sewer review.
- **New Milford** - Boardman Bridge: New Milford applied for a Department of Transportation grant to repair the old Boardman Bridge, closed to vehicles since 1985, as a pedestrian bridge. HVA provided a letter of support noting that it is the southern terminus of the Wild and Scenic River 41-mile stretch. Bridge paintings have drawn public engagement. Stacy Deming (HVA) is building a digital story map of the bridges on the HVA website.

- **West Cornwal**l wastewater treatment plant: Ms. Dias reported the project is in limbo while DEEP develops water quality standards and conditions. Residents, engineers, and contractors are frustrated by the 12-year delay.

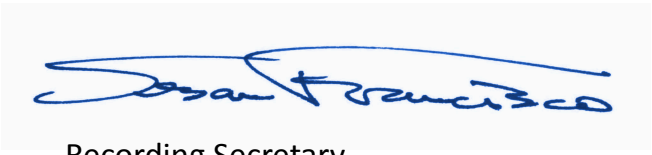
Partners

- **FirstLight**: Ms. Dias reported that FirstLight was acquired by an investment company, Hull Street Energy.
- **NPS:** Ms. Dias reported that current cooperative funding must be spent down by April 2028 and a new cooperative agreement must be submitted to federal authorities by April. Work Plans and budgets will be developed in January and February after final federal budget figures arrive. Supplemental funding of up to $30,000 will be available for management plan advancement projects starting next summer or fall. Construction costs are excluded.
- **CT DEEP:** Mr. Ransom noted that an angler survey will continue for another month.

Concerns and Future Agenda Items

- Ms. Dias encouraged members to consider equipment needs for future budgets.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded, approved unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 9:17 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
NPDES – National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
RIO - River Information and Outreach
TU – Trout Unlimited
ZEO - Zoning Enforcement Officer

Next regular meeting – December 8, 2026