

# FARMINGTON RIVER NEWS

WINTER 2025/2026



## SURPRISES AND SUCCESSES IN 2025

This year has been full of surprises for our River and for FRWA. We've faced drought, frozen funding, and sweeping changes to federal environmental organizations and policies. Despite this, your support has helped us to continue our research, stewardship, and advocacy work in a time of uncertainty. We cannot express how grateful we are to our members for helping us protect the river and watershed this year, and we'd like you to take a moment with us to celebrate the many successes 2025 brought to the Farmington River.

FRWA hired a Land Stewardship Coordinator this year to bring us up to 6 staff members, which is the largest payroll in our 71-year history. Staff were proud to present our first-ever research poster this year at the Northeast Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPC) Northeast Aquatic Biologists conference (pg 2), and we hope that other organizations can use this research to develop cost effective and continuous chloride monitoring programs in the future. We upgraded our continuous dataloggers this year and began new nutrient, flow, and aquatic invasive species monitoring programs (pg 4). Keep an eye out for our 2025 research reports, which will be uploaded to [frwa.org/resources](https://frwa.org/resources) later this winter. We've made big improvements on the Frey Property this year as well, with 500 new trees and shrubs planted, a meadow seeded with native wildflowers and grasses, and upgraded dataloggers (pg 5). FRWA has just been awarded a Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grant from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) to create a watershed based management plan for the Mad and Still Rivers in Torrington and Winchester, CT. These rivers are impaired, and they flow into the upper Farmington River in Riverton, CT. The creation of a Watershed Based Plan is an important step in identifying pollutant sources and best management practices to improve water quality for the Mad and Still Rivers.

The Farmington River has enjoyed some big wins in 2025 as well. The Winchell-Smith Grist Mill Dam, a 400-year-old dam located behind Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut, was removed this year. The dam has persisted as a partial barrier to the movement of fish into the upper Farmington River, Pequabuck River, and their associated tributaries during low flow conditions, and removal of the Winchell-Smith Dam is a critical step in returning the Farmington River to its historic role as spawning habitat for American shad, alewife, blueback herring, sea lamprey, American eel, and other aquatic species. We will be hosting a spring Wild & Scenic Film Festival on this site as well! In other River wins, Key Capture Energy has surrendered its approval to construct a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) in Granby, CT. This project was approved by the CT Siting Council in early 2025, and it received strong public opposition from residents and local organizations. BESS can pose a variety of safety and environmental hazards including fire, poor air quality, and possible thermal and metal contamination of local waterways and aquifers, and many efforts were made to encourage Key Capture to choose a more suitable location for the project elsewhere. In November the Town of Granby announced that the project had been surrendered. This success protects the health of Granby residents as well as the water quality of Salmon Brook and the Farmington River, and it sends a clear message that collaborative community efforts can lead to meaningful change. Thank you to all of our watershed municipalities and our members for making 2025 a great year. We can't wait to see what we can accomplish together in 2026!

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# LOOKING BACK AT 2025

## JANUARY

FRWA started off 2025 working on the annual water quality report and applying for grants. Staff attended the NEAPMS conference, and field work continued with Otis stream crossing assessments and the start of winter chloride monitoring.

## FEBRUARY

Staff attended the NEIWPCC Northeast Aquatic Biologists conference and presented a research poster on 2024 conductivity and chloride research, with specific results on Rainbow Brook in the Lower Farmington River.

## MARCH

In March we welcomed our new Land Stewardship Coordinator, Kaitlin Cole. Staff downloaded conductivity loggers, attended the Spring into Garden Season event in Avon, gave presentations for The Jackson Laboratory, and provided a macroinvertebrate program for the Montessori School of Greater Hartford. The Frey Property had 500 native trees planted in conjunction with Trout Unlimited.

## APRIL

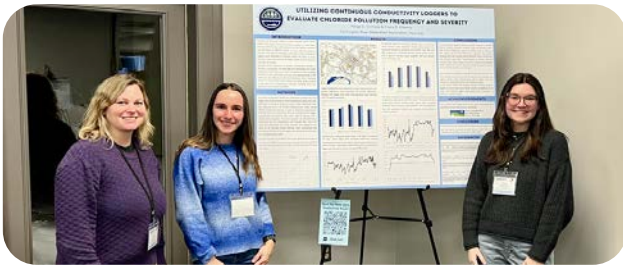
Staff were busy with Earth Day events in April, including cleanups and events with New Britain Public Schools, Jackson Laboratory, Farmington River Anglers Association, and Friends of American Legion and Peoples State Forests. Educational programs were provided for St. Joseph's preschool program and East Granby Salmon-In-Schools.

## MAY

FRWA finished a rain garden in Canton and began new installations in Becket, MA. Temperature loggers were downloaded and *E.coli* bacteria monitoring kicked off mid-May. Invasive removal days were held at the Frey property, Fisher Meadows, and at Pinchot Sycamore. We also had our Celebration of the River event at Metro Bis!

## JUNE

FRWA welcomed and trained our 2025 summer interns and continued bacteria and chloride monitoring. Research projects for flow and watershed nutrient study began. Collinsville Canoe & Kayak hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Paddling Film Festival, with all proceeds for FRWA. We also tabled at the 1<sup>st</sup> New Hartford River Rocks and New Park Brewing Funk Fest.



FRWA presents a research poster



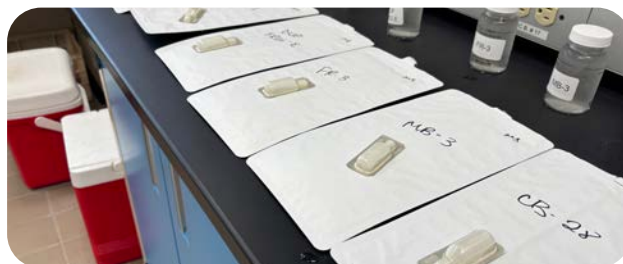
Tree planting on Frey property



Volunteers remove invasive barberry at Fisher Meadows



Celebration of the River at Metro Bis



Bacteria samples prepared for analysis

## FRWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## FRWA STAFF

**Executive Director** - Aimee Petras

**Conservation Director** - Laura Hart

**Water Quality Manager** - Paige Vichiola-Silva

**Aquatic Habitat Manager** - Heather Geist

**Watershed Programs Coordinator** - Ciara Kilkenny

**Land Stewardship Coordinator** - Kaitlin Cole



# LOOKING BACK AT 2025

## JULY

FRWA held informational programs on the Edgewood bioswale (visit [frwa.org](http://frwa.org) to view the curriculum guide), provided a kayaking trip for the Environmental Learning Centers of CT (ELCCT), attended a knotweed roadside management workshop, and started our Farmington River flow research.



Flow research on the Farmington River

## AUGUST

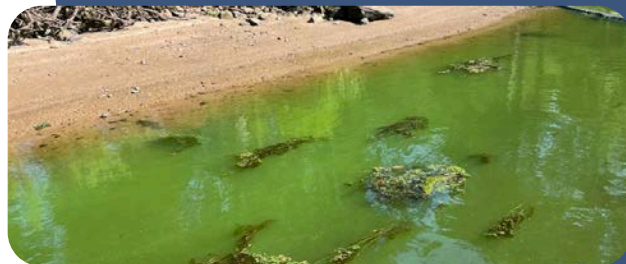
A cyanobacteria bloom took over Rainbow Reservoir in Windsor, and FRWA staff jumped into action to monitor and report the bloom. Invasive water chestnuts were pulled at Barber Pond with the Nonprofit Accountability Group and Sustainable CT, and employees from Cummins, Inc. helped clean up litter from Mill Brook in Windsor. We took a field trip to Hammonasset Beach with ELCCT, tabled at the Bristol Farmers Market, and said goodbye to our interns.



Volunteers pull water chestnuts

## SEPTEMBER

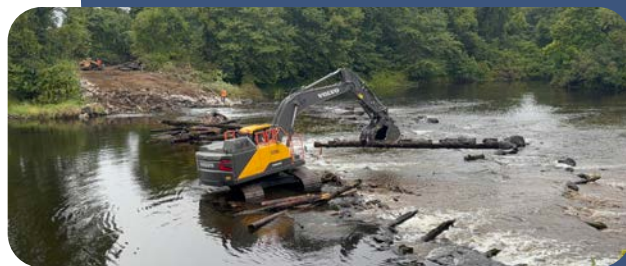
FRWA kicked off fall with in-stream insect bioassessments, hosted our 38th annual Farmington River Cleanup (with over 100 volunteers) and downloaded all of our data loggers. We tabled at Burlington Tavern Day, and hosted Bristol Eastern High School with Project Oceanology. We held a barberry removal day at Fisher Meadows in Avon, CT and collected data for our nutrient study. Most importantly, the Winchell-Smith Dam was removed after years of planning!



Cyanobacteria bloom on Rainbow Reservoir

## OCTOBER

FRWA staff hosted an Aquatic Insect Survey Workshop at Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton, CT. FRWA removed many invasive plants from the Frey Property and planned for future restoration efforts, and we held a second volunteer barberry removal workday at Fisher Meadows.



Winchell Smith Dam removal

## NOVEMBER

FRWA held our Annual Meeting with a special presentation about shad and the Rainbow Dam. Our monitoring data was submitted to the EPA, CT DEEP, and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, and data analysis and report writing began. Milkweeds hair salon in Canton hosted their "Thrift & Drift" event as a fundraiser for FRWA, and we hosted local Land Trusts to talk about recent Land Trust mergers in the watershed.



38th Annual River Cleanup

## DECEMBER

We received a grant from CT DEEP to complete a watershed based plan of the Mad and Still Rivers in Torrington and Winchester. We've also started winter chloride monitoring for the 2025/2026 season, and we are working on wrapping up 2025 data analysis, submission, and reporting.



Winter chloride monitoring starts again!

*Keep an eye out over the winter for our 2025 water quality, conductivity, nutrient, flow, and compiled cyanobacteria reports as well as our annual water quality report! All reports can be found on our website at [frwa.org/resources](http://frwa.org/resources)*



# 2025 RESEARCH PROJECTS

FRWA staff kept busy this year with four research projects on top of our annual monitoring. These projects will inform our ongoing research on cyanobacteria blooms on Rainbow Reservoir, and they will allow us to track ongoing threats to habitat and water quality in our watershed.

Staff installed a water level station to monitor the change in water level, flow, and temperature downstream from Rainbow Reservoir. Manual measurements were taken using our new flow probe to help us understand more about the releases at Rainbow Dam.

We carried out a watershed nutrient assessment to inform us about nutrient inputs into the Farmington River in relation to cyanobacteria blooms. Flow measurements were also taken to determine the amount of nutrient loading at each location per day.

Our continuous logger upgrades have enabled us to collect 2.2 million data points in 2025 to monitor conductivity, temperature, water levels, and dissolved oxygen in strategic locations throughout the watershed, and two of our monitoring locations were upgraded to include remote data retrieval. Because of this, we were able to determine chronic conditions in several tributaries over the winter of 2024-2025.

FRWA also began monitoring portions of the watershed this summer for invasive aquatic plants, specifically *Hydrilla*. We will continue this monitoring to help prevent the spread of invasive species populations into our river.



Paige installs a water level station



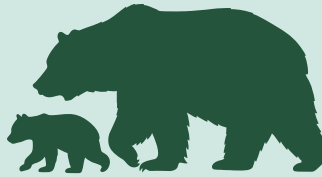
Ciara uses a probe to measure flow



Kaitlin collects a nutrient sample

## CREATURE FEATURE

### BLACK BEAR, *Ursus americanus* Frequently Asked Questions



Scan to view the CT DEEP Wildlife Sightings Public Viewer map and report sightings in your area.



**Is bear hunting legal in our watershed?** Not in Connecticut, but Massachusetts does allow permitted hunting seasons.

**Does a collar or ear tag mean a bear is aggressive?** No! Most tagged bears in CT have been caught as part of a project to research the state's bear population, and collars are used to track bear movements and monitor populations. Bears receive a tag on each ear the first time they are handled by CT DEEP, and they receive a tag on one ear for each subsequent encounter. Each colored tag has a 3-digit number code that indicates when it was caught.

**Why aren't nuisance black bears relocated?** Bears have a strong homing instinct and wide habitat range. A relocated bear is likely to return to the original location or become involved in conflicts elsewhere. Captivity is rarely the best option for a healthy wild animal, and there isn't enough space at sanctuaries to handle these populations.

**Can I feed black bears?** It is illegal to feed bears in CT. MA does not have legislation about feeding bears, but many municipalities have adopted ordinances to deter the feeding of wildlife. Feeding bears creates familiarity with humans, which can become dangerous for all parties involved. Bears also provide important ecological functions of native seed dispersal and insect population management, which are disrupted when bears seek human food over natural sources.

**Why do black bears come on to people's property?** Bears are omnivorous and opportunistic, and they have an incredibly keen sense of smell. Food sources near human development are often high in calories and stored in large quantities, creating a more concentrated smell and allowing the bear to consume more energy with less work. Forest fragmentation and the reduction of core forests have decreased the amount of wild foraging spaces available for bears, while new development in previously natural areas has increased the availability of non-native food sources.

**What are some of the things that might attract bears to my property?**





# 2025 STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS

## INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Our invasive plant removal efforts were more robust than ever this year. We hosted several terrestrial workdays with our partners that included removal of porcelainberry, knotweed, barberry, and oriental bittersweet. We also removed over 1000 lbs of water chestnuts from Barber Pond in Bloomfield as part of our continued efforts since 2023.

## STORMWATER RUNOFF REDUCTION PROJECTS

### SHALES BROOK BECKET, MA

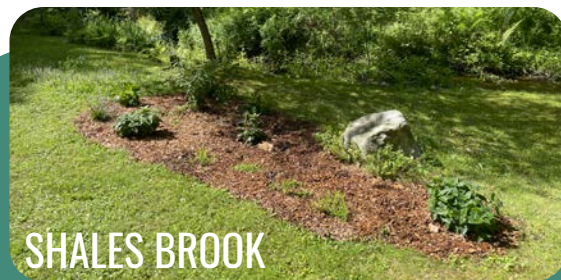
We installed a rain garden and a rain barrel, funded in part by BCCC. Two more gardens are scheduled to be completed in 2026.

### HIGHLAND LAKE WINSTED, CT

Three bioswales were installed and we planted them with natives at the State Boat Launch in an effort to reduce stormwater runoff, funded by CT DEEP and with Highland Lake Watershed Association volunteers.

### BICENTENNIAL PARK COLLINSVILLE, CT

This rain garden along the Farmington River Trail is providing habitat and food for wildlife and pollinators and capturing runoff. The overflow drain helps reduce flooding in times of extreme rainfall. Project support provided by the Long Island Sound Study and the Town of Canton.



SHALES BROOK



HIGHLAND LAKE



BICENTENNIAL PARK



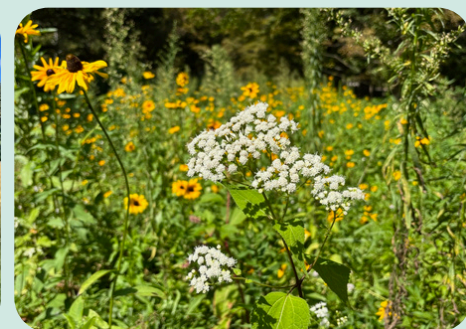
## WILD & SCENIC SPOTLIGHT

### FRWA FREY PROPERTY, NEW HARTFORD, CT

Scan to learn more  
about the Frey Property  
on [frwa.org](https://frwa.org)



FRWA's 13-acre Frey Property, a legacy gift from the Estate of Lily Frey, has provided FRWA with an amazing location for hands-on watershed education and conservation activities right along the Wild & Scenic Upper Farmington River. This March, after several years of battling invasive plant species on the property, FRWA partnered with Trout Unlimited and the National Park Service to plant 500 native trees and shrubs. These new species will provide shade to the pond and stream bank, provide shelter and food to wildlife, and help prevent bank erosion for many years to come.



Improvements on the Frey Property this year included the seeding of meadow habitat with a mix of native pollinator flowers and native grasses. Meadows have become increasingly rare in Connecticut, so we are excited to be able to provide an important habitat for wildlife—birds, pollinators, bears, deer, foxes, otters, and more have been sighted at our new property. There has been a notable difference in the meadow since it was seeded, with several different flowering plants throughout. The restored meadow will provide shelter and food for pollinators and birds, improve water infiltration and flood prevention for the area, and help improve soil quality. It also serves as an educational stewardship example for other landowners.

FRWA staff also spent time this year upgrading our dataloggers that monitored the Frey retention pond to a single logger that records water level, temperature, conductivity, and dissolved oxygen. This logger is bluetooth enabled, allowing for remote data access and eliminating the need for FRWA staff to retrieve data by kayak.

# SMART SALTING WITH RIVER SMART

Chloride levels from road salts have been increasing in our waterways, which can be harmful to wildlife, infrastructure, and public health. Follow these easy steps to help reduce the amount of road salt entering our rivers and streams this winter!

## SHOVEL



Clear walkways and driveways of snow before ice bonds to the pavement.

## SCATTER



Ice melt works best when grains have maximum surface area exposure. Try to leave 1-2 inches between crystals when scattering.

## SWEEP



After walkways dry, sweep up remaining salt to reuse later.

Less is more!

A 12 oz. coffee mug of salt is enough to treat a 20 foot driveway!



## FRWA *Saltiest Streams* CONTEST

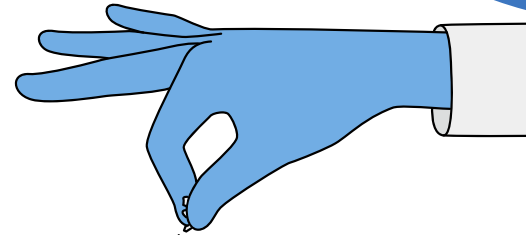
Join FRWA in our 5<sup>th</sup> winter sampling for chloride by participating in the Salt Watch program! This winter, we are having a contest to see who can find the saltiest streams in their watershed!

### TO QUALIFY:

- You must submit results from all 4 strips to the Clean Water Hub by February 28<sup>th</sup> 2026
- You must sample streams or rivers, it doesn't have to be the same one each time
- You must specify FRWA as your organization on the Clean Water Hub

**Results must be submitted to the Clean Water Hub by February 28th, 2026 and have FRWA specified as your organization!**

All complete submissions will be entered into a raffle for a chance to win a FRWA prize package, including a ticket to our 2026 Wild & Scenic Film Fest. The person who submits the highest chloride result will receive a prize package as well!



### PRIZE PACKAGE INCLUDES:



**FRWA SWAG +  
1 WILD & SCENIC  
FILM FEST TICKET!**

Scan for your FREE Salt Watch kit!



[IWLA.ORG/SALT-WATCH/](http://IWLA.ORG/SALT-WATCH/)

Salt Watch kits can be acquired through the IWLA's Salt Watch website. Any questions or kit requests can be sent to Paige Vichiola-Silva at [pvichiola@frwa.org](mailto:pvichiola@frwa.org)





# WAYS TO SUPPORT FRWA THIS WINTER



FRWA's event schedule has slowed down for the snowy season, but our work has not! Here are a few ways you can help support our work while we gear up for the winter monitoring.

## JOIN THE FRWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FRWA is looking to add new members to our Board of Directors. If you are a river advocate, passionate about supporting the FRWA, knowledgeable and have time to dedicate to FRWA fundraising and events, please contact us and we will refer you to our nominating committee. Board members serve a minimum of three years, and we meet on the 4th Tuesday of each month at 5:30pm.

If interested, please email Aimee Petras at [apetras@frwa.org](mailto:apetras@frwa.org) for more information.

## DONATE TO FRWA

Scan to help ensure that our research, education, and advocacy programs will continue, even if other funding sources become unstable.



[frwa.org](http://frwa.org/donations)  
donations page

## JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST

New to our newsletter? Subscribe to stay updated on FRWA events, volunteer opportunities, and river issues!



[mailchi.mp/frwa/sign-up](http://mailchi.mp/frwa/sign-up)

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Farmington River  
Watershed Association



@frwa\_org



## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

From the FRWA Staff, (left to right) Laura Hart, Heather Geist, Kaitlin Cole, Paige Vichiola-Silva, Ciara Kilkenny, and Aimee Petras

## VISIT THE FRWA STORE

Support FRWA with some new holiday merchandise for you and your loved ones!



[farmingtonriverfrwa.square.site](http://farmingtonriverfrwa.square.site)

**Prefer to mail your gift? Just send this slip to FRWA in the enclosed envelope.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount: ☐ \$50 ☐ \$75 ☐ \$100 ☐ 25

☐ \$150 ☐ Other amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I enclosed my check payable to FRWA **OR**

☐ Charge my: ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa

☐ Discover ☐ AMEX

Card #: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp.: \_\_\_\_\_ CVV: \_\_\_\_\_

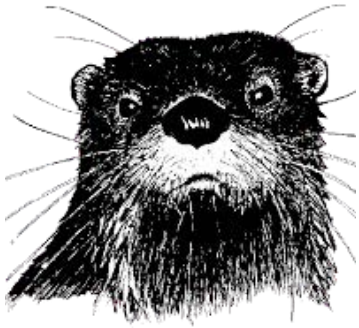
Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



The Farmington River Watershed Association  
749 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT 06070



## Protecting the Farmington River - For You, For All, Forever

*FRWA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and protection of the Farmington River and its Watershed through research, education, stewardship, and advocacy*

## SAVE THE DATE!



# WILD & SCENIC<sup>®</sup> FILM FESTIVAL

WHERE ACTIVISM GETS INSPIRED

A BENEFIT FOR



FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2026

MISS PORTER'S SCHOOL - HACKER THEATER  
FARMINGTON, CT



THANK YOU TO  
OUR SPONSORS



Farmington River  
Coordinating Committee



ESSEX FINANCIAL

FRWA is using a new donor database. If your record looks off, or if you would like to change your communication preferences, please send a message to [hgeist@frwa.org](mailto:hgeist@frwa.org)

No generative AI was used in the writing of this newsletter.