

**WILD & SCENIC**

**2016 ANNUAL  
REPORT**

# WESTFIELD RIVER

**COMMITTEE**



**WILD & SCENIC  
WESTFIELD RIVER  
COMMITTEE**

**WILD & SCENIC**

**2016 Highlights**

**FROM AROUND THE WATERSHED**

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### Town of Becket

Mercedes Gallagher, Treasurer  
Karen Karlberg, *alt.*

### Town of Chester

Robert Thompson, Chair  
Dave Pierce, *alt.*

### Town of Chesterfield

Nancy Rich; Denise Cormier, *alt.*

### Town of Cummington

Amy Pulley

### Town of Huntington

Jeff Penn, Vice-Chair

### Town of Middlefield

Carol Waag; Terry Crean, *alt.*;  
Don Munger, *alt.*

### Town of Savoy

John Tynan

### Town of Washington

Roy Bryan

### Town of Windsor

Jim Caffrey, Secretary

### Town of Worthington

Roan Katahdin; Jim Dodge, *alt.*

### Additional Members:

Westfield River Watershed Association  
The Trustees of Reservations  
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission  
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission  
Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
National Park Service

### Associate Member:

Westfield River Environmental Center —  
Westfield State University

## OUR MISSION

*To preserve, protect and enhance the special qualities and outstanding resources of the Westfield River Watershed in concert with local communities.*

*Front cover: Shaker Mill Brook, Becket, Photo Credit: Bill Warren*



## LETTER FROM THE COMMITTEE

The past year, 2016, was another successful year for the Wild and Scenic Westfield River Committee due primarily to the incredible efforts put forth by the Town Representatives, Meredyth Babcock Stream Team Project Coordinator, Carrie Banks Committee Coordinator and Liz Lacy our National Parks Service Representative. All of the Committee members are truly a pleasure to work with, always showing commitment and an endless amount of energy dedicated to the preservation of the “outstanding remarkable”

qualities of the Westfield. I would also like to recognize Westfield State University for providing new on campus workspaces for Carrie Banks and Liz Lacy – encouraging continued collaboration amongst the Committee, agencies, faculty and students.

The Westfield River has been selected to be the host of the 2017 Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers Meeting. This will be held at Westfield State University in early July and will provide a great opportunity for the Committee to showcase the remarkable qualities of the Westfield River.

I am looking forward to the upcoming year which should provide new opportunities and challenges for the protection of the Wild and Scenic portions of the River. With a new Administration coming to power, this might be the time for more attention to environmental values on behalf of the River. I urge anyone interested or concerned in the quality of life provided by the Westfield to become involved in as many activities as you can that support this goal.

Sincerely,

Robert Thompson, *Chair*



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*This Red Eft joined in the data collection during the Annual Watershed Blitz.*

# A YEAR BY THE NUMBERS



**\$833,332+**

in grants, donations, in-kind and volunteer services leveraged by the Committee.



**55**

**WATERSHED BLITZ PARTICIPANTS** surveyed segments along **13+ RIVER MILES** and collected more than **330 PHOTOS** and **DATAPOINTS**.



**24**

**HISTORICAL SITE MARKERS** highlighted in the Windsor Landmark Project map and guide.



**4**

**VERNAL POOLS DISCOVERED** and moving towards certification.



**5.5**

**MILES OF INVASIVES SPECIES CONTROLLED** along the East Branch river corridor.



**146**

**STREAM TEAM VOLUNTEERS** contributed **OVER 677 HOURS** to monitor the watershed, remove invasives, improve trail and recreational features, and certify vernal pools.

## FINANCIAL REPORT

Project funding provided through the National Park Service's Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers Program (except as noted\*).

Program and technical assistance provided by staff at the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, Department of Fish & Game and the National Park Service.

\* A total of \$651 of these funds came from other donations.



### General Expenses

General Operations \$7,306\*

### Outreach & Education

Outreach and Education \$3,047

Watershed Blitz \$1,614\*

### Resource Stewardship

River Internships \$4,147

Stream Team Projects \$18,993

### Community Grants

Town of Windsor Landowner Forum \$1,000

Becket-Washington Stream Explorers \$450

WISP East Branch Invasives Control Project \$220

Town of Windsor MACC Scholarship \$115

Friends of Windsor Historical Landmark Guide \$250

**TOTAL EXPENDITURES: \$37,142**

Additional Project Funds Under Contract: \$58,154



Vernal pool in Middlefield.

## CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF A VERNAL KIND

By Carol Waag, Middlefield Town Representative

On Saturday April 20<sup>th</sup> a bunch of early spring worshippers met at the Becket Town Hall for an indoctrination into all things vernal with Jane Winn of the Berkshire Environmental Action Team. She introduced us to the critters that inhabit vernal pools—those evanescent early spring sites of thousand-year-old amphibious mating rituals.

I was surprised to encounter at the workshop a fellow Middlefielder, Mike Brighenti, who had a site in mind for us all to visit after we were sufficiently educated. After Jane's presentation we jumped in our cars and drove to a 100 foot long pool on state land that Mike had first discovered in 1976. **We all explored the chilly, murky pond waters and had a blast discovering the egg masses of wood frogs, spotted salamander and even the secretive Jefferson Salamanders, a rare species.** Jane showed us how to distinguish the different species as we carefully lifted them from the water with our white Frisbee—who knew a Frisbee had so many uses! While we were investigating the area we found yet another pool 50 feet away that also had many egg masses. **Without one of us falling into the water, we searched and counted and measured and discussed, and then filled out the field forms necessary to certify these pools for the state.**

After submitting the forms describing the pools to the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species program I received an email from an enthusiastic Conservation Scientist there saying that **our discovery of the Jefferson Salamander eggs confirmed a “minor expansion of the known range in Massachusetts”!** As a result I was encouraged to submit an additional Rare Animal Report describing our discovery.

Mike and I have now formed an unofficial vernal pool investigative committee for our town and have a list of other potential sites that we intend to visit in future springs.

**Want to explore more vernal pools? Join us in 2017!**



*“Thank you for the informative program. Actually going out to see the differences between egg sacs was far more helpful than reading about them. I work with homeschooled children and am hoping that next year we can get involved in certifying some pools.”*

*Susan Warner  
Cummington MA*



*East Branch of the Westfield River in Chesterfield.*

## **INVASIVE PLANTS REMOVED TO PROTECT NATURAL COMMUNITIES**

Non-native invasive plants are broadly distributed along critical sections of the Westfield River corridor. **A 2013 field survey, funded by the Wild & Scenic Committee and conducted by Glenn Motzkin and C. Roberta Lombardi, documented the extent to which invasive species threaten priority natural communities and rare plant populations along the East Branch of the Westfield River.** This comprehensive inventory and mapping of invasive species, rare plants and priority natural communities along riparian zones of the Westfield River provided important data to support the East Branch Invasives Management Project. In many areas, invasives are sparse, but elsewhere large populations of invasives, particularly Japanese knotweed, dominate extensive areas of rivershores, dramatically altering natural communities.

Led by the efforts of the Westfield River Invasive Species Partnership (WISP), a collaboration of state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and academia, **the project controlled invasives in areas of high conservation value along the river corridor.** Invasives targeted in the project area include Oriental bittersweet, Japanese and Common Barberry, Glossy and Common Buckthorn, Autumn Olive, Winged Euonymus, Multiflora Rose, Morrow's Honeysuckle, Japanese Knotweed, Purple Loosestrife, and Garlic Mustard. **The goals for this long-term effort include protecting rare species populations, enhancing native habitats, and controlling or eliminating invasive plant populations located in priority natural communities.**

All areas were treated with special care to avoid impacts to native plants and natural communities. A botanist approved by Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program oversaw the work to insure avoidance and protection of state-listed rare plants during treatment operations.

**Invasive plants were managed in high conservation value areas along a 5.5-mile reach of the East Branch of the Westfield River, located in Gilbert A. Bliss State Forest.**



*East Branch of the Westfield River in Cummington July 2014 (left) and September 2016 (right).*

## VOLUNTEERS GATHER WATER BUGS DURING THE DROUGHT

The Westfield River watershed was under Severe to Extreme Drought conditions (U.S. Drought Monitor) throughout the latter half of 2016. River flows withered as extended dry periods continued throughout the Summer and Fall. The lowest flows of the year occurred in September — river levels were only about 6-8% of the average flows for the month (USGS Stream Gages 01179500 and 01181000).

Unlike floods which have direct and immediate impacts, droughts have consequences that will creep in over months and may impact human and wildlife populations for years. **Record low stream flows, depleted groundwater tables and wells, crop loss and a persistent "urgent" need to reduce water use were just some of the consequences of the 2016 drought (MA Drought Management Task Force).** As fish became isolated in shallower and warmer pools of water in the river, they became easy prey for predators and

were stressed by the warm temperatures and low oxygen levels.

The Westfield River did not experience completely dry riverbeds as occurred in other parts of the state. **Our expansive forests allow rainwater to be absorbed like a sponge, resulting in higher groundwater levels and allowing water to seep out gradually, helping to maintain a consistent flow within our streams.**

In response to the drought, we focused our monitoring efforts this year to track the impacts on the river life who rely on water flows for survival. **With volunteers we returned to our three historical monitoring sites to collect aquatic bugs to analyze their density and diversity compared to other monitoring years.** These three sampling sites provided us a unique perspective as we were able to conduct a post-flood recovery study on these same aquatic communities following Tropical Storm Irene. Additional samples will be collected in Fall 2017.

**Want to jump in and help us monitor?  
Contact us today to volunteer!**

JOIN US FOR OUR  
**WILD & SCENIC SATURDAYS**  
MAY-OCTOBER!

Visit our website or Facebook page for a listing of upcoming events.

[www.wildscenicwestfieldriver.org](http://www.wildscenicwestfieldriver.org)

[https://www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/WildScenicWestfieldRiver/)

[WildScenicWestfieldRiver/](https://www.facebook.com/WildScenicWestfieldRiver/)



*"We have hugely enjoyed the trips with you this summer. They have made our own walks in the woods and along streams so much more informed and enjoyable!" – Carolyn*

## WILDLIFE CAPTURED ON FROG HOLLOW CAM

Finding out what lives in your backyard can be exciting and quite revealing. This is true for Jen Parrish-Hill. She has **documented red and gray squirrels, deer mice, chipmunk, skunk, raccoon, porcupine, bobcat, fisher cat, coyote, fox, turkeys, bear, deer, mink, great blue heron, crow, blue jay, dark eyed junco, and even bats with one of our wildlife cameras!**

Setting up the wildlife camera in her backyard, a small haven adjacent to Watts Stream nicknamed Frog Hollow, she was amazed by the number and diversity of critters who would visit the stream. “It feels like Christmas. I was glad to see so much action down there. I was afraid our presence would scare off all the creatures. I guess not!”



*Blue Heron along Watts Stream in Worthington*

Jen first met our intern in the stream in 2015. She quickly became excited about hosting one of our wildlife cameras on her land to document who was using the stream corridor.

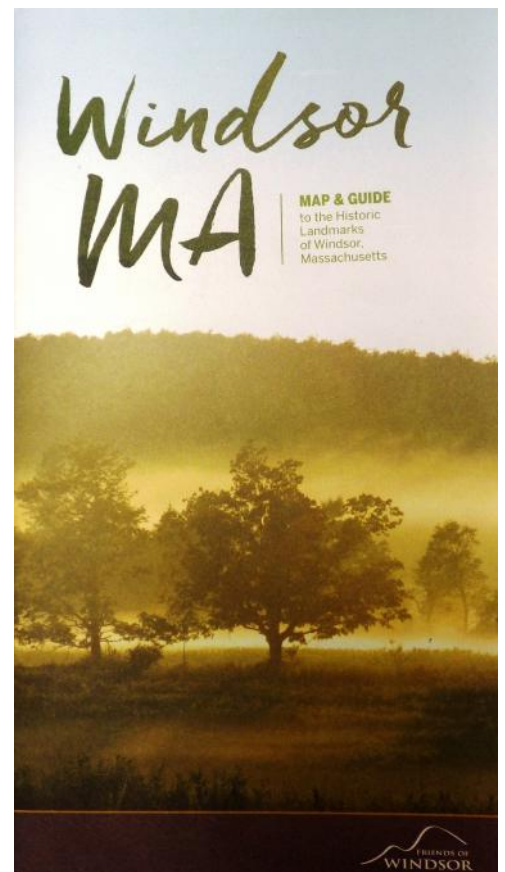
“It is so much fun, highly recommended. There is definitely a learning curve to setting up the camera in a good position/location.” Jen and her husband, David, have staged the camera in a variety of positions, on-the-ground, by a stump, facing the bat house on her barn, and along the slope leading down into the stream. They have graciously made a **compilation of the photos and videos to be shared on our webpages over the next couple of months.** Check it out on our website at [www.wildscenicwestfieldriver.org](http://www.wildscenicwestfieldriver.org) or Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/WildScenicWestfieldRiver/>

## WINDSOR LANDMARK PROJECT CELEBRATES TOWN TREASURES

The Windsor Landmarks Project highlighted and celebrated the Town of Windsor’s unique natural, historical and cultural treasures. Friends of Windsor, an all-volunteer community non-profit, collaborated with the Windsor Historical Commission to install twenty-four historical site markers. Through a year-long series of historically-themed inserts in their monthly newsletter, comprehensive web-based presentations on the historical sites, and a community-wide celebration, the Windsor Landmarks Project helped foster the community’s connection to its unique and distinctive past.

Through a Wild & Scenic Community Grant, **the Committee co-sponsored the production of a durable, full-color map and guide that features the locations of the 24 historical site markers, attractive graphics and a selection of old photographs.** Whether you are a resident, a frequent visitor, or just passing through, we think you will love this creative and useful guide to Windsor's most treasured sites. To request a copy of the map (Cost: \$5), contact: [fowindsor@gmail.com](mailto:fowindsor@gmail.com)

<http://www.friendsofwindsor.com/windsor-landmarks-project/>



## WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT *and contributions...*

Hayat Nancy Abuza

Jess Applin

Bill & June Babcock

Laura Baring Gould

Randy Berlingdon

Mike Brighenti

Judith Bryan Williams

John Burns

Dan Call

Katie & Michael Carr

Rebecca Cerry

Leslie Charles

Mike Cole

Michelle Coombs

Terry Crean

Sarah Currier

Gregory B D'Agostino

Debbie Daniels

Marianne Deignan

Cindy Delpapa

Joe Doboszynski

Deanna Domenichelli

Jimbo (James) Doucette

Trisha & David Drugmand

Casey Duggan

Gretchen Eliason

Eliseo (age 8) Engstrom

Art Feltman

Crispina Ffrench

John & Carolyn Friedman

Mercedes Gallagher

Robert Gerstle

Linda Haggerty

Lynn and Kent Hicks

Robert Johnson

Gigi Kaeser

Karen Karlberg

Joyce Keith

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Jeff Turner

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Dale Wallington

Susan Waren

Susan Warner

Bill Warren

Lynn & Michael Weisberg

Rene Wendell

Jane Winn

Mike Ziff

Alisa, Anna & Gianna Langone

Amy & Forest (age 5) Musante

Helen, Amber & Conner Smith

Peter, Eve & Sarah (Lieberman)

Soffer

Chris, Lucy & V Swindlehurst

Bruce, Marjorie & Sue Williams

### **Other Contributors:**

Alice's Kitchen at Honey Hill

Homestead

Center Pond Weed Project

Central Berkshire School

District

Chester Common Table

Chester Railway Station

Foundation

Cole Ecological, LLC

Hilltown Artist Michael Wolski

Rosencrans Family Foundation

Town of Becket

Westfield River Watershed

Association

Westfield State University -

Westfield River Environmental

Center



**WILD & SCENIC  
WESTFIELD RIVER  
COMMITTEE**

PO Box 393, Huntington, MA 01050

**We are in the River and on the Web!**

Visit our website at

[www.wildscenicwestfieldriver.org](http://www.wildscenicwestfieldriver.org)

[coordinator@wildscenicwestfieldriver.org](mailto:coordinator@wildscenicwestfieldriver.org)

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