

2013 ANNUAL  
REPORT

# WILD & SCENIC WESTFIELD RIVER COMMITTEE



WILD & SCENIC  
WESTFIELD RIVER  
COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### Town of Becket

Mercedes Gallagher, Treasurer  
Bill Babcock, *alt.*

### Town of Chester

Robert Thompson, Chair  
Dave Pierce, *alt.*

### Town of Chesterfield

Nancy Rich; Denise Cormier, *alt.*

### Town of Cummington

John Bye; Matthew Grallert, *alt.*

### Town of Huntington

Jeff Penn, Vice-Chair

### Town of Middlefield

*Vacant*; Carl LaFreniere, *alt.*

### Town of Savoy

John Tynan

### Town of Washington

Roy Bryan

### Town of Windsor

Jim Caffrey, Secretary

### Town of Worthington

Carole Fisher; 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: In the Mist of the Keystone Arch Bridge, photographed by Dan Minicucci, [www.danminicucci.com](http://www.danminicucci.com)*

## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

**With help from you, our Watershed Neighbors and Conservation Partners, the Westfield River has become a model for Wild & Scenic Rivers across the Commonwealth and the**

**country.** Twenty years ago, the Westfield River became Massachusetts' first National Wild & Scenic River. Through a culmination of efforts driven by local volunteers and with support from regional conservation partners and state and federal agencies, the Committee has accomplished many successes.

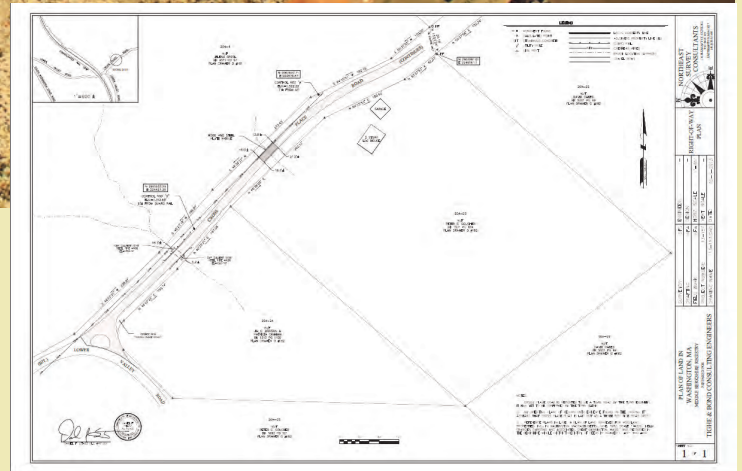
Among our major accomplishments in 2013, we sponsored three well-attended workshops for local highway departments (page 3), comprehensively surveyed over 13.5 river miles to identify priorities for invasive species control (page 4), contributed to a wildlife tracking study along important riparian corridors (page 6), and encouraged everyone to *Travel the Watershed* with our unique display cases (page 7).

As we continue to celebrate our 20th Anniversary, we hope you will join us in **Going WILD and Keeping It SCENIC** along the Westfield River.

Sincerely,  
Robert Thompson, *Chair*



	<b>IN THIS ISSUE</b>
	Cost Effective, Fish Friendly 3
	Protecting Natural Communities and Rare Species 4
	Volunteer of the Year 4
	Did You Know? 5
	Tracking Wildlife Movement 6
	Travel the Watershed 7
	Volunteer Support 7
	Financial Report 8
	A Year By the Numbers 8



## HELPING TOWNS WITH COST-EFFECTIVE, FISH FRIENDLY CULVERT DESIGNS

After extreme precipitation events, our Hilltown communities deal with clogged and washed out culverts, road closures, and economic impacts. In March, our Committee co-sponsored 3 workshops for 200 highway and municipal officials, conservation commissioners, engineering consultants, regional planning and state agency staff in Western Massachusetts. Each day-long workshop held in collaboration with the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, Baystate Roads, and River Continuity Partners brought state-wide experts from all sectors to cover:

- Economic costs of poorly designed crossings;
- Opportunities for wise investments in flood resilient, fish friendly designs;
- Permitting information and requirements;
- Engineering standards and how-to guidance;
- Case studies of successful culvert replacements; and
- Technical and funding resources.

**The Committee provided scholarships to municipal officials in the 10 Wild & Scenic Towns to attend a workshop.** In addition, those towns who sent representatives to the workshop were eligible to apply to the Committee for a Community Grant to fund preliminary engineering services to advance flood resilient, fish friendly road-stream crossing replacements in their towns.

The Towns of Becket, Middlefield and Washington applied. **The Committee provided engineering services including technical information, recommendations and cost estimates; flagging and mapping wetland and river resource areas; providing a Right-of-Way Survey for the Town to initiate bridge replacement plans; and preparing a MEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant application.**

## PRIORITIES FOR PROTECTING NATURAL COMMUNITIES AND RARE SPECIES FROM INVASIVE SPECIES

*“The Westfield River watershed is widely recognized as one of the highest priorities for biodiversity conservation in Southern New England. With miles of free-flowing streams, it represents one of the few river basins in the region with relatively intact hydrological and ecological processes.”*

– G. Motzkin and C. Roberta Lombardi, *Invasive Plant Species on the East Branch and West Branch of the Westfield River: Management Priorities for Protecting Natural Communities and Rare Species Final Report*

Along the East and West Branches exemplary occurrences of several natural communities types, including rivershore meadows, riverside seeps and high-terrace floodplain forests, and a high concentration of rare species highlight the biodiversity significance of these river reaches. Some of the best examples of extensive rivershore meadows in Massachusetts are found along the East Branch.

Based on observations by our Stream Team volunteers and by others in the field, invasive species are broadly distributed along these critical sections of the East and West Branches of the Westfield River. The extent to which they threaten priority natural communities and rare plant species, however, had not been well-documented. For these reasons, the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee sponsored an inventory of



*Perhaps the most striking and noteworthy of the riverine natural communities observed were the extensive rivershore meadows that occur in areas kept open by flooding and ice scour. In some years, thick ice covers the rivershore meadows well into April.*



### Volunteer of the Year **Kurt Heidinger**

As Director of BioCitizen and contributing writer to Hilltown Families *The Ripple: Stories about Western MA Rivers*, Kurt finds himself exploring the Westfield River and surrounding sub-watersheds almost daily. Kurt has enthusiastically lent his

eyes, ears and hands to helping protect the Westfield River as a Wild & Scenic volunteer. His writing skills and interest in citizen science make him a powerful source of insight, information and motivation. We look forward to working with Kurt in the upcoming year on developing Rapid Bioassessment Protocols for monitoring aquatic life in the Westfield River.

rare and invasive plant species along a 10-mile reach on the East Branch and a 3.5-mile reach on the West Branch.

The Committee contracted with Roberta Lombardi and Glenn Motzkin to conduct the fieldwork and provide recommendations. During the Summer and Fall of 2013, they recorded over 2200 invasive species locations, ranging from isolated individuals to dense stands.

In many areas, they found invasive species are sparse and apparently have little negative impact on natural communities or rare species. Elsewhere, large populations of invasive species, especially Japanese

Knotweed, dominate extensive areas of rivershore, dramatically altering natural communities. Numerous invasive species are well-established on the East and West Branches, and full eradication of these populations is not feasible. Management should instead focus on maintaining the ecological integrity of specific conservation targets.

Recommended priorities for invasive species management include: (1) protecting rare species populations; (2) preventing an increase in invasive species in rivershore meadows; (3) controlling invasive species in select high-terrace floodplain forests; (4) eliminating large populations that may serve as source populations for establishment in surrounding communities; (5) modifying mowing regimes and management of open fields; and (6) monitoring for early detection and removal of several invasive species that are currently uncommon or not yet established in the survey areas.

Results and data from this survey will enable our Committee, the Westfield River Invasive Species Partnership, and other organizations to develop plans for reducing invasive species threats to exemplary natural communities and rare species on the Westfield River. The final report recommended an adaptive management framework, including regular monitoring of rare species populations, natural communities, and responses to invasive species management. Such a long-term management approach will be a critical component of efforts to protect the ecological integrity and biodiversity of the Westfield River watershed.



*Rivershore meadows develop above cobble shores and are flooded during high water. Note Japanese Knotweed encroaching on the rivershore meadow (far right). Frequent disturbance of the riverbanks and shoreline encourage invasive plants such as Japanese Knotweed.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

# NOVEMBER 2, 2013

was the 20th Anniversary of the National Wild & Scenic Designation on the Westfield River.

The Westfield River became Massachusetts' first National Wild & Scenic River on **November 2, 1993** when **43 miles** of the three major branches were designated by the Secretary of the Interior. On **October 24, 2014** we will celebrate the 10th Anniversary since that designation was expanded to include an additional **44.1 miles** of the three major branches and headwater tributaries. **Join us in "Going WILD and Keeping It SCENIC."**

## TRACKING

# WILDLIFE MOVEMENT

## THROUGH THE WATERSHED

The Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee provided funding to The Nature Conservancy to expand their study of wildlife movement between forested areas in the Westfield River Watershed.

The Westfield River Watershed is a recovered and recovering landscape – one that was almost completely cleared in the early 1800's. The Nature Conservancy has identified several large forest blocks on the Berkshire plateau as being among the highest priorities for conservation throughout the entire Lower New England/Northern Piedmont ecoregion—an area that stretches from Maryland to Maine and comprises parts of 12 states. The blocks provide opportunities for movement of wide-ranging species across the landscape as well as high quality breeding habitat for forest interior nesting migrant birds. And they represent the highest quality and least fragmented areas of their kind in the Northeast, and thereby represent biodiversity of global significance.

While large stretches of intact forest, wetland and river habitat still exist in western Massachusetts, these areas have been historically fragmented by clearing for agriculture, and are becoming increasingly fragmented by an extensive road network and the spread of rural development. Habitat fragmentation causes public safety issues including vehicle-animal collisions, and it



makes moderately mobile species (including salamanders, turtles, porcupines, and many others) more vulnerable to natural disturbance and disease. The question of where animals are moving and whether they are negatively impacted by the current level of fragmentation is of particular interest. The watershed is crisscrossed by roads, ranging from small dirt roads, such as sections of Kinne Brook Road, to paved and relatively high-volume roads, such as Route 112 in Huntington and Worthington.

Knowing where wildlife is moving will inform actions to maintain and restore connectivity between the Westfield forest cores. These actions include: land protection, barrier mitigation improvements (transportation infrastructure — culverts and roads), outreach to and voluntary land management actions by landowners, and monitoring of well-connected areas to ensure they stay that way.



*Mink tracks were found along the banks of the Little River in Worthington — the same river valley used by vehicles travelling the Route 112 corridor.*



**Travel the Watershed** is a public art project inspiring you to tour the Westfield River, soak up its beauty, and learn about the watershed. Six handcrafted wooden suitcases were painted by local artists. Each suitcase, along with maps and information about the Westfield River, “traveled” around the watershed this past summer at Hilltown artist venues. Catch a glimpse at your local library in Winter-Spring 2014!

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

### Volunteer Support:

Hayat Abuza  
 Jim & Nancy Arnold  
 Bill Babcock  
 Chip Bishop  
 Eric & Joseph Brown  
 Rita Burns  
 Dan Call  
 Diane Carrico  
 Robert Cherdack  
 Michele Cohen  
 Denise Cormier  
 Mike Cronin  
 Wayne Crouch  
 Cindy Delpapa  
 Jim Dilts  
 Jim Dodge  
 Zara Dowling  
 Sandy Dune  
 Gordon Duschane

Susan Dworkin  
 Nancy Egan  
 Bri Eichstaedt  
 Dorthy Ericson  
 Carole Fisher  
 Jerry, Gail & Sarah  
 Friedland  
 Deb, Jon & Caroline  
 Friedman  
 Spring Furlow  
 Hassan & Karima Gebel  
 Ryth Glazerman  
 Cris Glennon  
 Teresa Greenwood  
 Kurt Heidinger, Jason, Jess,  
 Luke & Tara  
 Rob Hopkinson  
 Dan Jarvis  
 Craig Johansen  
 Carol Jolly  
 Karen Karlburg

Karen Katz  
 Lisa LaCroix  
 Mary Ann Laurie  
 Robin Lucchesi  
 Susan Macintosh  
 Rachael McLean  
 Peter McLean  
 Dan Minicucci  
 Ed Neumuth  
 Jeff Penn  
 Dave Pierce  
 Sarah Prince  
 Joseph S. Ragona  
 Nancy Rich  
 Tom Rouleau  
 Sally Salory  
 Mike Sherry  
 Matt & Susan Smith  
 Perri Sossaman  
 Sam Stein  
 Mike & Liz Stevens

Kester Warlow-Harry  
 Bill Warren  
 Jennifer & Bill Winkler  
 Michael Wolski  
 Ileene Wood  
 Mike Young

### Organizational Support:

Arts Alive  
 Becket Arts Center  
 Heartwood School  
 Hilltown Community  
 Development Corporation  
 North Hall  
 Peter S. Jensen & Associates, LLC  
 Price Chopper  
 Westfield River Watershed Assn.  
 Worthington Artist Guild  
 Worthington Sustainability  
 Committee

## FINANCIAL REPORT

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

General Expenses	
General Operations	*8,694
Outreach & Education	
General Outreach and Education	9,087
Publications and Mailings	24,059
Travel the Watershed	4,401
Resource Stewardship	
Biological Monitoring	9,932
Invasives Inventory	17,500
River Internships	6,379
Stream Team Projects	16,730
Trail Stewardship	1,398
Westfield River Environmental Center	5,000
Community Grants	
Friends of the Keystone Arches for NHL	35,000
Riparian Land Conservation Projects	23,961
Stream Crossing Site Assessments	22,509
TNC Wildlife Corridor Study	8,500
Trout Unlimited Culvert Project	40,000
TTOR Rivulet Brook BMPs	10,000
Westfield River Invasive Species Partnership	6,876
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES:</b>	<b>\$250,026</b>

Additional program and technical assistance provided by staff at the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, Department of Fish & Game and the National Park Service's River Restoration Specialist.

\* A total of \$44 of these funds came from other donations.

## A YEAR BY THE NUMBERS

**\$528,818+** in grants, donations, in-kind and volunteer services leveraged by the Committee.

**4060**

**organisms** found per square meter in the East Branch of the Westfield River — only 70 organisms per square meter were found following Tropical Storm Irene.

**198**

**Stream Team volunteer hours** spent "Walkin the Watershed" to monitor and assess the health of the watershed and building and maintaining community trails.

**13.5**

**riparian miles** surveyed — more than 2200 observations of invasive species and 4 rare plants species found.

**130**

**acres** of riparian lands conserved with the help of a Riparian Conservation Grant.

**6**

**wooden suitcases** painted by local artists as part of the "Travel the Watershed" display. Look for them in your local library!



**WILD & SCENIC  
WESTFIELD RIVER  
COMMITTEE**

PO Box 393, Huntington, MA 01050

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

Visit our newly updated website at

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

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

413-579-3015