



# Wild & Scenic News

Volume 4, Issue 1

Spring 2007

## Your Lawn and Safe Drinking Water

Safe drinking water is a matter of the utmost concern to all of us. You might ask what lawns have to do with our drinking water here along the banks of the Farmington River? We citizens of the river corridor towns do not get our drinking water directly from the river – and many of us may think that anything that washes into the river goes away downstream.

But think again! What about ground water — the source of our well water? Harmful pesticides and fertilizers can filter into our ground water and can seriously contaminate community (and our own) water supplies. Using toxic chemicals on lawns and gardens has been shown to increase the risks of cancer and asthma in children and can be tracked indoors to contaminate homes. Wildlife and pets are harmed as well. This issue begs the question of all of us, “Is a dandelion-free lawn worth the risks

to my family’s health?”

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), at least 143 different pesticides have been found in the ground water of 43 states. An important example is glyphosate — the main ingredient in Roundup, a common weed killer. This chemical has a half life from 3 to 141 days and can stay in the soil from 55 days to 3 years. Glyphosate reduces the growth and activity of both free-living nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the soil and on plant roots. This can cause the soil to degrade which means it will lose its ability to store water and nutrients, regulate flow, and filter pollutants.

There are many sources of information about safe, healthy organic lawn care. Please check our web site for them.

Help ensure that your drinking water is safe and clean. Become concerned about what you put on your lawn and

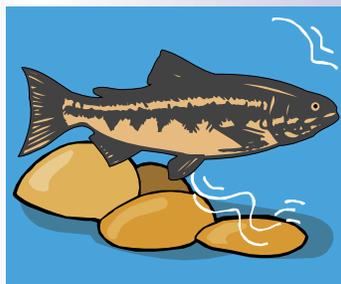


understand that it may find its way into both the river and your groundwater. Take the pledge to not use lawn care pesticides that the Farmington River Watershed Association and others are encouraging. Think of the future, think organic!

Source: *Environmental Impact of Pesticides Commonly Used on Urban Landscapes* by Jess Silver and Becky Riley, Sept. 2001.

## Study of the Lower Farmington River & Salmon Brook Gets Approved!

On November 27, 2006, President Bush signed into law Bill S.435 – the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic River Study Act. This act authorizes a federally-funded feasibility study for the inclusion of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. The study area is defined as the lower Farmington River: the 40 mile stretch from where the Upper Farmington Wild & Scenic section ends in Canton (near the Satan’s Kingdom tubing take-out) to the confluence with the Connecticut River in Windsor; and the East Branch, West Branch and main stem of the Salmon Brook (please see [www.frwa.org](http://www.frwa.org) for more information). A study committee is now being established bringing together



many organizations including: Farmington River Watershed Association, CT Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Salmon Brook Watershed Association, and ten towns:

Canton, Burlington, Farmington, Avon, Simsbury, East Granby, Bloomfield, Windsor, Hartland and Granby. FRCC will also be involved as a mentor given its experience on the upper Farmington River.

The Lower Farmington and the Salmon Brook rivers have many unique and special attributes that make them eligible for this national honor. For example:

- Several native, rare plants have been identified in this ecosystem,
- The Farmington is home to the some of

the greatest diversity of freshwater mussels in the northeastern U.S. — including a sustainable population of the federally endangered Dwarf wedgemussel,

- Both are important rivers in Connecticut for the restoration of Atlantic salmon,
- Both have many significant Native American archaeological sites,
- Flows from the Salmon Brook contribute to wonderful gorges and waterfalls along its waterways.

The study committee will document and develop a management plan for all of the cultural, historical, natural resource, and recreational features of these rivers in hope that eventually the Wild and Scenic designation will help preserve and protect them for future generations.



# Recent Results of Water Quality Monitoring in the Upper Farmington

In order to preserve a river you need to understand it. You need to look, listen, and find a way to “take its pulse.” Monitoring water quality does just that — which is why FRCC has been supporting studies to develop baseline data on the condition of the water flowing through the 14-mile Wild and Scenic corridor. Without a baseline, it is impossible to tell (scientifically) whether the health of the river is improving, degrading, or staying the same.

With critical lab analysis support from



the Metropolitan District Commission, the FRWA water quality monitoring program tests for copper, lead, nitrate, pH, conductivity, chloride, and E. coli. Water quality samples were collected at four sites along the West Branch Farmington River and four sites along each of the following tributaries — Morgan Brook, Mad River and the Still River. In addition, FRWA works each fall with volunteers and the CT DEP to collect and identify aquatic insects (another barometer of river health). Also, the United States

Geological Survey (USGS) has conducted cutting-edge testing for over sixty organic chemicals found in the wastewater discharges from sewage treatment facilities in New Hartford and Winsted (entering the Farmington and Still River respectively).

The good news is that the majority of the test results showed normal levels for almost everything tested. The levels for the wastewater organics were all quite low. But, FRWA reported that some bacteria levels were of concern.

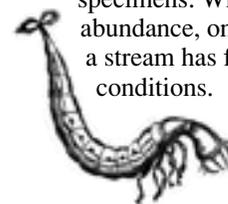
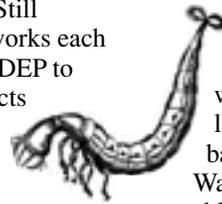
Water quality tests were performed monthly between March and October of 2006. At Farmington River Sites 2, 3 and 4, the E. coli levels periodically exceeded state guidelines for “designated swimming areas,” especially during wet weather.

Of course, we should all expect there to be some bacteria in our rivers. Naturally occurring bacteria are an important part of a healthy river system. Most bacteria are not harmful and have important functions as recyclers of nutrients in the stream. Certain bacteria that live in the intestinal tracts of birds and animals are essential for the recovery of nutrients from digested food. Millions of these naturally occurring organisms are found in fecal matter. However, pathogenic organisms are also found in fecal matter, so elevated levels of bacteria like E. coli do signal a higher risk of getting ill from water contact.

So, is the Farmington River safe to swim in? The answer is yes, most of the time, in most places.

However, after periods of rain, the amount of bacteria in the river can increase very quickly and remains elevated until the turbidity of the water returns to normal. As a preventative measure, it is best to limit exposure to the river during and after a rainstorm.

Back to good news – looking at the river’s aquatic insect population is probably the best measure of water quality since each organism acts as a mini, round-the-clock monitoring device. The recent assessment found that the aquatic insect community in some areas is diverse and contains many of the “most wanted” specimens. When these are found in abundance, one can infer that a stream has fairly healthy conditions.



## FRCC’s Open House & Photo/Art Exhibit

On September 21, 2006 the Farmington River Coordinating Committee held its Annual Open House and second annual Art Exhibit at Squires Tavern in Barkhamsted. This year we invited artists to exhibit their paintings as well as their photographs. Music for the event was provided by the Traveling Trout (the Barkhamsted Land Trust group that plays regularly at the Log House Restaurant), and refreshments were enjoyed by all of those who attended. FRCC wishes to extend its sincere thanks to all of the artists who trusted



us with their precious work and to whom we owe the success of our open house. Thank you.

## LOOKING FOR FUNDS FOR A RIVER-RELATED PROJECT?

Please see our web site ([www.farmingtonriver.org](http://www.farmingtonriver.org)) for a detailed description of our FRCC Grants Program!

## Who is FRCC?

The Farmington River Coordinating Committee was established when 14 miles of the upper Farmington River were designated as a National Wild & Scenic River on August 26, 1994. The FRCC comprises representatives from each of the five towns adjacent to the Farmington River and from groups noted below. The FRCC embodies an important partnership among the riverfront towns and others to provide stewardship of the Farmington River and its upper watershed. Visit us at [www.FarmingtonRiver.org](http://www.FarmingtonRiver.org).

Current representatives are:

- Barkhamsted** – Jean Miller; Mario Santoro, alt.
- Canton** – Alis Ohlheiser
- Colebrook** – Tom Stanton
- Hartland** – Fred Jones; Nicki Hall and Sam Slater, alts.
- New Hartford** – Pat Keener; Mark Lindquist, alt.
- CT DEP** – Sally Snyder, alt.
- Farmington River Anglers Association** – Dick Reynolds; Dan Busa, alt.
- Farmington River Watershed Association** – David Sinish; Eric Hammerling, alt.
- Metropolitan District Commission** – Tim Anthony; Carol Youell, alt.
- National Park Service** – Jamie Fosburgh; Liz Lacy, alt.

# Sightings in the Watershed

The Farmington River and its adjacent watershed lands form a natural corridor for the movement of wildlife. The rural quality of the land surrounding the Upper Farmington offers ideal habitat for a wide variety of animal and plant life, some found nowhere else in the state. Those of us who live here are often treated to spectacular views of some of these creatures.



It is now thought that about 100 moose reside in the state, mostly in our Farmington River watershed area. The DEP is planning to selectively radio collar a sample of these moose to study the extent of their spread into the state. They are concerned about the increased potential for motor vehicle accidents with moose. I had a young bull moose sally through my vegetable garden in West Hartland early one morning last summer. He barely paused to sniff the ripe lettuce and then continued to meander through.

Bear too have become common in the Upper Farmington regions. The reforestation of our woodlands provides an abundance of one of their most important food sources, acorns. Many residents report sightings around their homes, often of bears trying to capitalize on tasty treats from bird feeders or garbage. One unusual story concerned a mother bear seen with five cubs. Apparently, two of the cubs had been orphaned and had been placed by the DEP in the den of another female bear who already had three infant cubs.



The mother bear accepted the two newcomers and continued to raise them along with her own young. This extraordinarily large bear family was frequently seen and photographed in our watershed area. Unfortunately, one of the young cubs was killed by a car.

Bird life along the Farmington in the summer is colorful and diverse. From orioles, goldfinches, yellow warblers to mallards and common mergansers, many species nest here taking advantage of abundant habitat. Audubon-sponsored bird counts in this area have documented some interesting finds. Two pairs of eagles nested last summer on watershed lands, one on the Barkhamsted Reservoir

and the other on the Nepaug Reservoir. Each successfully fledged two young each. Some of the eagles remained in the area through December due to the open waters on the reservoirs and were often sighted flying along the Farmington.

Other birds of note seen in the most recent counts were 2 male Mourning Warblers (rare in the summer in the state), an encouraging record-high number of Whip-poor-wills (mostly in the Nepaug area. This is a species in decline), a pair of Ospreys, 2 Acadian Flycatchers, and 2 Northern Parulas. Of course the count



*Continued on page 4*

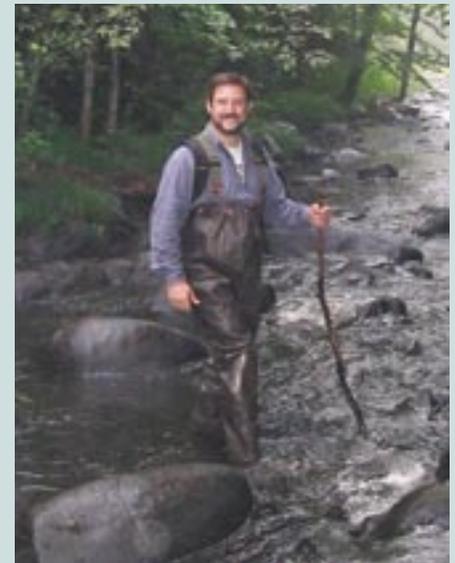
## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT—

### Eric Hammerling, Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA)

Eric Hammerling, one of FRWA's representatives, has been a valued member of FRCC for the past four years. He has been the vice-chair, is the chair of the Resource Stewardship Subcommittee, and serves as committee treasurer with FRWA Board Member David Sinish.

Eric's high level of expertise and commitment contributes to the efficient and purposeful functioning of the committee. Since 2003, Eric has been the executive director of FRWA, but he has a long history of education and work on environmental issues. He has an undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan and a Masters degree in Environmental Science from the University of California at Berkeley. Years ago, Eric worked as the Legislative Aide for environmental issues for Congressman Silvio O. Conte, and served as a Regional Director for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in both the Southwest and Northeast United States.

As Executive Director of FRWA, Eric promotes the understanding that healthy natural resources, such as the Farmington River and lands alongside it, are fundamental to community health and that education and community involvement are essential to long-term positive stewardship. He once commented, "You cannot protect the watershed from your couch with a remote control."



Amid the many usual challenges facing the executive director of FRWA — fundraising, project management, developing a volunteer base, and public education -- Eric managed to pull off his latest (and perhaps greatest) accomplishment. Garnering the support of ten communities and several organizations, he led a process that got a bill submitted to Congress to request the study of the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. The bill was passed and signed into law by the president at the end of 2006.

FRCC and FRWA are fortunate to have Eric Hammerling (and his sense of humor) as a committed and active participant.



Farmington River Coordinating Committee  
P.O. Box 395  
Pleasant Valley, CT 06063

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



*FRCC announces the new* **Nancy L. Johnson Scholarship!**

FRCC established the scholarship in honor of Nancy Johnson — a great champion for the protection of the Farmington River in Congress for decades. She was instrumental in the Upper Farmington getting Wild and Scenic status as well as getting the study legislation for the Lower Farmington and Salmon Brook. Students at Regional 7 who go on to college with an interest in environmental studies will have an opportunity to apply through their school guidance office.

## Sightings in the Watershed

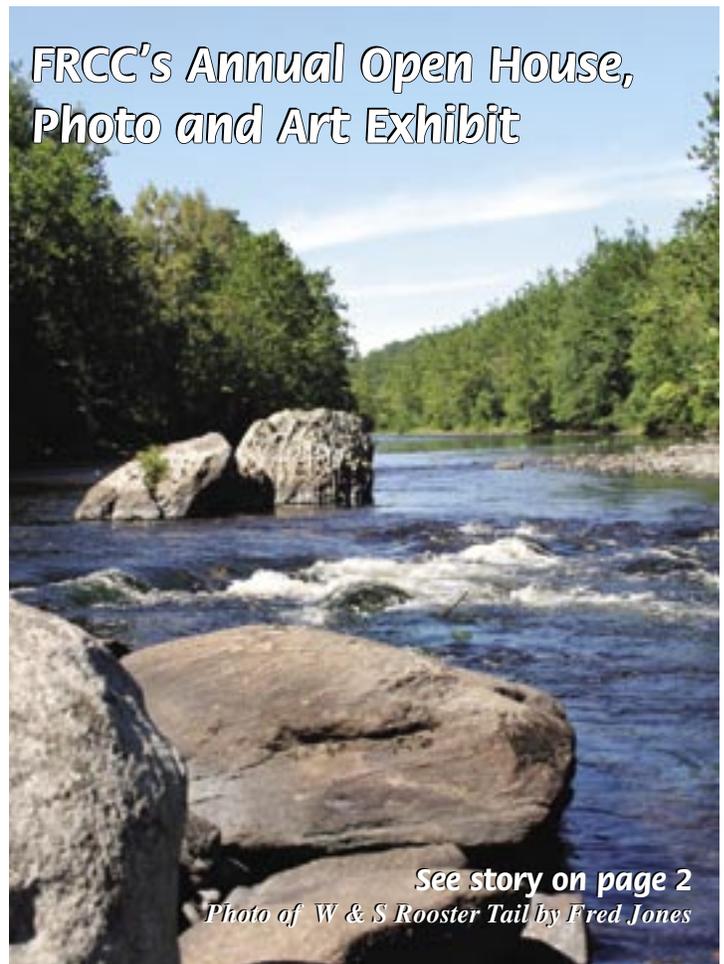
*Continued from page 3*

included a host of more common species that bring color and song to the valley. The winter bird count included a Red throated loon, Common Loons, Horned Grebes and Bonaparte's Gulls, all on the Barkhamsted Reservoir.

Habitat preservation for these species is an important responsibility for all of us who live and visit the area. Resource stewardship is part of the mission of the Farmington River Coordinating Committee. Hearing of a report that bluebird boxes placed in the Greenwoods Recreation Area had been vandalized by some individuals on ATVs is disturbing. All of us need to be advocates for this beautiful resource and to help educate those around us about the value of preserving and protecting the river and its wildlife.

*Nicki Hall, wildlife reporter*

## FRCC's Annual Open House, Photo and Art Exhibit



**See story on page 2**

*Photo of W & S Rooster Tail by Fred Jones*