

Celebrating 50 Years of River Restoration and Advocacy

When we began planning for the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Watershed Council's founding, we knew it would be both interesting and valuable to look back at what has been accomplished over the past five decades. None of the founding members is still alive, to our knowledge, but they did leave a record in the minutes of their meetings and the many archived files. We drew on those sources, as well as the memories of more recent Trustees and friends of the Council, to develop the following history. It touches on selected highlights of 50 years work as the principal citizen advocate for restoring and protecting New England's premier river ecosystem – the Connecticut River watershed.

The 1950's

According to the incorporation papers filed with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the founding members of the Watershed Council held their first meeting on May 16, 1952 at the Weldon Hotel in Greenfield. The Secretary of State subsequently set June 20, 1952 as the official date of birth for the new organization.

What brought these business and community leaders together? One thing for sure was the sorry state of the Connecticut River, which an editorialist of the time derided as “the best landscaped sewer in the nation.” Another reason was a perceived threat by the federal government to create a public authority similar to the Tennessee Valley Authority that would take over the existing hydroelectric facilities and potentially develop more based on the findings of a study of the resources of the New England-New York Region ordered in 1950 by President Truman and the Congress. The Watershed Council would be a guardian of local control and work for the River's cleanup. It also embraced the “new” concept of planning and conserving natural resources on a watershed basis.

The newly founded organization opened an office at 3 Bank Row in Greenfield, several doors up from our current location. E.R. (“Bud”) Foster was hired as Executive Director in December 1952. The first major project was an atlas of the resources of the Connecticut River watershed, entitled “The Connecticut River: Your Valley, Your Future,” which was developed by the Yale School of Forestry. This would be the first of many publications, films and brochures produced by the Council over the years to help inform and educate the public and Valley leaders.

An early goal was to facilitate creation of watershed associations throughout the watershed for major tributaries. CRWC's initiative led to the creation of Westfield and Farmington River Watershed Associations and the Ashuelot Valley Association.

In 1954, CRWC began holding an annual Connecticut River Valley Resource Conference at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Expert panels were assembled to address such topics as pollution, flood control, wildlife and recreation, agriculture, regional development and education.

CRWC took an early interest in state and federal actions to control water pollution. It supported legislation proposed in 1954 by U.S. Representative Boland of Springfield, MA calling for federal aid to cities and towns in the Connecticut River valley for pollution abatement. It opposed a 1955 bill in the MA Legislature seeking to postpone until 1960 further action by the State Health Department to require cities to install sewage disposal plants.

To promote increased public awareness of both the River and the Watershed Council, CRWC President Dr. Joseph Davidson organized a week-long trip down the River, our first “Source-to-Sea” adventure, for late September 1959. The route covered 260 miles of the 400-mile long river, mostly by powerboat. A jug of pristine water was collected at Fourth Connecticut Lake and used to show how polluted downstream waters were, and to impress on people the value of adequate water supply. The trip was filmed and later premiered as a movie, “From the Source to the Sea,” on May 20, 1960 at the 7th annual conference.

The 1960's

To help communities and residents address water pollution, CRWC set to work compiling a publication of the various laws, regulations and agencies concerned with the study, planning, financing and construction of water pollution control projects in the valley. In the introduction, the Chief Engineer of the MA Water Resources Commission, Clarence Sterling, Jr., wrote, “Today, there is no longer any excuse for any municipality to say it cannot afford sewage treatment. The familiar cry that a sewage treatment project will ‘bankrupt the municipality’ is just pure poppycock.” Amen, Mr. Sterling.

CRWC went international in 1962 by organizing a study trip to Europe for foresters to study how Europeans were dealing with expanding population and the increasing demand for use of forestland for development and recreation. “The Finest Forests of Europe” trip was supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture & Forestry and the German Federal Republic. Besides field trips and discussions with European forest experts in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Sweden, the trip brochure also noted the “unforgettable infectious gaiety and happy festival atmosphere” of the Oktoberfest in Munich as part of the trip.

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Local trips, so-called “CT River Rambles,” were more the norm. Excursion boats were used for annual trips from both Hartford and Middletown to the mouth of the Connecticut, and even as far as Block Island. CRWC even organized several “Boat-A-Rama’s” -- a flotilla of powerboats would start at Hanover, NH and tour downstream over the next week.

CRWC developed its first logo in the early 1960’s. It was designed by Jack North, son of one of the founding members.

A study of pesticide pollution in the valley was undertaken in partnership with the Farmington and Westfield River Watershed Associations and the New England Interstate Pollution Control Commission. A 1964 report to the Board stated that monitoring had found little evidence of contamination.

At the 1965 annual meeting, held at Stratton Mountain in Vermont, the keynote speaker was Richard Plough, President of the Natural Area Council of New York. He stressed that a new, dynamic conservation movement is needed. “As outlying areas become more urbanized,” he said, “open space should be preserved for parks, forest preserves, and wildlife refuge.” A prophetic message.

Two major federal studies of the Connecticut River received a great deal of attention from the Council during the mid- and late 1960’s. One was Connecticut River Basin Study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE); the second was a feasibility study for a Connecticut River National Recreation Area conducted by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR). Both raised renewed concerns over the possibility of the federal government taking over decision-making for the River.

At the completion of both studies, the Council spoke up for local control and cooperation. It said there was no need for creating a National Recreation Area, one of the BOR suggestions; and it challenged ACOE recommendations for additional flood control dams in the upper watershed, stating the study report did not substantiate the need for (new) large multipurpose dam construction in the Connecticut River valley.

The first Connecticut River guidebook was issued in 1966.

In 1967, the By-laws were revised to increase the Board of Directors from the initial size of at least six per state, with a maximum of 30 members, to ten per state with a maximum of 60 members. This increase was presumably to increase representation, but it would have consequences needing to be rectified in the future. Also that year, Bud Foster passed away, creating a vacancy that would be filled in 1968 by Chris Percy.

Under Chris Percy’s direction, CRWC undertook a new initiative – a Land Conservation Program aimed at protecting important natural areas in the Valley. Terry Blunt was hired in 1969 as Associate Executive Director and headed the program. To qualify land holdings in Connecticut for tax-exempt status, CRWC of Connecticut, Inc. was formed to hold title to conservation lands in that state.

During this decade, CRWC produced a number of 16mm films about the River and its resources to educate the public and promote action. The list of titles includes: “From Source to Sea,” “Shad Time on the Connecticut,” and “The Magnificent Connecticut.”

As the Sixties came to a close, CRWC weighed in on an issue that would energize community and grassroots defense of the Connecticut River in the decade to come – Boston’s plan to divert water from the River to the Quabbin Reservoir for its water supply. CRWC President Ellsworth Grant stated the Council’s opposition in comments on proposed 1969 legislation to authorize the diversion.

The 1970’s

CRWC gave strong support to efforts to restore anadromous fisheries (fish that are born in freshwater, migrate out to sea to mature, and return to their birth stream to spawn). It called in 1970 for the United States to abolish high-seas fishing for Atlantic salmon to give state efforts to restore these fish to the Connecticut River a chance to succeed.

A year later, CRWC adopted the position that it is the responsibility of the power companies to bear the cost of improvement projects at dams to allow fish passage. This was of immediate relevance as state Fish & Wildlife agencies and the U.S. Department of the Interior wanted the Holyoke Water Power Company to install a fish lift for improved fish passage at the Holyoke Dam. To the distress of our utility members, CRWC endorsed the project.

CRWC also took action on a potential threat to the lower River – oil spills by the tankers and barges that annually transported 16,000,000 barrels of petroleum products upriver to Hartford. CRWC proposed a cooperative among the suppliers, terminals, and barge companies to develop a contingency response plan. When this effort was unsuccessful, CRWC worked for legislation requiring contingency planning. That legislation was eventually passed in 1979.

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In 1972, CRWC completed the construction of a new headquarters building at the MA Audubon Society's Arcadia Sanctuary and moved to Easthampton. While CRWC owned the building, a ground lease entitled Audubon to purchase it in the future to meet its needs.

CRWC held its first reported canoe trip in 1974, from the Coolidge Bridge at Northampton, MA to the Oxbow near the new headquarters. A grant from the Ensworth Foundation enabled the purchase of six canoes and equipment in 1976 for a series of environmental awareness excursions on the River and tributaries. 13 trips were held that year.

The By-laws were amended in 1975 to create a Chairman of Board and make the President a board-appointed salaried position. Chris Percy's title became President, and Terry Blunt was subsequently appointed Executive Director.

A number of development projects arose that received the Council's attention and more active conservation advocacy. To protect the scenic quality of the lower River, CRWC took part in the state review of a planned transmission line crossing of the River, supporting a requirement that such crossings be placed underwater. CRWC raised objections to an oil refinery proposed off the mouth of the Connecticut River.

Citing concerns over the impact on surrounding communities and weak enforcement of environmental standards in NH, CRWC opposed development of a proposed pulp mill near Walpole, NH. CRWC endorsed a proposal by the Elmendorf Corporation to develop a fiber-board plant in Claremont, NH, citing its limited environmental impacts and no use of river water, its location in an industrial zone, its use of local forest management products. A plan by the Soil Conservation Service to develop a series of 11 dams on the West Branch of the Westfield River drew CRWC's opposition.

At the Annual Meeting in 1976, the members called for the Board to develop a position on a nuclear power plant being proposed for Montague, MA. At a special meeting held in April 1977, the Board adopted a policy opposing construction of the proposed Montague Nuclear Power Station and any additional nuclear power plants in the watershed until disposal of spent fuel and other concerns were resolved. The policy statement also supported energy conservation, renewable energy sources (solar and wind) and special fossil-fuel technologies to address future energy requirements.

A display map of the watershed was published in 1976 featuring the valley's natural and cultural features.

CRWC participated in New England River Basins Commission planning as a member of a Citizens Advisory Group (CAG). Chris Percy was the CRWC representative. The CAG provided advice and perspective in the development of a Basin Plan and "The Rivers Reach," a floodplain management strategy for the basin.

Plans by Boston to divert water from the Connecticut River to the Quabbin Reservoir were an issue throughout the decade. Chris Percy was instrumental in getting legislation opposing the diversion adopted by the CT Legislature.

A decision was made in 1977 to open an office in the Hanover, NH area to give CRWC greater presence and capability in the upper watershed. Bill Stetson was hired in 1978 to staff the new office as Associate Executive Director.

In 1979, the Conservation, Education and Research Program (CERP) was established to provide grants to support research by students and projects of individuals and organizations aimed at advancing the protection and wise use of the valley's natural resources. Over the following decades, CERP grants have funded research into such diverse issues as water supply in Easthampton, MA, trace metal chemistry in river sediments, analysis of water pollution in the River, analysis of riparian buffers as habitat, and a demonstration project using biological controls to eliminate purple loosestrife in the Cromwell Meadows. Grants are typically several hundred dollars, but can be as much as \$1,500.

Conserving Lands, Creating Access

Land conservation was a major program activity throughout the 1970's and 1980's. Given the significant achievements at locations throughout the watershed, we thought more than a summary mention was warranted.

CRWC established a land conservation program in 1968 that has protected over 8,700 acres of environmental sensitive land and open space throughout the watershed. Today, we own 15 properties totaling 1,446 acres and hold conservation easements on 44 additional properties totaling 2,233 acres. These 59 properties are located in 25 towns in the four watershed states. Our "premier" landholding is the Spaulding Pond Wilderness, 800 acres in Norfolk, CT, that was a gift from the Estate of the late Happy Egler.

Many of these projects represented partnerships with public agencies, whereby CRWC acquired a property and then transferred it to public ownership. Credit for most of our land protection accomplishments go to Terry Blunt and Bob Linck, and to the many landowners who either donated their land or an easement. We also recognize the important contribution of Mason Phelps, the current chairman of our Land Conservation Program.

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Over the years, CRWC was instrumental in securing the public ownership of a number of islands in the Connecticut River. We accepted the properties by donation or purchased them, and then transferred ownership to a local community or other public agency. The islands we helped protect are: Elwell and Shepard's Islands (*Northampton, MA*), Chase Island (*Cornish, NH*), Jarvis Island (*Claremont, NH*), Williams Island (*Sunderland, MA*), Third Island (*Deerfield, MA*), and Saddle Island in Bath, NH, which we still own.

Two of our conservancy properties protect significant bodies of water – Pout Pond in Lyme, NH and Spaulding Pond in Norfolk, CT. Two other properties, no longer owned by CRWC, contain important populations of protected species. Rainbow Beach, which we conveyed to the Town of Northampton, MA, is the habitat for a globally significant endangered species, the Puritan tiger beetle, and the Hawley Bog, now owned by the Five Colleges, is a classic northern acid bog with pitcher plant and sun dew, bladderwort, bog rosemary, cotton grass, sphagnum mat, black spruce, and red maple fringe in a kettle hole setting.

Almost a mile of riverfront in Lebanon, NH was protected from development through the donation of the Chambers property, now a public park, and purchase of the adjoining 16 acres which were slated for development.

Through a series of easements donated in the 1980s and early 1990s by the Holcombe Family and Edmund Zacher totaling 1,341 acres, we are protecting potential Atlantic salmon spawning habitat areas from riparian development in upper reaches of the Salmon River watershed in the towns of Marlborough and Hebron, CT.

In 1993, following an assessment of our land conservation program and opportunities by Ben Emory, a land trust consultant, the Board of Trustees made the decision to redirect CRWC's land conservancy work from ownership to advocacy. This reflected the emergence of numerous land trusts throughout the watershed since the inception of our program that have a greater capacity for stewardship, and the fact that CRWC cannot be all things to all people. As result, we are in the process of divesting of many holdings to other land trusts.

In addition to being an advocate for conserving open space and environmentally sensitive lands, CRWC will not hesitate to step forward to protect critical parcels when the opportunity and a threat arises. We will also make our land conservation revolving fund available to assist others protect these important natural resource areas.

The 1980's

Proposals for new dams drew CRWC's active attention. One of the first major actions of the decade was a resolution in 1980 opposing the development of a new 65-foot high hydroelectric dam on the "Stillwater" section of the Deerfield River in Deerfield, MA.

CRWC opposed a proposal by the Town of Windsor, VT to develop a 51-foot high hydroelectric dam on the main stem at Hart Island. If built, the dam would have inundated Sumner Falls and the species rich Connecticut River "macrosite" near Cornish, NH. CRWC also intervened in federal proceedings for a possible Chase Island dam, a series of five dams on the Millers River, and a proposed dam at Lyman Falls on the upper main stem.

Significant staffing changes occurred in 1981. Chris Percy announced his intention to leave, and John Crossman was hired as the new President. Bob Linck replaced Bill Stetson as Associate Executive Director for the Upper Valley office.

Concerned about the impact of acid precipitation on the Northeast and the watershed, CRWC called on the valley's Congressional Delegation to play a lead role in strengthening the Clean Air Act, and to prevent any weakening of the Act.

A staffed office in Connecticut was created in 1983 as a result of a challenge grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Denise Schlener was hired as Associate Executive Director for Connecticut.

CRWC issued an environmental status report in 1983, its 30th anniversary, for the Connecticut River basin. Entitled "Recovering the Valley," the report was developed under the direction of Rutherford Platt, Professor of Geology at UMass Amherst. Among the report's data is proof of water quality improvement between 1969 and 1983 – the miles of rivers and streams not meeting state water quality standards had decreased by 42%, from 936 to 543 miles.

CRWC entered into a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management to develop an action strategy for a Connecticut River greenway in Massachusetts. This resulted in the "Connecticut Valley Action Plan," with actions to address farmland protection, water quality, recreation, soil erosion, cultural and natural resource conservation, and economic development.

A significant property acquisition warrants mention. In 1983, CRWC purchased a 23-acre riverfront parcel in Norwich, VT on behalf of the Montshire Museum to be part of a site for a new regional museum and interpretive facility.

1984 brought major changes. John Crossman resigned, Ed Spencer was hired as the new President, and Terry Blunt resigned as Executive Director. The By-laws were revised to reduce the number of Directors from the unwieldy total of 60 (adopted in 1967) to 20, five per state. Directors were renamed "Trustees," and the position of

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President was dropped in favor of “Executive Director.” There was also a decision to give more attention to water quality issues.

The mid-80’s brought a new issue to the fore – Vermont ski area development in high elevation areas of the watershed. CRWC intervened in the review of expansion plans by Killington and joined a lawsuit challenging its waste disposal plan. Water withdrawals for snowmaking became an even more important ski area issue.

In 1985, Geoff Dates stepped down as Chairman of the Board to become the head of the Upper Valley office, and George Watkins became the new Chairman. That same year, CRWC was funded by the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust to initiate a water quality improvement program, which became known as the Clean River Campaign. At the end of decade, a program of water quality monitoring was initiated that involved volunteers and schools.

A new edition of The Complete Boating Guide to the Connecticut River was published in 1986 in partnership with Embassy Imprint of Old Saybrook, CT. The popular book sold well and was reprinted in 1989.

Boston’s plan to divert water from the Connecticut River to the Quabbin Reservoir came up again in 1986. CRWC worked to oppose the plan as part of a bi-state grassroots effort.

CRWC and the MA Public Interest Research Group initiated legal action in 1988 to get the Town of Erving, MA to eliminate pollution of the Millers River by toxic wastes from the Erving paper mill. The plant’s wastes were receiving inadequate treatment by the municipal treatment plant.

In Connecticut, CRWC conducted an in-depth study of the Salmon River watershed to develop strategies for protecting environmentally sensitive lands and water quality. The goal was to get the several towns to work together in protecting the basin. A similar study undertaken for the Blackledge River received a presidential award.

Upstream, CRWC supported and worked for the creation of the NH Connecticut River Valley Resource Commission and its VT counterpart, the Connecticut River Watershed Advisory Commission. They are better known today by their collective name, the Connecticut River Joint Commissions. CRWC also endorsed the designation of the Connecticut River under the NH Rivers Management & Protection Program.

The late 1980’s saw numerous staff changes. Ed Spencer left in 1987, and Phil Klotz was hired as the new Executive Director. In 1988, Denise Schlener stepped down as Regional Director for CT and was replaced by Rick Boynton. In 1989, Phil Klotz resigned, and Harry Francis became interim Executive Director while a search for a new full-time staff head was conducted.

The problem of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) received attention in both CT and MA. CRWC produced a video on CSOs in the Greater Springfield Area, and served on the CSO Citizen Advisory Committee set up by the CT Department of Environmental Protection. We also produced a video for the Hartford, CT Metropolitan District Commission to promote passage of an \$80 million bond act to fund CSO elimination projects.

The 1990’s

Real estate was an issue in 1990. CRWC and Dartmouth College were the joint beneficiaries of a house and property on the Connecticut River in Cornish, NH through the Will of Hugh Wade. CRWC purchased Dartmouth’s interest so it could use the Wade house for its Upper Valley office. A search began for a new main headquarters location when MA Audubon exercised its ground lease right to purchase our building on its Arcadia Sanctuary property.

In defense of the Public Trust Doctrine, CRWC opposed permits for “River City,” a floating restaurant proposed in the River at Hartford, CT in early 1990. CRWC supported MA legislation to require a 150-foot setback for development along waterways, which would eventually pass as the Rivers Protection Act in 1997.

More staff changes occurred in 1990. Hank Rupertsberger replaced Geoff Dates as Regional Director for NH and VT. Geoff continued on a part-time basis to assist with the River Watch water quality monitoring program. Jane Brawerman was hired as Regional Director for CT. Harry Francis, Interim Executive Director, died unexpectedly in October, and Robert Sbarge was hired as the new Executive Director in early 1991.

1991 was a very difficult year for the Council. The 1990 recession caused a major decline in corporate contributions that led to a growing budget deficit: donations could not keep up with the expenses of three offices, staff, and programs like River Watch water quality monitoring. In October, the Board of Trustees elected Neil Sheridan as the new Chairman, and then made the difficult decision to let the staff go and to work to rebuild the Council. Robert Sbarge was asked to stay on, but he also left. Trustees Alice Clemente and Dona Motts stepped forward to carry on basic administrative functions.

In February 1992, the Board accepted a proposal from two members, Whitty Sanford and Tom Miner, both of whom had extensive experience directing nonprofit organizations in New York State, to conduct an organizational assessment and develop a revitalization action plan. Tom and Whitty presented their

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recommendations in April, foremost of which was to resume CRWC's programs with available resources. They agreed to stay on to help the Board accomplish the Council's rebuilding.

The headquarters were relocated in September 1992 to rented space at One Ferry Street in Easthampton, MA.

CRWC Trustee Mason Phelps and attorney Sam Lovejoy carried out a land conservation project in the early 1990s to create a protected wildlife corridor in the towns of Leverett and Montague, MA between the Mount Toby and Wendell State Forests. CRWC took title to a series of properties that were then conveyed to the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

1993 brought a number of significant changes. Ben Emory, a land trust consultant from Maine, was hired to conduct an assessment of the Land Conservation Program. He recommended that CRWC redefine its role from that of a land trust to more of a land conservation advocate, and that we divest of many current holdings. This reflected CRWC's limited capacity for stewardship of properties and easements, and the growing presence of local land trusts throughout the Valley with that capacity, few of which existed when our program began. The Board adopted the recommendations.

The other significant change was a new amendment of the By-laws to address a problem created in 1985 when the authority of a large central Board of Directors was divided between four State Councils. That, it turns out, had led to competitive state interests rather than a unified focus on the watershed as a whole. The amended By-laws retained the State Councils in an advisory role and affirmed the leadership role of a 24-member Board of Trustees directly elected by the members.

A decision was made to sell the Wade property in Cornish, NH to help repay loans that were taken out during 1990 and 1991. We gave an easement to the Upper Valley Land Trust to protect a 200-foot riparian zone along the River. Prior the sale, the house was rented for a winter to J.D. Salinger and his wife while their house was being repaired following a fire.

The principal program focus from 1993 to 1995 was support for the creation of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge. Council staff worked to build public support for the new Refuge, including publication of the "Conte Refuge EXTRA!," an information-filled bulletin that was distributed throughout the Valley as a newspaper insert to inform the public and encourage their participation in the series of 16 public hearings on the proposed Refuge Action Plan.

To increase our on-river presence and our ability to assist others and address local problems, we initiated the Connecticut River Steward Program in 1994 and hired Tom Maloney as the first River Steward to serve the lower Connecticut River. A second River Steward, David Deen, was hired in 1998 with responsibility for the River in New Hampshire and Vermont.

We also undertook an environmental education program, "The River that Connects Us," that brought teachers together for workshops and for two summer institutes at the Northfield Mount Hermon School (NMH). Two lasting results of the program were a watershed curriculum for high school students and the creation of the Connecticut River Education Initiative in partnership with the Public TV stations of the Valley, science centers, Conte refuge, and NMH.

In response to calls for rebuilding the breached Enfield Dam, CRWC worked with the Chicopee and Westfield River Watershed Associations and Trout Unlimited to issue a report, "In Praise of a Free-flowing River," that summarized conclusions reached by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the CT Department of Environmental Protection that restoring the dam was economically infeasible and environmentally unacceptable. We also opposed rebuilding of a breached dam on the Sawmill River in Montague, MA.

Relicensing of hydroelectric dams on the main stem became a major involvement in the latter half of the decade. CRWC intervened in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission proceedings for both the Holyoke Dam and the 15 Mile Falls Project (a series of three dams near Littleton, NH). Our goal was increased river flows, fish passage improvements, and other river benefits. In both proceedings, we were signatories to settlement agreements that achieved major improvements for River that will be in place for the next 40 years.

At 15 Mile Falls, we were part of the cooperative relicensing effort that resulted in a settlement agreement that improved river flows, protected almost 9,000 acres, and created a Mitigation & Enhancement Fund that will total as much as \$15 million. Our Upper Valley River Steward, David Deen, played a lead role in the completion of the relicensing and creation of the Fund.

In 1996, CRWC co-sponsored with the CT Chapter of the Nature Conservancy a "Tidelands Symposium" that brought together researchers working on issues related to the River's estuary. This was a project of River Steward Tom Maloney.

We also adopted a new logo in 1996 that was created by Carolyn Isaak, the designer of our newsletter, *Currents & Eddies*.

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CRWC provided a nonprofit administrative umbrella for several organizations that were not formally incorporated and lacked tax-exempt status. This included Connecticut RiverFest when it was first being formed, a river celebration and education program in the Hanover, NH area; the Northfield Environmental Defense Fund, and a grassroots effort to fight a regional solid waste processing facility proposed for a rural site close to the River local. We are currently (2002) administering the Haddam Neck Environmental Defense Fund for a grassroots effort challenging a plan by the Connecticut Yankee Nuclear Generation Station to develop a new spent fuel storage on property zoned for residential use. CRWC supported each of these efforts.

We undertook two major new initiatives in 1997 that continue today. We built our first fishway to restore access to spawning habitats on tributaries for anadromous fish on Mill Brook in Old Lyme, CT – a partnership effort with the local land trust, the Conte Refuge and the CT Department of Environmental Protection. This led to our Migratory Fisheries Restoration Initiative that has built five fishways and is pursuing opportunities for removing derelict dams. We also led the successful valley-wide partnership effort to nominate the Connecticut River to be one of the 14 American Heritage Rivers designated by President Clinton. The fisheries initiative was directed by Tom Maloney, and Co-Executive Director Whitty Sanford led the ARHI effort.

Working in partnership with the Housatonic Valley Association, we undertook the Community Watershed Initiative in 1998 to explore how to make interstate and local river protection more effective. We also launched our Web site, www.ctriver.org.

CRWC addressed a seemingly endless variety of issues during the 1990s. They included: a major sewage spill by the Hartford MDC into Wethersfield Cove, loss of over 50 pounds of mercury into the environment by the Mattabassett District wastewater treatment plant in Cromwell, CT; removal of water chestnut and other invasive species from several river sites; a state highway bypass along the River's edge proposed in West Lebanon, NH; a proposed NFL football stadium on Hartford, CT's riverfront; creation of a CT River Water Trail; bioengineering solutions for bank erosion above the Turners Falls Dam; and water withdrawals for snowmaking by the Killington and Okemo ski areas in Vermont.

CRWC challenged the development of a new power plant in Meriden, CT that would take water from the River for cooling. We achieved a settlement agreement with the developer calling for funding of land conservation, fisheries restoration, and a conservation enhancement fund. We are currently (2002) challenging another power proposed at Middletown, CT: CRWC has gone on record in opposition to its planned consumption of over four million gallons of water daily from the River.

In 1997 we initiated the Connecticut River Source to Sea Clean up, an annual program to organize volunteers to clean up sites along the main stem and on tributaries. Hundreds of volunteers have removed hundreds of tons of trash, tires and other discarded things over the years.

A new publication came out in 1998 – “The River That Connects Us” – a display map of the Valley's natural and cultural resources that includes an essay by historian Richard Ewald on the Valley's cultural assets and a complete list of National Register sites on its back.

In 1999, CRWC purchased the historic E.A. Hall Building in Greenfield, MA to be its new headquarters. Following a year and a half of planning, fundraising and construction for renovations and upgrade of mechanical systems, we moved into our new offices on June 1, 2001. This fall (October 2002), we begin work on the final phase of renovations – creation of a new entry to make the building accessible for individuals with disabilities, installation of an elevator, and renovation of the second floor for rental offices.

The 21st Century

A number of projects are ongoing, especially the Connecticut River Stewards Program, the Migratory Fisheries Restoration Initiative, the American Heritage River Initiative, the CT River Source to Sea Clean Up, the CT River Water Trail, and CERP grants. At the heart of these and most other work are partnerships between CRWC and a diversity of other nonprofit organizations, communities, and state and federal agencies.

Grants in 2000 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency made it possible for CRWC to undertake Sustainable Riverbanks, a project to inventory and prioritize erosion sites, and the Growth Forum, a public outreach effort to involve community leaders in developing a strategy to address urban sprawl between Hartford, CT and Springfield, MA. We also receive a small grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to develop a flood hazard mitigation plan.

In the spring of 2001 we had a change of River Steward. Tom Maloney departed for a position with the MA Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and Chris Joyell was hired from the CT Chapter of TNC to be our new River Steward for the lower River (touché!).

CRWC was a sponsor in 2001 and 2002 of Biodiversity Days, a program of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs to have citizens take nature walks on the first weekend in June and record what they

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see Working with tributary groups on the Chicopee, Deerfield, Westfield and Farmington River, we have coordinated over 150 nature walks and submitted several thousand species for inclusion in the state's database.

Our newest publication came out in August 2001 – The Tidewaters of the Connecticut River – a guidebook to exploring the coves and marshes of the lower Connecticut River. River Steward Tom Maloney was a principal author, describing self-guided trips through 11 of the watershed's most special natural areas. The book was published by River's End Press, with the profits dedicated to supporting CRWC's work to protect and enhance the environmental resources of the lower River.

As part of our celebration of our 50th Anniversary, CRWC organized the Connecticut River Discovery Program, a series of trip and events for the spring and summer of 2002 to get more people to the River. We also held the first ever "Great Connecticut River Fish In," whereby we urged people throughout the valley to go fishing on June 1st and report their catch back to us.

On May 1, 2002, CRWC received an Environmental Merit Award from the New England Region of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in recognition of our 50 years of accomplishments for conserving, restoring and protecting the River. We were similarly honored by the Governors of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont who designed June 20, 2002 – the golden anniversary of our founding – as "Connecticut River Watershed Council Day."

At the same time as we are being recognized and are celebrating our anniversary, CRWC has been working on fishery restoration projects, river access, power plant threats, community planning to protect the River, river enhancements gained through relicensing of hydroelectric dams, and more.

The most important aspect of the Connecticut River Watershed Council is that we continue to be here every day, every year, as the River's champion. When threats and opportunities arise, we are here to respond, taking action and bringing people together to defend and enjoy the Connecticut River.

No history of the Watershed Council can be complete without mention and thanks to the thousands of individuals, families, businesses, and communities that have and continue to support our work as members. We also salute the hundreds of individuals who have given their time to serve on the Board of Trustees and State Councils over the past 50 years. Your contributions make everything we do possible. You can take personal pride in the accomplishments of the past 50 years and the years to come. Thank you.

The work of the Connecticut River Watershed Council is far from done. Every day brings new challenges and opportunities to be met. We look forward to the next 50 years with a sense of achievement and the knowledge we can and will make a difference for the Connecticut River – protecting its natural resources and helping people to understand and enjoy them.

This 50-year history of the Connecticut River Watershed Council was developed with the assistance of Trustee Tom Rice and member Robert May, who reviewed the Minutes of board meetings to note important events and decisions. The text was written by CRWC Co-Executive Directors Tom Miner and Whitty Sanford.