



PROTECTING OUR LIVING WATERSHED

The Connecticut River Conservancy's
2026-2030 Strategic Plan



Clean Water. Healthy Habitats. Resilient Communities.

**Connecticut River
Conservancy**

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LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

The Connecticut River watershed is a region defined by diverse ecosystems, waterways, wildlife, and communities. With a geologic history stretching back over 750 million years, it is humbling to orient ourselves to the current state of our environment and all who call this watershed home.

With homage to interconnected living systems and purposefully carrying responsibility for the future, we are pleased to share with you **the Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) Strategic Plan for Protecting Our Living Watershed**. This plan creates an ambitious vision for the organization, focusing on our critical work at the intersection of **restoration, advocacy, and collaborative partnerships**. With this Strategic Plan for Protecting Our Living Watershed, CRC is enthusiastically embarking on a new era of capacity-building and expansion for increased impact in our shared watershed.

In the next five years, CRC will accomplish the following new initiatives:

- **Publish a State of the Watershed Report** highlighting critical data and establishing conservation objectives.
- **Undertake strategic litigation** to harness the full force of the law in protecting our rivers.
- **Celebrate CRC's 75th anniversary** with engaging programming watershed-wide.

We will strengthen our focus in ongoing work to:

- **Leverage science and partnerships** to make a tangible difference in restoring clean water, healthy habitats, and resilient communities.
- **Foster a shared sense of belonging** to one watershed beyond arbitrary boundaries.
- **Build capacity for sustainable growth** to identify and implement solutions to the watershed's greatest challenges.

Equally importantly, CRC will focus on those areas of our mission where we can have the biggest impact, and allocate existing and necessary new resources intentionally. Through Protecting Our Living Watershed, our efforts will foster a **swimmable, boatable, and fishable Connecticut River**, and sustain a **healthy watershed for future generations**. We are grateful for the staff, members of the Board of Trustees, partners, donors, and volunteers who have already made great progress and will help to further realize these ambitious goals in the years ahead. Forward ho!



Rebecca Todd

Rebecca E. Todd
Executive Director



Leslie Harris

Leslie Harris
Chair, Board of Trustees

THE CONNECTICUT RIVER

New England's "Great River" flows for 410 miles from the Canadian border in northern New Hampshire to the Long Island Sound. It is a unifying force—an ancient waterway that binds our shared environment, history, and future.

To the Indigenous communities of New England it has been called the "long tidal river" stemming from the Mohegan word *Quinetucket* and the Nipmuc word *Kwinitekw*. The watershed is the homeland of the Abenaki people of the upper reaches; the Pocumtuc, Nipmuc, and Mohican in the middle watershed; and the Wangunk, Tunxis, and Podunk in the southern section.

The Connecticut River has been at the center of culture and livelihoods for thousands of years as an essential corridor for travel, trade, sustenance, and deep relationship with living lands and waters.

Throughout the period of European settlement, the Connecticut River served as a vital artery for exploration, commerce, and expansion. During the Industrial Revolution, the river became the driving force behind factories and mills, providing the waterpower necessary to spur New England's industrial and economic growth. In the 20th century, citizens of the region recognized that widespread development, farming, and industry had taken a toll on the river's health—degrading its habitat, polluting its waters, and blocking its flow. They formed the Connecticut River Watershed Council, now known as the Connecticut River Conservancy, in 1952.

The Connecticut River watershed encompasses a 7.2 million acre thriving mosaic of forests, wetlands, and tributaries that support hundreds of fish, bird, and wildlife species—including some that are threatened and endangered—making it uniquely abundant both ecologically and recreationally.



The Connecticut River is our home. This includes about 2.4 million people throughout 400 communities, with 84% being residents of urban areas. Swimming, fishing, boating, birding, and hiking are some of the ways local communities foster a connection with the natural world and, we hope, become motivated to protect it from harm. As we celebrate the collective progress made in restoring the river to its greatness, we recognize the work required to continue stewarding this important resource for current and future generations.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The objectives of this strategic plan are to **define clear goals, align resources, and guide actions** that advance CRC's mission and decision-making over the coming years.

This plan comes at a pivotal moment for the Connecticut River. Climate instability, habitat loss, increasing demands for water, and outdated infrastructure threaten the health and resilience of our waterways, and often impact the watershed's most vulnerable communities. At the same time, our vision for abundant life, passion for the river, and the strength of our partnerships fuel powerful momentum for change.

CRC is uniquely positioned to meet this moment—combining science, advocacy, and hands-on restoration across the watershed. With boats in the river, hard hats in the field, and testimony in the statehouses, we are prepared to deliver results that benefit local communities and the watershed at large.

CRC's impact is powered by talented staff who implement projects in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, as well as extraordinary partners and volunteers. As we approach our 75th anniversary, we continue to take the long view of the river, applying technical solutions and hard-won wisdom to complex intra- and interstate challenges. Grounded in science, driven by community, and focused on results, this strategic plan is a roadmap for collective action to protect and restore the river we call home.



The Connecticut River in Vernon, VT, with the Vernon Dam in the background. Flight support by LightHawk.



CRC's Annual Meeting in 2025 with staff, guests, volunteers, and partners on the Connecticut River in South Hadley, MA.

PATH TO IMPACT

To achieve meaningful outcomes across the watershed, CRC starts with the bedrock principles of science and partnership. These principles guide decisions made throughout the watershed, ensuring our actions are grounded in evidence and implemented through collaboration with organizations and individuals who bring valuable expertise. We will also leverage funding opportunities for the greatest possible ecological and community benefit.

From that point of departure, CRC's theory of change revolves around three key strategies:

Advocate

We advocate for clean water, healthy habitats, and resilient communities across the entire Connecticut River watershed.

Through **policy leadership, coalition-building, education, and community engagement**, we work at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels to **advance environmental protections**. This includes supporting research, influencing land and water management decisions, ensuring river-friendly permitting and dam relicensing, promoting river access, centering environmental justice, and advancing stronger environmental laws and regulatory requirements.

Restore

We restore rivers and riparian zones to improve ecological functions and support biodiversity.

We help address issues of impairment in the watershed by **restoring water quality and habitat for fish and wildlife**; removing dams and obstacles to aquatic organism passage; managing aquatic invasive species; establishing riparian buffers and re-creating floodplain forests; supporting stormwater solutions, and **conducting fieldwork that helps transform urban and rural environments to greater ecological wholeness, function, and benefit**.

Connect

We connect people, rivers, and organizations in service of shared goals for a thriving watershed.

We bring people together from headwaters to estuary to not only protect and restore the river's health **through community science**, but to **encourage river-friendly activities for everyone**. By connecting and convening communities—including historically under-resourced communities—with the natural systems they depend on, **we turn awareness into action, improving both human and ecological resilience**.

GOALS FOR A LIVING WATERSHED

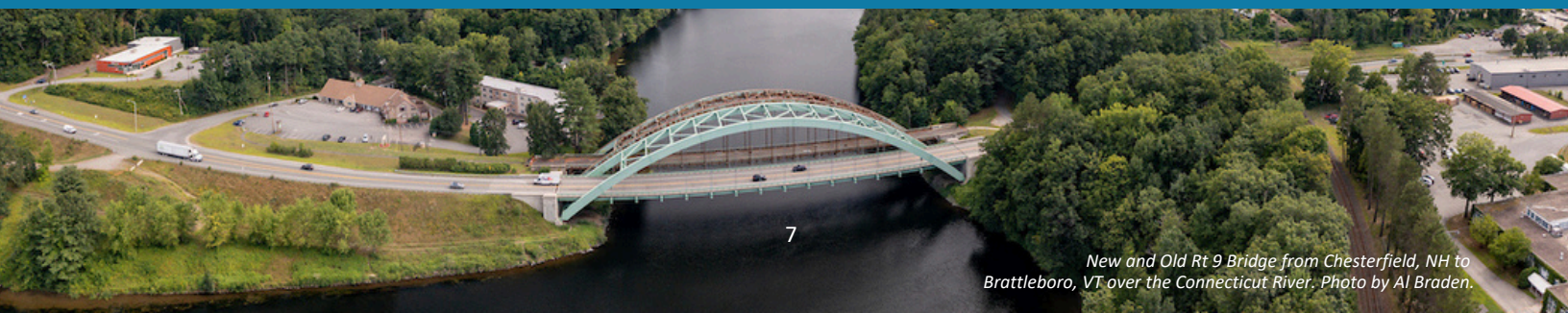
The following are the strategic objectives that will guide our organization in the coming years.

1 PROMOTE THE ADOPTION OF A SHARED AGENDA FOR PROTECTING AND RESTORING THE WATERSHED

2 IMPROVE THE ECOLOGICAL HEALTH OF RIPARIAN AND AQUATIC HABITATS

3 DELIVER CRC'S FULL MIX OF STRATEGIES ACROSS THE ENTIRETY OF THE WATERSHED

4 BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH





River herring in Connecticut.

GOAL #1: PROMOTE THE ADOPTION OF A SHARED AGENDA FOR PROTECTING AND RESTORING THE WATERSHED

Mobilizing resources at scale across the watershed will require a dual approach of deep listening and making common cause with a range of stakeholders. CRC will expand engagement with decision-makers—including federal, state, tribal, and local government officials—by fostering a shared vision for a healthy, living watershed. At the same time, we will connect with local communities and the public by recognizing the needs of the people we serve. We will continue to elevate the importance of the Connecticut River, its tributaries, and the ecological, economic, and community value they deliver.

Key Activities:

- **Elevate** the idea of a shared sense of place and belonging in the Connecticut River watershed, where all are welcome and have a role to play in protecting and restoring vibrant natural spaces.
- **Create and distribute** an authoritative State of the Watershed Report concentrating on riparian and aquatic areas (more details on page 12).
- **Advocate** for regulatory protections as well as dedicated federal and state funding focused on restoring water quality and supporting the entire Connecticut River watershed.
- **Participate** on the boards and steering committees of collaborative partnerships such as the Connecticut River Watershed Partnership to ensure strategic alignment among diverse groups.
- **Conduct community outreach** through local and virtual events, environmental conferences, town hall meetings, schools, and other gatherings.
- **Further amplify** voices of underrepresented communities not typically included in advocacy or programmatic conversations.
- **Remain agile** and responsive to political changes that are likely to impact CRC's mission and work in the Connecticut River watershed.
- **Develop** multimedia resources and educational content such as written guides, brochures, videos, and articles to support the goals in this strategic plan.
- **Leverage** CRC's 75th Anniversary year in 2027 to raise awareness of 75 years of advocacy, restoration, partnerships, and dedicated community leaders who came before us.

GOAL #2: IMPROVE THE ECOLOGICAL HEALTH OF THE RIPARIAN AND AQUATIC HABITATS OF THE WATERSHED



A diverse array of life underwater in the Connecticut River watershed. Top to bottom: Physid snail, sea lamprey, Eastern elliptio mussel, young smallmouth bass.

The Connecticut River watershed has abundant forests, rivers, wildlife, and spaces to enjoy the outdoors. However, the combined challenges of accumulating pollutants, outdated infrastructure, increased development, severe weather events, and threats to biodiversity mean there is work to do to ensure the future ecological health of the bioregion. Building upon CRC's prior restoration successes and staff expertise, we will continue to focus on improving the ecological condition of riparian and aquatic areas. These efforts seek to mitigate human impacts and to enhance life on, in, and near the river for people and nature.

Key Activities:

- **Expand restoration projects** including obsolete dam removals, culvert upgrades, and bank biostabilization, while improving in-stream habitat, riparian buffers, and floodplain forests to reduce the impacts of flooding and restore freshwater connectivity for fish and other aquatic organisms.
- **Advance stronger policies**, protections, and partnerships to support a healthy environment.
- **Engage with partners** working to promote restoration of aquatic and riparian habitats throughout the watershed.
- **Increase and/or refine capacity** for science-based programs including migratory fish research, aquatic invasive species, tree planting, and water quality monitoring.
- **Assess and monitor** the ecological health of the watershed.
- **Continue mobilizing volunteers** to remove tons of trash from our waterways through the Source to Sea Cleanup.
- **Reduce stormwater impacts** through Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) such as rain gardens, upgrades to storm drains, and other measures.
- **Through litigation, secure specific conditions** in the new federal licenses for five hydropower facilities that affect environmental quality, fish and wildlife populations, and river use for the next 30-50 years.

GOAL #3: DELIVER CRC'S FULL MIX OF STRATEGIES ACROSS THE ENTIRETY OF THE WATERSHED

In order to support a living watershed we must reconcile the gaps in availability of programmatic initiatives and the diversity of needs across different watershed communities. The regional distribution of CRC's programs has been historically uneven due to a range of circumstances including funding limitations, staff capacity challenges, inconsistent regulatory and permitting processes, and partnership priorities. We recognize the opportunity to deepen and better coordinate restoration, science, advocacy, and communications to develop greater impact across the watershed. Strengthening and expanding localized and equity-centered partnerships will play a key role in advancing this effort.

Key Activities:

- **Advocate** for all states in which we work (New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut) to have similarly robust water quality standards.
- **Expand** restoration work including dam removal, riparian buffer plantings, and stormwater solutions in the southern portion of the watershed, while increasing invasive species management and water quality monitoring in the northern watershed.
- **Ensure** a consistent use of best practices in delivering programmatic endeavors.
- **Foster and maintain** inclusive partnerships with community groups in all four states to identify and implement relevant programs, events, or activities.
- **Leverage** findings of the State of the Watershed Report to identify new opportunities for supporting clean water and healthy habitats throughout the entire Connecticut River watershed.

Photos from river restoration and community science projects in 2024-2025.



GOAL #4: BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH

The Connecticut River Conservancy has evolved rapidly in recent years, with the welcoming of a new Executive Director, expansion of the Board of Trustees, addition of highly experienced staff across all departments, and renovations to our 1813 headquarters building. These changes have improved both human and operational capacity, which help continue the trajectory of growth needed to achieve our desired impact in the watershed. Our people are CRC's greatest asset and what make this organization thrive. This strategic plan is intended to support the continued growth of CRC's people, places, and programs.

Key Activities:

- **Add depth and diversity** to our staff, including opportunities for training, facilitating information-sharing for cohesive organizational flow, and retaining commitment to equitable and inclusive processes.
- **Further develop the Board of Trustees** with expertise and engagement in the meaningful support of strategic plan goals.
- **Strengthen** a culture of philanthropy to advance our mission and the enthusiastic participation of CRC staff and Board throughout the year.
- **Double** the amount of unrestricted operational support and increase endowment funds to have greater flexibility in how resources are deployed to maximize organizational impact.
- **Improve internal systems** and processes, including decision-making, documentation, software, policies, and communications.
- **Increase capacity** in critical areas of growth and staff support, such as recruiting for key positions in Development and HR, and integrating effective methods for organizational sustainability and retention.



CRC's office and water quality lab in a historic building that was previously the First Franklin County Courthouse dating back to 1813.

- **Complete renovations** to CRC's HQ in Greenfield, MA—a historic building—including improvements to a large Community Room for gatherings, technology upgrades to support hybrid engagement, and amenities for accessibility and maximizing community use.
- **Offer** a comprehensive and competitive benefits package that supports the well-being, growth, and long-term commitment of our team.
- **Direct resources** toward improvements that advance our mission, enhance capacity, and demonstrate lasting impact.



NEW INITIATIVE

THE “STATE OF THE WATERSHED” REPORT

As a pillar of this strategy, CRC commits to the design, development, and launch of a "State of the Watershed" Report intended to help set shared conservation objectives for the Connecticut River watershed. Synthesizing and analyzing existing data, the report will use metrics, graphics, and other insights to share key findings about the watershed's health.

The State of the Watershed Report is intended to inform and inspire elected and appointed officials from local, state, tribal, and federal government; community leaders; other nonprofits with aligned missions and programs; and major donors and foundations. This public report can serve as an impetus for citizens to advocate for changes and improvements in the watershed.

Although we envision the State of the Watershed Report as a CRC-led initiative (and one that we intend to regularly revisit), we will actively seek partner participation throughout the watershed to incorporate their ideas, data, and areas of focus. Collaboration will result in a stronger, more comprehensive outcome and foster opportunities for synergy and greater impact.

The initial version of the report will concentrate on the riparian and aquatic areas of the watershed, with an assessment of current status to inform the need for future measurement. The report will attempt to prioritize threats, both across the watershed and state-by-state, and offer a set of recommendations for action. These recommendations will further inform goals 2 and 3 in this strategic plan and likely expose future issues for discussion and cooperation.

We are planning the publication of the State of the Watershed Report to align with CRC's 75th anniversary in 2027. This timeline will enable us to feature an exciting, substantive new resource as part of larger efforts to highlight the organization's contributions to the watershed. The report will then catalyze purpose-driven discussions to advance continued watershed priorities.

The Connecticut River in Turners Falls/Great Falls, MA. Flight support by LightHawk.

NEW INITIATIVE **STRATEGIC LITIGATION FOR A RESILIENT WATERSHED**

The Connecticut River Conservancy has always believed in the power of collaboration, community engagement, and science-based stewardship to protect and restore the watershed. But when these approaches fail to uphold the standards our river deserves, we recognize that stronger measures must be taken. That is why we must elevate our advocacy efforts to include strategic litigation—presenting our case in the courthouse to demand accountability and defend the river with the full force of the law.

Our watershed faces mounting challenges—from aging infrastructure and continued toxic pollution to climate-driven stressors and regulatory neglect. These issues cannot be addressed by goodwill alone, and we will not hesitate to pursue legal action when water quality standards are violated, ecosystems are threatened, or communities are put at risk.

The creation of the Connecticut River Legal Advocacy Fund is a crucial first step in this strategy. Initially intended to support a legal challenge involving the state-issued Water Quality Certifications for five hydropower facilities undergoing relicensing, this fund will help to offset attorneys and expert witness fees and expenses that are a necessary part of financing any legal actions CRC pursues.

This new chapter in our work is grounded in meticulous policy analysis, quantitative and qualitative evidence, and a deep respect for the laws that protect our shared environment.



We are investing in legal expertise, building coalitions with environmental partners, and ensuring that every case we take on is rooted in the law and the well-being of the watershed.

Our goal is not conflict, but accountability. CRC will stand firm in court to uphold the rights of the river and the communities that depend on it. We will lean on quality partnerships and participate in joint legal challenges with partners when warranted.



The Connecticut River is more than a body of water—it is a lifeline, a legacy, and a living system that deserves fierce representation. Through strategic litigation, we reaffirm our promise to safeguard the Connecticut River for generations to come.

NEW INITIATIVE 75 YEARS OF HONORING THE CONNECTICUT RIVER'S LEGACY & FUTURE

Celebrating 75 years of impact, CRC is preparing for a landmark anniversary in 2027. This will be an extraordinary milestone that honors commitment to protecting and restoring New England's longest river. This occasion is not only a time to reflect on CRC's legacy of environmental stewardship, but also a powerful opportunity to look ahead with renewed purpose and vision. As a key initiative in our strategic plan, the 75th anniversary will serve as a rallying call for partners, supporters, and river enthusiasts across the region.

CRC will proudly launch a transformative campaign fund—an ambitious investment in the future of the Connecticut River and its tributaries. This campaign will fuel vital restoration projects, support all the goals laid out in this strategic plan, and bolster the organization's growth. It's a bold step forward that reflects the scale of our vision and the urgency of our mission.

Throughout 2027, CRC will also host a cascade of events designed to engage, inspire, and celebrate. From community paddles to art installations, stream walks, educational talks, and much more, the anniversary year will be filled with opportunities for people up and down the river to learn, connect, and celebrate a shared commitment to a thriving Connecticut River watershed. The inaugural State of the Watershed report will also be released this year, and additional activities will commemorate historical achievements while setting a course for the next 75 years in service to clean water, healthy habitats, and resilient communities.





MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

Mission

The mission of the Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) is to restore and advocate for clean water, healthy habitats, and resilient communities to support a diverse and thriving watershed.

Vision

We envision a living watershed, from source to sea:
For fish, wildlife, and ecosystems full of life.
For swimming, fishing, and boating in clean water.
For resilient communities adapting to climate disruption.
For a sense of place and shared identity.
For all those who call the watershed home.

Values

Collaboration

By listening, learning, and developing inclusive relationships, we build partnerships for action at all levels.
We create opportunities and resources, offer meaningful support, and implement priority projects throughout the watershed with the communities who sustain and are sustained by our rivers.

Integrity

We act with transparency, accountability, and respect—honoring the trust placed in us by the communities, partners, and ecosystems we serve. Our decisions are grounded in science, guided by ethical practices, and focused on the long-term health of the Connecticut River and watershed.

Purpose

We are driven by a passion and deep commitment to clean water, healthy habitats, and resilient communities. Every action we take—whether through advocacy, restoration, or events—advances a mission to protect and restore the Connecticut River for the benefit of current and future generations.

Adaptability

We embrace change as essential to progress, responding to new challenges with creativity, flexibility, and resilience. By remaining open to innovation and learning from experience, we strengthen our ability to lead in a dynamic environmental and social landscape.

CRC'S PROGRAMS & PEOPLE

The Connecticut River Conservancy is fortunate to have a remarkable staff and Board of Trustees stewarding programmatic and operational work. Here is a listing of our programs:



ADVOCACY & POLICY



AQUATIC ECOLOGY



AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



DAM REMOVAL



RIVER RESTORATION



WATER QUALITY MONITORING

Below are some of the people behind the mission. You can find the complete and current list of the staff and Board of Trustees at ctriver.org/staff and ctriver.org/board respectively.



CRC Staff in Norwich, VT, in September, 2025.



Partial group of CRC's Board of Trustees in South Hadley, MA, in June, 2025.

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION FOR CLEANER RIVERS. VISIT [CTRIVER.ORG](https://ctriver.org).

Please consider making a contribution to support our work on the Connecticut River.

Visit ctriver.org/donate to make your gift.

You can also call or email to get in touch.



**Connecticut River
Conservancy**

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Events: ctriver.org/events

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Programs: ctriver.org/programs

Annual Report: ctriver.org/annual-report