

Representative Policy Board
Land Use Committee
South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
Meeting Location: Prospect Reservoir, 2 Cornwall Ave., Prospect, CT

AGENDA

Regular Meeting of Wednesday, July 10, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

1. Safety Moment
2. Approval of Minutes – June 12, 2024 regular meeting
3. Prospect Dam Update: Larry Marcik and Cody Savoy
4. Updates on land and RWA properties, including invasive species update
5. Other land items
6. Elect Committee Chair for 2024-2025
7. Next regular meeting - Wednesday, August 14, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.
8. Adjourn

*In the event of rain *ONLY*, the meeting will be held at 90 Sargent Drive, New Haven, Connecticut. To view meeting documents, please visit <http://tinyurl.com/tvu5cy9m>. For questions, contact the board office at 203-401-2515 or by email at jslubowski@rwater.com.

SAFETY MOMENT

AVOID POISON IVY

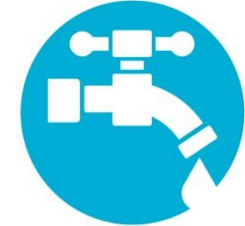
The stuff grows everywhere – in the yard, beside the highway and in city parks. And if botany's not your thing, follow the old adage: "Leaves of three, let it be." Most of us will develop some sort of rash from exposure to the oils in poison ivy and poison oak. The oil comes from the plant leaf and stem and can stay on your skin, clothes, shoes, work gloves – even your dog.

AVOID EXPOSURE TO POISON IVY BY:

- Wearing protective clothing while gardening or hiking in the woods
- Washing skin and clothes well with regular soap or laundry detergent
- Use cortisone cream to treat rashes or use oral antihistamines
- If experiencing more severe symptoms see a doctor



**Tap Into
Safety**



Regional Water Authority

Service – Teamwork – Accountability – Respect – Safety

Safety is a core company value at the Regional Water Authority .
It is our goal to reduce workplace injuries to zero.

 Regional Water Authority

Representative Policy Board
Land Use Committee
 South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
 June 12, 2024

Minutes

The regular meeting of the Land Use Committee (“Committee”) of the Representative Policy Board (“RPB”), of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water District (“RWA”), took place on Wednesday, June 12, 2024, at Lake Glen, 2040 Litchfield Turnpike, Woodbridge, Connecticut. Chair Betkoski presided.

Committee Members Present: P. Betkoski, P. DeSantis, B. Eitzer, C. Havrda, M. Horbal, M. Levine, G. Malloy, J. Oslander and J. Mowat Young

Authority: D. Borowy and C. LaMarr

Management: S. Lakshminarayanan and J. Triana

Chair Betkoski called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He reviewed the Safety Moment distributed to members.

On motion made by Mr. Malloy, and seconded by Mr. Eitzer, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of its May 9, 2024, special meeting.

Mr. Triana, the RWA’s Real Estate Manager, provided a historical update of Lake Glen, in Woodbridge, which included:

- Location, size, and accessibility
- Sperry Family settlement and wool processing operations
- Sperry falls and areas of interest

Update on *The Land We Need for the Water We Use Program* – Mr. Triana reported:

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

| | Current Year | Previous Year | Historical Average | Drought Status |
|--------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------|
| May 31 | 98% | 97% | 93% | None |

Rainfall (inches)

| | Current Year | Previous Year | Historical Average |
|----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|
| May 2024 | 5.44 | 2.84 | 3.93 |
| Fiscal YTD (6/1/23 – | 64.21 | 42.33 | 46.65 |

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- Hamden, Preisner property – A2 survey finalized. Inspected property. Closed on property.
- Cheshire, Bis/Bowman property – Phase II investigation found some contaminants above limits. Contacted sellers about addressing the issue before any closing. Reviewed draft survey.

- North Haven, Boy Scout camp – North Haven Land Trust closed on the property on May 15th.
- Cheshire – Corresponded with property owner of 16+/- acres.
- Seymour, Squantuck Rd. (SE 5) – Completed draft of disposition application for review.
- Seymour, Silver Mine Rd. (SE 9) – Corresponded with town staff about what acreage might be available for sale on this parcel.

Rental houses:

- Hamden, Skiff St. house – Discussed process of severing the lot for the house from the remaining acres with Murtha staff.

Forestry Update

- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) – 75% complete.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – The harvest was halted in early June, and the logger pulled his equipment off the property on June 13th. It is uncertain at this point whether the buyer will continue with the salvage operation even if a market is found - 15% complete.
- Guilford - Menunketuc High-Grade Rehabilitation Cut and Conifer Release (GU12/12A) – 20% complete.
 - Worked closely with RWA’s Invasive Species Management Technician to plan and implement the first field season of the Landscape Scale Restoration grant.
 - Interviewed four applicants for the Natural Resources Technician internships and worked with HR to offer positions to the two, best candidates.
 - Observed bat mist-netting on the night of May 14th with DEEP’s bat specialist.
 - Organized and participated in planting 250 additional chestnut hybrids inside the Seymour slash wall donated by The American Chestnut Foundation.
 - Released 400 beetles in Bethany (BE 23) as part of a multi-year effort to establish a population of beetles to act as a biocontrol on a hemlock wooly adelgid infestation.
 - NRA met with CAES staff at Prospect Reservoir and Lake Chamberlain to show where dead ash was still on the ground.

Recreation

- Installed two waterbars along trail south of Lake Chamberlain with help of Bethany Horsemen.
- Discussed Bethany Horsemen’s plans to put up signs at Lake Chamberlain.
- Cleared trails at Lake Chamberlain.
- The Water Wagon attended three events.
- Kids fishing derby had 21 attendees.
- Recycled plastic bait was created, packaged, and distributed.
- Applications for two bass tournaments at Lake Saltonstall were submitted to DEEP.

| | May | | April | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2024 | 2023 | 2024 | 2023 |
| Permit Holders | 4,571 | 4,972 | 4,972 | 5,021 |

Special Activity Permits

- West Haven Parks & Recreation – (Ms. Margaret Ruggiero and designees) – Fishing Derby, Maltby Lakes, 5/11/24.
- Stephen Trumbo, Ph.D. (Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, UConn Waterbury) - Continue research on the behavior and ecology of burying beetles. - Off Route 42 (near the Cheshire-Bethany-Prospect line) just east of traffic light at Rt.69-Rt. 42 juncture (5/15/2024-9/20/2024).
- Trinity Baptist Church (George Hayner)-to walk Lake Chamberlain with international student’s bible study group at Trinity Baptist Church (5/25/24). —Revised date due to weather issues in March.

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
 - Orange, 854 Greenway Rd. (OR 4) – Abutter called and was antagonistic. Sent letter giving them a deadline to remove the encroachment or enter into a license agreement.
 - Woodbridge, 888 Greenway Rd. (OR 4) – Executed license agreement for the encroaching lawn and fence.
 - West Haven, 20 Saw Mill Rd. (WH 8) – Abutter said he would move the dumpsters, but upon inspection, they were still on RWA property. Alerted abutter. He said they would be moved within the week.
 - Hamden, 445 Sherman Ave. (HA 17) – Met with property owner and went over the encroachment.
 - Hamden, 95 Booth Ter. (HA 22 & HA 22A) – Met with abutter about the property line. Discussed options. Exchanged maps.
 - Hamden, Hamden Hall (HA 9A) – Met with President of the school about the appraisals needed to determine the fee for the remainder of the lease.
 - Hamden, 14 Russell St. (HA 6B) – Corresponded with abutter about installing fence along the property line.
 - Branford, 91 Linden Ave. – Met with property owner and showed her location of the watermain. Said we would get back to her about any actions needed.
 - West Haven, Shingle Hill Tanks (WH 7) – Corresponded with Yale’s consultant about their proposed repeater at the tanks.
 - North Haven (NO 10) and North Branford (NB 14 & 14A) – Renewed hay agreements with the Page’s for another 5 years at these two sites.
- Invasive plants – Treated or documented invasive plant populations in Bethany, North Branford, East Haven and Branford. The new steam weeder was received and staff from multiple departments attended a training session with the new equipment. Met with CT Invasive Species Outreach Specialist to look at treatment areas in North Branford and Madison.

| | |
|--|----------|
| Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac) | 49 acres |
| Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH) | 21 acres |

- East Haven, Beach Ave. watermain – Consultant started submitting the plans to DEEP.

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June 12, 2024

- West Haven, Allings Crossing Rd. (WH 6) – UI staff shared plans for removing poles near our property and installing a new pole on the other side of the railroad tracks near the 20” watermain.
- New Haven, Yale Golf Course (NH 1) – Inspected new drainage system coming off the golf course to Authority property.
- Woodbridge, Sperry Rd. – Asked by abutter if we owned the gates that the town used to close off Sperry Rd. Replied that they were not ours and we never operated them. A new gate has been installed farther south on the road.
- East Haven, Rock Rd. SNET easement (EH 2)– Corresponded again with Frontier about their abandoned equipment at Rock Rd.
- Guilford, Lanes Pond Rd. access – Corresponded with surveyor working for new owner of the former Marchegian Club property about the legal status of Lanes Pond Rd.
- Deer hunt - The application deadline was in May. There are 182 hunters: Seymour/Ansonia has 8 hunters, Prospect has 20, Bethany has 20, and North Branford has 134. The contact database was cleaned and culled of non-responsive candidates.
- Boundaries – Checked and remarked boundaries in East Haven, Branford, North Branford and Woodbridge.
- Furnace Pond re-vegetation – Planned and executed planting of woody plants along a stretch of Furnace Pond shoreline that was disturbed.
- Drone inspections – ISMT performed drone missions at Armory St. Pump Station, West River Water Treatment Plant, and Derby Tank.

There were no other land items to report.

Chair Betkoski reported that his term as chair of the Land Use Committee is coming to an end on June 30th and a new chair will be elected at the next meeting in July. Interested candidates should contact him or the board office.

The next regular meeting is on Wednesday, July 10, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

At 6:32 p.m., on motion made by Mr. Malloy, and seconded by Mr. Oslander, the Committee voted to adjourn the meeting.

Peter Betkoski, Chairman

July 10, 2024
Land Use Committee Meeting

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

| | Current Year | Previous Year | Historical Average | Drought Status |
|---------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------|
| June 30 | 94% | 92% | 88% | None |

Rainfall (inches)

| | Current Year | Previous Year | Historical Average |
|----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|
| June 2024 | 3.94 | 2.48 | 3.71 |
| Fiscal YTD (6/1/24 – | 3.94 | 2.48 | 3.71 |

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- Hamden, Preisner property – Received packet from Murtha. Filed in vault.
- Cheshire, Bis/Bowman property – Seller supposedly removed the contamination source. We indicated preference to carve out the farm dump area due to contamination and possible wetlands violation. Discussed size of this with the seller.
- North Branford, Beech St. and Poms La. properties (NB 4) – NBLCT reported they got a review of the survey back from DEEP.

Rental houses:

- Woodbridge, 1029 Johnson Rd. – Owner stated that would schedule a meeting with us and their architect in July.
- Woodbridge, 2040 Litchfield Tpk. – Corresponded with owner about replacing rear chimney.

Forestry Update

- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) – 75% complete.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – The harvest was halted in early June, and the logger pulled his equipment off the property on June 13th. It is uncertain at this point whether the buyer will continue with the salvage operation even if a market is found - 15% complete.
- Guilford - Menunketuc High-Grade Rehabilitation Cut and Conifer Release (GU12/12A) – 20% complete.
 - Planned and implemented the first field season of the Landscape Scale Restoration grant.
 - Worked with vendor and Field Operations to manage vegetation at the Gaillard Christmas tree farm.
 - Cleared black birch from within new white oak sapling release plots at BE13.
 - Scouted potential witch hazel harvesting locations in advance of upcoming field meeting with a former witch hazel harvester.

Recreation

- CT Trails Day hike at Chamberlain had 12 participants.
- Bass tournament at Lake Saltonstall had 33 participants.
- Butterfly walk at Lake Saltonstall had 20 participants.
- Butterfly walk at Lake Gaillard had 35 participants.
- Put up new large sign at entrance to Lake Saltonstall.
- Discussed additional signage with Bethany Horsemen to be placed at Lake Chamberlain.
- Cleared trails at Lake Chamberlain.
- The Water Wagon attended five events in June.

| | June | | May | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2024 | 2023 | 2024 | 2023 |
| Permit Holders | 4,989 | 4,980 | 4,571 | 4,972 |

Special Activity Permits

- Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station –(Dr. Elisabeth Ward) conduct research on invasive plants and regenerating ash trees by monitoring plots in areas where ash has been affected by Emerald Ash Borer. In ash stand along Fram River at the northern end of Lake Gaillard (41.3798800, -72.7455400) and Lake Chamberlain (41.404111, -72.9910951) (6-3-2024 – 6/3/2025).
- Bimble's Bluff 50K (Russell Hammond) - Annual 50K foot race - Use of trails through Genesee Preserve north of Guilford (10/20/2024)
- Native Plant Trust (formerly New England Wild Flower Society) – (Michael Piantedosi, Conservation Director) – survey and seed collection of CT endangered plant species with DEEP approval species name Carex typhina, Totoket Mountain Guilford (6/20/24-12/31/24)

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
 - Orange, 854 Greenway Rd. (OR 4) – Abutter signed license agreement.
 - Seymour, 8 Jefferson St. (SE 1) – Notified that the abutting property was sold. Sent letter to new owner about encroachment (Mindlin).
 - Hamden, 95 Booth Ter. (HA 22 & HA 22A) – Surveyor set two pins along the line.
 - Hamden, Hamden Hall (HA 9A) – Spoke to Amodio about his initial impressions of the appraisal.
 - Hamden, 14 Russell St. (HA 6B) – Received sign agreement from the abutter.
 - Branford, 91 Linden Ave. – Discussed the matter of encroachments over water mains and within water main easements. Set up meeting to discuss with other RWA staff.
 - West Haven, Shingle Hill Tanks (WH 7) – Discussed plans with Engineering staff. We are still waiting for Yale’s consultant to provide a structural analysis of the roof of the tank.
- Invasive plants – Treated or documented invasive plant populations in East Haven and Branford.

| | |
|--|----------|
| Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac) | 55 acres |
| Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH) | 4 acres |

- Deer hunt – Mailed out acceptance letters to hunters.
- East Haven, Beach Ave. watermain – Consultant continued submitting the plans to DEEP. Corresponded with Beach Ave. property owners.
- West Haven, Allings Crossing Rd. (WH 6) – Continued corresponding with UI/Avangrid staff about old and new poles by the 20” water main.
- Yale Divinity School – Met with YDS staff to talk about land conservation as part of their Living Building Certification.
- Orange, Baldwin Rd. utility pole – A UI/Avangrid vendor requested to put a guy wire and anchor on our property. Attempted to get more information from UI/Avangrid staff directly.
- Durham, Madison Rd. – Received letter and photos from Vassel about activity on his neighbor’s property. Forwarded to Environmental Planning staff.
- Drone inspections – Flew drone for American chestnut flower search. Flew drone at Page’s Millpond to document water chestnut population.

- Personnel – Joshua Tracey was promoted to Forester II. Juliette Doyle and Brenda Leard started in the positions of Natural Resources Specialists.

Attachments

- June 10, 2024 - Once called Nantucket fever, this nasty tick-borne illness is on the rise – WNPR
- June 11, 2024 - Dam! It's Time To Tend To Whitney Dam – New Haven Independent
- June 26, 2024 - Over GOP objections, Senate passes Aquarion measure – CT Mirror
- June 26, 2024 - Connecticut's stone walls have ties to the last ice age and 18th-century farmers. Professional 'wallwatcher' shares history – New Haven Register
- June 12, 2024 - Opinion: To protect Connecticut's forests, we must understand — and help — land – CT Mirror

Upcoming Agenda Items

August 2024 - ???

Once called Nantucket fever, this nasty tick-borne illness is on the rise

By Allison Aubrey - June 10, 2024 - WNPR

Micheline LeBlanc knew something was up in the summer of 2022. She felt achy and fatigued. “Headaches were a big problem. Night sweats were dramatic,” LeBlanc says.

When she developed throbbing pain in her legs and shortness of breath, her husband took her to the hospital, where she was diagnosed with Lyme disease.

They sent her home with antibiotics. But a few days later her doctor called to tell her a blood test showed she actually had a different tick-borne illness – babesiosis.

The first case of babesiosis in the U.S. was identified on Nantucket Island in 1969. The tick-borne parasitic disease is endemic in New England, and as deer ticks expand their range it’s now found from Virginia to Maine as well as the upper Midwest, from Michigan to Minnesota. The CDC points to a significant increase in incidence over the last decade.

Babesiosis can be treated with drugs, typically a seven to 10 days course of an antibiotic, azithromycin combined with atovaquone, which are both prescription medications. But, sometimes, this isn’t enough to kill off the parasite, and there’s a risk of relapse.

Now, researchers are launching a randomized, controlled clinical trial, slated to begin this month, to test whether the anti-malaria drug — tafenoquine — in combination with the other drugs already used, can speed up recovery and clear the parasite from patients’ bodies faster.

Most younger people who get infected after a tick bite have only mild illness. “A fever that can take a couple of days to a week or two to go away,” says Linden Hu, an infectious disease doctor at Tufts University. Some people have no symptoms. But some people over 50 as well as those with compromised immune systems can become very ill and end up in the hospital.

That’s what happened to LeBlanc, “It was a roller coaster ride,” she says.

LeBlanc lives in New Hampshire, where ticks are common. She would feel better for a few weeks, but then her symptoms would return. She had headaches and fatigue. LeBlanc had her spleen removed in her 20s after an infection and her immune system was compromised from a prior illness which put her at high risk.

“These patients can have many relapses, lasting months or sometimes even years,” explains Dr. Peter Krause, an infectious disease physician and babesiosis expert at the Yale School of Public Health. And a small percentage die.

A small case study published last month provides some initial evidence that tafenoquine is beneficial for these patients. The study included five people including LeBlanc, 72.

When doctors added tafenoquine to these patients’ regimen, they got better.

“It worked,” Dr. Krause says. “They no longer had symptoms and they no longer had the organism in their blood.”

When LeBlanc went to the hospital for testing after taking the drug, the doctors began to document a significant decline in the parasite within a few weeks. “It went down and down, and then it was not even found in my system,” she says. And she started to feel much better, “I was elated,” LeBlanc says.

Now she’s back doing all the things she couldn’t do while she was sick, such as dancing and volunteering. “It’s just great,” LeBlanc says.

Researchers plan to enroll hospitalized patients this summer who are admitted with babesiosis, explains Edouard Vannier of Tufts Medical Center, one of the trial sites. “Now the tick season has started we are going to see patients coming to the hospital,” Vannier says.

He says they will not include patients with mild disease because the existing drug regimen of azithromycin combined with atovaquone already does a good job. He says enrollment should be “up and running very shortly.”

Currently tafenoquine is approved by the FDA for malaria treatment and prevention. For now, doctors are using the drug ‘off-label’ in babesiosis patients, but the ongoing research could pave the way for FDA expanded approval of the drug for the tick-borne disease. “That’s our goal,” says Dr. Geoff Dow, CEO of 60 Degrees Pharma.

Given the rise of babesiosis, there’s also more testing for the disease. It can be diagnosed with a blood test. The FDA recommends blood donation screening for the parasite that causes babesiosis in 15 states.

LeBlanc says she’s now very careful now to avoid tick bites. The CDC advises people to protect themselves by walking on trails, using repellent, wearing long-sleeve pants and shirts when outdoors, especially in wooded areas and showering soon after being outdoors. And be especially careful in spring, summer and fall when ticks are most active.

Dam! It's Time To Tend To Whitney Dam

New Haven Independent - Brian Slattery | Jun 11, 2024

The Lake Whitney Dam on the border of New Haven and Hamden has been going strong since 1860, when Eli Whitney and the city built it. But it's in need of rehabilitation — a major construction project — to prepare it for the climate challenges of the next century and beyond. That can be done while also keeping an eye on the community and environmental concerns of the present.

That was the message from Lawrence Marcik, Regional Water Authority (RWA) capital program lead and dam engineer who has been working on it for “most of my career,” and Sunder Lakshminarayanan, vice president of engineering and environmental services, at a meeting Monday morning attended by around 20 community members.

The online meeting offered the RWA's latest update on its progress to rehabilitate the Lake Whitney Dam, a project that has been years in the making.

The rehabilitation project's goals are to improve the dam's structural stability generally, better control seepage (which happens “with all dams,” Marcik said), and improve the dam's ability to withstand the “probable maximum flood,” which Marcik estimated at about a foot of rain a day for three days. All of this, the team emphasized, is to be done while also attending to environmental and community concerns, including historic conservation and protection.

The construction work itself entails a few challenges. The Mill River's water flow still needs to be managed. The nearby water treatment plant needs to receive enough water to stay operational. Existing utilities need to be protected. And the project's plans must pass through several authorities — the city of New Haven, town of Hamden, state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers — before construction can begin.

“It's time for the dam to be upgraded” to meet the needs of “the next 160 years,” Marcik said, and “given climate change,” its capacity needs to be improved.

Another in-person meeting will be held on Thursday, June 13, at 6 p.m. (RSVP at whitneydam@rwater.com). The next meeting after that will be held in the early fall, offering further detail on the steps the RWA will take in this complex project, from building a temporary dam upstream at Davis Street to doing construction behind the existing dam at the border of New Haven and Hamden.

The Lake Whitney Dam is one part of the larger scope of the RWA's work. Its 270 employees oversee 140 square miles of watershed, treating 45 million gallons of water per day for 430,000 customers in 15 towns. The water treatment plant on Whitney Avenue is one of 11 plants, and the Lake Whitney Dam one of over 31 dams, the RWA owns and runs. The Lake Whitney Dam is the oldest of them. It was completed in 1860, “before Abraham Lincoln became president,” said Marcik.

The dam was built under an agreement between entrepreneur Eli Whitney, a contractor (W.C. McCullen and Son), and the New Haven Water Company, predecessor to the RWA. Thanks to the dam, Whitney got hydropower to run his arms factory (just in time for the Civil War) and the city of New Haven got a source for potable water and fire protection.

The dam is “largely unchanged” since 1860, Marcik said, though it has been modified. Six years after it was finished, Whitney and the city added an additional four feet to the structure to increase capacity. In 1917 the dam was raised again, and the spillway — where the water flows over the dam — elongated to its present length of 250 feet.

The second half of the 20th century saw the installation of intake towers, underground pipes, and a pressure release valve to account for large storms. The high water mark for such storms (so far) was a flood in June 1982, after almost 12 inches of rain fell over three days. The Lake Whitney Dam weathered that storm despite having 27 to 29 inches of water spilling over it at the flood's height. In hindsight, the flood lingers as indicating what the dam should be able to withstand.

At some point, RWA engineers are expecting more rain — much more than what fell in the 1982 flood.

Lakshminarayanan said that the design process for the project is about 45 percent complete. After considering alternatives, the RWA has settled on the general plan of building a temporary dam at Davis Street, which crosses Lake Whitney upstream from the reservoir, to maintain the water in the lake at its current level upstream. The water level behind the dam will then be lowered to a level of 10 feet to allow for construction to happen; Marcik estimated that the lake between the two dams will, for a time, be a stream.

In the Q&A period that followed, questions from community members arose about the design of the dam when it's finished and the state of the lake during construction, especially its potential as a breeding ground for mosquitoes in the mud flats the lowered water level will reveal. Marcik assured participants that environmental concerns were foremost. Fish and other wildlife would be transported to the lake upstream of the temporary dam as the water level was lowered.

The details of the design have also not been worked out yet, but “the path that we’re taking is the one that preserves the façade of the dam,” Marcik said. The original stone wall, save for a notch cut in it, will remain as it is. “The actual face of the dam and the spillway will not be disrupted or touched,” he said. “All the construction is on the upstream side.”

Actual construction likely will not start for a year and a half, due to the necessity of getting permits for the work, especially from the Army Corps of Engineers. Once construction is allowed, the project will likely take years to complete.

“We are in the mode of fine-tuning the design,” Lakshminarayanan said. As they run their plans by local, state, and federal agencies, “all of those entities will give input. It’s going to be a very holistic approach.” But “we want to make sure we listen to the concerns of the community,” and community members’ concerns are issues “we’ll start getting into the weeds about” as the design proceeds.

“There will be a lot more community meetings,” he said. “We would like to keep this communication a two-way street.”

Marcik echoed his colleague, encouraging community members to reach out to him. “It’s my pet project, so I’ll be here for the end of it,” he said.

Over GOP objections, Senate passes Aquarion measure

CT Mirror – June 26, 2024

The state Senate Democratic majority crushed Republican efforts Wednesday to slow passage of an unvetted proposal allowing a New Haven-based public water authority to acquire one of the nation’s largest investor-owned water companies, Aquarion Water Company.

On a 20-9 party line vote, the Senate passed a 137-page omnibus bill in a special session originally envisioned primarily as a means to rectify a motor vehicle taxing problem left over from the regular session but eventually included an Aquarion issue that came as an 11th-hour surprise.

The House is to vote on the bill Thursday.

The largest section of the bill would enable the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority to bid for Aquarion and, if successful, create an Aquarion Water Authority that would oversee and set rates for a supplier of water to nearly 60 of Connecticut’s 169 cities and towns.

“This stinks. It might be the right policy. I just don’t know yet,” said Sen. Ryan Fazio, R-Greenwich. “We’ve had two days to analyze 50 pages of a policy change, which have an economic effect of billions of dollars without any sort of substantial input from experts, from the agencies, from the regulators.”

The Connecticut Mirror reported Friday that Aquarion would be an element of the special session call that Gov. Ned Lamont would issue the next day, a surprise to lawmakers. The authority’s interest in purchasing Aquarion had not been previously reported.

Senate President Pro Tem Martin M. Looney, D-New Haven, said the action was timely, since Eversource Energy, which purchased Aquarion in 2017, could sell the subsidiary before the General Assembly’s next regular session in January 2025.

He and Sen. John Fonfara, D-Hartford, who explained the bill, noted that it simply allowed a bid and that regulators would have final say over a sale.

But the Regional Water Authority operates outside the jurisdiction of state regulators, and lawmakers questioned what a purchase could mean to the finances of the water authority or the rates of a combined RWA-Aquarion system.

Fazio, the ranking Republican on the legislative committee that would have reviewed the legislation if proposed in regular session, said data at the Office of Consumer Counsel showed that the Aquarion’s regulated rates were lower than those of the RWA.

“It was not given any public vetting, any major public debate or analysis,” Fazio said. “And so I submit to you that no one knows what the consequences of what we’re voting on will be.”

Senate Minority Leader Stephen Harding Jr., R-Brookfield, and his staff approached Looney and his staff in the Senate chamber before the session opened to ask, at the least, for a separate vote on the Aquarion provision as a standalone bill.

Democrats refused, and they later defeated a motion to divide the bill and an amendment that would have struck the provision from the omnibus measure.

"I'm very happy that I'm going to support this amendment so that I can make it clear to my constituents that I don't want my fingerprints on this thing at all. I do not want to be within 1,000 miles of this bit of legislation because I think this is a bad, bad set of terms to make a huge change in the way these consumers are going to purchase their water," said Sen. Rob Sampson, R-Wolcott.

Democrats largely ignored the Republican objections in debate. There was broad support for other portions of the bill.

Without the car tax fix, motor vehicles could have seen a tax increase in October. The fix would continue to classify commercial vehicles as motor vehicles, and it would clarify that current law allows municipalities to establish mill rates on motor vehicles that are lower than mill rates on real property and personal property.

Another component of the bill lays out new rules and timelines for the State Historic Preservation Office's evaluation of state-funded redevelopment projects. SHPO sits within the Department of Economic and Community Development but currently has very little oversight, leaders of the Legislature's Commerce Committee said.

Under the new law, SHPO would have just 30 days to make an initial determination of a project's impact on "historic structures and landmarks" and, if possible, propose a "feasible alternative" the developer could pursue to avoid the impact. If there's no alternative, SHPO would have to propose a mitigation plan within the next 15 days.

All of SHPO's determinations would need to be provided to the developer in writing, and it would have to make public all its determinations on an annual basis. Developers would also have the option, within 15 days, to request the DECD commissioner's review of any SHPO determination — and the commissioner would have 30 days to do so.

Commerce Committee Co-Chair Sen. Joan Hartley, D-Waterbury, said the bill — which overwhelmingly passed the committee this session but never came up for a vote in the House — was developed after committee members conducted a "listening tour" and heard constituents criticize the SHPO's opaque process and inconsistent timelines. Evaluations stagnated, Hartley said, approvals were unexpectedly reversed, and in some cases that led developers to back out, leaving the sites — some among the most blighted urban properties in the state — no better off.

"We're now going to have some sunlight on it," Hartley said. "They're going to have to report on it. There's a definitive calendar."

The bill also includes a special request of the governor and the Department of Economic and Community Development aimed at attracting certain kinds of financial services companies to the state that serve corporate customers.

These banks don't offer personal banking for everyday retail clients, and thus are not insured by the FDIC; in Connecticut statute, they're referred to as "uninsured banks." That could now change. Across 40 pages of the special session bill, every instance of the term "uninsured bank" in state law was changed to "innovation bank."

"This is timely is because a lot of the FinTech — and particularly the payment processing — industry would qualify under this charter," said Rep. Jason Doucette, D-Manchester, the Banking Committee co-chair. "So it's been part of an effort by the governor and the DECD to recruit these types of companies to Connecticut."

The bill also reverses a provision inserted in a fiscal bill at the end of the regular session in May that would have allowed construction management companies to bid on work in school projects for which they had overall responsibility.

A Republican amendment to create a working group examining school construction bidding was rejected.

Connecticut's stone walls have ties to the last ice age and 18th-century farmers. Professional 'wallwatcher' shares history.

New Haven Register - Joseph Tucci - June 26, 2024

One by one, early New England farmers stacked the rocks they unearthed from tending to the land together. Hundreds of years later, many of the stone walls they created remain abandoned and scattered throughout Connecticut.

The history of New England's stone walls spans centuries. Most of the walls were built by European settlers between 1750 and 1850 and some were also built during the early 1600s, according to University of Connecticut Department of Earth Sciences Professor Robert Thorson. While New England fields were popular places for early farmers to plant crops because of their rich nutrients, the soils were often filled with rocks, which they viewed as annoyances. The farmers and their draft animals (i.e. horses) hauled away stones they found in the fields, soils and pastures they used for agriculture. Looking for a way to use the numerous stones they acquired, farmers often stacked them together and used the newly formed walls to set boundaries on their land.

"It's not like it's terrible land, or rock soil or anything; it's just that the stone is in the way. You get rid of it the way you get rid of leaves in the fall," Thorson said.

Thorson explained that, while some might think that the stone walls were meticulously created, he inferred from his research that it is likely that farmers were just putting together what they found without much thought because of how the stones are randomly assorted. However, during the Gilded Age of the 19th century, wealthy individuals in New England suburbs would pay stone masons to create more elaborately planned walls.

"If you look along most of these older walls, they're higgledy-piggledy; they look different every 20 feet. Sometimes there's a little patch of beautifully laid stuff and then nothing and sometimes it's just a heap," Thorson said.

Thorson's love of stone walls began with a college course he took to fill a requirement, but it made him "open his eyes." Now he enjoys venturing across the natural landscape of New England, with his phone turned off, to see what he can find, a practice he calls "wallwatching."

He encourages his students at UConn to do the same and see how stones connect to the rest of the ecosystem. He has published work on the topic, including "Stone by Stone: The Magnificent History in New England's Stone Walls" in 2004 and the article "How Stone Walls Became a Signature Landform of New England" in the Smithsonian Magazine in 2023.

"You can be outdoors, you can have binoculars, you can go look at stuff and you can do the same sort of thing that you do with birdwatching, but call it wallwatching," Thorson said. "Every class I teach, I have this (saying): 'No rocks. No ecosystems. No culture.' ... The message is that most people are obsessed with human culture, humanities, politicians and economies and what we don't give a lot of thought to is ecosystems."

Many of the farms that were guarded by stone were abandoned in the 1880s as industrial cities grew and farming became less profitable, the Stone Wall Initiative, an online resource created by Thorson, reported. The buildings of the abandoned farms decayed away and nature slowly reclaimed the areas that were once occupied by farmers. However, the walls remain standing, often encased in moss, and can still be found across Connecticut.

While stone walls in New England have stood for centuries, the individual stones that they are made of have existed for far longer than that. Between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago, the Laurentide ice sheet, a structure from the last ice age that covered much of the northern United States and Canada, melted away, fracturing bedrock, bringing it to the surface and distributing it all over New England, Thorson explained. New England is also filled with igneous and metamorphic rocks that were created millions of years ago from materials like mud, sand and lava as the Appalachian Mountains were formed through heat and pressure.

"When the glacier is coming over that material, over that topography, it's a lot like coming over a washboard," Thorson said.

In 1939, mining engineer Oliver Bowles estimated that there were more than 259,000 miles of stone walls throughout the northern eastern section of the United States, most of which were in New England. However, many of those were destroyed or ground away to be used for other purposes. During the 1900s in Stamford, the city brought in rock crushers to grind some of the old stone walls into rubble, which was used to create some of Stamford's streets, including Hope Street, Crescent Street and Courtland Avenue, Glenbrook, Newfield Avenue, Belltown Road and Oaklawn Road, according to the New England Historical Society.

Thorson calls the walls a "defining human ecological landform" and advocates for them to be left in place. To this end, he developed a naming and classification system for them that was published in "Historical Archaeology." He aims for the classification to be used to help identify more stone walls across the state and be used in legislation to protect them. The criteria include factors like material, granularity, elongation, continuity and height.

"You have to come up with a definition of a wall. And then the lawyers would go up and they'd say, yes it meets the definition or it doesn't," Thorson said.

Thorson isn't the only one working to preserve the Nutmeg State's stone. During a January 2023 session of the Connecticut legislature, a bill was introduced that would make it a Class D Misdemeanor to steal stones from a stone wall or intentionally dismantle a stone wall without permission. The bill passed the Connecticut House; however, it was tabled during a May 19, 2023 Senate session.

Aside from historical and aesthetic purposes, Thorson said that it is important to preserve the walls for the environment. They serve as habitats for all kinds of life including milksnakes, raccoons, badgers, mice, lichens (fungi mixed with algae) and moss.

"It's busy being a habitat; let it be that. Don't strip that down and bring it to the center of Fairfield County and build some patio," Thorson said.

Stone walls continue to be popular in modern-day Connecticut. Owner of Thomaston-based Alby's Masonry Construction, Alby Cekici, said new walls are often built at high-end houses in the rural areas of Fairfield and Litchfield Counties. He said it's popular for customers to request a stone wall around the front of the house, instead of the whole property. The business also sees requests to restore the historic stone walls on properties.

However, Cekici also noted that his business, which began in 2004, isn't seeing as many requests to build stone walls as it did 10 years ago due to rising costs and cheaper alternatives like interlocking walls made from bricks. He added that newer stone walls use stone and cement and can often run between \$50 and \$80 per square foot. Cekici added that most of the stone still comes from local farmers digging it up in their fields, similar to the original walls; his business buys the stones for around \$100 a ton.

"Everywhere there were farms, they used them to divide their property lines and they got their stones from the plowed fields. So the same thing kind of happens nowadays. ... Every year, when (farmers) turn their fields, stones come up, they clean them off and sell them to us," Cekici said.

Opinion: To protect Connecticut's forests, we must understand — and help — land

Sharon J. Lynch - June 12, 2024 – CT Mirror

Do you think about how fortunate we are to live in a state that is so beautifully green?

About 60% of Connecticut's 3.1 million acres is forested. Most of this state is rated as "Great" by NatureQuant, an organization that maps the U.S. for green quality of life and health. (See maps here.) Although Connecticut's six major urban areas need serious green improvement, it is also true that *everyone* who lives in, or visits, Connecticut benefits from being surrounded by forested land that allows us to breathe air that is cleansed by trees and plants, and drink water filtered through forest soils.

We do not need to travel far to find a wetlands, river, or pond that nurtures shorebirds, amphibians, and wildlife. We can enjoy a walk in the woods on the fringes of suburban or on rural natural land or find a remote area for a challenging hike.

Do not take it for granted, however.

Connecticut needs a plan to ensure that our green resources remain unspoiled and to protect a substantial proportion of untouched wild land and water for healthy wildlife habitats. There is increasing competition to find land suitable for housing, and pressures for commercial and municipal entities to buy forested land for alternative energy use. There are also land demands for AI tech and goods distribution centers with large bankrolls behind them and the promise of jobs. Stiff competition for green space.

How will we protect our forests and watersheds?

The issue is land: Who owns Connecticut forests? Surprisingly, there is very little federal protected land — think national parks, forests, or wildlife recreation areas. Connecticut has the least designated federal land of any of the 50 states, just .3%. In contrast, nationally, the federal government owns about 27% of the land.

Most of Connecticut's forests are privately owned. The amount of forest land has held mostly steady over the four decades as forest removal has been balanced by agricultural land gradually reverting to productive young and middle-aged forests. But there has been loss of "core" forests, lands of five hundred acres or more that are truly wild and protected by their location far from roads and development. Core forests connect wildlife habitats and migration paths, allowing native species to quietly thrive. In addition, these core forests help Connecticut native plants flourish, and sustain ancient seed banks and microfauna habitats crucial to healthy and diverse ecosystems—and agriculture.

In 2019, the Connecticut legislature created a statute that would conserve 21% of the state's open land for future generations. The goal was for 10% of the land to be designated state land and managed by the state. The other 11% would be protected by Connecticut's conservation partners, which include conservation organizations like land trusts, municipalities, and water companies. Land trusts hold a large portion of the acreage. Conservation partners have been steadily adding land and nearly reached the 11% portion of the goal. The state, however, has lagged. At the current rate of acquisition, it would take 58 years for the state to acquire enough land to reach its goal.

Not enough money has been allocated for state-managed lands.

Land trusts figure importantly, crucially, in Connecticut for open space conservation. Unlike many other states whose public lands are overseen by federal or state entities, Connecticut leans more heavily on land trusts to acquire and steward open space, or "land in fee." Connecticut has the third highest number of land trusts in the nation, after California and Massachusetts.

The 120-plus Connecticut land trusts are loosely affiliated with one another through voluntary membership in organizations like Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) and the Land Trust Alliance (LTA). CLCC guides land trusts in their work, helps facilitate acquisitions, and coordinates with state environmental agencies. The LTA is a national

group that can accredit land trusts seeking recognition for the quality of their work. Accreditation also opens doors for trusts to obtain more grant money from the state or nonprofits, enabling the acquisition of larger tracts of land such as core forest land.

People (like me) who have moved to Connecticut recently, are surprised to learn that a large portion of Connecticut's protected forestland is stewarded by land trusts, rather than by federal or state entities. In other states, it is easy to rely on federal or state land management systems, and not think much about this at all.

On the other hand, people who have lived in Connecticut for a long time, even generations, may take land trusts for granted. They appreciate a nearby preserve where they can walk their dog, or the marshland where they view migrating waterfowl. But unless directly involved, it is easy to underestimate the importance of land trusts, or the scope of the work done by their local volunteers who maintain green places.

We are all neighbors to one or more of Connecticut's 120 land trusts.

We can identify local land trusts, learn about the properties that they conserve, and how they are organized. (See this to find local land trusts.) As good neighbors, we can support trusts through donations, small or large. A local municipality may want to donate land, or designate funds to purchase and protect a parcel of land in collaboration with a trust. If this is a good idea, then it needs citizen support. Volunteers work on conserved lands to maintain trails, post signs, or keep invasive species at bay. Myriad other ways to help in the land trust office or online can present themselves. Sometimes, garden clubs, scouts, or rotary clubs pitch in to fund a trust project, or to simply work alongside land trust volunteers to get a job done.

Keeping our green, healthy, and thriving Connecticut open spaces nurtured and protected requires that everyone understand land trusts and their contributions a little better. It will help to protect the health of our forested environment and our quality of life.