

Connecticut River Projects and Collaborations

Because of the Connecticut River's critical importance to the region and New England, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) has been working with numerous partners for more than 30 years to restore and protect the river and its watershed. Following are descriptions of some of the more recent projects and collaborations undertaken by PVPC:

- Connecticut River Clean Up Committee: To prioritize and eliminate combined sewer overflow (CSO) locations along the Connecticut River, PVPC has been managing an intergovernmental compact of five communities (Ludlow, South Hadley, Springfield, Chicopee, Holyoke) for the past 15 years. For this regional effort to clean up the Connecticut River, PVPC has secured more than \$20 million in federal and state grants and local funding. CSO projects completed or presently underway have reduced the annual volume of untreated CSO discharge into the Connecticut River from 1.6 billion gallons per year to 0.7 billion gallons per year, a more than 50 percent reduction. (*MassDEP Status Summary 6/24/11*)
- Connecticut River Stormwater Committee: To promote education and outreach about stormwater impacts on the Connecticut River, PVPC manages an intergovernmental compact of 12 municipalities. In this effort, PVPC has collaborated with the Massachusetts Bay Estuary Association to bring both the *Connecticut River Think Blue* and *Greenscapes* educational campaigns to its programming in the Pioneer Valley. *Think Blue Massachusetts* (www.ThinkBlueMA.org) has used a variety of strategies to challenge individual behaviors that negatively impact the health of the Connecticut River and *Greenscapes* (www.Greenscapes.org) provides clear instruction and access to resources and information about practices that reduce lawncare impacts on water resources and human and environmental health.
- Sustainable Communities Initiative: As one of only 45 regions nationwide to receive a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Hartford/Springfield bi-state region will roll out an ambitious work plan over the next three years to position itself as a leader in sustainable community development. The \$4.2 million award will be used to create a foundation of opportunity—in housing, education, transportation, employment, nutrition, and community resources. As part of this effort, PVPC is charged with developing and initiating implementation of a regional sustainability plan that includes components on transportation, climate action, food security, housing, land use, environment, and green infrastructure. The green infrastructure plan will promote and identify locations for adaptive reuse of impervious surfaces and introduction of absorptive green spaces such as green streets and alleys and facilitate decreasing reliance on gray infrastructure (steel and concrete for conveyance, storage, and treatment). Many strategies within all of these plans will be cross cutting. For example, the retrofitting of a street right of way with green infrastructure such as a stormwater infiltration area could coincide with climate change and transportation objectives as well.
- Connecticut River Targeted Watershed Initiative: PVPC is completing a \$1.4 million U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Targeted Watershed Initiatives project on the Connecticut River with partner organizations located in three states, including the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, University of Massachusetts Water Resources Research Center, and US Geological Survey. Project work includes: water quality monitoring all

along the Connecticut River in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts; stabilization of 1,725 linear feet of eroding river bank in Gill, Massachusetts, with “large woody debris” design features and an emergent aquatic shelf (or beach); design and construction of a green roof at the Jones Ferry River Access Center in Holyoke; installation of agricultural stormwater best management practices at the University of Massachusetts Horse Farm in Amherst; and the development of a model stormwater utility program in Westfield.

- Lower Connecticut River Joint Commission in Massachusetts and Connecticut: Through a \$150,000 grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), PVPC has been leading an effort to define bi-state goals for the Connecticut River and establish a bi-state commission that will help municipalities and organizations throughout the watershed implement priorities to improve water quality and recreational access. PVPC’s project partners include the Capitol Region Council of Governments in Hartford, the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency, and Franklin Regional Council of Governments in Massachusetts. To date, PVPC and its project partners have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to form a bi-state partnership for purposes of collaborating more effectively to improve the environment, water quality, recreation and public access on the Connecticut River. With NOAA funding, partners have also: conducted a region-wide stakeholder survey to help define goals and priorities; produced a small grants program that issued 10 grants to non-profit organizations and schools throughout the watershed for river enhancement projects; and created an interactive web page on recreational access along the river.
- Connecticut River Water Quality Assessment Projects: A combination of funding from the EPA Targeted Watershed Initiative and Section 604B program, has enabled PVPC and the University of Massachusetts Water Resources Research Center to lead a water quality monitoring program on the Connecticut River since 2008. Project partners have also included the former Connecticut River Joint Commissions (CRJC), the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, and more recently the Connecticut River Watershed Council. Now in its fourth year, the monitoring program continues to focus on recreational access areas to help provide the public with information on whether the river is safe for water-based recreation at any given location or time. PVPC has conducted other water quality assessment work in the region through Section 604b funded projects on the Westfield River and Chicopee River.
- Connecticut River Water Pollution Control Projects: PVPC has completed numerous Section 319 water pollution control projects in the Connecticut River watershed, including projects serving Lake Lorraine in Springfield, Mill River in Hatfield, stormwater runoff in Chicopee, Nashawannuck Pond in Easthampton, and most recently at Congamond Lakes in Southwick.
- Valley Vision II: PVPC produced this land use and growth management plan in 2008 and recently developed an update this year, 2011, to align the plan with the Commonwealth’s Sustainable Development Principles and the proposed Comprehensive Land Use Reform and Partnership Act. The Valley Vision plan counteracts current development trends in the region by promoting compact, mixed use growth in and around existing urban and town centers, while promoting protection of open space and natural resources outside developed centers. One of the key intentions of Valley Vision is to provide a regional framework and tools for smart growth implementation at the local level. Through

memorandums of understanding, PVPC is obtaining direct commitment from communities to adhere to the plan's updated goals and priorities.

- Connecticut Riverwalk and Bikeway: Working with local municipalities, PVPC conceived of the Connecticut Riverwalk and Bikeway as a linear park along both sides of the river that serves as a regional trail system, greenway, and alternative transportation link. The Riverwalk and Bikeway stretches from Springfield to Chicopee on the east side of the river and from Agawam and West Springfield to Holyoke on the west side of the river. To date design work has occurred on more than 20 miles of trail. Approximately 6 miles have been constructed and these built sections are already helping to restore the river as a focus for life throughout the region.
- Connecticut River Scenic Farm Byway: The first national scenic byway in Massachusetts, the Connecticut River Scenic Farm Byway extends 39 miles along the Connecticut River in Massachusetts through a landscape of farms, forests, mountains, and historic villages that include South Hadley, Hadley, Sunderland, Montague, and Northfield. Working with byway communities, PVPC and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments have been instrumental to the establishment of the byway, its national designation, and the work to protect the character of the landscape and quality of experience for residents and tourists alike. Most recently, PVPC received a \$1.2 million grant from the Federal Highway Administration for protection of critical lands along the byway. PVPC has been working in this effort with local land trusts, landowners, as well as key state agencies.