

Norwalk River Watershed Association Strategic Plan



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*Protecting the Watershed through
Education and Action!*

Vision

A healthy, thriving Norwalk River watershed stewarded by engaged communities.

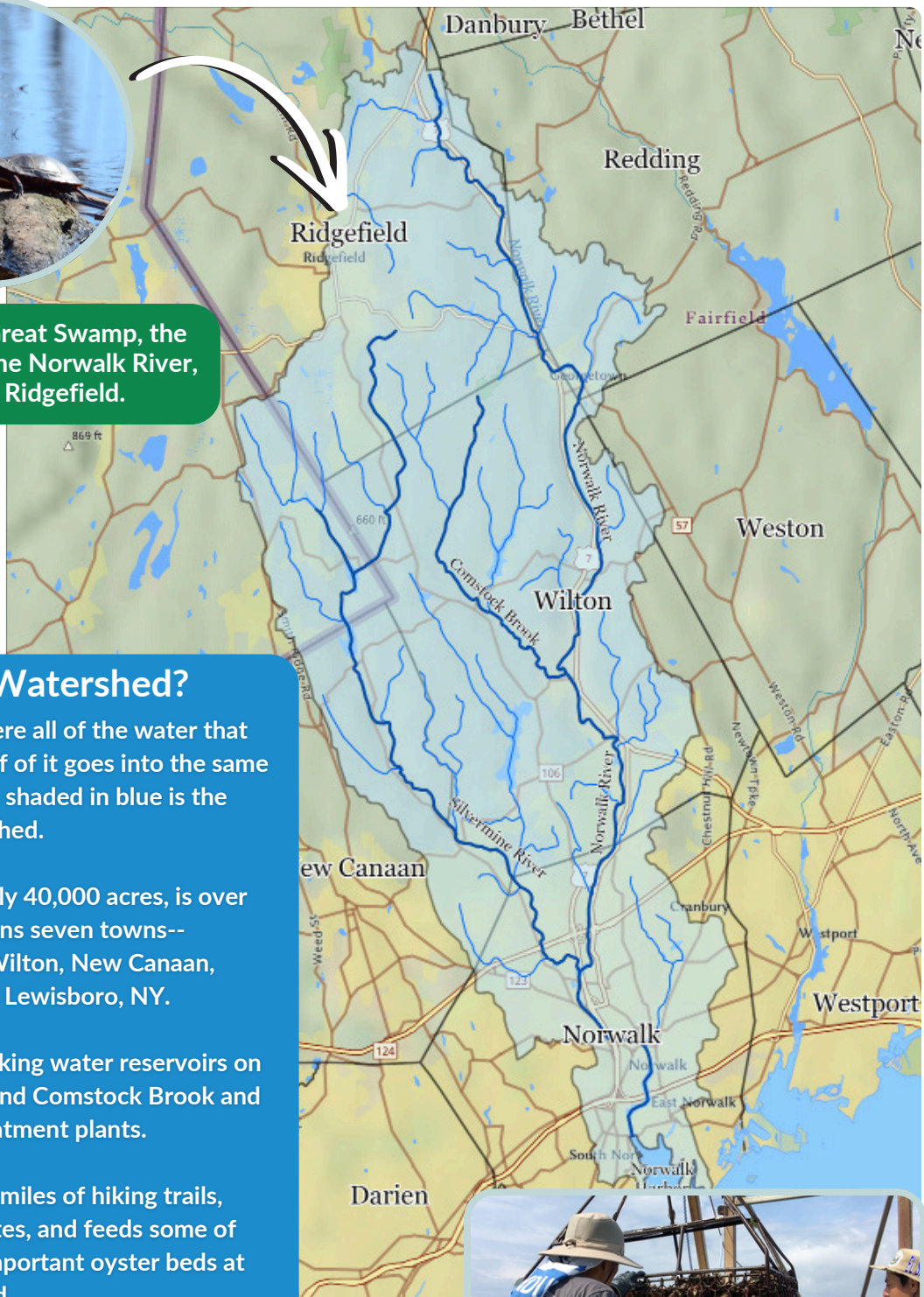
Mission

To protect and restore water quality and wildlife habitat in the Norwalk River watershed.

Protecting the Watershed through Education and Action!



Turtles in the Great Swamp, the headwaters of the Norwalk River, located in Ridgefield.



What is a Watershed?

“The area of land where all of the water that is under it or drains off of it goes into the same place.” (EPA) The area shaded in blue is the Norwalk River watershed.

It covers approximately 40,000 acres, is over 20 miles long, and spans seven towns-- Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, New Canaan, Weston, Norwalk and Lewisboro, NY.

It provides public drinking water reservoirs on the Silvermine River and Comstock Brook and three wastewater treatment plants.

The watershed offers miles of hiking trails, recreational fishing sites, and feeds some of Connecticut's most important oyster beds at its mouth in the Sound.



Oysters being harvested just outside Norwalk Harbor by Copps Island Oysters.



GOAL 1

Water Quality Improvement

Improve water quality to meet state standards and achieve removal from EPA's list of impaired waterways.

Strategies

1

Reduce stormwater pollutants entering the river by working with communities to:

- Advocate for limiting impervious land coverage to less than 12%, a critical threshold for water protections ([EPA, 2026](#))
- Plant and protect vegetated buffer zones along waterways and wetlands
- Educate about sustainable lawn practices and buffer protections
- Increase homeowner awareness of regular septic maintenance advantages
- Promote best practices for winter de-icing

2

Monitor water quality to show which pollutants are present with a focus on emerging contaminants not tested by CT DEEP, including:

- PFAS chemicals
- Lawn pesticides (neonicotinoids and diamides)
- Microplastics

3

Host community river and harbor cleanups to remove trash.



GOAL 2

Habitat Restoration

Restore and protect fish and wildlife habitat with a focus on connectivity.

Strategies

- 1 Engage community volunteers and students to:
 - Help remove invasive and/or ecologically harmful plants
 - Plant native species
 - Avoid pesticides on public and private properties
 - Support local Pollinator Pathway projects

- 2 Adopt and maintain critical riverbank, meadow, and trail areas for long-term restoration focus.

- 3 Advocate for and help facilitate streamflow protections and dam removals:
 - Promote water conservation with a goal of no more dry streams due to water withdrawals
 - Educate about the environmental benefits of dam removals
 - Promote and assist with dam removals



GOAL 3

Education and Outreach

Engage and educate the public and community leaders about how to help protect and improve water quality and wildlife habitat.

Strategies

1

Create and share high-quality educational resources to engage watershed communities and municipal leaders on the benefits of:

- Septic maintenance
- Water conservation
- Reducing single-use plastic and products containing PFAS
- Reducing lawn size, transitioning to pesticide-free lawncare, protecting vegetated streamside buffers
- Planting native plants, removing invasives, and leaving the leaves
- Removing dams

2

Host students, partner organizations, and the public for invasive plant removals, plantings, river cleanups, talks, webinars, nature walks, and other events.

3

Engage communities to help address climate and environmental justice challenges with a special focus on increasing tree canopy by:

- Maintaining existing and adding new Miyawaki microforests
- Working with municipalities to add street trees
- Helping residents in communities with low canopy obtain free trees
- Creating legacy or champion tree projects in each of the watershed towns



GOAL 4

Environmental Policy Advocacy

Advocate for local, state, and federal environmental policies that protect water quality and wildlife habitat.

Strategies

1

Local Action:

- Advocate for protecting riverbanks, headwaters, wetlands, and aquifer recharge areas from development
- Support towns with municipal stormwater regulation compliance
- Promote and support local ordinances that protect watershed resources
- Oppose the addition of artificial turf playing fields in the watershed
- Promote the municipal adoption of Stormwater Utilities

2

State Action:

- Continue to serve as lead organizer of [CT Pesticide Reform](#), a coalition of over 40 conservation organizations using science and data to support restrictions on the most harmful pesticides
- Advocate for state legislation that protects water quality and wildlife habitat
- Maintain a focus on the threat of neonicotinoids and other lawn pesticides that are present in the Norwalk River

3

Federal Action:

- Advocate for water, wildlife and climate protection policies
- Share information and action alerts with members about environmental policies that may affect our watershed

NRWA in Action



Advocating for pesticide reforms in Hartford



Testing water quality in Ridgefield



Restoring a riverbank at Oyster Shell Park, Norwalk



Leading a nature walk in Wilton



NRWA Annual Meeting and Environmental Hero Award presentation at Nod Hill Brewery in Ridgefield