



Protecting the Watershed Through Education and Action

2025

# ANNUAL REPORT

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Norwalk River Watershed Association, Inc.

## 2025 Annual Report

Dear Watershed Supporters,

A look back over the last year shows many new milestones we have reached together.

- NRWA received the largest grant in our history, \$150,000 from the CT Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection for planting a MicroForest in South Norwalk to help cool and clean the air, filter storm water, and provide habitat for wildlife
- We broke ground on our first construction project—a rain garden to catch polluted stormwater runoff in Ridgefield
- Saw the first season of wildflowers bloom in the newly restored meadow at Allen's Meadows in Wilton
- Became the lead organizer of CT Pesticide Reform (CPR), a group of 40 conservation organizations working on policy to rein in the pesticides showing up in our rivers
- Contributed to a UConn report, *Neonicotinoids in Connecticut Waters*, that is helping shape state policy--and talked about it on NPR, the Hartford Courant, The CT Mirror, and others
- Testified in Hartford for bills protecting water and climate
- Continued to steward seven sites across the watershed
- Co-hosted the first annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival in Wilton with partners Wilton Go Green, Wilton Land Trust, Woodcock Nature Center, the Norwalk River Valley Trail, Trout Unlimited, and Wilton Pollinator Pathway!

We can't do any of this without you. More than 825 of you submitted letters of testimony to the General Assembly to support a bill to restricting pesticides that are polluting the Norwalk River. You also tromped through mud to plant marsh grasses, risked poison ivy to cut back invasive phragmites, and showed up to plant trees and pull trash out of the river month after month.

On top of that, your generous donations make all of these projects possible. Together we are working to meet the challenges of achieving climate resiliency, healthier yards, and cleaner water.

Thank you for being part of NRWA!

*Louise Washer*

NRWA President

# Outlook 2025

## Launching New Habitat Restoration Projects

### Friends of Oyster Shell Park is Born

The 25-acre Oyster Shell Park in South Norwalk provides waterfront open space, spectacular views of the Norwalk River, a new dog park, connections to the Norwalk River Valley Trail, and beautiful native gardens and meadows, including a Sandy Hook Memorial garden. Beautifully and sustainably planted in 2013 by the City of Norwalk, the restored former landfill had become a tangled mess of invasive plants until NRWA volunteers, the "Weed Warriors," got to work uncovering and re-planting the original native gardens.

The Weed Warriors, have met every Wednesday and Saturday morning since 2018! They remove invasive plants, maintain the pollinator and rain gardens, and restore habitat, all without chemicals or pesticides.

Volunteers of all stripes join the Weed Warriors—students, corporate volunteer groups, and community members. The city is formalizing the public/private partnership at the park this year with the establishment of the Friends of Oyster Shell Park. Join us!

### A New Ridgefield Riverbank Project Begins

Board members Ryan Bossis and Kitsey Snow are working with the town of Ridgefield to organize an on-going effort to clear invasives and restore native shrubs and trees along Ridgefield Brook, at the very beginning of the Norwalk River. The area starts at the Rec Center parking area on Route 35 (Danbury Rd) across from Fox Hill Drive and the project starts this spring!

### Wilton's Allen's Meadow Project Adds Shrubs

Birder and master meadow maker, Joe Bear, has led the restoration of a quarter-acre meadow at Allen's Meadows in Wilton, removing invasive mugwort and planting wildflowers—all using no herbicides! Thanks to all the volunteers who helped with weeding last summer. In 2025 Joe and team will add a hedgerow of native shrubs with lots of berries for the birds.

To join us on any of these projects, email us, [outreachcoordinator@norwalkriver.org](mailto:outreachcoordinator@norwalkriver.org).



Oyster Shell Park Weed Warriors at work!



Friends of Oyster Shell Park brochure.

### River Planting

- Prioritize areas adjacent to river with least existing buffer
- Ground covers and herbaceous plants to stabilized soil and reduce runoff
- Woodchip and mulch to improve water absorption/retention



A page from the new Ridgefield Rec Center Project riverbank planting plan.



This new meadow is getting a hedgerow of native shrubs with berries for birds next!

# Growing our Partnerships with Schools and Student Groups

## Tracey Magnet and Cranbury Elementary Plant for Pollinators

We welcome new partnerships with Norwalk's Tracey Magnet School and Norwalk High School. At Tracey, NRWA helped grade students plant a pollinator garden in the school courtyard, and now we are working together to grow pollinator plants for Oyster Shell Park. The new Tracey project is built on a model Pollinator Pathway curriculum we partnered with Norwalk's Cranbury School to create four years ago and which is still going strong.

## Norwalk High School Students Join NRWA Members from Redding for the 'Source to Sound' Project

Three NRWA members from Redding came to the board last year and pitched the idea to work together on a project to bike and/or kayak the entire Norwalk River filming the journey and testing water quality along the way. Tim Keyes, Charlie Allred and Ken Boehm invited students from the Marine Science program at Norwalk High School to join and collect water quality samples along the way. Norwalk High students interested in film are now helping make a documentary about the Norwalk River and the project.

The team tested the river for pH, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, and micro-plastics at over a dozen spots and tested air quality as well, from Ridgefield to the Sound. We will be posting the new documentary with information about water quality and footage of our beautiful river in the next few months. Thank you to the students and the team in Redding who made this cool project happen!

## Maritime Aquarium Teen Interns Make a Difference at Oyster Shell Park

Every spring and summer NRWA 'Weed Warriors' at Oyster Shell Park welcome teens from across the watershed interning with the Maritime Aquarium to help create 'bug snug' nesting habitat and clear out invasive plants at Oyster Shell Park.

## Eagle Scouts Plant Native Shrubs Along the River

Last year, we were lucky to work with Boy Scout Troop 19 in Norwalk. The team helped remove invasive plants by the riverbank along the NRVT at Broad Street in Norwalk and plant the beautiful plants supplied by a grant from Starbucks and Sustainable CT.



Norwalk's Tracey Magnet School plants a pollinator garden.



Cranbury students plant wildflowers at Oyster Shell Park.



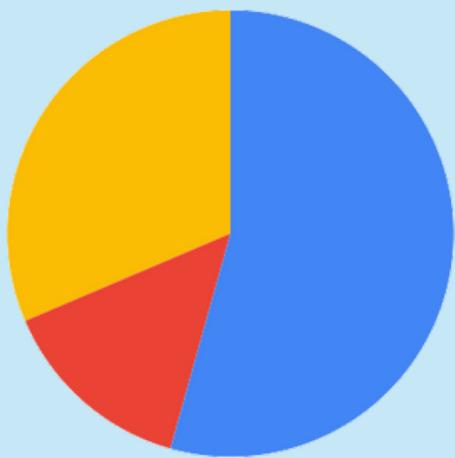
Norwalk High Students test the river for micro-plastics.



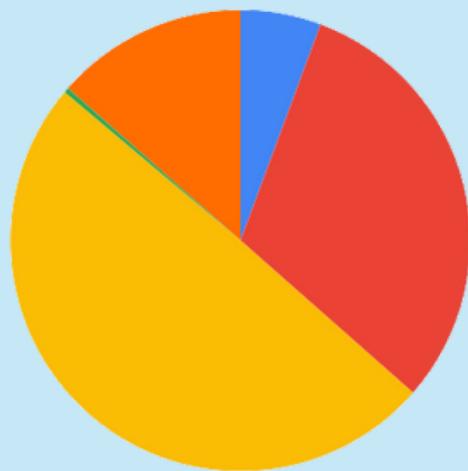
Eagle Scouts planted along the river at Broad St.

## 2024 FINANCIALS

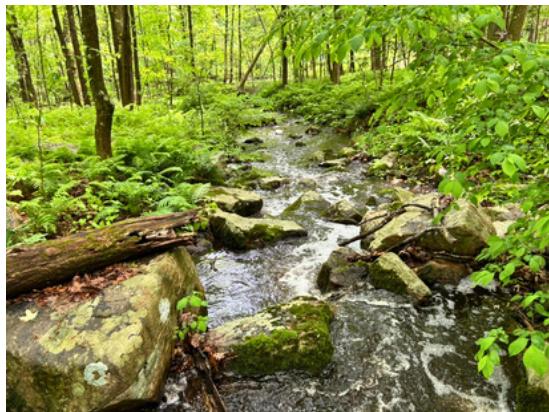
**Total Revenue:**  
**\$98,719**



**Total Expenses:**  
**\$82,893**



### From the Source...



**...to the Sound**



### Increasing Our Commitment to Water Quality Testing

NRWA is working to fill gaps in the information available on the health of our river. Harbor Watch has been testing the Norwalk River for over 30 years for bacteria, dissolved oxygen, and conductivity—all key to understanding the health of the river. The CT Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection also tests the river every other year for its Integrated Water Quality Report. Neither tests for 'emerging contaminants' like pesticides and PFAS, though. The US Geological Survey tests for pesticides, and we hope that testing continues. It has been crucial to developing education and policy initiatives at the state level and locally. Our goal is to augment the USGS data on the Norwalk River.

Last year, NRWA partnered with East Norwalk Blue, a coastal non-profit working to protect Norwalk Harbor and Long Island Sound, and UConn's Center for Environmental Science and Engineering to test 10 streams and rivers in Southwest Connecticut for neonicotinoid lawn chemicals. We chose spots near areas with lots of manicured lawns and golf courses. Many of you contributed to the Clean Rivers Campaign that funded this testing.

The findings show that 7 of the 10 rivers contain neonicotinoids at levels damaging to aquatic life. These findings are part of UConn's 2025 report, *Neonicotinoids in Connecticut Waters*. Going forward, we are committed to more testing for chemicals, including PFAS. We hope to test more groundwater and well water in addition to rivers and streams to help shape policy to protect the environment and human health.

# THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS!

Bill Abrams  
Carol Aikenhead  
Jane & Moses Alexander  
Charles Allred  
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Courtenay Austin  
Christel Autuori  
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James Westlake  
Nancy Winship  
Richard Woods  
Wilton Garden Club

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City of Norwalk Rec & Parks and Dept of Public Works  
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CT Dept. of Energy & Environmental Protection  
FactSet  
GE Vernova  
Sustainable CT  
Starbucks