“Dear FRWA: What’s Going On?”

Welcome to a special issue of the Farmington River News. Over the past three months, we have been inundated with questions from our members, the media, other organizations, and the community in general. People want to know more about hot topics in the news that involve the Farmington River Watershed. For example:

**What’s all this about selling Farmington Watershed water to the UConn campus in Storrs?** It’s a real possibility. There is a proposal by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) to do just that. You can visit our website, [www.frwa.org](http://www.frwa.org), to learn more, or read the Environmental Impact Evaluation that describes the project in full at [http://www.envpolicy.uconn.edu/eie.html](http://www.envpolicy.uconn.edu/eie.html).

**What is the FRWA’s position on this?** FRWA is withholding comment on the MDC’s proposed water sale — as described on page 2. We are addressing related questions that are of serious concern to our members, such as:

**What will happen to the river if the plan goes through?** In the short term, you might not notice any difference. That’s because water would be sold from already-impacted watershed segments that used to be rivers but for decades have been impounded for diversion to greater Hartford and other destinations: namely, the Nepaug Reservoir and the Barkhamsted Reservoir. There is no existing requirement to release water to the river from these two reservoirs. If more water is sold, the Farmington River receives less of their overflow. For more about this, see the “Are We Missing Something Here?” article on page 5 and the Farmington River Watershed Reservoirs Map on page 6.

Long-term effects on our whole watershed are much more complicated to predict. They depend on many factors such as climate change, economic growth in Greater Hartford, sprawl in eastern CT, the strength of environmental protections for a living river, and the outcome of statewide water supply planning.

**What statewide water supply planning?** Good question. See page 4.

**Would this affect the beautiful and recreationally priceless West Branch?** Not yet. See page 2 for comments about the future of the West Branch.
The Portland Agreement

Many were surprised to hear that in 1998, the FRWA signed a document with the Metropolitan District Commission, known as the Portland Agreement. The Portland Agreement arose from a dispute over the MDC’s sale of water to the Town of Portland. The attorneys for the MDC have notified FRWA that the Portland Agreement prevents FRWA from opposing MDC’s sales of water outside its exclusive service area under certain circumstances. FRWA’s attorneys are reviewing FRWA’s legal obligations with respect to the Portland Agreement. Pending such legal review, in deference to the MDC’s request, FRWA has not opposed MDC’s sales of water outside the exclusive service area.

Save the Date
FRWA’s 60th Anniversary Party
September 22, 2013
Ski Sundown

Welcome Katonya, Our Newest Board Member!
Katonya Hughey is a financial services and insurance industry professional with extensive knowledge in Defined Benefit and Defined Contribution plans. In 2007 Katonya returned to Connecticut as a Vice President of Relationship Management at Prudential Retirement serving as the executive advocate to clients in the target and jumbo markets. She volunteers with today's youth through the YMCA's Achiever's program, teaching 7th grade entrepreneurialship. Also focused on advocacy, Katonya began working on her Master in Organizational Leadership in 2012. She is eager to move into the education or human resource arena where she can help to foster and create a climate of empowerment, growth and positive risk taking.
In her spare time, Katonya enjoys spending time with her son, Tyree, granddaughter, Kenzie, golfing, dancing, reading and writing. She is also an avid Pittsburgh Steelers fan.
Connecticut Has No Statewide Water Supply Plan. Why Not?

The Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA) was recently thrust into a statewide debate on Connecticut water policy. An Environmental Impact Evaluation process was initiated by the University of CT to explore options for its future water supply. As part of that process, the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) proposed providing UConn with drinking water from reservoirs here in the Farmington River Watershed. FRWA is not commenting on the MDC’s proposal because of an agreement that FRWA signed with MDC in 1998 in order to secure greater protection for the West Branch of the river. However, the proposal gained a lot of attention and we did get many visits, calls and emails at our office requesting information on how the water supply planning process works in the state of Connecticut. This larger, important issue has not received enough attention over the years. We are providing a summary here.

The saga of the state’s water planning efforts in the last three decades can be found in many documents, available to the public online. The picture that emerges is that the State has not committed enough resources to institute a statewide water policy; specifically lacking are funding, leadership and legislation. The need for all three was clearly stated more than ten years ago in the 2002 Water Allocation Policy Planning Model: “To succeed, a water allocation plan will need high level support, adequate funding and identification of appropriate people to design and implement the Plan. The process must start with a clear water resource management policy established by the state legislature. The recommendations should include an administrative structure for water planning and allocation that will effectively carry out the various tasks proposed in this report.” Today, a decade later, there is still no statewide plan, and the State is still short of resources to actively continue the planning. How did that happen?

What Happened to the WUCC Process?

A severe drought in 1980-81 propelled the Connecticut State Legislature into creating a Water Resources Task Force (WRTF) to draft legislation to enable statewide drinking water planning. Public Act 85-535, “An Act Concerning a Connecticut Plan for Public Water Supply Coordination,” was drafted, and approved by the General Assembly in 1985. It created the WUCC (Water Utility Coordinating Committee) water supply planning process and made it a priority of the Department of Public Health. It divided the state into seven regional management areas (see map at right), in which representatives of local water supply systems and representatives of government would jointly develop plans to address water planning. [DPH, 2011 WUCC Annual Report Appendix 1]

In 1986 and 1987, the first three regional WUCCs convened and met, thanks to funds appropriated by the Connecticut Legislature. Then the money dried up, staffing needs changed, and the DPH shifted focus to the approval of individual water supply plans required of the larger water companies in each region. The WUCC 2010 Annual Report indicates that during this period, the “WUCC planning process was halted. C.C.G.S. 25-33j was revised in 1998...sufficient resources were then made available to fund the fourth WUCC which was convened in Southeastern Connecticut and ...has been the most active and successful in promoting regional cooperation and shared costs of major infrastructure investment.” (WUCC Annual Report 2010 Appendix 1.)

And then the process halted again. In November 2010 the WUCC Chairs Advisory Committee met and agreed that statewide review of WUCC management areas is warranted because of changing demographics, water company consolidations and new data DPH compiled during development of state stream flow regulations. At a second meeting in August 2011, DPH provided statewide data and maps to the Committee. At that time, members said the WUCC process merits salvaging, albeit with major changes and more extensive municipal input into technical discussions and the decision making process.

Continued on next page...
At this point in 2013, we question whether the WUCC process does merit salvaging — unless the “major changes” include more emphasis on watershed boundaries instead of the boundaries of water company service areas, inclusion of environmental groups, as well as municipalities, in technical discussions and planning decisions — and, of course convening the remaining WUCCs that have never even met.

Besides the WUCC process, there have been concurrent efforts to move water allocation planning forward. For example,

- The Water Planning Council (WPC), comprising representatives from 4 state agencies, plus its Advisory Group of volunteer stakeholders, have been working for more than 10 years to accomplish planning tasks assigned to them by the Legislature in 2002. (See The Role of the Water Planning Council at right)

- In 2005, PA 05-142 was enacted, mandating revised state stream flow regulations to “preserve and protect the natural aquatic life... while providing for the needs and requirements of public health, flood control, industry, public utilities, water supply, public safety, agriculture and other lawful uses...” Drafting and adopting these regulations took until the end of 2011. This was necessary and important progress in managing our surface waters. But while flow requirements were under discussion, state water supply planning could (and did) bog down.

While planning stalls, things change. Over the years, water demand in some areas has dropped beyond expectation (for example, greater Hartford), leading to loss of revenues for water infrastructure investment. In other areas demand continues to rise, even with advances in conservation measures (for example, UConn at Storrs). The economic picture has deteriorated. Climate change has come calling with a vengeance, throwing old models for water availability into question. Municipal, regional, and water company supply plans have been updated and revised without a state water supply plan for reference. Some of the water company plans are progressive, working toward a decoupling rate plan that can provide sustainable business plans and fair rates for poorer customers and incentives for water conservation. These deserve consideration as models for water supply planning in general.

Clearly even a finished state water supply plan shouldn’t be set in stone. It should be flexible and adaptive and based on lasting core principles. But our current situation is more like running to catch up to events with our sneakers still untied. It’s appalling that we’ve been so complacent for so long about our state’s water resources that there’s still no plan.

The state is facing intense economic and political pressure for development right now. If the strategy for supplying water to development appears based on logic that says “Water is available from over there; I need it right now over here; therefore piping it from there to here is the best use of that water,” then it’s not surprising that proposals for water transfers (whether wise or foolish) are angrily resisted by citizens. They are rightly anxious that their water — considered as a public good, not a commodity — can be shunted around by planning processes they can’t follow, or that do not exist. The furor over the UConn tech park’s water supply reflects a fear that water supply decisions can be short-sighted, narrowly focused, and of questionable public interest. It’s up to water supply planners in general to be inclusive and transparent about their process — and it’s up to water supply planners at the state level to get the overall job done.
Are We Missing Something Here?

Nepaug and Barkhamsted Reservoirs in the Farmington Basin provide drinking water for Greater Hartford — and possibly new points farther away. Present estimates by the MDC are that these two reservoirs could comfortably supply another twelve million gallons a day to consumers.

Why, then, is the lower East Branch below Barkhamsted Reservoir so dry, so much of the time, that land plants grow throughout the riverbed? Those plants get an occasional dunking, but only when Lake McDonough (the man-made lake just below Barkhamsted Reservoir) spills over enough to briefly re-fill the East Branch channel. Along with the lower Nepaug River, the lower East Branch is one of two severely dewatered channels in the Farmington River Basin. Both are on the State’s list of “impaired waters” because they “do not meet water quality standards for aquatic life and recreation” (CT DEEP, Inland Fisheries Division, 2012).

To repeat: just upstream, there is stored drinking water behind MDC dams in such abundance that it far exceeds the current human demand for it. Barkhamsted Reservoir/Lake McDonough hold this “surplus” of water just above the remains of the East Branch. Likewise, Nepaug Reservoir sits above what’s left of the Nepaug River. There is no mandated release from these reservoirs to augment the water-starved channels downstream. Only when the reservoirs overflow in high-water events do the downstream reaches fill as they once did. Why not support a living river when there is enough water to do so?

In the mainstem of the Farmington River, there’s a method to keep adequate water in the channel: releasing water from West Branch Reservoir upstream. Water from West Branch Reservoir thus compensates the main river for the choking-off of flows from the East Branch and the Nepaug. But the East Branch and the Nepaug rivers can’t benefit from water in the main channel; it goes right past their rather dry mouths. They can only be supplied from their own upstream impoundments.

De-watered streams have been in the news for years. You might recall that the state even adopted revised streamflow regulations in 2011 to ensure that the flows needed for living streams are maintained and balanced against human needs to divert water. It made sense. After all, water in streams supports human needs too, by enhancing recreation and real estate values as well as supporting biodiversity and other natural resources. But did you know that the new streamflow regulations do not apply on the Farmington River’s East Branch, or on the Nepaug? The MDC’s pre-existing flow management plan exempts them from compliance with the state streamflow regulations. Restoring more water to these channels would have to be voluntary.

So how about it? Is the MDC flow plan the best, most flexible balance of competing demands, if it withholds water entirely from de-watered rivers while there are 12 million gallons a day of extra supply in its drinking water reservoirs? We think it’s time to talk about workable alternatives.
March is Membership Renewal, Help us Spring Ahead!
Join at $60 for Our 60th Anniversary!

FRWA is now in our 60th anniversary year and it amazes us to look back at all of our challenges since 1953: Pollution from industry and raw sewage. Pesticides. Possible diversion of water from the gorgeous West Branch. Stormwater runoff laden with bacteria and chemicals. Blocked fish migrations. Destroyed riverbanks. Hazardous litter.

But guess what? It’s just as amazing to realize that you and other members of FRWA have been key players in helping solve these problems. FRWA’s supporters make a huge difference to this region: you’ve enabled thought-provoking educational programs, quality research, informed advocacy, and active stewardship. You’ve risen to each challenge - whether it’s taking a dam out, analyzing water samples, funding a clean-up, or just getting kids to jump in and explore a stream.

We never would have done it without you — our members and volunteers. Our celebration of this special year is dedicated to you - for all you’ve achieved. **March begins our Spring Membership Renewal. If you have renewed already, thank you! Otherwise please renew your membership now and help us reach our goal of $60,000!**

**Not an FRWA Member?** Then join us! For 60 years, FRWA has fought for the Farmington River. Won’t you add your voice? Together we will start another season of preserving, protecting, and restoring the river - for everyone and forever.

If you usually give $40, would you consider giving $60 this spring?

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**Name:**

________________________________________

**Address:**

________________________________________

**City:**________________ State:_________ Zip Code:_________

**Phone Number:**________________________ Email:________________________

**Check one:**

☐ I want to renew my membership now:

☐ $40 (Individual)

☐ $60 (Family and 60th Anniversary Level)

☐ $120

☐ $150

☐ $250

☐ $____ other amount

☐ New Member

☐ $10 ☐ $25 ☐ $40 ☐ $60 ☐ $120 ☐ $150 ☐ $250

☐ I have enclosed my check payable to FRWA, or please charge my ___ MasterCard or ___Visa.

Card #: ____________________________ Expiration Date: ____________ Amount $ _________

**Name on Card:** ___________________________ Signature________________________

Please send to: Farmington River Watershed Association, 749 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT 06070

Credit card donations may be phoned in to Aimee Petras at (860) 658-4442 x. 201 or submitted online at www.frwa.org via our secure online contributions server.
FRWA Spring Events
FRWA is actively working on Spring and Summer Event Planning including our 60th Anniversary Special Events.

Here is a sampling of what we have coming up in the Spring season. Call the office or check back with our next newsletter or our Website (www.frwa.org) for event details, or give us a call!

Salmon Stocking (April & May)
First Church of Windsor Buffer Planting (April 28)
Invasive Removals
NCCC Buffer Planting
Spring & Summer Canoe Trips
Lecture Series
Water Quality Sampling
Watershed Talks

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