



A PARTNERSHIP FOR THE SALMON RIVER WATERSHED

The Salmon River watershed is a jewel in central Connecticut: a destination for anglers, hikers, and paddlers, a keystone of rural character for the communities within it, the standard against which the water quality of other streams in the Connecticut River watershed are compared. It also supports well-known water recreation areas, such as Lake Pocotopaug and Moodus Reservoir.

The Salmon River also is located in the heart of one of the fastest-growing regions in the State. In 2007 The Nature Conservancy launched the Salmon River Watershed Partnership, a collaborative effort to engage municipalities in developing a regional plan of action to conserve the Salmon River system and support the long-term social and economic vitality of the communities in the watershed.

Elected officials of the watershed towns met on January 30, 2007 to kick off the effort, and over the following months a broad group that included municipal and other governmental representatives, scientific experts, and conservation organizations (see Appendix A for participants) came together to develop a Conservation Action Plan.

CONSERVATION TARGETS

An interdisciplinary group of 30 biologists and other professionals met in March to identify the set of species and natural ecological systems ("conservation targets") that represent the diversity of the Salmon River Watershed. We also determined how to measure their "health" over time. These include:

- ❖ Rivers (mainstem of Salmon R. & major tributaries, headwater streams, tidal portion of Salmon R.)
- ❖ Large wetland complexes
- ❖ Lakes and ponds
- ❖ Forest system
- ❖ Migratory fish (e.g., Atlantic salmon) and dependent mussels
- ❖ Native cool and coldwater riverine fish (e.g., brook trout) and mussels

CRITICAL THREATS

At a workshop in April we identified threats to the long-term health of the targets and ranked them to focus our conservation actions where they're most needed. The four critical threats are:

HOUSING AND URBANIZING AREAS

Runoff from impervious surfaces associated with development alters the amount and timing of water entering rivers, carries excessive sediments and contaminants. Clearing of land breaks intact forest into fragmented, degraded wildlife habitat.

ROAD CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

Watercourse crossings can block passage of fish and wildlife. Roads are conduits of sand, sediment, and pollution.

WATER MANAGEMENT AND USE

As the region grows, so does the demand for water use, which could lead to reduced availability of water for the rivers.

DAMS

Within the watershed are about 90 dams, few of which serve their original purpose. They are barriers to salmon, trout, and other animals that need to move up and down rivers and riverbanks.



PROPOSED STRATEGIC ACTIONS

In July a broad base of stakeholders developed a set of practical, strategic actions to abate the threats and to support the long-term social and economic health and vitality of the communities in the watershed.

CONSERVE WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY.

- ❖ Ensure that municipal land use plans and regulations conserve watershed resources, and that they adopt best management practices.
 - Evaluate current regulations and practices, such as storm water management (FY08).
 - Conduct build-out analysis to illustrate how towns will develop under current zoning and regulations (FY08).
 - Identify model regulations and practices and provide guidance to strengthen protection (FY09).
- ❖ Ensure that town leaders and land use decision makers understand importance of Salmon River Watershed for people and nature and are committed to its conservation.
 - Create a "case statement" (FY08).
 - Sign multi-town compact (FY08).
 - Identify target audiences and messages (FY09).
- ❖ Establish a volunteer-based water quality monitoring program.
 - Determine needs and identify sampling locations (FY08).
 - Recruit and train volunteers and begin sampling (FY09).
- ❖ Ensure that water policies sustain a healthy Salmon River system while meeting human needs for water.
 - Outline a study to determine the water flows and fluctuations needed to sustain Salmon system's rivers and lakes so that appropriate flow standards can be applied to water supply decisions (FY08).
 - Pursue funding (FY09-10).

RESTORE AND RECONNECT RIVERS AND HABITATS.

- ❖ Restore passage for fish and wildlife at priority dams.
 - Identify five priority barriers and approach owners (FY08).
 - Seek funding for passage (FY08-09).
 - Provide passage via dam removal and fish ladders (FY09-).
- ❖ Ensure that new and repaired culverts and bridges provide for passage of fish and wildlife.
 - Evaluate current practices (FY08).
 - Determine which standards to apply (FY09).
- ❖ Identify essential lands for conservation.
 - Form a subcommittee (see below) to gather and evaluate information on current conservation land and priorities for towns and land trusts throughout the watershed and to pursue joint strategies (FY09).
- ❖ Manage infestations of problem non-native plants in priority wetlands and prevent future invasions.
 - Assess current extent (FY09).
 - Identify management priorities.

STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION AND INVESTMENT IN SALMON RIVER WATERSHED.

- ❖ Create a Salmon River Watershed steering committee to guide implementation of the conservation action plan and engage partners and volunteers in the work.
 - Identify committee members and hold first meeting (FY08).
 - Build leadership (FY09-).
- ❖ Identify and pursue funding to support the work of the Partnership.
 - Apply for community foundation grants (FY08).
 - Research public funding sources (FY08-).
- ❖ Coordinate land acquisition efforts among towns and land trusts and build capacity to acquire land.
 - See "essential lands," above.

APPENDIX A:

SALMON RIVER WATERSHED CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN PARTICIPANTS

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