

Representative Policy Board
Land Use Committee
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
Location: Lake Bethany, 200 Hatfield Hill Road, Bethany
(recreation area parking lot)

AGENDA

Regular Meeting of Wednesday, August 12, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.

1. Safety Moment
2. Approval of Minutes – July 8, 2020 meeting
3. Projects Update at Lake Bethany: J. Triana
4. Option on Olin property in Hamden
5. Discussion regarding trees along Whitney Avenue in Hamden
6. Updates on land and RWA properties, including invasive species update
7. Other land items
8. Next Regular Meeting: Wednesday, September 9, 2020 at 4:30 p.m.
9. Adjourn

****This meeting is being held outdoors. In order to comply with social distancing and stop the spread of COVID-19, the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority is requiring attendees to remain outdoors, keep a 6' distance and wear masks or face coverings. Driving together to the meeting is not encouraged.**

In the event of rain, the meeting will be held remotely. For information on attending the meeting, via remote access and to view meeting documents, please visit <https://www.rwater.com/about-us/our-boards/board-meetings-minutes?year=2020&category=1435&meettype=&page=>. For questions, contact the board office at jslubowski@rwater.com or call 203-401-2515.

IN THE EVENT OF RAIN THE MEETING BE HELD REMOTELY. BELOW IS THE INFORMATION TO ATTEND VIA CONFERENCE CALL. PLEASE CONTACT JENNIFER SLUBOWSKI AT THE BOARD OFFICE AT 203-401-2515 WITH QUESTIONS.

Topic: RPB Land Use Committee Meeting

Time: Aug 12, 2020 05:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Meeting (*via conference call*)

Dial by your location

+1 646 876 9923 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 408 638 0968 US (San Jose)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

Meeting ID: 848 1622 0300

Passcode: 653124

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kccgqVUapY>

SAFETY MOMENT

AUGUST – HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION

As the summer progresses, the possibility of heat related illness increases. Below are signs and symptoms of heat related illnesses, and methods to prevent them.

Heat Cramps are painful muscle spasms caused by sweating while performing strenuous physical labor in a hot environment. To prevent heat cramps eat regular light meals and stay hydrated.

Heat Exhaustion is the body's response to an extensive loss of water and salt, usually through excessive sweating. Symptoms include: extreme weakness and fatigue, dizziness, confusion, nausea, clammy moist skin, pale or flushed complexion, elevated body temperature, and fast and shallow breathing. To prevent heat exhaustion rest in a cool, shaded or air-conditioned area, cool down with wet towels or water spray and drink plenty of water or other cool, non-alcoholic beverage.

Heat Stroke is the most serious heat-related disorder. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. When heat stroke occurs, the body temperature can rise to 106 degrees or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Symptoms include: hot, dry skin, hallucinations, chills, headache, high body temperature, confusion and slurred speech. To prevent heat stroke move to a cool shaded area, soak clothes with cold water, use fans, use ice packs or ice under the arms, offer water if the person is conscious.

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Regional Water Authority



Service – Teamwork – Accountability – Respect – Safety

 Regional Water Authority

UNAPPROVED DRAFT

**Representative Policy Board
Land Use Committee
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
Via Remote Access
Minutes of July 8, 2020 Meeting**

The regular meeting of the Land Use Committee of the Representative Policy Board of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water District (“RWA”) took place on Wednesday, July 8, 2020. Due to inclement weather, the meeting took place via remote access.

Present: Committee Members: P. Betkoski, P. DeSantis, B. Eitzer, R. Harvey, M. Horbal, M. Levine, G. Malloy, J. Oslander and J. Mowat Young

Authority: D. Borowy
Management: W. Henley, T. Norris, J. Tracy and J. Triana
RPB Staff: J. Slubowski

Chair Levine called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He proposed reordering the agenda to move the election of committee chair to the end of the agenda. It was the consensus of the committee to move the election of committee chairperson after Item 6, *Other Land Items*.

Chair Levine reviewed the Safety Moment distributed to members.

On motion made by Mr. Malloy, seconded by Mr. Eitzer, and unanimously carried the Committee approved the minutes of its June 10, 2020 meeting.

Mr. Henley, RWA’s Source Water Quality Analyst, and Mr. Tracy, RWA’s Invasive Species Management Technician, provided an update on RWA’s Furnace Pond Harvesting, which included:

- Overview of the water chestnut invasive aquatic plant
- Impacts on water quality and recreation program
- Harvesting update and rate of spread
- Project cost and duration
- Drone imagery
- Next steps

Discussion took place regarding disposal and drone cost.

The committee requested a presentation by management of the drone video recording of the water chestnut harvest, before and after, its September meeting.

Update on *The Land We Need for the Water We Use Program* – J. Triana reported:

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average	Drought Status
June 30, 2020	90	99	88	None

Rainfall (inches)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average
June 2020	2.33	4.56	3.74
Fiscal YTD (6/1/20 – 6/30/20)	2.33	4.56	3.74

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- Cheshire - Corresponded with property owner of 40+/- acres.

DePodesta and Hendrickson properties, Hamden/Bethany – Executed documents for Hendrickson property and sent to DEEP.

Beers property, Brooksvale Rd., Hamden – Sent another letter of support to Hamden town council to acquire this property.

Rental houses:

- Seymour, 59 Rimmon Rd. (SE 11) – Bid opened. Winning bid was from Kanzler for \$67,000. Asked Murtha staff to contact their attorney.
- Hamden, 95 Ives St. (HA 13) and 233 Skiff St. (HA 9A) – Zone change application for 233 Skiff St. was approved by P&Z. Repaired roof at Skiff St.

Forestry Update

- Guilford – West of Sugar Loaf ash salvage (GU 4) – 40% complete
- North Branford - Beech Street Softwood (NB 4) – 85% complete
- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) - Contract not yet awarded.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – Not started yet
- Bethany – East of Lake Bethany hardwood (BE 18) – 70% complete.
 - Received final report from the UConn researchers.
 - Inventoried RWA forests in Seymour and Madison.
 - Cut tree blocking West River trail.
 - Participated in news segment on ticks and barberry for several news channels at Maltby Lakes.
 - Met with Jeff Ward (Chief Scientist, CAES) at two sites (Seymour/Madison) for experimental natural deer fencing (slash walls) in timber harvests.

Recreation

- Recreation permit holders – 5,435
- Billboard campaign with 20% coupon continued ended in May (May 26), but the bill insert restarted on June 8 and will continue until August 21.
- As COVID restrictions are lifted, we have seen fewer people out at the properties, however there are still more people than in previous June's.
- Worked on plan to re-open boating at Lake Saltonstall. Boat dock has been installed.
- Recreation staff continued to be stationed at Maltby Lakes and Lake Saltonstall parking lots daily since April 13. We have done occasional shifts at Lake Chamberlain which have been beneficial.
- Revoked permits for two people who verbally abused a recreation staff member at Maltby Lakes. By the end of the month, we have been in contact with one of them as they were appealing to be reinstated.
- Reblazed and cleared trails at Lake Chamberlain, Lake Hammonasset, and Genesee.
- LUP amendments were approved by the RPB for relocating the Quinnipiac Trail in Prospect and creating a new trail from the Harrison Preserve in North Branford. License agreements were sent to the CFP and NBLCT for each trail. Invoices were also mailed out.

Special Activity Permits

- Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, UCONN (Gina Nichol) – survey the lake edge by boat (personal Kayak or canoe) to document any breeding birds along the edge- zebra mussel protocol strictly follow; Lake Saltonstall (06/05/2020 raindate 06/08/2020)

- CT Agricultural Experiment Station (Dr. Claire Rutledge) – research project on two aspects of ash preservation in the presence of Emerald Ash Borer; Lake Gaillard, West St., Mill River, Old Mill Rd. (06/10/2020-09/30/2023)
- Resources in Search and Rescue, Inc.-(Ms. Celeste Robitaille and designees)- Training of Search and Rescue K9 teams to locate drowning victims, Gaillard Reservoir south and west portion; (6/25/2020-6/28/2020)
- Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, UCONN (Gina Nichol) – conduct a follow-up survey the lake edge by boat (personal Kayak or canoe) to document any breeding birds along the edge-zebra mussel protocol strictly follow; final date for documenting this species breeding is July 5; Lake Saltonstall (06/22/2020 rain date 06/26/2020)
- Resources in Search and Rescue, Inc.-(Ms. Celeste Robitaille and designees)-Training of Search and RK9 teams to locate lost or missing individuals, RT 42 “Swamp” southeast of RT 42 Bethany; (6/25/2020-6/25/2021).
- C. Thomas Paul – (Permit renewal) Conduct research on American Indian and pre-Columbian culture as related to the Hammonasset Line - Killingworth, Madison and Guilford (6/26/2020-6/26/201).

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
 - Agricultural fields – Signed agreement with Bobby Tanev to hay all the fields in Prospect, Bethany, and Woodbridge. At month’s end, we were waiting for his COI to authorize him to start. Discussed other fields with two potential farmers.
 - Bethany, 54 Wooding Hill Rd. (BE 17) – Sent letter about encroachment.
 - Bethany, 127 Gaylord Mountain Rd. (BE 13A) – Sent letter about encroachments.
 - Bethany, 377 Carrington Rd., (BE 9) – Sent letter about encroachment.
 - Hamden, 4061 Whitney Ave. (HA 19) – Sent letter about encroachments.
 - North Branford, 29 Whispering Hills Dr. (NB 4A) – Sent letter about encroachments.
 - Seymour, 131 Silvermine Rd. (SE 10) – Sent letter about encroachment.
 - Bethany Horsemen – Executed annual agreement.
 - Hamden, Servoss St. – Remarked boundary and repaired fence to prevent trespassers going to Lake Whitney.
- Invasive plants – Cut invasives along Saltonstall Ridge, mostly ailanthus. Also, cut invasives in Bethany, Woodbridge, Hamden, and East Haven. Installed metal mesh on Davis St., as an experiment to reduce the amount of knotweed near the sidewalk.

Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac)	~ 10 acres
Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH)	~ 22 acres

- ATV’s and dirt bikes – Continued to work with land trusts regarding ATV and dirt bike trespassers.
- Deer hunt – Deadline for the applications was June 20. There were 184 applicants for 205 spots.
- Simon property dam – Met with Roger and Mary Ellen Simon to discuss how we operate Lake Bethany for the water system since they are planning to work on their dam.
- Milford, Tower St. tank – Replied to question regarding former tank on this site. Supplied photos to requestor.

There were no other land items to report.

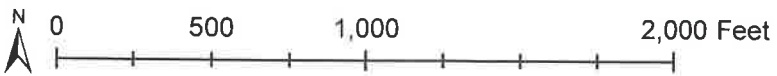
Mr. Levine stated the next order of business would be to elect the Land Use Committee Chair for the upcoming year. He reported that one member contacted him with an interest in serving. He asked committee members if anyone else was interested in the position. Upon hearing none, on motion made by Mr. Malloy, seconded by Mr. Harvey, and unanimously carried, the committee elected Mr. Betkoski as Committee Chairman for 2020-2021.

Committee members thanked Mr. Levine for his years of leadership and a job well done.

The next regular meeting of the committee is Wednesday, August 12, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.

At 6:18 p.m., the meeting adjourned.

Mark Levine, Chairman



August 12, 2020
Land Use Committee Meeting

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average	Drought Status
July 31, 2020	83	94	81	None

Rainfall (inches)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average
July 2020	3.27	4.14	3.68
Fiscal YTD (6/1/20 – 7/31/20)	5.60	8.70	7.43

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

Ricci/Moran property, Fenn Rd., Cheshire – The town closed on the property and conveyed a conservation easement to the Authority and the Cheshire Land Trust.

DePodesta and Hendrickson properties, Hamden/Bethany – Submitted additional form to DEEP for the Hendrickson property grant. DEEP asked for the certificate of title/title insurance for the DePodesta property.

Olin Powder Ponds property, Hamden – FMA approved discussions with Hamden Land Conservation Trust to assign the option to buy this property.

Rental houses:

- Seymour, 59 Rimmon Rd. (SE 11) – Communicated with winning bidder. Their attorney asked for a mortgage contingency. We declined since it was not part of the bid. Signed P&SA.
- Hamden, 95 Ives St. (HA 13) and 233 Skiff St. (HA 9A) – Worked on lot split application for Skiff St. Removed trees by the house and garage. Cleaned gutters and roof at Ives St.

Forestry Update

- Guilford – West of Sugar Loaf ash salvage (GU 4) – 40% complete
 - North Branford - Beech Street Softwood (NB 4) – 85% complete
 - Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) - Contract not yet awarded.
 - Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – Not started yet
 - Bethany – East of Lake Bethany hardwood (BE 18) – 70% complete.
- CAES asked if they could use part of our property for the Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative. We agreed.
 - Met Jeff Ward (Chief Scientist, CAES) to install plots for regeneration measurement around the two upcoming slash wall harvests.
 - Door Tree, Hamden – Received the \$750 check from the state that the vandal was required to pay.
 - Completed forest inventories for Nathan’s pond and west of Silvermine Road in Seymour. Met with Operations staff to discuss installation of a tracking pad off of Silvermine Road in Seymour.
 - Assisted Environmental Planning department in transplanting wildflowers to our RWA pollinator gardens.

Recreation

- Recreation permit holders – 5,583.
- Bill insert continued and will end on August 21.
- Started renting boats at Lake Saltonstall on July 14.

- Reinstated one of the revoked permits from last month. Talked to another permit holder who's brother has been noted as violating our terms with other people.
- License agreements signed with CFPA and NBLCT for each new trail. Fees were received and deposited.
- Cut back growth along some trails at Sugarloaf.
- Met with North Branford recreation staff about possible walks on our property.
- Dealt with many instances of swimmers in Lake Chamberlain. Conducted additional patrols.

Special Activity Permits

- Native Plant Trust (formerly New England Wild Flower Society) – Jessa Finch, Michael Piantedosi) survey for a population of a rare plant species, Northern Dropseed (*sporobolus heterolepis*) to see if still present in area, Beaver Head Swamp (Guilford), Totoket Mountain (North Branford), Lake Saltonstall (Branford), Mill Rock (Hamden) (07/14/2020-12/01/2020).
- Connecticut Bird Atlas-Karen Schnitzer, purpose of watching birds in order to gather data for the Connecticut Bird Atlas, Two Cornwall, Prospect, (07/17/20-07/17/21)
- CT Agricultural Experiment Station (Dr. Jeff Ward, et al) - General forestry and wildlife research, tick/Lyme Disease studies - Lake Gaillard, North Madison, Prospect, Seymour, Branford, Madison (07/22/2020 – 07/22/2021)
- UCONN and URI (Gail Reynolds, and designees) – Release biological agent, moth *Hypena opulenta* to help control the population of invasive plants black and pale swallowwort (*Vincetoxicum nigrum* and *V. rossicum*, Lake Gaillard, (7/28/20-7/28/21)

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
 - Agricultural fields – Licensees are having issues obtaining affordable insurance for the fields. Discussed other fields with one potential farmer. Contacted Hammarlund to get signed copy of the new hay agreement.
 - West Haven, Shingle Hill Tank site – WHPD extended agreement to use the site for their radio for another 5 years.
 - West Haven, Burwell Hill Tank site – Corresponded with Comcast about the extension of their ground lease.
 - Cell phone towers – Corresponded with two cell phone company representatives about potential sites.
- Invasive plants – Contractor started harvesting water chestnut at Furnace Pond. Mechanical issues postponed completion of the work by the end of the month. Flew drone to take photos and video of the operation. Met with UConn staff about potential biocontrol of pale swallowwort at Lake Gaillard. Inspected sites in Madison, Prospect, and Bethany for invasives. Cut invasives in East Haven and Bethany. Started second year of the Japanese stilt grass plots with herbicide in Prospect.

Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac)	~ 3.75acres
Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH)	~ 1.5 acres

- Deer hunt – Applications were received and processed so that hunters were assigned areas. Permits this year: North Branford 136, Bethany 25, Prospect 20, Seymour/Ansonia 8.
- Bethany, Simon property dam – Corresponded with contractor for the Simon dam about our operations and their work.

- Bethany, Green Haven/Rocky Corner development – Assisted CP&D with research in agreements and easements that are similar to this matter.
- Madison, Poole Rd. – Halloran reported that the down moved the boulders/rocks back to the road.
- Orange, Racebook Rd. – Land owner asked about the nature of the easement we have over their property. Spoke to them about the tunnel. They were interested in responsibility for trees.

Attachments

- July 7, 2020 - Trail Usage Continues To Spike, Officials Urge Hikers To Maintain Social Distancing
- July 7, 2020 - New Haven Mayor: Over 2 million gallons of sewage discharged into Mill River
- July, 31, 2020 – Cheshire Acquires 58-Acre Parcel Of Open Space – Patch
- July 8, 2020 – West River Chainsaw Mystery Solved – New Haven Independent

Upcoming Agenda Items

September 2020 –

Trail Usage Continues To Spike, Officials Urge Hikers To Maintain Social Distancing

By Patrick Skahill • Jul 7, 2020

When the Connecticut Trail Census began in 2017, it relied on a group of electronic sentinels. They were tiny boxes, housing infrared counters, which logged trail visits across the state. The intent was to provide local and state officials a clearer picture about how trails were being used and could be improved.

But during the COVID-19 pandemic, those infrared workhorses have continued to steadily tick away, and they are providing a quantifiable glimpse into something many outdoor enthusiasts have observed anecdotally: A lot more people appear to be recreating outside. .

“In the month of March, we saw an increase of 100 to 150 percent. Sometimes a 170 percent increase on the trails that we were tracking,” said Charles Tracy, coordinator for the Connecticut Trail Census, based out of UConn Extension. “In April and May it slowed down a little bit, but still about 50 percent more than we saw last year.”

Tracy’s team has trail counters on more than a dozen of the major multiuse trails around Connecticut. These are shared trails that can be used for walking or biking.

“We download the data quarterly, although these days we’re downloading it monthly to really look at the impacts of COVID-19 on trail use,” Tracy said.

Data from the latest report show the biggest user jumps at the Hop River Trail in Bolton, Norwalk River Valley Trail in Wilton, the Air Line Trail in East Hampton and the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Hamden.

Tracy said “it’s no surprise” that the data show weekend afternoons are the busiest times.

“If you can stay outside those times, you’re much more likely to have an easier time doing social distancing,” Tracy said.

And while Tracy’s analysis doesn’t yet consider if possible changes in use could be due to other factors such as weather, he said his team continues to observe other trail use fluctuations, which appear to be rooted in behavior changes brought about by COVID-19.

“Some of our trails ... have a higher commuter use,” Tracy said. “During the pandemic, those didn’t have as large an increase ... people weren’t using them as much to go to work.”

“The most commuter-oriented trail of all participating trails, the CTfastrak in New Britain, was down (-23%) in April, but almost even in May (+1%), which may reflect changes in work patterns from the phased re-openings,” the report’s authors write.

But the Connecticut Trail Census is just one glimpse into a boost in outdoor recreation.

Katie Dykes, commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, said there’s been a large visitor spike at many of the more than 140 state parks and forests her agency operates. The DEEP is also responsible for over 2,000 miles of trails and has funded some of the Connecticut Trail Census’ work.

“Since the spring, we’ve seen a really dramatic increase in the amount of visitors to many of our state parks, particularly on our trails,” Dykes said.

In response, the DEEP enacted parking restrictions at some state-owned land in an effort to limit visitors and maintain social distancing.

“It’s mostly something that we’ve used at shoreline parks, which tend to be really popular, especially on those hot weather days,” Dykes said. “If you come to a park and it’s closed, it will reopen the following day.”

Dykes said if a park is closed, visitors should not park outside and then try to walk in, which she said “compromises our ability to maintain those visitor levels.”

The DEEP is maintaining a list of temporary park closures online.

Dykes said getting outside on a trail is “one of the safest things you can do to get some exercise,” but she noted visitors still need to be prepared for situations when keeping 6 feet of social distance might be difficult: like encounters in a parking lot or at a restroom.

“Bring some water with you. Bring some bug repellent. And bring your mask,” Dykes said.

“It’s the new piece of gear that we want everyone to continue bringing with them when they’re out on a hike.”

New Haven Mayor: Over 2 million gallons of sewage discharged into Mill River

By Tara O'Neill - Tuesday, July 7, 2020

File photo taken Thursday, Oct. 25, 2018, showing the Mill River in New Haven, Conn., toward the Interstate 95 Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge. The sewage leak on July 7, 2020, was reported to be in the river near the Whitney Dam, Mayor Justin Elicker said.

NEW HAVEN — A massive sewage leak in the Mill River Tuesday led officials to urge residents to avoid contact with the water for at least several days.

In a message to residents Tuesday night, Mayor Justin Elicker said the discharge of sewage happened in the river near the Whitney Dam.

"Over 2 million gallons of sewage have been discharged into the river," Elicker said. "The Greater New Haven Water Pollution Control Authority fixed the pipe earlier today so there is no longer any sewage leaking into the river."

Elicker said the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection has been monitoring the situation.

"We were not properly notified by the Water Pollution Control Authority the extent of the problem, or we would have notified you earlier," Elicker's message around 9 p.m. said.

The mayor told residents that even though the pipe is fixed, they should avoid contact with the water including swimming, boating or fishing "for several days" as the polluted water in the Mill River moves out to sea.

Elicker said the city will work with the authority to improve communications so there are more timely notifications and updates during any possible future incidents.

Cheshire Acquires 58-Acre Parcel Of Open Space

By Vincent Salzo, Patch - Jul 31, 2020 2:50 pm ET

CHESHIRE, CT — The town has purchased a 58-acre parcel of undeveloped property at 257 Fenn Rd., officials announced Friday. The property will be used for passive recreation, officials said.

"This parcel is a valuable addition to the town's open space," officials wrote in a news release. "It abuts 185 beautiful acres of open space that includes the Mill River Watershed which was purchased by the Town and the Regional Water Authority in 2003."

The acreage was acquired in partnership with the Regional Water Authority and the Cheshire Land Trust. The purchase was initiated by the Cheshire Land Trust when the previous owner contacted them regarding preservation of the property, according to officials.

The Regional Water Authority contributed a third of the purchase cost, and worked closely with the Town and the Land Trust to develop the conservation easement that will preserve this property, according to the news release.

"Preserving open space properties safeguards the health of our communities and our waterways," said Ted Norris, vice president of asset management for the Regional Water Authority. "The RWA owns and protects over 27,000 acres of undeveloped land. We were happy to have this opportunity to work with our partners in the Town of Cheshire and Cheshire Land Trust to help them secure this Mill River watershed property for conservation."

The Cheshire Land Trust secured a grant to assist with the purchase of the property.

"Land trusts exist to protect open space," said David Schrumm, treasurer of the trust. "The Cheshire Land Trust is pleased that we were able to obtain funding that, combined with dollars and cooperation from the RWA and the town, made the purchase possible. It has ended well."

West River Chainsaw Mystery Solved

by Nora Grace-Flood | Jul 8, 2020



The “whodunit” in the woods by the West River is now a “hedidit.”

Nature lovers had wondered who was the mystery chainsaw-wielder who had cut three steps into a toppled tree in order to make a path passable in the West River Open Space trails.

After this article about it appeared in the Independent, Alex Amendola, the Regional Water Authority’s forester, came forward as the man behind the mystery.

According to Amendola, Ron Walters, also of the RWA, heard about the tree blocking a pathway from the West River Watershed Coalition, one of RWA’s community partners. The two decided to go lend a hand.

It was only when Amendola arrived on the site and saw the tree that he realized the magnitude of the task.

“It was larger than three feet in diameter!” Amendola exclaimed.

“The way the tree had uprooted meant that it was suspended in mid air in the center,” Amendola explained. “There was so much tension in the trunk that I was worried I couldn’t get the chainsaw out if I tried to cut all the way through.”

Amendola had to get creative. He had done some chainsaw work back in college; he used skills he honed then to create a miniature staircase through the tree instead of just cutting out the portion of the trunk obstructing the trail.

Amendola pointed out that many of the people who walk through the West River trails are of an older age demographic. It was possible for some to jump over the “giant” tree, but the steps offered increased accessibility.

While the elegant steps started considerable speculation and discussion, this kind of work is not out of the ordinary for Amendola.

The RWA manages over 21,000 acres of watershed forest. Amendola said he does “trail work on RWA property all the time.” He also regularly volunteers to lend his time and skills to other community parks and forests.

“It would have been a real trial for the community to have done that work without our tools,” Amendola said.

“The RWA is involved with a lot of different organizations around New Haven and around Connecticut,” he added. “We have a lot of power being a quasi-state organization, so we like to do anything we can do to help.”

The WRWC celebrated Amendola’s stairway as an important step towards increasing the walkability and connectedness of the area. Amendola emphasized some of the project’s other benefits.

“The first step to healthy water is a healthy watershed forest,” Amendola said.

Amendola leads multiple timber harvests every year. "No one in the world loves trees more than I do," he said. But one of the most important parts of supporting younger trees is recognizing when to take down the old ones.

Identifying senescing trees and creating "a younger forest" improves species diversity as well as water quality. Younger trees are able to filter rain water more effectively before it reaches the reservoir, meaning the water will ultimately require less filtering and treatment by the RWA.

"Having a healthy forest is in the interest of everyone in our distribution system," Amendola said.

Under normal circumstances, Amendola also makes community outreach and engagement a central part of his work.

"A few other environmental guys and I do a lot of outreach and interpretive walks through the West River and the Mill River," he said. "We do all sorts of stuff over the summer: bringing kids outside, teaching them to fish."

While Amendola has been able to keep up some of these activities through the pandemic, he admitted that most of that work "has been smashed into the ground" by Covid-19.

He said that it is possible to effectively social distance outdoors, but that many of the events are arranged in partnership with local organizations that have canceled because of the stress of the pandemic.

"And again," said Amendola, "a lot of the people that come to these activities are in an older demographic... they are understandably wary."

For now, Amendola will continue to do more solitary volunteering when and where it's needed. However, his future projects may not have the same anonymous allure as the wooden steps.

Amendola noted that neither he nor Walters told the WRWC about their work. Then the story "spiraled out of control," and the stairs became regarded as "some unbelievable thing."

He has since received consistent positive feedback from the company and community. His company's CEO even reached out on social media to say "great job, Alex!"

Despite the praise, Amendola remains humble.

"It was no superhuman feat," he said. "It just required a bit of planning."