

MILL RIVER      2010  
WETLAND      ANNUAL  
COMMITTEE      REPORT





## January – December 2010

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#### *River-Lab Program Director*

Joy Shaw

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#### *Mill River Wetland Committee, Inc.*

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Fairfield, CT 06824  
(203) 259-1847

Web site: [www.River-Lab.org](http://www.River-Lab.org)

E-mail: [River-Lab@juno.com](mailto:River-Lab@juno.com)

The 2009 Annual Meeting was held February 5, 2010 at the Fairfield Museum and History Center in Fairfield, CT. Joseph Montemurno, a consultant for Steven Winter Associates, a nationally recognized architectural/engineering research and consulting firm with expertise in green technologies, was guest speaker. He spoke about energy efficiency improvements for the home: what you can do yourself, what a professional may need to do, and what qualifications to look for in an environmental efficiency firm.

Martha Murphy, Diane Rossiter, and Jennifer Titrud were re-elected for three-year terms expiring in 2013.

Charlene Brauns-Schindler presented the 2009 Volunteer of the Year Award to Gay Gasser for her eighteen years of service to River-Lab and MRWC. Gay started guiding River-Lab study-trips in 1990, served on the Board from 1991 to 2001, and conceived and launched the Garden Expo twelve years ago. For the past twelve years, Gay has devoted her time, leadership and exceptional creativity to the Garden Expo. Charlene presented Gay with a traditional Fairfield pewter plate in recognition of her contributions.

In August, MRWC hired Jessica Kochiss to fill the position of Executive Director. Jessica has a strong record of success in the areas of marketing, communications, and community outreach in the field of education. Most recently, she served as the marketing manager at American University's School of Public Affairs for over four years in Washington, DC. She earned her Bachelor's degree from Clemson University and a Master's degree from Georgetown University. Jessica is charged with promoting awareness of MRWC and its mission in the field of environmental education.

This year proved to be a most challenging one financially for MRWC. Our income was down, while expenses increased significantly. We had to purchase additional expensive trail gear for the Grade 6 Estuary study-trip and our general operating expenses increased.

The largest increase was due to filling a long-term need by hiring our new Executive Director. This vital executive will play an invaluable role translating awareness of MRWC's mission into financial support. In addition to increasing these outreach efforts, Jessica has launched into an intensive search for more grants.

We also incurred additional expenses with the hiring of an Event Planner to assist The Garden Expo Committee. The annual Garden Expo is a very popular event with vendors and the public, as well as a key fundraiser for MRWC. Vendors cite our attention to detail as a main reason for their continuing participation. Many people look forward to this event, which they see as the "face" of MRWC. Feeling that we should take the Garden Expo to a more professional level, we hired an experienced event planner to increase publicity and attract more financial sponsors. Increasing publicity for Garden Expo will also increase public awareness of River-Lab and its importance in preparing young students to become stewards of our Earth.

The MRWC Board is also exploring various ways to increase income to cover these new expenses and position ourselves to meet any future needs. We are cutting expenses wherever possible, while maintaining the high quality River-Lab Program everyone has come to expect.

## Executive Director Report

Although MRWC already has a distinguished history, it is refocusing and looking forward with renewed energy. The organization has weathered challenging financial times over the past year. It is intent on reintroducing itself to the community and gaining wider support to secure its future as the dynamic provider of environmental science education for the children of Fairfield.

The fall of 2010 became a time of thoughtful reevaluation. Although MRWC provides roughly a third of the science curriculum to children in Grades 3-6 in Fairfield through River-Lab, many people in the community are unaware the program is independent from the Fairfield Public Schools and is provided by a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation. It became clear that community outreach was required to define River-Lab and the critical role it plays in the lives of young learners in the town.

This renewed effort began with more clearly defining the organization and shaping messages to reach the community in a way that is concise, accurate, and easily understood. The next step involved outreach that had remained under-utilized for several years. This included directly contacting the media, other like-minded nonprofit organizations, the Fairfield Chamber of Commerce, the parents of students experiencing River-Lab, and other potentially interested persons. Going further, it was decided that the current way of communicating with volunteers, members, and donors was dated and in need of an upgrade. This led to changes in the look and feel of all MRWC communications and the release of our first electronic newsletter.

Also, a great deal of time was dedicated to securing new sources of funding for River-Lab. These efforts included submitting over a dozen grant proposals, releasing a call for corporate sponsors and asking for parent support through the school communication systems. Future fundraising efforts will include a renewed donor drive, "family nights" at local restaurants, and additional grant submissions.

The work and outreach conducted in the fall of 2010 delivered results in several areas. MRWC is proud and grateful to have received a generous donation from the Estate of Ruth Krauss that will facilitate the purchase of new microscopes and the Powell Endowment Foundation that will assist us in covering general operating costs. The organization was also the 2010 recipient of a Green Coast Award from Conscious Decisions for its work in providing environmental science education.

These encouragements and continuing progress will be reflected in extensive changes on the MRWC website and the launch of a dynamic social media platform. The future success of River-Lab is dependent on community support and involvement. MRWC is optimistic that 2011 will be a year of significant gains in these areas.



### Statement

Terrestrial Earth is divided into river drainage basins. The diversity and abundance of life forms on Earth depend upon the integrity and viability of the natural systems in each basin. These systems are frequently threatened by human activity.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of Mill River Wetland Committee is to strengthen environmental education and develop general public understanding of river basin systems.

## **River-Lab Curriculum Review**

The Curriculum Writing team was hard at work in 2010, in its quest to provide a quality environmental science curriculum that meets the needs of students, teachers, and guides.. The focus was on the spring, Grade 6 Estuary study-trip. The content remained much the same (with four added activities), but was rewritten so that each trail point could be done by students with minimal guide input. This structure requires student responsibility for gathering of the data, encourages ownership of the procedure, and allows the students to be scientists using the "discovery" process. This structure also requires fewer attending adults than an elementary River-Lab study-trip—a plus for our volunteers with their busy lives. As many of you know, this format is a departure from the way most of these students have experienced River-Lab study-trips in the past, when they were dependent on River-Lab guide direction and explanation.

This new system required the Curriculum Writing Team to put themselves in the position of the student. Directions had to be step-wise and totally clear as to what the students were to do at each trail point. Each site's tasks had to be accomplished in fifteen minutes with enough activity to keep students engaged. We replaced the term "trail point" with "discovery site" to foster the idea that students were to make a discovery about the estuary at each site. At school, during their study of the unit, teachers prepared their students on both content and the skills necessary to work in a small group (2-4), independently of an adult.

Training for the guides was focused on the procedures students would be using, so that guides could help them problem-solve during the study-trip. At indoor training, Alex Moran and Anne Weinrod gave the guides an overview of the content and how it related to the research activities students would be performing. The guides were shown scientific instruments and the gear to be used at each trail point, and Outdoor Trainer Lenka Biardi had them perform the trail points as if they were students.

An added burden, both financially and logistically for River-Lab, was the amount of gear required to be carried out to the revised RL6 study-trip sites. Our Gear Manager, Cindy Leighton, hired earlier in the year, was able to order all the necessary replacements and organize the gear, but we had to hire an assistant in order to have it all delivered and managed at the two study-trip locations, on either side of Ash Creek. Fortunately Mill River Wetland Study Group Director Charlene Brauns-Schindler was able to take on this job, but our costs were mounting.

Generally, the revised study-trip format worked well. Guides understood their new role and, as parents of middle-schoolers, they appreciated that their students were working independently gathering data. Students were engaged and "... doing quality science ..." as reported by Walter Wakeman, the Math and Science Curriculum Leader for Fairfield Public Schools, after he observed students during one of these study-trips. As with any new procedure, kinks have to be ironed out. This is the current work of the Curriculum Writing Team.

Refinements to the revised RL6 study-trip began soon after the completion of the 2010 season. Anne met with Grade 6 teachers and Walter Wakeman in July to review what had gone well and where improvement was needed.. In early fall, Anne also met with Patrice Faggella, the new-to-Grade 6 Science Curriculum Leader. Following that meeting, the Curriculum Revision Team met, and Lenka Biardi and Amy Borrusso assumed the task of drafting a trail point for review by the teachers and Ms. Faggella. Suggestions made during this review will guide Lenka and Amy as they rewrite all ten trail points. These rewrites will ensure an engaging study-trip for Grade 6 students at the estuary in May 2011.

## Mill River Wetland Study Group News

### Mill River Wetland Study Group Officers and Staff 2010

#### Co-Directors

Charlene Brauns-Schindler  
Lynn Shavinsky

#### Trails Chairperson

Mark Tygesen

#### Gear Manager

Cindy Leighton

#### Schedulers

Colleen Barker  
Nancy Henry  
Lynn Shavinsky

#### Nominating Committee

##### Chairman

Charlene Brauns-Schindler

#### Indoor Guide Trainer

Amy Borruso

#### Outdoor Guide Trainer

Lenka Biardi

We are pleased to report that Lynn Shavinsky joined Charlene Brauns-Schindler in June as Co-Director of the Mill River Wetland Study Group. Lynn is a hard worker and has great enthusiasm for River-Lab. Charlene, Lynn, the Trainers, Schedulers and Gear Manager made major changes in several areas. One accomplishment was improving all aspects of communications with volunteers. Another was revising indoor and outdoor trainings. Training sessions are now shorter but speak more directly to guides' needs through a combination of covering concepts and explaining trail content. In addition, there were two helpful and important improvements in gear management. One person now handles the gear for all levels, and we acquired a larger gear storage space.

The decision to drop the former three-study-trip minimum for volunteer guides and to allow volunteers to commit to only as many study-trips as they were able to fit into their personal schedules, along with the shortened training times, encouraged many more people to volunteer to guide. (See stats below.)

A total of 324 guides volunteered their time and energies to the River-Lab Program in 2010. Within this total, 242 were new guides. The new guide participation level in 2010 is close to a 50 % increase over last year. This participation level attests to the strength of the program and the volunteer's (new and experienced) belief in the value of River-Lab for young students and for the community.

**A total of 3,592 students and 324 guides participated in River-Lab in 2010.**

### Mill River Laboratory Program 2010

Key: RL3, RL4, RL5, RL6 = River-Lab Program Levels 3, 4, 5 and 6

Level	# Experienced Guides	# New Guides	# Study Teams*	# Zones**	# of Students
RL6 '10	5	43	--	29	925
RL5 '10	26	50	168	--	912
RL4 '10	26	64	173	--	920
RL3 '10	25	85	166	--	835
<b>Totals</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>3,592</b>

\*Study Team : A study team consists of 1 guide per 4 to 6 students

\*\* Zone: A zone consists of 2 guides per 30 to 32 students

## Mill River Wetland Study Group Awards & Recognitions

The following were recognized this year for their guiding contributions:

### 20-Year Gold Kingfisher Pendant Recipients

Charlene Brauns-Schindler      Ellie Pinson

### 15-Year Gold Kingfisher Pin Recipient

Anne Weinrod

### 5-Year Kingfisher Pin Recipients

Amy deLannoy  
Lynn Goddard

Reini Knorr  
Michele Onofrio

Kim Palmer  
Mark Tygeson

### Kingfisher Badge Recipients

Megan Bochanis  
Kate Croarkin  
Pam Dale  
Amy deLannoy  
Marilyn Donahoe  
Amy Dutter  
Lynn Goddard

Mary Hogue  
Maureen Kane  
Reini Knorr  
Laura Maloney  
Cindy McHugh  
Mary Ellen McKee  
Hetty Nerod

Michele Onofrio  
Lisa Perret  
Nancy Sargent  
Lynn Shavinsky  
Kathleen Stauffer  
Katie Traynor  
Donna Walsh

## Volunteer Guides 2010

Jim Accomando  
Andrew Alexopoulos  
Mary Baker  
Colleen Barker  
Charlotte Bartol  
Jane Becker  
Karen Benjamin  
Clifford Betron  
Jessica Bishop  
Sarah Boccarossa  
Amy Borruso  
Ellen Boyle  
Alicia Bratton  
Charlene Brauns-Schindler  
Janet Brogan  
Kathryn Brown  
Susan Buck  
April Burggraf  
Susie Byrne  
Jodi Cahn-Wasserman  
Robert Caramore  
Susan Carbine  
Jennifer Carden  
Terri Carron  
Tabitha Carter  
Nicole Cassidy  
Katherine Caufield  
Kathleen Chandler

Michelle Chapman  
Aimee Chartier  
Teresa Cherry  
Heather Chirigos  
Taryn Cholakian  
Carla Cinti  
Susan Cipollaro  
Lisa Clancey  
Jamie Clifford  
Emily Cocklin  
Paula Coccozza  
Annie Coolidge  
Sean Corrigan  
Sue Coyne  
Julie Crager  
Diane Creamer  
Stacie Crespo  
Mike Crimmins  
Kate Croarkin  
Tricia Dafoe  
Pam Dale  
Lisa Damp  
Cathleen Davenport  
Jamine Davidson  
Meg Day  
Zsuzsanna Deer  
Clinton DeGroat  
Nicola deJounge

Amy deLannoy  
Deanna DelPrete-Bookas  
Janak Desai  
Linda DeSilva  
Amanda Desmond  
Erika Deutschlander  
Ann Devine  
Steven Diamond  
Eric Dieffenbach  
Debbie Dies  
Maria DiPierro  
Susan Domizio  
Dana Donahue  
Leslie Donahue  
Dinal Doshi  
Karen Duffy  
Ellen Dunn  
Alex Durrell  
Amy Dutter  
Celia Dyer  
Patti Dyer  
Cindy Elwood  
Lilly Elzanaty  
Sarah Essig  
Cheryl Eustace  
Becky Evans  
Johanna Farrell  
Cathy Fell

Chris Fellows  
Rosemary Field  
Tom Fitzpatrick  
Tara Forrest  
Susan Freed  
Alyssa French  
Nicola Fuller  
Kristin Galletta  
Laura Galusha  
Deborah Garskof  
Heidi Gassel  
Milana Gates  
Jennifer Gillis  
Marjorie Glass  
Lynn Goddard  
Chris Gombos  
Julie Gottlieb  
Melinda Gremse  
Tamara Guarino  
Joe Gueterman  
David Gunn  
Akshay Gupta  
Elizabeth Haas  
Ashley Harris  
Jill Hedman  
Cheryl Heinzman  
Marina Henninger  
Mindy Hersch

Jennifer Hoffman	Liz Lundregan	Christy Ottaviano-Ohe	Marcy Shinbaum
Mary Hogue	Karen Lynch	Kim Palmer	Olivia Sims
Kim Hoover	Liz Lyons	Danielle Panagiotidis	Renata Singh
Christopher Huckins	Mary Macri	Marc Patten	Hillary Sollinger
Ava Hunter	Robert Martin	Gretchen Patterson	Kirsti Spadone
Sofia Ibanez	Tammy Martin	Lisa Perret	Ann Spinka
Dina Inchoco	Stephanie Mastino	Robin Phillips	Kathleen Stauffer
Jennifer Jacobsen	Mary Mayer	Ellie Pinson	Michelle Stearns
Patrick Jennings	Thomas McCay	Laura Pitaniello	Rachel Stott
Karen Johns	Mike McElroy	Kristin Poly	Stacey R. Sullivan
Molly Johnson	Kelly McGovern	Peter Porrazzo	Subhashree Sunder
Kathi Kane	Keri McKay	Scott Powell	Eileen Tarney
Jill Kellerman	Mary Ellen McKee	Emily Price	Carol Taylor
Lynn Kelly	Mary McKeon	Maira Price	Martha Terry
Lori Kempton	David McKinnis	Jim Push	Christa Thompson
Alicia Kennedy	Jessica McManus	Sydney Raha	Angela Toner
Emily Kerns	Kara Mead	Lawrence Ratner	Missy Townsend
Teresa Kerrigan	Kelly Mead	Leann Ratner	Mauricio Trabuco
Maureen Kiernan	Jennifer Meagher	Linda Raymond	Katie Traynor
Guylaine Kinney	Michael Meehan	Amy Reading	Mark Tygesen
Gail Kiremidjian	Michele Meehan	Christina Rescanski	Cristin Vahey
Lulu Kleinbeck	Anne Mele	Debbie Reynolds	Alison Varcoe
Reini Knorr	Kathy Mills	Tracy Roberts	Julia Vayda
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Brenda Kugeman	Tricia Money	Christine Rose	Sue Voltz
Ed Kuryluk	Suzanne Monk	Max Rothman	Malini Vyas
Suzanne Laginestra	Eva Morocz	Carrie Rullo	Donna Walsh
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Allison Laurion	Brendan Murphy	Pam Ryan	Bob Westervelt
Randy Lauro	Bridie Murray	Rebecca Ryan Hunter	Christyn Whitney
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Kyung-Im Lee	Fran Nolan	Karen Sanger	Elizabeth Wood
Barbara Lehring	Katie O'Grady	Nancy Sargent	Kate Worrell
Cindy Leighton	Kate O'Mahony	Anna Schlatter	Yvonne Zeisler
Michael Lengel	Jane Oravec	Laurie Schmidt	Arlena Zlatin
Colleen Lerman	Irene Orosz	Dean Schneble	
Denise Leverty	Josh Orosz	Melissa Schramm	
Janet Lopez-Kalapir	Maya Otalora	Lynn Shavinsky	

## Mill River Wetland Committee Contributors to 2010

- Indicates MRWC member

### \$1-29

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Becky Martin & Neal Brady

Roberta Clark  
Nancy & Mark Scott  
Lori & Kurt Steinhauer

Eleanor Watts\*  
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Timothy Dwight School PTA



\$1000 +

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Harry L. Shaw (Given by Joy Shaw)

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GE Foundation Matching Gift Program  
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Occidental Petroleum Corporation Matching Gift Program

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Tom Fitzpatrick  
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## Garden Expo 2010 Sponsors

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Equal Exchange	Committee	Nestle Waters of	Westys Self Storage
Fairfield County	( and families )	North America	WSHU
Real Estate	GKS Computer Repair	James O'Donnell	
Fairfield Ludlow	Mary Goodbody	Oliver Nurseries	
High School Key Club	Green Mountain	Kate and Dan Pengue	

***Thank you to all the Garden Expo Committee members and their families!***

The twelfth annual Garden Expo was held March 20 and 21, 2010 at Fairfield Ludlow High School. Over 3000 attendees enjoyed the lectures, wares and information provided by over 90 exhibitors. All monies raised for the Garden Expo benefit the River-Lab Program.



### You Can Help Support Environmental Science Education

As a member, you are a very important part of MRWC. Your donation will directly support River-Lab, the unique hands-on environmental science program for students in grades 3-6.

Thanks to the generosity of its supporters, River-Lab continues to educate thousands of students, guides and teachers each year.  
Thanks for your support!

**Become a Member – Support River-Lab Today!**

**MILL RIVER WETLAND COMMITTEE, INC. FINANCIAL REPORT**

**January 1, 2010 – December 31, 2010**

<b>INFLOWS</b>	<b>Year to Date Dec 2010</b>	<b>Year to Date Dec 2009</b>
Membership Dues	7,460.00	6,053.00
Gifts		
General & Corp.	3,036.00	2,723.00
Memorials	100.00	100.00
Challenge period	560.00	1,360.00
Anonymous Matching	1,000.00	1,000.00
PTA's	6,550.00	7,300.00
River-Lab Program Income		
Fairfield Public Schools Study-Trips	9,050.00	9,167.00
Parochial Schools Study-Trips	200.00	200.00
Reimbursement for Materials	1,371.00	3,800.00
Fundraising		
Garden Expo 2010	35,058.00	40,635.00
Garden Expo deposits 2010	3,310.00	
Other Fundraising Income		
Tag Sale	0.00	0.00
Grants	5,500.00	5,000.00
Other Income	0.00	120.00
Money Market Transfer	7,000.00	0.00
Interest/Dividend Income	2,868.00	6,624.00
<b><u>TOTAL INFLOWS</u></b>	<b><u>\$83,063.00</u></b>	<b><u>\$84,082.00</u></b>
<b><u>OUTFLOWS</u></b>		
MRWC Expenses		
Insurance	10,617.00	9,048.00
Office Storage	6,361.00	5,302.00
Office Expenses	2,614.00	659.00
Copying	3,077.00	4,676.00
Postage	1,675.00	1,720.00
Annual Meeting — Publicity	481.00	355.00
Professional Development	0.00	2,000.00
Business fees/memberships/charity	861.00	1,295.00
Website/Computer	1,660.00	1,106.00
River-Lab Program		
Guide & Teacher Materials	3,922.00	2,393.00
Published Materials	0.00	0.00
Study-Trip Expenses	18,026.00	13,350.00
Marketing Dev/Research	0.00	0.00
Payroll Expenses		
Payroll Taxes	3,329.00	4,450.00
Payroll Service Fee	1,747.00	1,563.00
Staff Salaries/Advertising	25,505.00	30,962.00
Executive Director	10,481.00	0.00
Fundraising Expenses		
Garden Expo	25,156.00	14,364.00
Other Fundraising — Tag Sale	0.00	0.00
<b><u>TOTAL OUTFLOWS</u></b>	<b><u>\$115,512.00</u></b>	<b><u>\$93,243.00</u></b>
<b><u>NET CASH FLOW</u></b>	<b><u>(32,449.00)</u></b>	<b><u>(9,161.00)</u></b>
<b><u>Beginning Cash Balance</u></b>	<b><u>50,494.00</u></b>	<b><u>63,902.00</u></b>
<b><u>Ending Cash Balance</u></b>	<b><u>\$10,981.00</u></b>	<b><u>\$50,494.00</u></b>

Balances as of 12/31/2010	<b>INVESTMENTS</b>	<b>Unrestricted</b>	<b>Restricted*</b>
<b>CASH:</b>	Oppenheimer Equities	9,249.00	
Checking Account      \$10,594.00	Vanguard Intermediate-term Treasury Funds	33,190.00	26,712.00
Savings Account      0.00	Vanguard Short-term Treasury Funds	26,734.00	21,515.00
Oppenheimer Money Market <u>387.00</u>		<u>\$69,173.00</u>	<u>\$48,227.00</u>
<b><u>Total Cash</u></b>	<b><u>Total Investments</u></b>		<b><u>\$117,400.00</u></b>
<b><u>\$10,981.00</u></b>			

\*The restricted investments are funds from HUD for the dam restoration.

Editors: Joy Shaw, Diane Rossiter, Anne Weinrod, and Roberta Clark

Revised: February 9, 2011