

**FISCAL YEAR 2006-2007 ANNUAL REPORT  
CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY COMMISSION**

**HISTORY**

In 1973, the Connecticut Legislature recognized the Lower Connecticut River Valley as one of the State's most important natural, recreational and scenic areas, and authorized establishment of the Connecticut River Gateway Commission. In July 1974, the Commission became operational with eight eligible towns, two regional planning agencies and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection participating.

The Gateway Conservation Zone is about 30 miles long and includes those portions of its eight member towns (Chester, Deep River, East Haddam, Essex, Haddam, Lyme, Old Lyme and Old Saybrook) within view of the river. Since 1973, this area has been recognized as a unique area.. The Nature Conservancy has designated the lower Connecticut River as one of its "Last Great Places"; the river's tidelands were recognized as an "internationally significant" habitat for waterfowl under the terms of the international Ramsar Convention; the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior has recognized the Lower Connecticut River Valley as "one of the most important ecological landscapes" in the United States; and in 1999, the River was designated as one of 14 American Heritage Rivers by the President of the United States. The State Greenways council designated the Gateway Conservation Zone as an official State Greenway in 2007.

**SCENIC PRESERVATION RESPONSIBILITIES**

While other organizations have concerned themselves with natural ecological systems in the River Valley, this Commission has concentrated its attention on the protection of key lands along the River that contribute to the Valley's scenic qualities. Since its inception, the Commission has worked with others to protect over 2,000 acres of land through gifts or purchase of scenic easements, development rights and fee simple titles. These are located in all eight towns, ranging from the estuarine marshes of Old Lyme to the heights of Mount Tom in East Haddam. More recently, the Commission assisted with a portion of the funding for purchase by the Old Saybrook Land Trust of property along the Old Saybrook waterfront and acquisition of the Roger Tory Peterson property in Old Lyme.

**LAND USE OVERSIGHT RESPONSIBILITIES**

Another significant role assigned to the Gateway Commission by the 1973 legislation is establishment of common zoning standards for height, setback, lot coverage and the like, which member towns have agreed to adopt and enforce within the Gateway Conservation Zone. At its monthly meeting, the Commission reviews and acts on zone changes and variance applications affecting land within the Conservation Zone referred to it by local boards and commissions. No zone change within the Conservation Zone can become effective without the Commission's approval.

The Gateway Commission officially amended its zoning standards on February 26, 2004. Revisions include a new requirement for a vegetated buffer area along the riverfront, clarification of limitations on the height of structures, and greater emphasis on

blending new structures with existing topography and landscaping. These standards respond to continuing concerns over highly visible, large, new homes along the river bank and in the upland hills facing the river, as well as extensive tree-cutting for new development or new views for existing development.

As of June 30, 2007, Gateway member towns of Haddam, Chester, Deep River, Old Saybrook and Lyme have incorporated the new standards into their zoning regulations as required by State Statute. Incorporation by East Haddam, Essex and Old Lyme is still pending.

### **OTHER ACTIVITIES**

Margot Burns, GIS Specialist, has completed a GIS database from the Resource Sensitivity Index (RSI) maps created by J. H. Torrance Downes as an extension to a preliminary dock study for the area. It was funded through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. In another extension of the original dock study work, Downes used the dock study results to assist the Harbor Management Commissions from the Gateway Region Towns of Old Saybrook and Old Lyme to develop private residential dock standards that are intended to be included within their respective Harbor Management Plans. The standards were developed from local planning efforts and are intended for inclusion in the local Plans in order to guide state permitting decisions which are statutorily bound to the DEP-approved local Plans.

### **TIDEWATER INSTITUTE:**

A new initiative designed to address key threats to the internationally significant natural resources of the Connecticut River Estuary has been created by Judy Preston and has been partially funded by the Gateway Commission over the last three years. This past year, Judy assembled and mapped, with GIS help from Margot Burns, and funding from the EPA, the current status of riparian buffers in the Gateway region. In addition, she has applied for and received EPA funding to “groundtruth” the Gateway Region. Tidewater Institute is an independent non-profit 501(c)3 organization.

### **FINANCES**

Until 1991, the State supported the work of the Commission with a modest annual appropriation for administrative purposes. These funds were removed from the state budget in 1992. The Commission has had no state financial support since that time and has had to rely on income from its land acquisition fund to meet its administrative costs of about \$20,000 per year. In addition, the Gateway Commission has invested almost \$15,000 this past fiscal year in support of Tidewater Institute and the pursuit of research and education in the Gateway area.

### **DELEGATES**

Current members include: Margaret Wilson and Martha Wallace of Chester; Nancy Fischbach and Amy Petrone of Deep River; Robert Boulware and Logan Clarke of East Haddam; Fred Vollono and Edward Marlowe of Essex; Susan R. Bement and Scott B. Thompson of Haddam, Kevin Mazer and J. Melvin Woody of Lyme; Rudi Besier and Ted Crosby of Old Lyme; Madeline Fish and David LeMay of Old Saybrook; Steve

Williams from the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency; Raul de Brigard and Stasia DeMichele of the Midstate Regional Planning Agency; and David Blatt of the Connecticut DEP. Fenwick Borough has been designated an ad hoc member and is currently represented by Chuck Chadwick.

The Gateway Commission is staffed by planners from the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency. Updated information including meeting minutes and current standards can be found on the web at [www.ctrivergateway.org](http://www.ctrivergateway.org) or through a link at [www.crerpa.org](http://www.crerpa.org).