



SPRING
2026
NEWSLETTER

**FRIENDS
OF THE LAKE**



Dear Friends of the Lake...

Whoever prayed for snow this winter sure got their wish! Three seventy-degree days around the Ides of March are giving us a good thaw and hope for warmer weather ahead. We are pleased to present our 2026 newsletter, with news of the past year, listings of events and new members, a new State of CT boating requirement, and coverage of the many projects now underway to improve and protect Lake Lillinonah. All of this is possible because of your membership. We are deeply grateful for our growing organization (Take a guess – how many members? Answer below...) and proud to have so many members; those who have been with us since the beginning as well as the very newest members.

If you get a chance, please check with your neighbors to make sure they are aware of FOTL. As always, please contact us with any questions or concerns, and please consider volunteering. Looking forward to a very fun and safe year ahead on our beautiful Lake Lillinonah!

Respectfully yours,
Your Executive Board
Friends of the Lake

NEW BOATING REQUIREMENT

Please be advised that there is a new requirement in Connecticut to obtain, annually, an Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) sticker for your boat or as an operator of any registered vessel. As you will see later in this newsletter, FOTL is pleased to announce that we have just been awarded an AIS grant for this coming summer! Here are details from the CT-DEEP:

“Boaters Operating a Registered Vessel on Connecticut’s Inland Waters Need to Purchase an AIS Stamp

The Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) today reminds those who operate a motorboat or personal watercraft on Connecticut’s inland waters that they are now required to purchase an Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Stamp through DEEP’s online Sportsmen Licensing System or wherever fishing licenses are sold.

Previously the AIS Stamp fee was included with boat registrations. Effective October 2024, the Connecticut legislature modified the method by which the annually required stamp is purchased. The legislature established the AIS Stamp Program in 2019, and it is the primary source of funding for the Lakes, Ponds, and Rivers Preservation Account which provides grant funding to non-profit groups and municipalities for research, treatment, and education campaigns combatting AIS.

“The spread of nuisance aquatic invasive species is one of the biggest threats to water-based recreation in Connecticut today. The funds collected through the AIS Stamp program brings important resources to this fight,” said DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes.

The spread of aquatic invasive species can wreak havoc on the economy and the environment. AIS are non-native plants or animals which are introduced into water environments. When left unchecked, AIS can cause significant impacts to native species, water quality, and recreational opportunities for boaters and anglers. Connecticut is no stranger to these nuisance species, with several aggressive plants, fish, and shellfish currently dispersing throughout Connecticut’s waterbodies.

The AIS Stamp annual purchase is required when a boater answers yes to these two questions: (1) are you operating on Connecticut’s inland waters, and (2) are you operating a vessel which is required to display a registration decal? This applies to state residents and out-of-state visitors boating on Connecticut’s inland waters. To comply with the AIS Stamp law, boaters have two options:

- Individual AIS Stamp (\$7.00). The Individual AIS Stamp is assigned to the individual purchasing the stamp, and it allows that individual to operate in compliance. The proof of purchase is displayed on that individual’s Sportsmen Conservation License as a privilege like a hunting or fishing license.
- Vessel AIS Decal (\$25.00). The Vessel AIS Decal is assigned to a particular vessel, and it allows anyone operating that vessel to operate in compliance. The proof of purchase is a decal that must be affixed to the vessel. The Vessel AIS Decal also provides an Individual AIS Stamp for the purchaser which will be displayed on that individual’s Sportsmen Conservation License as a privilege like a hunting or fishing license.

For more information, please see the DEEP Boating AIS Stamp FAQs website at: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/DEEP/Boating/FAQs/FAQ-AIS-Stamp> or email the Boating Division at DEEP.Boating@ct.gov.”

LAST SUMMER'S EVENTS – Angela Macchiarulo

We kicked off the summer of '25 with 'Save the Lake Day,' always a favorite. We had our biggest turnout yet with volunteers of all ages. Everyone jumped onto pontoon boats to collect man-made garbage from the shores of the lake. After cleanup, participants compared their hauls while sharing a few slices of well-deserved pizza!

The Dine-Around may have been the best one ever! Members and their guests boarded boats to enjoy the generosity of our members who agreed to be host homes. Wine, laughter, and great food along with the beautiful weather provided the backdrop for a perfect evening. Special thanks to Dine-Around Chairperson Francie Malina for her efforts organizing the evening!

Our anniversary party took a twist this year. Held at the Mine Hill Distillery, it was a new adventure for all of us. Our host provided signature cocktails and a beautiful outdoor setting. Members enjoyed a slideshow presentation by FOTL member, Bridgewater town historian and Vice President of the Bridgewater Historical Society Julie Stuart on the history and lore of our beautiful lake.

All three events are scheduled once again for this year. Reach out to any board member if you can provide a pontoon boat for Save the Lake Day or a home/boat for the Dine-Around.

UPCOMING EVENTS – Josh Francis

Please mark your calendars and let us know if you can help in any way!

Save the Lake Day: Sunday, May 31, 2026

Due to the success we had last year moving Save the Lake Day from our normal Saturday to Sunday, we will once again schedule STLD for Sunday, May 31, 2026, with the hope of getting more young folks and fresh faces involved! For any families with middle/high school kids, this is also a great opportunity for community service hours. We are happy to provide the documentation and sign-off for those who attend!

Please arrive at the Route 133 boat launch in Bridgewater at 8:30AM. We will provide gloves, garbage bags, bottled water, coffee, and doughnuts for the launch; and maybe some pizza (if you do a good job!) upon your return... Don't forget to wear shoes that don't mind getting wet, sunscreen, a hat, layers in case it's cold, and a smile. It is always amazing what we pull off our shores, and it is very satisfying to make a direct impact on the health of our lake. It's always fun to reconnect with the usual volunteers while meeting other members and neighbors.

If you can attend with a pontoon boat, please let us know! All are welcome, but be careful about bringing very young ones; it gets very slippery out there and there's always debris that is not kid-friendly...

A VERY special thanks once again to the Cisowski family for providing the dumpster – a critical component to the success of Save the Lake Day!

Dine-Around: Saturday, July 11th from 4:30PM until the dessert house kicks us out!

Details are still being developed. Prepare for a great evening of shuttling around our lake via Pontoon boats on a (hopefully) beautiful summer evening, visiting several lake-front homes while being treated to a succession of appetizers, entrees and finally, dessert! Let us know if you are interested in hosting or if you can provide a pontoon boat at info@friendsofthelake.org. Expect a separate email with more details when available.

Anniversary Party: Thursday, August 13, 5:30 – 8:30PM

Again, we are still in the process of nailing down the details, but our twenty-third anniversary bash will be a gathering of our members, special guests, with cocktails and hors-d'oeuvres, plus a summary of the summer's accomplishments.

MEMBERSHIP – Josh Francis

We have a record number of members! That is quite a compliment to the success of our organization and the importance of our mission. With 300 active members, we have representation in 19 towns. We also warmly welcome our newest 18 members from the past year (see below). We are so proud of this growing organization and the increasing strength our voice has in protecting and improving Lake Lillinonah.

A friendly reminder to renew your 2026 membership!

Most members have a recurring membership set up. If you have selected auto-renew in the past, we will be doing one annual renewal date this year, which will be April 1st, 2026. We will send out two reminders leading up to the auto renewal date in case you want to make any modifications. With that said, if you have any questions regarding your status or the data you have for your auto-renewal, please reach out directly to us and we can verify or change that information. If you wish to discontinue auto-renew, please let us know that as well. For those who would like to manually renew, or share this with a new neighbor who may be interested in joining, please visit this link: <https://friendsofthelake.org/members/>

A very warm welcome to our members who joined in 2025!

Jeff Bergson
Melissa Bergson
Andrew Cerqueira
Anna Cerqueira
Carolyn Dwyer
Patrick Dwyer
Vico Gonzalez
Tamar Greeley
Bill Greeley
Cindy Monti
Bill Monti
Haley Perry
Christopher Perry
Ronald Rienas
Kevin Shine
Sarah Shine
Joshua Easterly
Riva Horwitz

DEBRIS – by Mike Schimenti and George Walker

The wood debris issue on the lake improved last year in comparison to prior years. Fewer high water-level events occurred during the season resulting in less debris being washed down river and floated off of the shorelines. The FirstLight Power program to remove wood debris and provide collection areas for large wood debris logs contributed to the reduction.

In 2025, we successfully developed and validated a proof of concept for a Drone /AI-based wood debris survey tool. The drone pilot demonstrated that wood debris could be reliably identified using drone and aerial footage, confirming the technical feasibility of automated debris detection. This proof of concept met its objectives and established a strong foundation for a future wood debris data collection program by FOTL.

As we move into 2026, our focus shifts from proof of concept to accuracy, scale, and operational maturity. We are seeking to partner with a public company or university that maintains mature, production-grade AI models capable of delivering higher detection accuracy and improved classification performance. Data collection will continue through drone and aerial footage, ensuring consistent, high-quality inputs across varying environmental conditions. This next phase represents a strategic evolution of the wood debris data collection program and moves us from validation to a long-term, partnership-driven program.

WEBSITE – by Jeff Bradshaw

We're looking to add more lake imagery (and possibly video) to our website. If you have any content you'd like to share (still photos, videos, drone footage, live webcams, etc.), please email them to us at info@friendsofthelake.org. Favorite scenes, wildlife, watersports, fishing, sailing...anything that captures what you love about the lake! (Special thanks to Jeff for keeping our website running and up to date! – ed.)

WATER QUALITY – by Rebekah White, Director of Water Quality

A major focus of the Water Quality Committee of Friends of the Lake (FOTL) is monitoring the environmental health of Lake Lillinonah while working with other stakeholders to improve water quality. Monitoring starts with lakeside observations made by member volunteers and finishes with the use of sophisticated multiparameter electronic monitoring devices plus analysis of water samples for cyanotoxins and nutrients. Sharing the collected information with other stakeholders including municipal, state, private and University partnerships is key to formulating a management plan. Our stakeholder partnerships are the key to FOTL monitoring success.

Our Citizen Led Environmental Observatory (CLEO) program is conducted by volunteers. This past season we had four CLEO locations including Poison Ivy Island, Ryan's Rock, the Rt 133 bridge, and on the Shepaug River portion of the lake. We sincerely thank our 2025 CLEO volunteer monitors John Guth, Mark Malina, Greg Bollard, Rebekah White, and Kendra Kilson. See below if you would like to contribute to the CLEO program.

Monitoring is also conducted at a more frequent and sophisticated level through the use of multiparameter monitoring equipment mounted on our GLEON buoy near the Route 133 bridge. FOTL began using this equipment in 2010. Some monitoring is conducted from the buoy, and the rest is collected from land-based equipment from the shoreline across from the buoy. The equipment collects data every 15 minutes from mid-April to mid-October. The collected data is available to interested students and professors, state and federal employees, and professional limnologists world-wide. The studies using our data assist FOTL in understanding the water quality of Lake Lillinonah. See below to understand how you can contribute to FOTL Water Quality.

Additionally, water samples are collected and analyzed from numerous locations on a scheduled basis to measure the level of cyanotoxins in the water. This analysis is conducted by students at Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) as part of their Cyanobacteria Monitoring Program. If an algae bloom is found, we collect a water sample that is analyzed by WCSU to identify the species and concentration of cyanobacteria. See below to understand how you can help when you see an algae bloom using the BloomWatch app. Additionally, we collect samples that are analyzed for nutrient levels.

The second focus of the Water Quality Committee is Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS). The four current concerns include hydrilla, water chestnut, milfoil, and zebra mussels. We do have other invasives in Lillinonah, but they aren't as much of a nuisance or a major threat to the ecological health of the lake. Special thanks to FirstLight Power (FLP) who monitor the lake for aquatic invasive plants. In an ideal world we would work to eradicate all invasives, but that is not a realistic goal. Monitoring and controlling the most aggressive plant populations is our goal.

Our most important current concern is controlling Hydrilla. Hydrilla has the potential to overwhelm the other plants in the lake, creating a monoculture of a dense plant biomass that grows to the surface. Hydrilla grows so thickly that we would be unable to enjoy swimming or boating where Hydrilla is growing. The massive amount of plant material would be dangerous for swimming, and tangle in paddles and propellers. Hydrilla threatens fish populations because it creates a low oxygen environment. FOTL works with the CT DEEP, who is in the process of issuing permits for the treatment of our known populations, and we have submitted a grant request for funding of the treatment of new populations that are discovered through FLP and FOTL monitoring efforts. As mentioned earlier, the CT DEEP is raising money for these efforts through an annually renewed sticker program for boats and boaters.

We are very pleased to announce that the CT DEEP has awarded FOTL an AIS grant in the amount of \$33,750

(with a \$12,250 match from FOTL, bringing the project funding to \$50,000), for the removal of Hydrilla in Lake Lillinonah. We will put those funds to use this season to try and stay ahead of this extremely invasive species.

We have worked with the Lake Lillinonah Authority (LLA) on the control of Water Chestnut since 2018. The LLA has contracted a vendor to control Water Chestnut in the lake, while FOTL works to control the populations located just outside of the lake.

The extensive population of Eurasian Watermilfoil does not allow FOTL or LLA to implement broad control measures, but the population is monitored by FLP. It appears that the distribution of milfoil has remained steady at around 132 acres since 2019. Milfoil tends to be a nuisance because it likes to grow where we like to swim and dock our boats near the shoreline. See below to find out how you can control milfoil or represent your town on the Lake Lillinonah Authority.

We are all familiar with our zebra mussel population that has been monitored since 2010. Unfortunately, there is no known way to eradicate them, but we do continue a simple monitoring technique to help us determine their role in the clarity of the water. We quantify their population by setting out “hotels” for them to populate, then take pictures of how populated the hotels are throughout the season. Protect your boats by using boat lifts, if possible, or occasionally removing boats from the water to allow the zebra mussels to dry out and be removed. Wearing gloves, use a brush or scouring pad to clean items in the water frequently to prevent a buildup of mussels.

The work performed by FOTL is supported by intellectual curiosity and contribution, monetary donations and volunteerism. You don't need to be a professional lake manager to make a difference or contribute. Please take the time to read below or reach out to us to contribute to our goal of monitoring and improving the health of Lake Lillinonah.

Send us PICTURES of your observations!

Your observations of the lake are a great step towards assisting us. What one person sees on the Shepaug River portion may be dramatically different on the Housatonic River portion. A report made at 10AM of an issue may be gone by the time someone can get out and view it later in the day. Pictures are a great way to document conditions. If you see something you feel is different or concerning, please send a picture with your observations to info@friendsofthelake.org.

BloomWatch

Download the BloomWatch app. If you are on the lake or on the shore and see an algal bloom, open the BloomWatch app and send your pictures to the EPA and CT DEEP. Please also send us the photos at info@friendsofthelake.org along with the location and we will try to grab a sample of the bloom for testing.

CLEO (Citizen Led Environmental Observatory)

Training is only a couple of hours, all equipment is provided by FOTL, and the data collected is valuable to many different stakeholders. We would love to add more volunteers and locations and wish to restart monitoring in Barkwood Cove again. All you need is 15 minutes of access to a dock on the lake Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays between the hours of 3 and 7 during the boating season. Substitutes to cover regular monitors at their sites are also welcome.

FOTL Water Quality

Are you interested in limnology (lake science)? If you are a student or just curious to learn more about the monitoring program and the equipment we utilize, feel free to contact us. You can join us in collecting samples, maintaining the equipment or just learning more. Email us at info@friendsofthelake.org.

How to Control Milfoil

In shallow calm areas, benthic barriers placed after the ice is gone and removed by Memorial Day or left in place for the season can be an effective control measure. Other options that are utilized on the lake include hiring a diver to perform Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting (DASH) or contracting a licensed vendor to apply for a permit and apply the pesticide.

WAKESURFING – Bart Conant

As some of you may know, wakeboarding and wakesurfing have come under scrutiny on nearby Lake Warmaug, potentially leading to legislation banning these sports on certain bodies of water. Friends of the Lake encourages all our members to enjoy the lake in their favorite way, but we would like to encourage everyone participating in watersports to be mindful of their neighbors and fellow boaters. Surf in areas without homes, surf on the side away from homes, and stay at least 200 feet from the shore. Also please be mindful of rowers, kayaks, canoes and paddleboarders and try to give them as wide a berth as possible. The area of the lake by the dam is perfect for surfing!

KIMBERLY-CLARK UPDATE – Bart Conant

Kimberly-Clark's renewal permit to discharge is still in the technical review phase with the CT DEEP. Unfortunately, we have not made much progress on this issue, but we will continue to push DEEP and the state to ensure that the permit parameters are in line with other wastewater treatment plants that affect our lake. We continue monitoring water samples above and below where the plant discharges into the Housatonic River to keep building our case for improvements to what their prior permit allowed.

JEFF TINLEY MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Reed Woerner, our 2025 Jeff Tinley scholarship winner, is very grateful for his award. Reed is currently a freshman at Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island. He is a member of its division-one basketball team while carrying a full course load. While enjoying college life, Reed says he is looking forward to the summer so he can get back on the lake!

This scholarship was established in loving memory of our dear friend and neighbor, founding member and board member Jeffrey Tinley, Esq. As a key member of Friends of the Lake, Jeff put his legal expertise to work on our behalf to help clean up the lake and to keep it clean for future generations. Jeff was a member of the Connecticut Bar Association, serving on the Professional Discipline Executive Committee. He was generous with his time and talents and enjoyed taking on pro bono cases, serving as town attorney for Southbury and advocating for environmental preservation. In one of his more notable battles, Jeff worked to get the discharge of phosphorus and nitrogen at the Danbury Wastewater Treatment Plant reduced. Jeff's efforts led Danbury to pay a \$100,000 fine and take measures to ensure that the city properly operates and maintains its sewage collection and treatment system to prevent further discharges of untreated wastewater into the Limekiln Brook and the Still River. As a result of these efforts CT DEEP subsequently designated these areas as "priority waterbodies" resulting in extra effort and focus on cleaning them up.

A \$1,500.00 scholarship will be awarded to a high school senior/college/grad student studying at a two- to four-year accredited institution. The student must demonstrate an interest in a field of study related to law or environmental sciences. Students must be residents of one of the six towns bordering Lake Lillinonah or be the daughter or son of a FOTL member. Applicants must apply by June 30. An application form is available online at [Friendsofthelake.org](https://friendsofthelake.org). Here is the link: <https://friendsofthelake.org/jeff-tinley-scholarship-application>

The scholarship winner will be announced during the Friends of the Lake anniversary meeting each August.

LAKE LILLINONAH AUTHORITY

The Lake Lillinonah Authority is funded by the towns of Bridgewater, Brookfield, New Milford, Newtown, Southbury, and Roxbury to oversee environmental, safety and recreational needs of Lake Lillinonah. Board members are chosen by their town. Meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month virtually. If you would like to attend or find out more about the LLA, visit www.lakelillinonahauthority.org.

Marine Patrol Summary - From 11/4/25 minutes:

"The Lake Lillinonah Authority hires sworn off-duty police officers and non-sworn personnel for marine patrol. Three Lake Lillinonah Authority-furnished marine patrol boats were utilized throughout the season. Boat #3 Metal Shark had serious engine issues and was out of service for several weeks at the during this season while engine was replaced. Boat #2 older Whaler had another leak brookfield 2025. This included training and administrative hours. Patrol had 585 vessel contacts, which resulted in 338 verbal and written warnings, 351 inspections, and 52 requests to vacate due to trespass and equipment violations. The patrol had 73 documented boater assists and performed numerous debris removals. Assisted the following agencies: Brookfield Police, Bridgewater Fire/Ambulance, CSP Troop A, Newtown Police, New Milford Fire, DEEP Encon Police, and New Milford Police several times throughout 2025 for assorted emergency service needs. We used approximately 2575 gallons of fuel during this boating season. We had a credit of 286 gallons at the end of the season."