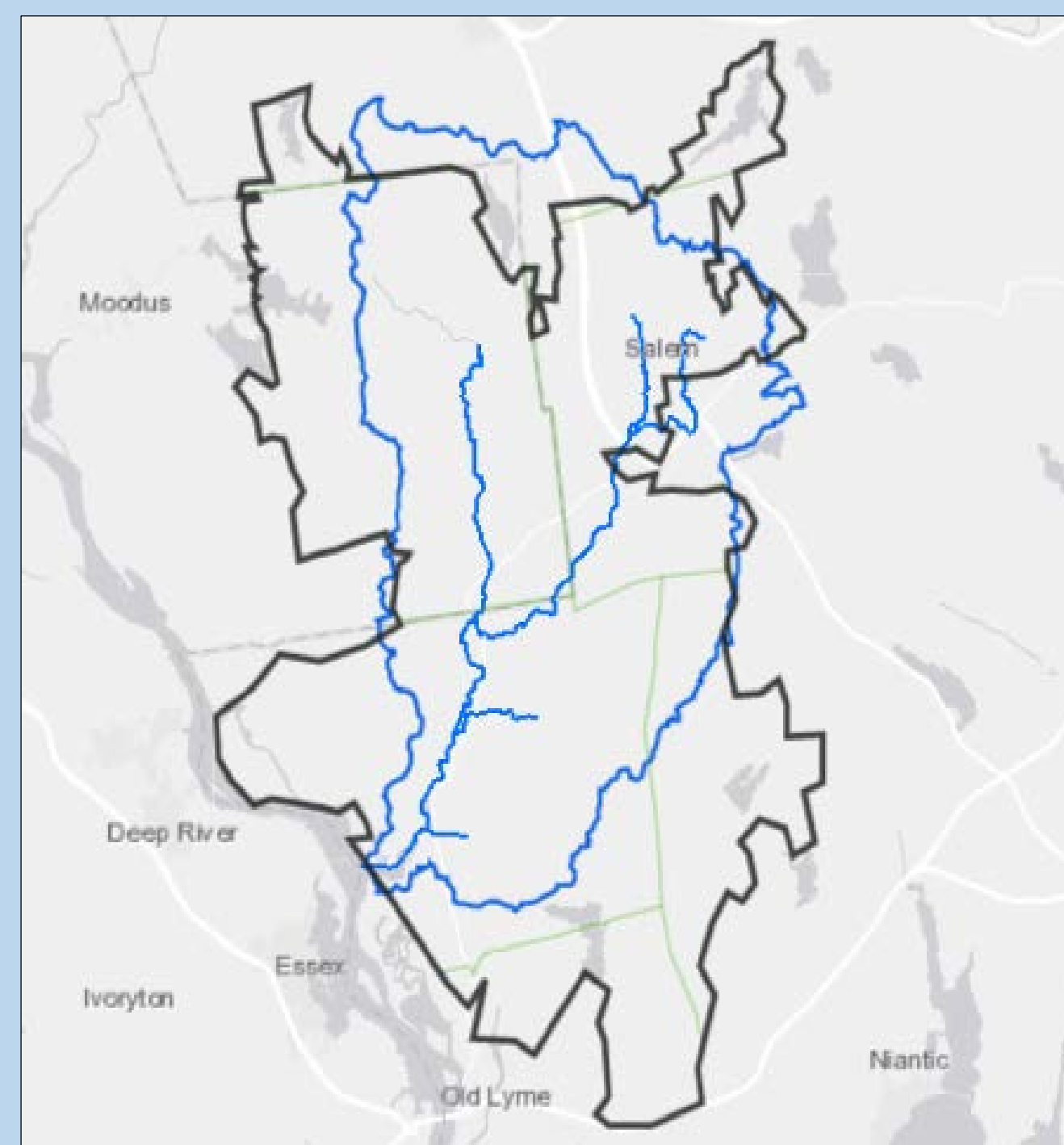


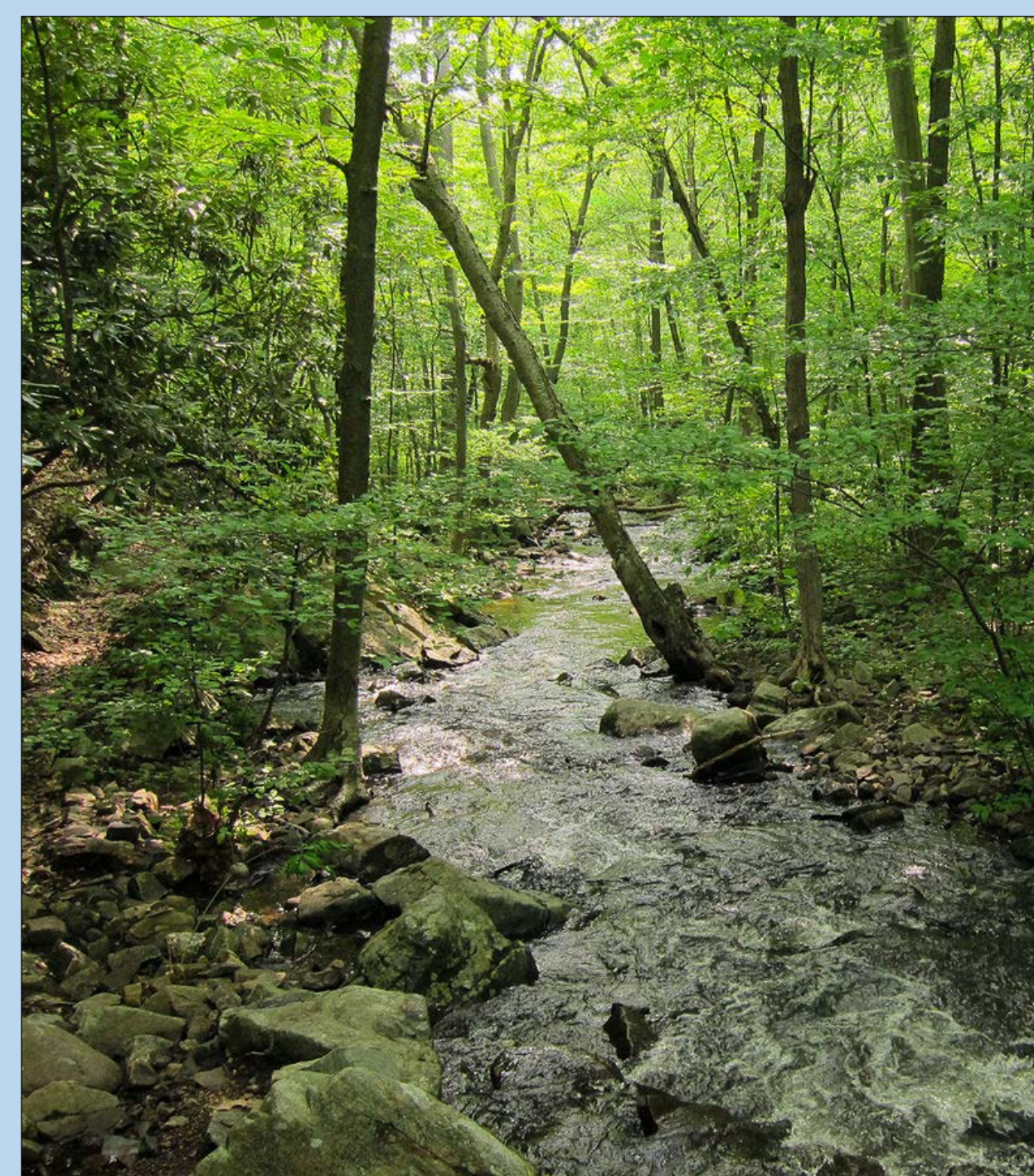
Introduction

The Eightmile River was signed into legislation as A National Wild & Scenic River System in 2008 by President George W. Bush, recognizing it as one of the nation's great river systems. From its smallest feeder stream, to the river itself, there is no other near-coastal river system between Boston and New York that is functioning much as it did before colonization. The Eightmile watershed contains all the elements that make for a healthy, natural river system.

Much of the watershed is within the Lyme Forest Block, which in 2016 was recognized as an Important Bird Area by Audubon Connecticut, in partnership with the State of Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection. This 60,000-acre block includes wooded areas in six towns in southeast Connecticut (East Haddam, Colchester, Lyme, Old Lyme, East Lyme, and Salem). The woodlands in this region contain habitat that is important to the Cerulean Warbler and Wood Thrush. The worldwide populations of these birds are declining, and the Lyme Forest Block Conservation Project is an effort to strengthen the conservation of this area and halt bird population declines.



The Lyme Forest Block IBA spans six towns in southeastern Connecticut. The blue line on the map represents the Eightmile River Watershed.



An example of wooded habitat along a watershed. This type of habitat is used by a variety of bird species.

Habitats of the Eightmile Watershed

With over 150 miles of pristine rivers and streams flowing through this relatively undeveloped wooded land, the Eightmile Watershed contains an array of habitats for a wide variety of birds all year round, including

- Mature forest
- Shrub/scrub, early successional
- Wetlands
- Vernal pools
- Eightmile river and its watershed

The Eightmile River as a Food Source

The Lyme Forest Block is core breeding and nesting area for migratory birds. The Cerulean Warbler and the Wood Thrush are being threatened because of habitat fragmentation. The Cerulean Warbler needs very tall mature trees, and their habitats are found scattered through the Lyme Forest Block. The Wood Thrush needs a thick understory, and leaf litter, and its habitat is found throughout the Lyme Forest Block.

Migratory woodland nesting birds feed their young insects, and the Eightmile River provides a steady food source. Insects such as the Mayfly, Stonefly, and Caddisfly hatch from the water, and birds catch these flying insects throughout the spring.



Cerulean Warbler. Photo by Andrew Simon.



Wood Thrush. Photo by Kathy Johnston.

Landowners in the Watershed

Audubon Connecticut and local partners are engaging landowners in the Watershed and Lyme Forest Block (LFB). Over 40,000 acres of the LFB are privately owned, and in order for the LFB to support healthy bird populations, these landowners need to be good stewards of their land. With outreach and education on proper woodland management, these landowners can make a positive impact on the quality of the LFB.

Currently, landowners may be planting harmful invasive species, or do not know what actions to take in creating a healthy habitat on their property. Through the LFB project, we aim to improve habitat quality of woodlands for both the people and birds by

- Reaching priority landowners
- Teaching proper woodland management
- Encouraging creation of habitat variety
- Raising awareness of the link between woodlands and watersheds
- Promoting good stewardship of property

Engaging Landowners

Together, the project partners and the Lyme Forest Block IBA community will bring about positive conservation results that will benefit the birds, other wildlife, and people throughout the area through:

- Bird walks to spotlight woodland species
- Presentations on importance of woodland habitat
- Training workshops on habitat management
- Work days for hands-on learning
- Web page with resources for landowners

Through these activities, participants will gain appreciation for natural resources, feel more connected to their land and water, and actively participate in conservation efforts.

We will recognize landowners who are make a difference for birds and other wildlife through a pledge form. When the pledge is signed, landowners commit to making positive changes to their land. When improvements are made, as a thank you, we will send them a beautiful Lyme Forest Block Stewardship sign for their yard.



The Lyme Forest Block Stewardship Pledge

I pledge to encourage a diversity of native plants and animals, control or remove invasive plants, and to use knowledge learned at Audubon CT presentations, workshops, and online resources to enhance my property in an effort to help woodland birds and other wildlife.* Audubon CT will contact with you three times throughout the upcoming year to learn about the enhancements you have made to your property and celebrate with you on your accomplishments! As a thank you from the Lyme Forest Block Conservation Project, when positive changes are reported, you will receive a beautiful Audubon CT Stewardship sign for your yard.

Signed: _____

(Land steward/property owner)

Date: _____

*This is not a legally binding agreement. By signing, you are recognized as a Land Steward by Audubon Connecticut for the Lyme Forest Block Conservation Project. The strength of this pledge rests on the landowner's personal commitment to conservation.



Acknowledgements

- Project Funders: Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed, Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, Jeniam Foundation, National Wild & Scenic Watersheds
- Project Partners: Audubon Connecticut, Colchester Land Trust, Connecticut College, East Haddam Land Trust, Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed, Lyme Land Conservation Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Old Lyme Land Trust, Salem Land Trust, Town of Lyme, and the Connecticut Audubon Society