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A lifeline for the region

Soon, a 20-inch pipe underneath the Thames River will link water systems east and west of the river. This project, which will tunnel under the river bottom, is a fine example of modern engineering, but it also exemplifies the great potential of regional cooperation in managing southeastern Connecticut's growth.

The pipeline will link Groton, Ledyard and Montville systems directly, and indirectly will connect to Waterford, New London and Norwich. The line will enable these communities to share water for the first time under regional agreements. This is a giant step for regional cooperation in an area known more for its parochialism.

The pathway for the 20-inch pipes will be created by horizontally drilling 10 feet beneath the bottom of the river. The pipeline will supply water from Groton Utilities, the region's largest water supply. Six weeks after the pipe is installed, it will begin carrying 200,000 gallons a day, but has a capacity for nearly 2 million gallons.

To reach this point, the communities participating in the system had to agree to a complex set of rules for metering and pricing water. This required significant concessions by local governments for the greater interest of the group. The impetus came from the Mohegan Tribe, which is financing the \$1 million pro-

New pipeline can become a catalyst for regional cooperation in managing growth in southeastern Connecticut.

ject. The tribe did this because the local systems, created by a patchwork of bilateral agreements, could not provide a reliable supply of water to meet the huge demands of the Mohegan Sun casino.

The Thames River pipeline not only brought together local governments in a regional effort, but also empowered the Southeastern Connecticut Water Authority, which plays an enhanced role in this compact among local governments.

This project ought to be only a start to greater regional efforts, notably to plan for the future water needs of this fast-growing area. Such a process requires that the region take stock of its tapped and untapped water supplies, and develop a plan of conservation and development for water. The communities in the region must also tailor their land-use regulations to take into account their water supplies.

These are tasks that are best carried out cooperatively. This pipeline can become a catalyst for such cooperation.