

Annual Report of the Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association

January to December 2001

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Organizational Status

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) is a 501(c)(3) conservation organization formed in 1983. WPWA is governed by a board of trustees, and employs a full-time executive director and a full time program director, as well as one or two part-time summer interns. WPWA's volunteer work force totals around 90 throughout the year. Paid membership includes approximately 700 individuals and families (which brings the total number to roughly 1000) from throughout the watershed, the State of RI, and the United States.

WPWA's operating expenses for 2001 totaled approximately \$135,000. A statement of financial position can be found at the end of this report.

Summary of Activities

Website – WPWA's official website, www.wpwa.org, was launched in the fall to replace existing sites hosted by Brown University and Bryant College. The site contains the full version of the Pawcatuck Watershed Action Plan, information on the association, drought information, a powerpoint presentation on river access, and much more.

Stream Monitoring in the Pawcatuck Watershed – a report of stream monitoring results from the years 1999 and 2000, including stream flow and physical parameters, was published and distributed, and is available on WPWA's website. A report of 2001 stream water quality results is in development, and shows results consistent with the previous two years. Together these reports, combined with years of URI Watershed Watch results, serves as the basis for WPWA's strategic transient monitoring strategy to be launched in 2002. Partners in the Stream Monitoring program include North Stonington Citizen Land Alliance and the Hopkinton Conservation Commission.

URI Watershed Watch - Continuing its 15th year of volunteer monitoring under the URI Watershed Watch program, WPWA volunteers kept watch over 12 freshwater ponds and 5 river impoundments, sampling for temperature, pH, water clarity, dissolved oxygen, bacteria, chlorophyll, and nutrients. Overall the water quality remains fair to good, with the exception of eutrophication in Barber and Yawgoo Ponds, the cause of which is being investigated by RI DEM. A report of these results is available upon request.

GPS Inventory of River Banks – in the summer, Doug Costello, an intern from Brown University's Department of Environmental Studies, conducted an inventory of the navigable river banks along the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers, identifying and mapping points where erosion control and access improvement are required.

Public River Access Powerpoint Presentation – as a companion to the GPS inventory, a physical inventory of river access points along the Wood and Pawcatuck was compiled and presented, with recommendations for prioritizing access improvement and erosion control, to various RIDEM officials in September of 2001. WPWA also distributed a CD of the presentation to several officials and stakeholders, and for inclusion in the South County Greenspace Protection Project.

Municipal Government Outreach – WPWA completed its final year as part of the EPA Wetland Grant administered by Southern RI Conservation District, and including USGS, Audubon Society of RI. WPWA's role in 2001: municipal outreach on behalf of the Water Use Stakeholder Group and its work on water availability and water use management.

Watershed Education – WPWA educator Denise Burgess presented an 8-week *AWEsome!* course to teachers at Coventry School Department, earning them graduate credits and creating a new corps of watershed educators. The program was funded by a grant to the Town of Coventry through the 106 section of the Clean Water Act, distributed by RI DEM. Partner agency Southern RI Conservation District wrote and administered the grant for the town.

Classroom instruction was offered throughout the year. A Groundwater Protection Grant to the West Greenwich Conservation Commission allowed 250 West Greenwich fourth graders and staff members to engage in land and water science activities and field trips. At Pawcatuck Middle School, 100 fifth graders learned about watersheds to complete their ecosystem study, including participation in water quality monitoring in the Pawcatuck River as part of the program. At Wheeler Middle and High School in North Stonington, a water quality testing curriculum was developed for 60 students in the gifted student program. Elementary school students, 120 in all, in Hope Valley, Richmond, and Kent Heights participated in Aquatic Insect Exploration field trips. An Aquatic Insect Unit was also developed for the science curriculum. Finally, at Chariho-Middle School, 100 students continued to monitor two sites on the Meadow Brook, both for educational purposes and as part of the ongoing Stream Monitoring Program.

Recreational Programs - to raise awareness during RI Rivers Month in June, WPWA conducted a five-part *Source-To-Sea-Paddle* through the Pawcatuck River basin from its source at Worden's Pond to Little Narragansett Bay. Additionally, three summer paddles were conducted on the Wood River.

On Rivers Day, WPWA and the Horace Kimball Foundation, with the assistance of Rep. Brian Kennedy and Sen. Donna Walsh, hosted a Wood River canoe trip and luncheon for members of the RI General Assembly.

In conjunction with RI DEM educator Christine Dudley, WPWA held two Family Fun Fishing Days at the Carolina Fish Hatchery, and conducted an aquatic education program for children.

Five watershed hikes were hosted at favorite trails in the region, some under the guidance and expertise of Charlie Hickox.

Summer kayak instruction, river exploration, and aquatic insect education programs were offered in conjunction with Paddle Providence, Roger Williams Park Zoo Camp, and the Norman Bird Sanctuary. In total, 110 teenagers participated over 8 weeks.

Community Action and Outreach –Chariho High School Community Service Students worked with WPWA in the spring of 2001 to produce a PowerPoint presentation about the Pawcatuck River. Two other students began work in the fall to help WPWA with office tasks and outreach programs.

Fifty-seven volunteers helped cleanup 17 river access sites in five towns in the watershed for Earth Day. WPWA received a grant from the RI DEM to help cover expenses.

The 8th annual *Opening Day in the Watershed* litter awareness program marked the start of trout fishing season. Free Bess Eaton Coffee was dispensed at six popular fishing sites to anglers with reusable coffee mugs. Partners from the Narragansett Chapter of Trout Unlimited were on hand to help.

WPWA recruited volunteers for RI DEM's *South County Greenspace Protection Project*. Hours of participation by WPWA resulted in an entire data layer being produced for the final Greenspace maps, aimed at making riparian corridors a top priority for protection.

River and hiking trail were preserved with funding from the RI Trail Advisory Committee, and the work of area Eagle Scout candidates. Projects included clearing blowdowns from 16 miles of river along the Wood and Pawcatuck to improve navigability, installation of fencing and footbridge construction around Browning Mill Pond trail, and the installation of fishing line collection boxes at public fishing sites.

WPWA participated in the *Gaia Dialogues*, an initiative spearheaded by artist and RISD professor Ana Flores to bring the art and environmental communities together. A series of discussion and workshops culminated in a multi-media exhibit at the RI Foundation Gallery in September.

WPWA has representation on numerous municipal and state boards and commissions, including the RI Watershed Approach Coordinating Council and its Stormwater Subgroup, Westerly Town Council, Richmond Land Trust, RI Trails Advisory Committee, Water Use Stakeholder Group, Hopkinton Land Trust, RI Environmental Educators Association, and the Washington County Regional Planning Council.

Facility Improvements – the association's headquarters on Arcadia Road in Hope Valley has undergone major renovations in 2001, including the completion of a new state access and handicapped-accessible fishing pier on site, complete interior renovation of a rental cottage on the property (through which the association derives operating income); repair and replacement of the bulk head retaining wall between the main office and the Wood River; and the start of driveway and landscape work, and renovation of the exterior and interior of the main office to create a small watershed conference and learning center.

Publications – WPWA published for quarterly issues of *Watershed*, each one very well received. In addition, sales of WPWA's guide books – *Wood Pawcatuck River Routes Map* and *Walks in the Watershed*, remained consistent throughout the year. Revision for the reissue of the river map are underway.

Pawcatuck Watershed Action Plan – 2001 Priorities

GOAL: Protect and restore natural, cultural and recreational resources of importance to the communities within the watershed.

Objective 1: Target land acquisition efforts to protect riparian corridors and their multiple benefits.

Strategy 1.1: Identify riparian areas that:

- If protected would diminish impacts from development on water and recreational quality.
- If acquired would improve suitable recreational opportunities.
- Are potential sources of contamination, and thus are candidates for strategic water quality monitoring.
- If restored would protect water quality and provide habitat.

Activities:

- 1.1.1 Encourage active participation by watershed residents in the Greenspace Implementation plan.
- 1.1.2 Convene a steering committee that includes town planners, DEM Fish and Wildlife, DEM Planning and Development and WPWA.
- 1.1.3 Conduct streamside assessments by RI Canoe and Kayak Assoc., WPWA volunteers and staff and Brown University intern.

Strategy 1.2: Allocate a significant portion of open space bond funds to protection of riparian corridors.

Activities:

- 1.2.1 Adopt regulations for allocating open space bond funds that give a high priority to protection of riparian corridors.
- 1.2.2 Encourage towns and non-profit organizations to propose for protection the areas identified in Objective 1.

Strategy 1.3: Restore degraded riparian areas.

Activities:

- 1.3.1 Prioritize restoration opportunities identified in Objective 1.
- 1.3.2 Where owners of priority parcels are unwilling to consider restoration, target these parcels for acquisition.
- 1.3.3 Direct restoration funds and programs to the highest priority sites.

Strategy 1.4: Improve the quality of recreational access to rivers in the watershed.

Activities:

- 1.4.1 Adopt regulations for allocation of recreational bond funds that give a priority to providing safe and convenient recreational access to rivers.
- 1.4.2 Encourage towns and non-profit organizations to propose for recreational development river access areas identified in Objective 1 (DEM and WPWA).
- 1.4.3 Based on Riparian Areas Committee (Activity 1.1.2) findings, target financial and technical resources to specific riparian areas for recreational development.

GOAL: Clean and Plentiful Water. Fishable/Swimmable surface water bodies.

Objective 2: Create and implement a cost effective, efficient water quality monitoring strategy for the Pawcatuck Watershed.

Strategy 2.1: Identify and allocate water quality monitoring resources to provide most efficiently the information that will be most useful in pollution prevention and enforcement efforts.

Activities:

- 2.1.1 Convene a committee to design a targeted water quality monitoring strategy for the Pawcatuck Watershed that is realistic given available resources.
- 2.1.2 Assign responsibility for the highest priority sampling areas.
- 2.1.3 Sample, analyze, interpret and report results on a website in a timely fashion.
- 2.1.4 Where results demonstrate a water quality impact, report directly to the agency with responsibility for remediation.

Overview of the Status of the Watershed

According to R.I. DEM's Land Acquisition report for FY-2001, 485 acres of land within the Pawcatuck Watershed was protected.

In 2000, 45% of the 808.5 acres acquired, or a total of 336 acres, was within the boundaries of the Pawcatuck Watershed. In 2001, 21% of the 707.8 acres, or 149.6 acres, is within the watershed.

Out of these totals, 0.96 acres in Hopkinton was acquired for recreational boating/fishing access. These monies came from state open space funds, as opposed to recreation funds. During this past year, and in the coming year, one of WPWA's priorities is to improve the amount of money spent on acquiring and improving public access areas by RIDEM and RIDOT.

Information on the status of the watershed as classified by the state can be found in the "Rivers Policy and Classification Plan," Jan. 1998, as follows:

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed continues to be Rhode Island's premier fresh water recreational resource. The watershed boasts 53 miles of canoeable river, over 30 fresh water ponds for recreational fishing, and many miles of maintained hiking trails. The primary objective in the management of the watershed is to preserve its quality in this regard. A second objective is to maintain habitat quality, and a third critical objective is to preserve the high quality of groundwater in its sole-source aquifer system. A further objective is to preserve agriculture within the watershed, which has been declining steadily for more than a century.

For the most part, water quality throughout the watershed is good to excellent. However, there are areas where it is degraded and segments where it is threatened, especially by development. Point source discharges do limit swimming uses in the specific areas in the vicinity of discharge points.

The Wood-Pawcatuck River system is divided into 32 segments classified as follows:

Pristine Segments – pristine sections of the watershed include headwaters to both the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers and various ponds and river segments. Parris Brook and the Falls River, the Flat River, Wood River and Breakheart Brook, all feeding the Wood, are classified pristine. Historic Long, Ell, and Blue Ponds and their headwaters, as well as Lock, Fisherville and Queens Fort Brooks above and into the Queen's, share pristine status. Feeding Worden's Pond and the Pawcatuck: lower Chipuxet River, and two upper stretches of the Pawcatuck, the Ashaway River and Tomaquag Brook share pristine classification.

Recreational Open Space – the majority of the watershed’s ponds, rivers and brooks are designated recreational. Ponds include Boon Lake, Wincheck and Locustville Ponds, Tucker Pond, Ashville Pond, Worden’s Pond, Hundred Acre and Thirty Acre Pond, Yawgoo and Barber Ponds, Watchaug Pond, and Chapman Pond. River segments include the Wood River from Barberville to 138, and from Brushy Brook to Alton; the Usquepaug River to Chickasheen; the Chipuxet river from Taylor’s Landing; the Beaver River; the Pawcatuck River from Usquepaug to Kenyon, and from Route 91 to Bradford. Among the recreational brooks feeding the Wood are Roaring Brook and Brushy Brook, and Canonchet Brook. Feeding the Pawcatuck: Meadow Brook and Chickasheen Brook, Poquiant Brook, Aguntaug Brook and Alewife Brook.

Two segments of the Pawcatuck are classified *recreational open space*, however activity is limited to non-contact. These are the segments immediately downstream of the operational mills at Kenyon and Bradford, and in the vicinity of landfill at Chapman Road in Westerly. In 2001, both Kenyon Industries and Bradford Dyeing Association renewed their RIPDES permits with R.I. Department of Environmental Management.

Recreational Multiple Use – the Wood River from Route 138 in Hope Valley to Brushy Brook runs through an historic village center, its banks dotted with historic homes and antiquated septic systems, an auto repair facility, and commercial businesses. This segment has a public fishing access, and is often the victim of littering.

Water Supply – the watershed’s lone designated surface water supply is Yawgoog Pond, which serves Camp Yawgoog with potable water. Yawgoog Pond is also suitable for swimming and other contact recreational activities.

Working – there are no river segments or ponds in the Pawcatuck watershed classified as working.

Grants and Contributions -

Charitable Foundations:

Champlin Foundations - \$25,000 capital
Horace Kimball Foundation - \$25,000 capital
Horace Kimball Foundation - \$25,000
Rhode Island Foundation - \$25,000

Ocean State Charities Trust \$4,640 capital
The Freedom Forum \$2,500 endowment
Anonymous \$5,000 endowment
Forest C. Lattner Foundation \$15,000
Virginia C. Mадiera Trust - \$5,000

Public Sources:

RI Legislative grant - \$10,000
RI Rivers Council - \$10,000
RI DEM Earth Day Grants (4 towns) - \$1,000

RI Trails Advisory / Syms Grant - \$1,960
Westerly Conservation Commission \$600
Town of Charlestown \$500
Stonington Conservation Commission \$150

Corporate Contributions:

Country Cape Antiques Shows - \$1,500
Washington Trust Company - \$1,000
Liepold Tool and Dye - \$1,000

United Builders Supply - \$500
H.C. Woodmansee and Son - \$500
Ashaway Line and Twine - \$300
Pfizer Foundation - \$100

Member Dues and Fundraising events:

Membership Dues - \$20,000
Annual giving 2001 - \$8,600

Art Auction Fundraiser - \$9,000
Benefit concert - \$2,400