

## **REPORT OF THE PAWCATUCK WATERSHED COUNCIL**

Submitted by Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association to the RI Rivers Council  
For the period from April 1999 – December 2000

### ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS, MEMBERSHIP, AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) is a 501(c)(3) conservation organization formed in 1983. It's mission: to promote and protect the integrity of the lands and waters of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. WPWA received its Watershed Council designation in April of 1999.

The WPWA is governed by a board of trustees, and employs a full-time executive director and a full time program director, as well as part-time summer interns. WPWA enjoys the support of over 60 loyal volunteers who participate in many things, from leading canoe trips and walks, to monitoring ponds and streams, to preparing bulk mailings of newsletters and membership renewals.

The association experiences the same fiscal operating crunches that most small, non-profit agencies often do. The annual budget is roughly \$130,000. The association owns the land and buildings that house its headquarters, and is seeking funding to provide meeting space that could be available for community meetings.

The WPWA counts nearly 700 members, including residents of each of the watershed's 10 Rhode Island and 4 Connecticut communities (see attached list). As the most widely recognized regional environmental organization, several of the municipalities in the watershed provide modest support through their annual budgets.

### SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

#### *Coordination of Planning Efforts in the Watershed*

The WPWA has been an active participant in the Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership (PWP) since the Partnership was formed, and serves as co-chair of the group, and also has been active in the more recently formed South County Watersheds Partnership. WPWA has also played an active role in the PWP's Water Use Stakeholder Group (WUSG) to identify water supply and resource issues in the watershed. WPWA assisted the US Geological Survey with a habitat assessment in the Queen's River, as part of a pilot study by the WUSG. The purpose of the study is to assess the effect of flow during drought conditions on the ability of the river to support different species of fish. This is part of a broader effort to establish a water budget for this basin that will serve as a model for water management planning in other basins in the Watershed. Results of the pilot will be published in the Fall of 2001.

#### *Water Quality Monitoring*

The RI Watershed Watch program began with WPWA in the mid 80's and continues today, with WPWA sponsoring 12 freshwater pond sites and 21 stream sites in the region. In 1999, WPWA initiated a Stream Monitoring program with support from Partners for Resource Protection. Ponds are monitored for physical

parameters such as temperature, pH, clarity, dissolved oxygen, bacteria, and nutrients. For stream monitoring, flow velocity is included with the above.. Elementary and middle school students in the Chariho district have monitored three of the stream sites on the Meadow Brook as part of WPWA's School Stream Monitoring Program, in conjunction with the Watershed Watch program.

### *Educational Programs*

WPWA program director Denise Burgess has established a reputation as the watershed educator in our region. Using the Active Watershed Education Curriculum (AWEsome), Denise has trained educators in schools throughout the watershed and beyond in watershed education, offering numerous teacher-training workshops during the past two years.

During the Summer of 2000, Denise worked with the Roger Williams Park Zoo Camp to introduce youngsters from all over the State of RI to different aspect of riverine habitat, taking a new group of campers on canoe expeditions on the Wood River each week for 8 weeks.

With grant funds, Denise established a program of Student Watershed Assessment Teams (SWATeams) in watershed high schools. The students will conduct community assessments in watershed towns to provide information on natural resources and greenways for comprehensive plans under revision.

Denise has been working with teachers in the Exeter-West Greenwich school system to develop a program on groundwater education.

Classroom programs for students have also been hosted by Denise in five schools on the topics of watersheds and water quality.

Denise is also a GEMS-Net scientist mentor. GEMS-Net (Guiding Education Math and Science Network), is a science curriculum used in seven school districts in southern RI. As a mentor, Denise provides support to educators working with the program, and she facilitates teacher-training workshops pertaining to the kits.

Denise continues to teach "Historic Sites and Salmon Flights," an elementary school curriculum developed by WPWA and Westerly Gifted and Talented teachers in 1995. It combines in-class sessions on the Pawcatuck Watershed's mill village history and its affect on anadramous fisheries, specifically the Atlantic salmon; site visits to a trout hatchery, salmon hatchery, a working local mill, and a fish ladder; and an exercise in salmon fry stocking in a watershed brook.

### *Community Action Projects*

*River Clean Ups* - WPWA sponsored volunteer river clean-ups along the banks of the Pawcatuck River on Earth Day.

*Litter Awareness* - On opening day of trout fishing season, the second Saturday in April in Rhode Island, WPWA conducts a litter-awareness program. Through the generosity of Bess Eaton Coffee and Bake Shops, WPWA serves free coffee at various fishing sites to anglers with reusable coffee mugs. Annual assistance is provided by the Narragansett Chapter of Trout Unlimited. This program is in its ninth year.

*Trail Maintenance* – WPWA adopted the trail around Browning Mill Pond and has, with the help of volunteers, improved and maintained the trail over the past two years, including building foot bridges and removing obstacles.

*Habitat Assessment* - WPWA assisted the US Geological Survey with a habitat assessment in the Queen's River. The purpose of the study was to assess the effect of flow during drought conditions on the suitability of the river to support different species of fish. Results will be published in the Fall of 2001.

*Stream Monitoring* - In 1999, WPWA initiated a Stream Monitoring program with a grant from Partners for Resource Protection. Twenty-one sites in five streams are currently being monitored for physical parameters including flow velocity. Elementary and middle school students in the Chariho district have monitored three of the sites on the Meadow Brook.

*URI Watershed Watch* – WPWA sponsors 12 pond and 21 stream sites in the Pawcatuck Watershed. Volunteers monitor physical parameters at their site each week from May through November.

### *Recreational Programs*

In addition to various walks and canoes hosted throughout the season, WPWA, in conjunction with three other South County watershed groups, established a "Rivers Month" celebration of event. This included a special canoe trip for RI State Legislators in 1999, and a River's Day "Source-to-Sea" canoe in the summer of 2000. The canoe took boaters from Worden's Pond to Little Narragansett bay over four weekends. Over 100 boaters participated.

WPWA continues to host seasonal canoe and kayak trips and a variety of special-interest hikes such as during the mountain laurel bloom.

An annual Family Fishing Day program is offered where experienced anglers teach children the sport of recreational fishing in the watershed.

Weekly groups of summer campers from the Roger Williams Park Zoo summer program were led on Wood River canoe expeditions.

WPWA participated in the work of the Trail Advisory Committee for the State of Rhode Island.

Late fall of 2000 brought the groundbreaking for the RIDEM handicapped-accessible fishing pier and boat launch on WPWA property at Barberville Dam.

### *Collaboration with Grassroots Organizations*

WPWA initiated formal collaboration between the four South County watershed organizations. WPWA has also combined forces with the Narragansett Chapter of Trout Unlimited on various programs, as well as the Wild Plant Society, Southern RI Conservation District, Chariho Rotary, and the Appalachian Mountain Club, among others.

### *Contracts with Governmental Agencies*

WPWA has been under contract to provide educational and technical services various agencies as follows:

*US Dept. of Agriculture / Natural Resource Conservation Service* – Partners for Resource Protection funds for development of stream monitoring program.

*Southern Rhode Island Conservation District* – Habitat Assessment and Municipal Outreach programs for Queen's Watershed Pilot Study. Also three AWEsome workshops

in area schools districts.

*Northern Rhode Island Conservation District* – AWEsome workshop presented to Scituate Watershed teachers.

*West Greenwich Conservation Commission* – Education program for Exeter-West Greenwich Metcalf Middle School teachers and students on the topic of Groundwater education.

*Hopkinton Conservation Commission* – establishment of stream monitoring sites to be sponsored by agency.

#### *Newsletter/Publications*

WPWA distributed eight issues of its quarterly newsletter, *Watershed*, over the past two years, to a list of over 1000 recipients.

The *Wood-Pawcatuck River Routes* map and *Walks in the Watershed*, our own hiking guide, continue to be distributed through retail stores, encouraging recreational use of the watershed, and earning revenues for the association.

#### *Fundraising Activities*

WPWA depends primarily on membership dues and private donations to meet its operational needs each year. To achieve its goals, WPWA hosts an annual membership drive in the Spring, the “Art in the Watershed” wet-paint auction in late Summer, and an Annual Giving Campaign in late Fall.

WPWA generates a modest amount of income from the sale of its two publications *Walks in the Watershed* and *Wood-Pawcatuck River Routes Map*.

Grant awards from charitable foundations and government agencies help WPWA develop specific environmental programs and capital improvements. WPWA submitted several grant requests since April of 1999 and was awarded a total of \$ 86,280 from the following foundations:

Champlin Foundations	\$30,000
REI (Recreational Equipment Inc.)	5,000
Southeastern CT Community Foundation	3,000
RI State Senate Grants	15,500
The Lattner Foundation	15,000
Madiera Foundation	2,500
Grant Sherbourne	2,000
Felicia Foundation	3,000
Captain Planet	1,280
Partners for Resource Protection	9,000

WPWA applied but was not funded by the following sources:

Ben and Jerry’s Foundation	Eastern Mountain Sports
H.W. Buckner Charitable Trust	Russel L. Epker Charitable Foundation
The Butler Foundation	Merril G. and Emita E. Hastings Foundation
Chase Fund Inc.	The Roy A. Hunt Foundatin
The Cowles Charitable Trust	Island Foundation Inc.
The Cricket Foundation	

Henry M. Jackson Foundation  
The Home Depot  
Fanny & Leo Koehner Charitable Trust  
The Kresge Foundation  
The Little Family Foundation  
Livable Communities Lgrants Program  
Merck Family Fund  
The Moriah Fund Inc.  
The Nathan Cummings Foundation  
New England Grass Roots Environment  
Fund  
The New-Land Foundation Inc.

Nathan M. Ohrbach Foundation Inc.  
Orchard Foundation  
Patagonia, Inc.  
The Perkin Fund  
The Porspect Hill Foundation  
Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation Inc.  
James Ford Bell Foundation  
Henry P. Kendall Foundation  
Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation  
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation  
North Family Trust  
Ocean State Charities Trust  
The Penates Foundation  
The River Network  
The Sudbury Foundation

### SUPPORT OF BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT, AND NON-PROFITS

WPWA has a track record of support, both financial and in-kind, from many businesses in the region, for programs such as Opening Day, our *Walks in the Watershed* guide, and our River's Day events. We have a working collaboration with several non-profit organizations via the Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership and the South County Watersheds Collaborative. Several municipalities in the watershed offer financial support in their budgets each year, as well as the RI Senate, which provided a grant of \$5500 in 1999 and \$10,000 in 2000.

### STATUS OF WATERSHED / REVIEW OF RIVERS' CLASSIFICATIONS

(excerpted from the "Rivers Policy and Classification Plan" Jan. 1998)

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:

*Prisitine Segments* – prisitine 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 to 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. Within the past decade, significant improvements were made to the industrial waste management technology at both mill locations.

*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.

## PLANS FOR 2001 / STRATEGIC PLAN

### Next Six Months.

- Maintain and enhance the association's position and visibility in providing leadership on environmental issues in the watershed, and become involved in goal-setting for land protection in the watershed
- Build formal, working relations with at least four local governments in the watershed (e.g. Conduct municipal outreach programs in Queen's River watershed towns using power point presentation developed in conjunction with PWP Water Use Stakeholder Group)

- Provide leadership in the watershed as co-chair of the Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership and as a local watershed council, with the purposes of preserving open space, natural resources, and scenic resources including cultural and historic landscapes, and of preserving and promoting recreational uses, including the establishment of greenways in the watershed
- Build active committees in four critical areas: membership, buildings and grounds, publications and media, and scientific/technical.
- Coordinate and cooperate with watershed programs conducted by agencies and universities (e.g. Assist URI Cooperative Education and RI DOH with volunteer recruitment for the Source Water Assessment Program, Work with RI DEM South County Watersheds Coordinator to consolidate efforts toward watershed management approach in the region)
- Maintain the strength of the schools-based environmental education programs (e.g. Conduct one or two AWEsome education workshops for local teachers and Continue to conduct school stream monitoring and other classroom programs with elementary school students)
- Integrate the schools programs with our watershed policy and planning programs (e.g. the SWAT program)
- Continue to support water quality assessment programs, and utilize these resources more strategically (e.g. Watershed Watch, Stream Monitoring, School Stream Monitoring)
- Retain executive director with good organization management skills, appropriate to a small non-profit organization, communications skills, an ability to work easily with local communities, and a grasp of environmental issues.
- Reactivate programs for trail monitoring and repair, including the removal of blow downs, and monitoring wetland encroachment
- Continue building an endowment, with the ultimate goal of establishing one of sufficient size to support 25 percent of the operating budget.

Six months -- two years.

- Become an informational and technical assistance resource to local planning boards in the watershed, especially with regard to the Greenspace program.
- Strengthen membership base, by 25 percent in total membership and by 50 percent in total giving.
- Rebuild non-school based public education program.
- Establish program to enhance the recreational use of the river system.

Two -- four years.

- Fully implement local watershed council responsibilities, so that the organization is an established participant in watershed governance.
- Become the conduit for volunteer and funded-non-profit scientific assessments in the watershed.
- Refurbish headquarters so that it is an asset for involving membership in the organization and is a place that other organizations use for small, daylong retreats.