



Westport River Watershed Alliance

2019 Annual Report

Our mission:
Working together
to protect and
preserve the
Westport River
Watershed now
and for future
generations.

Photo: Russell Babbitt



The Westport River Watershed Alliance (WRWA) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) environmental education and advocacy group, formed in 1976 to protect and conserve the natural resources of the Westport River and its 100-square mile watershed located at the entrance to Buzzards Bay in southeastern Massachusetts. The Westport River watershed includes the communities of Westport, Dartmouth, Fall River and Freetown in Massachusetts, and Tiverton and Little Compton in Rhode Island.

A Voice for the River

Since organizing in the mid-1970s we have listened to the River and its waterways: the sounds of water, wind, and the creatures with which we share this magical corner of the world. Members often tell us they feel privileged to live in this special place, one that encourages reflection, relaxation and renewal. Our sole objective is to protect the environment we all share, and to assure that our children and theirs will be inspired to preserve this treasure as well.

How do we do we do that?

- **Through observation.** An active volunteer network led by our professional staff gathers data on and performs frequent tests of water quality throughout the entire 100 square mile watershed.
- **Through collaboration.** Together with Town of Westport and regional environmental officials, we observe, assess and advise on trends that indicate potential threat(s) to the River's fragile ecosystems. We also collaborate with scientists from UMASS Dartmouth, Brown University, UCONN and Providence College on targeted studies designed to help us understand both the reasons for River degradation and promising strategies to retard and remediate it.
- **Through advocacy.** By nurturing relationships with local, regional and state officials we seek to influence decision making, development of regulations and legislative initiatives that will sustain River water quality and where needed, to improve it.

WRWA's Guiding Principles

- A healthy watershed with its natural beauty is an asset for the entire community.
- Recreational and commercial use of the River is part of our heritage and culture.
- Human activity has a major impact on River health.
- A clean River and clean drinking water are linked.
- Science guides our actions and advocacy for the watershed.
- Building collaborative relationships with government and community groups helps to achieve shared goals.
- Educating our youth ensures the continuation of responsible stewardship.

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Photo: Greg Stone

Dear Members and Friends:

2019 transformed the Watershed Alliance! After over five years of planning, designing, raising money, securing permits and completing construction, we finally moved to our River Center—an attractive, welcoming public space to serve local communities with tangible, on-site watershed education programs. Our reward: hosting a community Open House, and launching a “2020 Discovery Series” that will utilize our first level space as it was intended—to provide citizens of all ages with diverse experiences that will inform them about the watershed and introduce them to new resources and strategies that will help sustain that resource for generations to come.

Prior to moving in mid-September, construction and outfitting of the River Center consumed much of our time and resources. However, at the same time, we actively focused on thinking about and planning for the future, expanding programs, projects and initiatives and sustaining WRWA’s ongoing activities.

Reflecting on our experience, we learned that success depends heavily on strong, creative, professional partners, patience and an ever-present sense of humor. We invite you to come and see us in our new home at any time. We’ll leave the light on for you.

2019 WRWA events exceeded all attendance goals and financial targets. A large, enthusiastic 2019 annual meeting audience watched and listened as Drs. Pat Ewanchuk and Catherine Matassa delivered a talk on their rigorous and thorough investigation into salt marsh loss, a study that has expanded understanding of that phenomenon. Please join us when they present their Year 2 findings on Saturday, April 25 at 10 am at the River Center.

2020 promises to be a “Watershed” year (pun intended) as we use our new offices and resources at the Head of Westport. Our recently-updated Strategic Plan will guide renewal of commitment to sustain and improve health of the Westport River Watershed and the communities it connects. Our strong finances will enable us to continue and selectively expand investment both in WRWA science, education, advocacy programs, and in our community engagement initiatives. Most of all, we hope you will join us at upcoming events to celebrate our renewal and sustain our successful partnerships. We have many new opportunities and resources to use as we educate, celebrate and share our commitment to the Westport River Watershed.

“Bottom line”: Healthy finances (see Charts)



Tom Schmitt
WRWA President



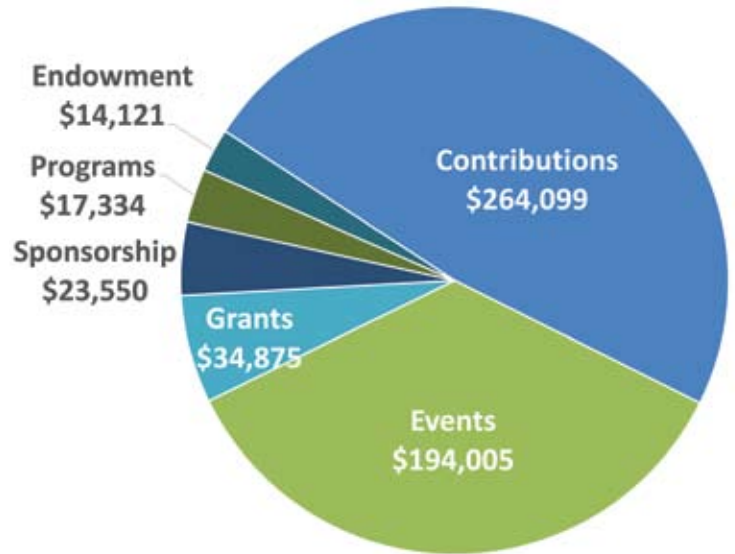
Deborah Weaver
Executive Director

Westport River Watershed Alliance 2019 Finances*

Sources \$ 547,984

SOURCES:

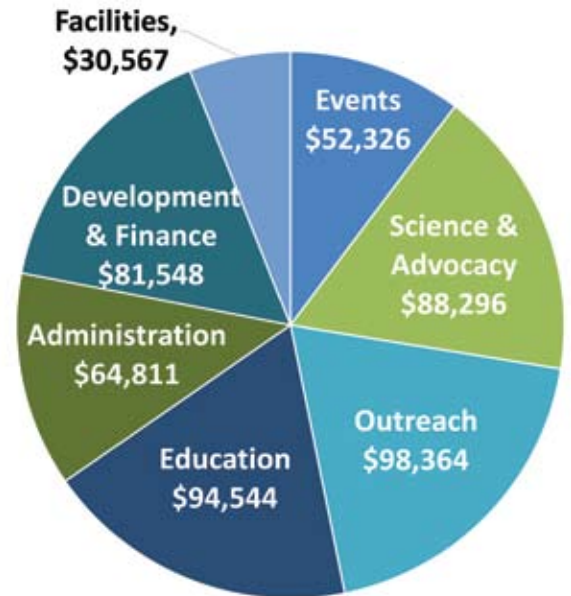
- Exceeded all philanthropy goals.
- Endowment spending at 2.5%.
- Revenue surpassed budget by \$14,500 due to successful Gala and fundraising events.



Uses \$ 510,456

USES:

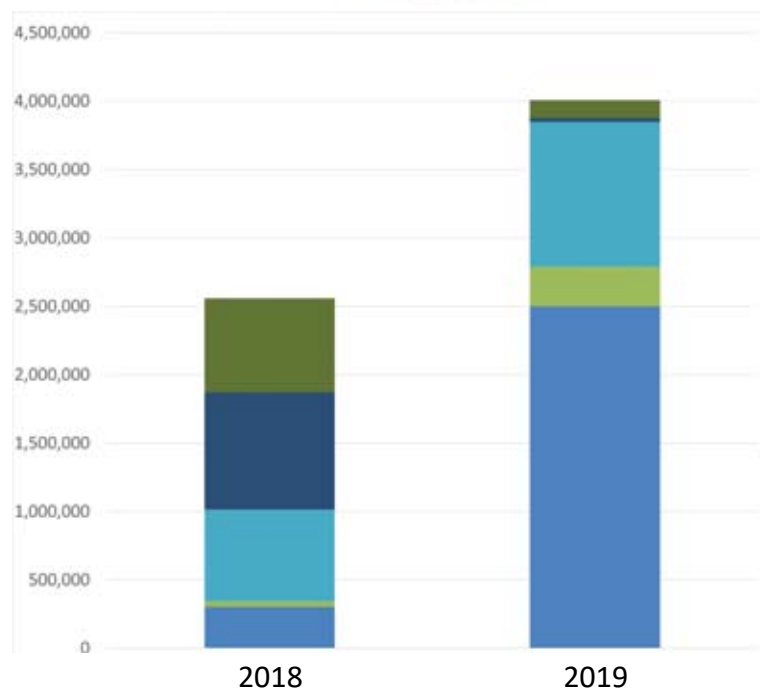
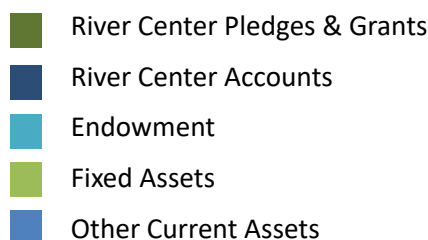
- \$3,000 under budget due to a close watch on expenses.



Assets

ASSETS:

- Endowment up 58% (appreciation plus contributions).
- River Center endowment is almost fully funded.
- Great staff.
- Committed members.
- Generous donors.
- River Center Offices and Public Space.



*Unaudited

2019 Education Programs

Over 2,500 school children in grades Pre-K-High School participated in WRWA's Watershed Education Program (WEP). Our award-winning program enhances the existing school curriculum with hands-on, science lessons and field studies. WEP's main goal is to build a sense of local stewardship for our natural surroundings.

2019 was a remarkable year for the WEP Program, which continued to improve throughout the year by completing the following goals:

- WRWA hosted two full-time Commonwealth Corps volunteers to build on our education and outreach programs. Our service members, Jessica Mattos and James Austin, have created new outreach programs and added new lessons to our existing WEP Curriculum.
- WRWA continues to expand our program offerings with the first floor of the River Center outfitted with new tools to engage visitors. Three native creatures aquariums, projection microscope, augmented reality watershed model and a children's nook were installed this year as part of the education initiative.
- The education staff continued to support an organic school garden with the Westport Kindergarten students. Students went on a field study of a local farm, Alderbrook Farm, as part of their science learning.
- Fifth graders at Westport Middle School planted the 20,000th dune grass seedling as part of the Dune Restoration Project. Students also researched the plants and animals that have adapted to survive in the dunes climate.
- WRWA has continued successful partnerships with local nonprofits. The Westport Land Conservation Trust hosted WRWA and the Westport 1st grade students at the Westport Woods Conservation Area for the annual vernal pool field study.
- WRWA continues to receive support from BayCoast Bank to hire 2 local college interns to assist with our summer education and water quality monitoring programs. This funding supported two interns, Andrea Bickford and Bailey Sweet. They were a great addition to our education team for the season.
- Summer science education programs were almost completely booked for the 2019 season. We offered seven weeks of summer programs, reaching over 100 participants ages 3 to 16 throughout the season. WRWA continued to build the Gay Gillespie Summer Scholarship Fund through generous donations. Six children received full scholarships in 2019.



2019 Science and Advocacy Programs

In 2019 WRWA continued our long term monitoring of bacteria levels in the River. We also continue our collaboration with the Buzzards Bay Coalition to monitor and measure nutrient (nitrogen) levels in the River. The main goal of WRWA's monitoring program is to accurately identify regions of the Westport River and its tributaries that continue to suffer from high levels of contamination associated with fecal pathogens. WRWA tests 19 sample sites on both branches of the Westport River and perennial tributaries weekly from June-August 2019, results for the River are below. In 2019 we continued to see elevated fecal coliform bacteria levels during wet weather events.

Test Dates	Head of Westport	Doctors Point	Hix Bridge	Cadman's Neck	Westport Point	West Branch near 448 River Road	Charlton Wharf (mouth of River)	Rainfall in last 48 hours (inches)
5-Jun	38	6	4	2	2	2	2	0.04
12-Jun	1,320	250	170	182	30	4	30	0.93
19-Jun	3,200	36	36	96	2	8	2	0.86
26-Jun	1,100	208	176	20	20	20	12	0.81
1-Jul	98	36	34	16	84	6	4	0.52
10-Jul	194	~	16	4	2	4	2	0.00
17-Jul	90	14	16	14	2	2	2	0.00
24-Jul	1,190	2,500+	2,500+	2,500+	350	360	92	2.76
31-Jul	12	40	30	6	2	4	2	0.00
7-Aug	28	18	12	8	4	2	2	0.00
14-Aug	92	78	80	52	12	2	2	0.46
21-Aug	90	2	8	2	4	2	6	0.06
28-Aug	56	164	38	14	2	10	2	0.00

Numbers indicate colonies of fecal coliform bacteria per 100 mL of water
 Numbers in **RED** exceed Massachusetts threshold for swimming (200+ per 100 mL)
 Massachusetts threshold for shellfish is 14+ per 100 mL and for drinking water is 0 per 100 mL

- Many years of data collection done by WRWA and partner groups were utilized to help the Town identify the most effective and least costly means for improving water quality throughout the watershed. After years of testing and analysis, the Town of Westport has received its **Integrated Water Resource Management Plan** which describes how best to address the long-term problems affecting the Westport River and local water resources. The River is changing; the climate is changing, and our land uses in the watershed must be less impactful to help the River regain its health. WRWA will have an active role in the public outreach and education component.
- WRWA continued work with salt marsh ecologists and experts, Dr. Patrick J. Ewanchuk, Providence College, and Dr. Catherine M. Matassa, University of Connecticut, to continue a series of descriptive and manipulative experiments in both branches of the River to better understand why our local marshes are disappearing.
- We began to wrap up a project with the Coastal Systems Program at UMass Dartmouth (SMAST) that was funded by a grant from the US EPA Southeast New England Program for Coastal Watershed Restoration. This was the third year of a 4 year project using the Westport River and Cockeyeast Pond as a natural laboratory to measure how oysters improve water clarity and potentially reduce elevated nitrogen levels which destroy marine wildlife habitats. This year 100,000 oysters used in the experiments were given to the Town of Westport Marine Services Department and were placed in the Westport River.





2019 Giving

In an effort to acknowledge the many ways our contributors support WRWA throughout the year, members are listed according to their total annual giving. Gifts in this total include memberships, Annual Fund contributions, matching gifts, memorial contributions, endowment gifts, Summer Gala contributions (excluding auction purchases) and other donations from January 1 - December 31, 2019. Every effort has been made to ensure that these are accurate and inclusive. If you see an error, please contact the WRWA office.

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Photo: Brian Mullaney

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Photo: Roberta Carvalho



Oars and Paddles Art Show



Our Winter Art Show in 2019 continued the theme “Oars & Paddles.” This was our sixth annual event, hosted generously by the Dedee Shattuck Gallery for two weeks from February 23 through March 9. We collected old wooden oars and paddles and gave them to forty-five local artists, whose skill and imagination transformed them into beautiful works of art.

The gallery was once again packed for the final silent auction and reception, and we distributed our keepsake program booklet to nearly 400 people who attended the show.

In conjunction with the Oars & Paddles Art Show, we hosted another sellout Brushes & Brews art event on March 2, with artists Barbara Healy and Pam Clarkson offering a two-hour workshop to create a lovely painting of a familiar Westport water scene. Our thanks to Buzzards Bay Brewing, Westport Rivers Vineyard and Ten Cousins Pizza for donating the food and beverages.

Artists

Phyllis Dobbyn Adams

Ashley Ainsworth

Josie Arkins

Ray Audet

Marianne Boucher

Claire Bowen

Molly Brash

Pam Clarkson

Stanley Cornwall

John Cummings

Bob & Sue Daylor

Faith Duarte

Anne Marie Fallon (Kracke)

David Formanek

Jan Freddo

Perrin Gardent

Rita Gardent

Gay Gillies

Sandra Hall

Barbara Healy

Nick Jansen

Trintje Jansen

Rebecca Janzen

Brian Kahn

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Fred Kracke

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Summer Concert at the Westport Rivers Vineyard



Summer Concert Sponsors



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Vineyard & Winery



Summer Concert “Blues and Bluegrass”

Our fourth annual Summer Concert at Westport Rivers Vineyard was another sell-out, with over 700 guests enjoying the energetic sounds of Roomful of Blues and Twisted Pine on a picture-perfect July evening. Co-presented with the Narrows Center for the Arts in Fall River, the concert was sponsored by DSK Architects and Planners and Page Building Construction Company. Additional sponsorship was provided by Westport Rivers Vineyard, Buzzards Bay Brewing, Lees Oil Service and the Bayside Restaurant.

This event continues to draw people from all around the region, with top-tier musicians performing in a beautiful part of the Westport River Watershed.

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2019 Summer Gala



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We Are Officially in Our New Home

As many of you know we moved our offices last fall and are happily getting adjusted to the bright wonderful space. We do not miss our mice and chipmunk friends or the cold winter winds that would find their way into our old barn “home”.

The River Center is busy with programs and lots of curious visitors. The first floor now has seahorses in residence and fun exhibits to explore and better understand the natural resources in the watershed.

The River Center is a reality due to the many donors who shared our vision and made an investment in WRWA’s future. With huge gratitude to the following:



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 Jim Whitin



Westport River Watershed Alliance

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Our Vision—
a healthy watershed
where people, wildlife
and the River thrive.

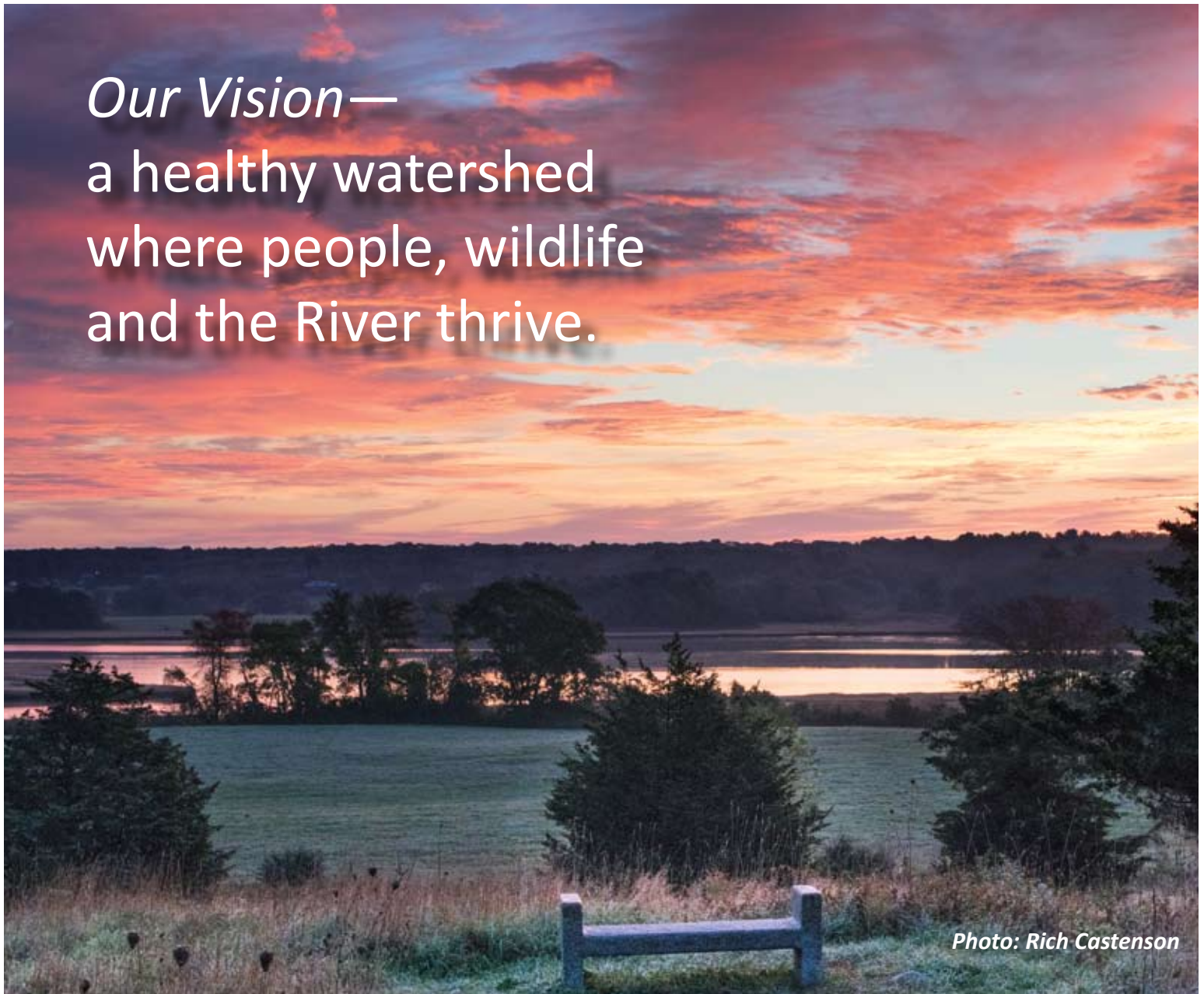


Photo: Rich Castenson