



Westport River Watershed Alliance

2020 Annual Report

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



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 groups and officials, we observe, assess and advise on trends that indicate potential threat(s) to the River's fragile ecosystems.
- **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.

Westport River Watershed Alliance 2020 Board of Directors

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Roberta Carvalho, *Science Director*
Steve Connors, *Community Engagement Manager*
Shelli Costa, *Education Director*
Jennifer Lynch, *Development and Finance Administrator*

Commonwealth Corps Service Members
Jenny Burns
Chelsea Thiboutot

Drone Image: Alex Haggert

Dear Members and Friends:

2020 began with a spirit of hope and creative new ways to engage the public in our Mission and our new building! In early January, we launched our “Discovery Series” – talks by experts on a variety of timely topics that proved to be very popular and well-attended. This series was enjoyed by local citizens of all ages and provided diverse experiences that focused on the watershed and introduced them to new resources and strategies to help sustain the watershed for generations to come. As well, between January and mid- March, we hosted family programs, and held open house hours for the community.

You know what happened next: the bewildering announcement of a pandemic, the uncertain days of whether schools would remain open, and the shutdown of life as we had known it. WRWA staff dismantled their office computers and began to adapt to working from home. We are proud that we managed to pivot—to make our in-school programs happen via video and eventually outdoor classes. We continued to do presentations on Watershed topics via video, and increased communications to our members with a bi-weekly newsletter. Summer events were all canceled except for family based education programming. We held a very successful “UN-Gala” and we thank you for your unbelievable generosity in that time of crisis. We also produced a high-quality film on the Watershed, with drone footage and interviews with local leaders. If you haven’t seen it yet, we encourage you to visit our website: westportwatershed.org.

Our science program continued summer water quality monitoring, supported in part by Science Director, Roberta’s son, who will be honored this March as our Volunteer of the Year. After 4 years of collaboration with the School of Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) at UMass Dartmouth, the EPA funded Oyster experiment in Cockeast Pond is winding to a close, and an informative booklet on the project is now available. Our Salt Marsh study is nearly completed for Phase 1, and we are about to launch Phase 2 to examine the effects of hydrology and velocity on the salt marshes. We are also collaborating with Buzzards Bay Coalition on a Town feasibility study of shared septic systems to reduce nitrogen pollution in the River.

None of this would have been possible without your support and engagement. In a year of tremendous turmoil and suffering, we remain committed to our mission of protecting the Watershed and celebrating the beauty of the environment. Our finances remain strong thanks to the generosity of you and other members, the resolve of our talented Board of Directors, and the resourcefulness of our dedicated staff. We thank you, and look forward to better days ahead.



Linda Findlay
WRWA President



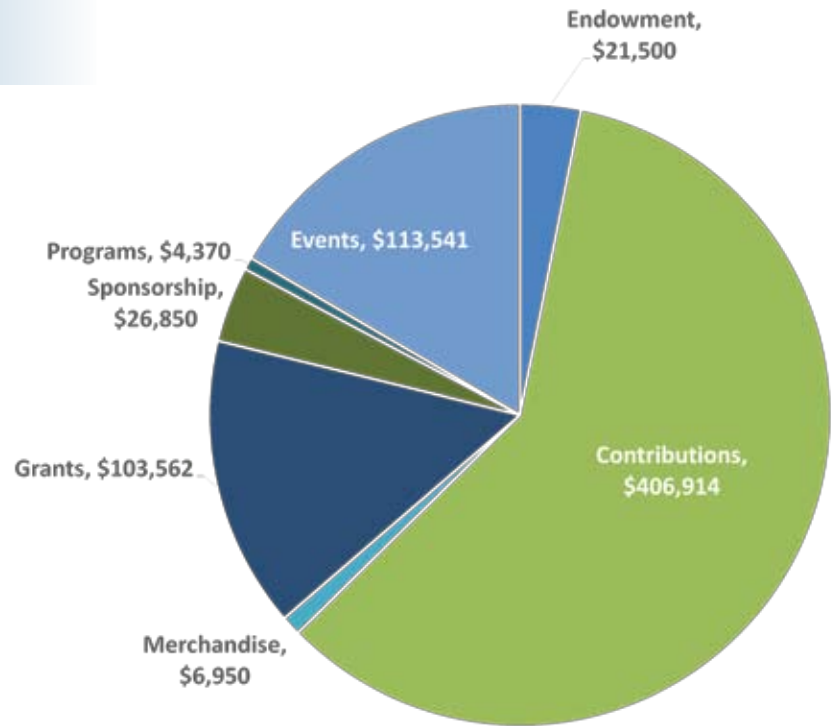
Deborah Weaver
Executive Director

Westport River Watershed Alliance 2020 Finances*

Sources \$ 683,687

SOURCES:

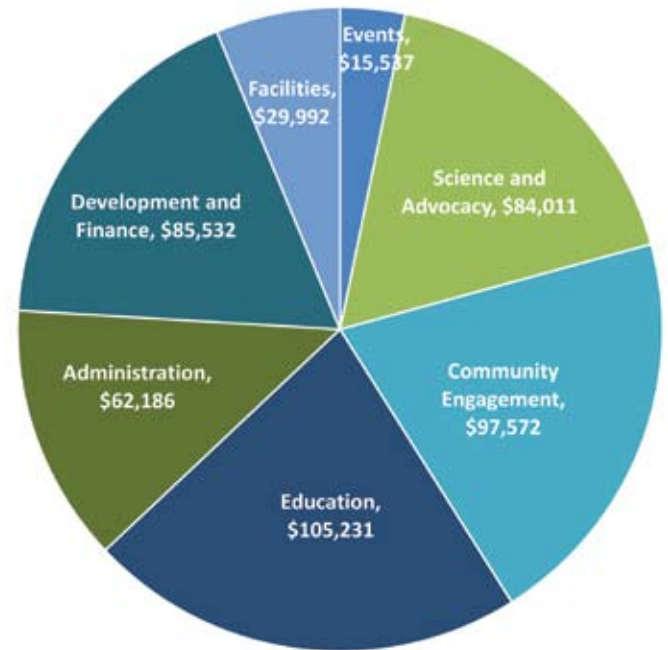
- Revenue increased due to quick adaptation to virtual programming.
- Adult engagement increased through a series of video presentations and communications.
- Payroll Protection Loan forgiven.
- Individual giving increased by 54%.
- Endowment spending limited to 2.5%.
- Exceeded all philanthropy goals.



Uses \$ 480,061

USES:

- Budget reduced in anticipation of a drop in fundraising.
- Event expenses dropped by 86% from 2019, as all fundraising events were cancelled.
- Water testing and science projects continued without interruption.
- Educational programs K-12 held outdoors or remotely with no reduction in children served.



Assets

ASSETS:

- Endowment up 14% (appreciation plus contributions).
- River Center endowment is fully funded.
- Great staff.
- Committed members.
- Generous donors.
- River Center Offices and Public Space.

2020 Education Programs

Shelli Costa, Education Director

During 2020, our education programs made many adjustments to continue to provide quality watershed education programs to the surrounding communities. Throughout the year WRWA staff and Commonwealth Corps volunteers became proficient at creating interactive video lessons. As the year progressed we began offering outdoor classes mixed in with live streaming programs. All of these transitions required a lot of innovation, creativity and effort to adjust to new technology and new safety measures.

Before the pandemic began, WRWA was able to provide in-class programming to students in Westport, Little Compton and Fall River. We had also hosted over 100 community members at our monthly River Center events in the beginning of the winter. As the year progressed on and the pandemic caused many changes, WRWA was still able to maintain the consistent level of programming for the local community schools and created additional public outreach videos to keep members engaged with WRWA's mission.

Here is a sample of the classroom lessons and public outreach videos created in 2020:

Water Cycle in the Dunes-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f80vYbnuXzg>

Salt in the Estuary-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGmXy4Vf35c>

Sawdy Pond video-

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnsOUI02_9E

The summer science education programs also had to be adjusted for the summer of 2020 and instead of the typical classes WRWA education staff created Family Adventure Programs. These 2 hour programs were offered on a variety of topics for up to 6 members of the same family. These programs reached close to 100 participants throughout the months of June, July and August. We were also able to offer our popular 1 hour River Rats program to our youngest participants and their families. Children were able to catch crabs, fish and even see a horseshoe crab as some of the highlights from this summer.

The education staff have been incredibly grateful for all of the support and positive feedback we have received this year even as things had to be changed and shifted to new formats. We plan to keep making adjustments and continuing to improve the programs we are able to offer to the community. Special thanks to Commonwealth Corps Service Members, Jenny Burns and Chelsea Thiboutot and summer interns, Bailey Sweet and Malia Cafasso.



2020 Community Engagement Programs

Steve Connors, Community Engagement Manager

Community Engagement in the Year of Covid

As offices closed and the population began staying home to avoid the pandemic, WRWA changed its approach to communications by creating more online outreach.

Beginning in March, we increased the frequency of our email River News and shortened its content to a “news brief” format. Readership increased significantly. At the same time, we began creating more dynamic educational videos, with Shelli and her Commonwealth Corps service members turning out multiple projects to stay engaged with our school students. These videos were very popular with our adult followers as well. Every issue of River News was linked to a new video.

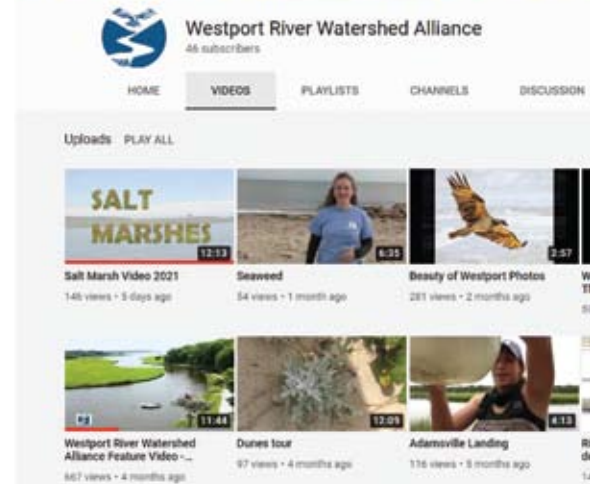
Topics discussed included visiting vernal pools, plants of the estuary, seining in the River, seaweed and sea urchins. These videos can still be viewed by visiting our web page and youtube channel.

Something Different for our Photo Calendar

Our traditional photo contest took place as usual in 2020, but with a very successful added component. This year, since we could not assemble our usual judges, we asked our members to choose the best of the eighty-five excellent photo entries we received. Over 700 viewers watched our video slideshow of the Westport photographs and sent in their choices for the calendar, resulting in the extraordinary collection gracing the pages of our 2021 calendar.

Deborah also took the go-pro camera out into the field, exploring the forest in early spring and summer, creating videos about wildflowers and skunk cabbage. Board member Mike Sullivan, an experienced scuba diver, took us on an underwater tour of the Westport River. And videographer Alex Haggert spent the summer with Deborah to create a lovely documentary about the Westport River Watershed Alliance, with interviews and beautiful drone aerial views of the watershed.

Collectively, these videos, titled The Wonders of the Watershed (WOW), received thousands of views and helped WRWA stay connected to our audience during the time when our River Center was primarily closed to the public.



2020 Science and Advocacy

Roberta Carvalho, Science Director

2020 provided challenges with laboratories and universities being closed and unavailable. Our summer bacteria monitoring continued as did many of our science and research projects, but in a limited capacity because of closures due to the COVID virus. The summary of WRWA's bacteria monitoring for 2020 is below. Bacteria levels are typically elevated during wet weather events, a good precaution to take includes avoiding swimming right after a heavy rain. During dry weather, bacteria levels are typically low and the River is usually considered safe for swimming. A fecal coliform test is used to determine whether water has been contaminated with fecal matter. The presence of fecal coliform indicates the possible presence of organisms that can cause illness. The EPA has set acceptable limits for fecal coliform in water based upon the use of the water. For example, drinking water cannot contain any fecal coliform but water for swimming may contain up to 200 fecal coliform colonies/ 100 ml.

What is going on at the Head of Westport? In 2020 there was lots of activity at the Head of Westport including resetting and repair of the stone walls at the Head. Also in spring and summer a gaggle of Canada geese had taken up residence at the Head Landing. The group totaling 18+ geese were staying around the area all summer. Their waste/droppings were located all over the grassy areas of the landing increasing bacteria levels. Waterfowl do add to bacteria levels but are not a significant source of nitrogen.

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)
10-Jun	564	16	10	6	2	2	2	0.00
17-Jun	130	2	2	2	2	2	2	0.00
24-Jun	630	~	8	6	2	2	2	0.00
1-Jul	7,800	32	20	6	2	~	2	1.16
8-Jul	130	14	16	16	4	2	4	0.76
15-Jul	150	14	14	6	2	2	2	0.00
17-Jul	90	14	8	2	4	2	2	0.00
22-Jul	1,500	18	16	14	2	2	2	0.14
29-Jul	430	144	164	26	2	2	4	0.37
4-Aug	1,870	4	4	290	10	10	10	0.19
12-Aug	620	2	2	2	2	4	2	0.00
19-Aug	2,180	24	16	10	6	20	16	0.12
28-Aug	400	144	118	4	4	6	8	0.00
2-Sep	740	4	10	2	4	14	26	0.22

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

We also continued to partner with the Buzzards Bay Coalition to monitor Bay Health Indicators-the sum of five health indicators: nitrogen (organic and inorganic), dissolved oxygen, algal pigments, and water clarity. Results and summaries for the Westport River are posted for past years: <https://www.savebuzzardsbay.org/bay-health/westport/>



Cockeast Pond and Oyster Aquaculture Experiments-

We completed research with the Coastal Systems Program at UMASS using Cockeast Pond as a “natural laboratory”. WRWA produced a summary booklet on the project: “Quantifying potential for oyster aquaculture and impacts on estuarine nitrogen related water quality.” The project was designed to quantify the oyster aquaculture as a method for estuarine nitrogen remediation. For more detailed info visit: <https://westportwatershed.org/whats-being-done/oyster-experiment-in-cockeast-pond/>

The pending solution for cleaning up Cockeast Pond is complex. It will require a well-engineered plan to increase the tidal exchange while still protecting the habitat for herring migrations. This will require extensive permitting and cooperation with the Town, Department of Marine Fisheries and local stakeholders.

Salt Marsh Degradation Studies-

WRWA continued work with salt marsh ecologists and experts, Dr. Patrick J. Ewanchuk, Providence College, and Dr. Catherine M. Matassa, University of Connecticut. Due to COVID closures the final processing of samples from experiments in the River are delayed. The study examined the biology and ecology of salt marsh plants to see if this could explain why salt marshes are degrading. A preliminary report has indicated that excess nitrogen is not the cause of salt marsh degradation in the Westport River. However, excess nitrogen remains a pollutant in the River affecting water quality and habitats. We plan to continue collaborative work with these universities to further investigate the primary drivers of salt marsh degradation. Future research investigating change in flow and resulting inundation levels, frequency and velocity of the water at the edges and over the top of the marsh are planned.

Westport Targeted Integrated Water Resource Management Plan-

WRWA continues to work with the Town committees and consultants to insure scientifically valid approaches to water quality management. In 2020 WRWA launched a collaboration with the Buzzards Bay Coalition and the Town of Westport to fund a study of the feasibility of constructing shared nitrogen-reducing septic systems in two neighborhoods in Westport. 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.

Cockeast Pond as a Living Laboratory: Nitrogen and Oyster Aquaculture



A Report on Quantifying Potential for Oyster Aquaculture and Impacts on Estuarine Nitrogen Related Water Quality





2020 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, 2020. Every effort has been made to ensure that these are accurate and inclusive. If you see an error, please contact the WRWA office.

\$15,000 to \$75,000

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Photo: Brian Mullaney

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Linda Tripp
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Myrth York and David Green
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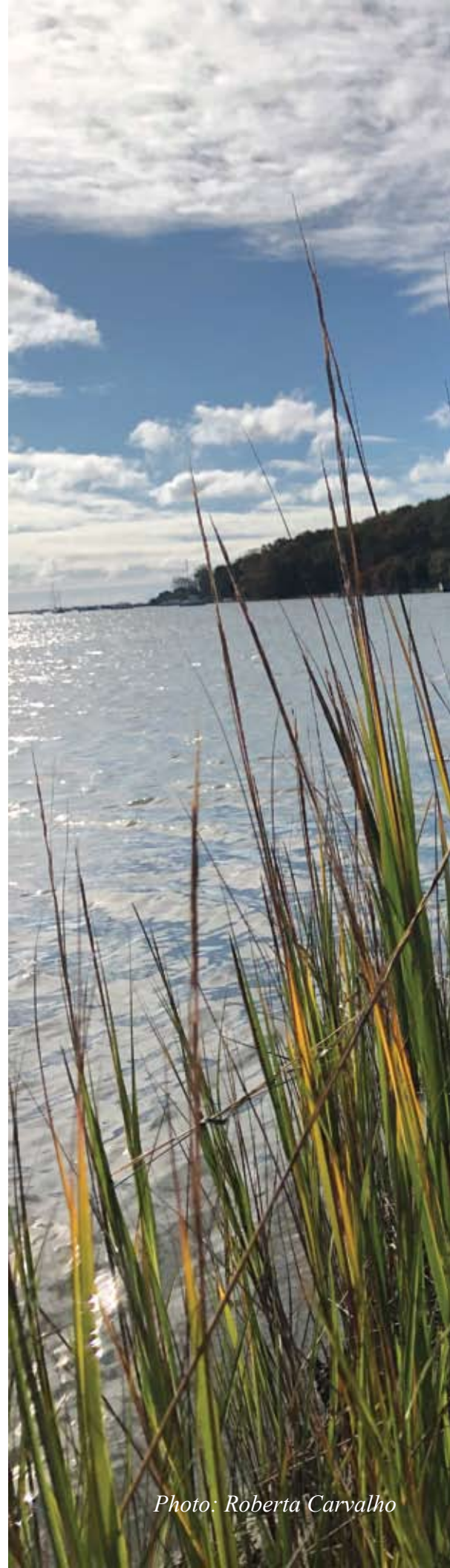


Photo: Roberta Carvalho



Winter Art Show 2020

WRWA managed to hold our 7th Annual Winter Art Show in March, just before the Covid-19 pandemic. It was a spectacular show, entitled “Boat ART-ifacts,” hosted generously by the Dedee Shattuck Gallery. We collected a large and unique assortment of parts from boats of all kinds and distributed them to forty-five local artists. Their skill and imagination transformed them into beautiful works of art.

The gallery was well attended for the silent auction and reception on the final day of the show. We estimate that over 400 people visited the Art Show during its run. We are grateful to all the artists who participated and donated their time and talent.

During the Art Show, we hosted another sellout Brushes and Brews art event, with artists Barbara Healy and Pam Clarkson offering a 2-hour workshop to help aspiring artists create a painting of a familiar Westport coastal scene. Our thanks to Buzzards Bay Brewing, Westport Rivers Winery and Ten Cousins Pizza for donating food and beverages.

Artists

- | | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Josie Arkins | Jill Law |
| Ray Audet | Monica Lopes |
| Marianne Boucher | Betsey MacDonald |
| Heather Bentz | Dick Manchester |
| Carol Bliven | Nancee Meeker |
| Molly Brash | Judy McLean |
| Annie Cloutier | Nathan Orié |
| Stanley Cornwall | Norma Pineault |
| John Cummings | Holly Popielarz |
| Merri Cyr | Tom Schmitt |
| Susan Czernicka | Christina Sherman |
| Mike Davis | Elizabeth King Stanton |
| Faith Duarte | Mac Stanton |
| Connor Fleming | Jay Sullivan |
| Rita Gardent | Kate Turner |
| Perrin Gardent | Caroline Unruh |
| Christina Glaser | Elizabeth Wade |
| Sandra Hall | Faith E. Wilbur |
| Charlotte Hamlin | Cory Windham |
| Barbara Healy | Sarah Tappen Windham |
| Jenna Hudson | |
| Trintje Jansen | |
| Rebecca Janzen | |
| Janie Kinnane | |
| Paula Kochanek | |

2020 Summer Un-Gala

Photo: Brian Mullaney

Our signature Summer Gala would have taken place on August 8, 2020; but, we had to cancel the event due to the pandemic. Our past Benefactors, Patrons and Sponsors of our Summer Gala whole-heartedly donated their financial support of what we called our "Un-Gala," by making a gift equal to what they would have spent at the event.

We created a special thank you video to all our members who helped us make up for the fundraising shortfall by donating so generously to the "Un-Gala!"

<https://youtu.be/lnq2Gt06B6w>

Contributors

Bill and Penny Agnew
Lucien and Kristi Agniel
Joel and Lisa Alvord
Charley and Pat Appleton
Sally Bachelder
Charlie Baker and Dorothy Pizzella
William and Susan Barker
Greg Barr and Elizabeth Trippe
BayCoast Bank
Elizabeth Baylies and Nicholas Burns
Mary Berg
Gertraude Bergland
Debbie and Trey Bianco
Emilio Bizzi
Daphne and *the late* Robert Borden
Tom Boreiko and Alison Coolidge
Lawrence and Susan Borges
James and Ellen Brayton
Mayke and Scott Briggs
Nils Bruzelius and Lynne Weil

John and Laurie Bullard
Nancy Burkholder
Philip and Hilary Burling
Catriona and Michael Burns
Susan Bush
Pam and Charley Carey
Constance and Richard Castenson
Nicholas and Meg Christ
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Harold and Geraldine Cooper
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Charles Deknatel
Ralph and Heidi Derbyshire
Jim Dorsey and
Wendy Nicholas Dorsey
Jeffrey Elefante and
Catherine Satterlee
Michael Elefante and Louise Sawyer
Barry and Elaine Fain
Helga Faulenbach Nichols
Dale Ferris
Linda and Charles Findlay
Marjorie Findlay and Geoff Freeman
Michael and Jen Gazdacko
Thomas and Julie Gebhard
Gay Gillespie
Lydia and Bill Gollner
Scott and Laurie Haig
Judy Hale
Sally Harty
Carol Ann Hayes
Ann Higgins
Barbara and *the late* Tom Jansen
Lionel and Jane Kaliff
Martin and Judy Kelly
Mary Ellen Kennedy
Ronald Knapp
Nancy and the late James Laird
Sarah and Ted Lodge
Terry MacFadyen and Jean Rosiello

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Maurice May
Brem and Anne Mayer
Charles and Nancy McGrath
Sarah Rodgers and Sean McNeill
Richard and Nancy Mobley
James and Donna Moody
Ward and Lucy Mooney
John and Carol Moriarty
Brian and Cricket Mullaney
Sean and Stacy Mullaney
Joop and Ria Nagtegaal
Ernest Patrikis and Emily Trueblood
Dr. Billie Pivnick
Debbie Robbins and George Andrews
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Martha Slaight
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Howard and Fredi Stevenson
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Keith and Susan Watson
Dale Weber and Frank McDonough

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Korina Ramsland
Susan Thibodeau
Elodie Zukauskas

In Memory of Robert Borden

Marjorie Priebe

In Memory of J. Richard Fischer

David Fischer and
Carol O'Connor-Fischer

In Memory of Riley Gavruluk

Westport United Youth Soccer

In Memory of Katharine Hall Preston

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David Cole and Betty Slade
Sharon Connors
Rosemary Downer
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Joan O'Brien
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Peter and Diane Brusman
Kathleen Zippler

In Memory of Sally Trowbridge

May B. Remensynder

In Memory of Gurdon Wattles

Henriette Derbyshire
Elizabeth (Bunny) Millikin
Kate and Tom Schmitt
Elizabeth and Paul Sittenfeld

In Memory of David Whipple

Nancy Gladstone

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In Honor of the Moriarty Family

Kathryn and Fred Borges

In Honor of Sarah Ackerman and Karl & Ella Sevareid

Jill Slosburg-Ackerman

In Honor of Sydney MacCormick

Jill Kelsall

In Honor of Richard Dey

Rebecca Saxon

In Honor of Sam Mundel's Birthday

Dix Leeson

In Honor of WRWA Leadership, Outgoing President Tom Schmitt, and incoming President, Linda Findlay

Elizabeth and Paul Sittenfeld

In Honor of Charley and Pat Appleton

Myrth York and David Greenwood

2020 was a challenging year with many losses. We salute all our WRWA friends who have passed, for their commitment to the River and the community.

Russell Beede
Peter Berg
Bruce Derbyshire
Barbara Hawes
Helen "Betty" Johnson
Peter Lenrow
Jim Laird
Elizabeth "Betty" Reny
Jack Reynolds
Kendrick Snyder

High School Merit Scholarships

The Heath Scholarship was established in 2005 with a gift of \$20,000 in honor of Ruth and Bill Heath. It was created for the purpose of granting a scholarship in the name of the Heath Family to a graduating senior with an interest in the environment and service to the community.

In accordance with WRWA policy and terms and conditions established by the Heath Family, each year \$1,000 of the Funds value on December 31 of the previous year is distributed in scholarship. Members of the Education Committee include: WRWA Education Director, 2 WRWA Board members who are current or retired teachers and up to 4 other volunteers from the local community and the Local High School Faculty. Together they read all submitted essays, rank their choices and wrestle with the final decision of selecting the award winner.

Over the years, WRWA has granted more than \$18,000 to graduating seniors from Westport High School, Tiverton High School, Bristol County Agricultural High School, Dartmouth High School, Moses Brown, Bishop Stang High School, Bishop Connolly High School, Apponequit High School, and Durfee High School.

In 2020 the WRWA was pleased to grant the Heath Merit Award to three deserving students



Adam Charest, Westport High School



Jillian DaSilva, Tiverton High School



Julia Kelly, BMC Durfee High School



Westport River Watershed Alliance 2020 Volunteers

Drone Image: Alex Haggert

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Autumn Davis
Gay Gillespie
Jim Gorman
Sandy Hall
Trintje Jansen
Nora Kearney
Debby King
Ryan Nuttall
Marilyn Packard-Luther
Phil Weinberg
Evelyn Wilber
Faith Wilbur



WESTPORT RIVER
A RESOURCE FOR GENERATIONS



Photo: Lucy Chase



Westport River Watershed Alliance

493 Old County Road
P.O. Box 3427
Westport, MA. 02790-0703

508-636-3016
<http://westportwatershed.org/>

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



Drone Image: Alex Haggert