

Westport River
Watershed Alliance

Strategic Plan

2019-2024



ENJOY...the River

LEARN...about the watershed

PROTECT...our water resources

OUR VISION

A healthy watershed where people, wildlife and the River thrive.



OUR MISSION

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



OUR STORY

The Westport River Watershed Alliance (WRWA) is a nonprofit environmental organization established in 1976 to protect the natural resources of the 100-square mile Westport River Watershed. Located at the entrance to Buzzards Bay in Southeastern Massachusetts, the watershed encompasses parts of Dartmouth, Fall River, Freetown, and Westport in Massachusetts and Little Compton and Tiverton in Rhode Island.

WRWA has been working for over 40 years to educate watershed residents about sound environmental practices to protect our natural resources. Our education programs reach over 2,000 public school students during each academic year through in-class lessons and field studies. Our outdoor summer programs and outreach activities enrich the lives of more than 100 children.

Through our scientific efforts, we continue multiple collaborative programs of measuring water quality. We analyze, document, and communicate the results about the condition of the River and watershed to residents. WRWA has instituted numerous local scientific research efforts which currently include a Salt Marsh Degradation Study and the Cockeyeast Pond Studies. We advocate for responsible solutions and best management practices with local, state and federal regulators who are making critical decisions for our environment. WRWA staff and volunteers assist and serve on relevant town boards and committees.

Our primary focus is to promote the environmental integrity of the Westport River Watershed. This effort is supported and advanced by a large team of people. The Board of Directors is a representation of watershed residents with diverse talents. WRWA's staff includes an Executive Director, Education Director, Science Director, Development Director, Finance and Development Administrator, and Community Engagement Manager, three of whom have served the organization for over 14 years. A group of enthusiastic volunteers and interns support our staff. More than 1,400 families are involved through membership. We all work together to advocate for the wise use, preservation, and the sustainability of our natural resources. This in turn benefits the aesthetic, recreational, and economic integrity of the watershed environment.

WRWA will be moving to a newly renovated, historic building right at the head of the River. Our goal is to utilize this facility as a learning and resource center for the community; a place where people of all ages can explore the watershed, see all that has been accomplished, and learn about our current work on behalf of the River. We welcome your participation.

Our 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.



Our Goals

- ◆ **Science:** Provide the scientific basis for policies and actions to ensure clean water and a healthy watershed.
- ◆ **Education:** Educate children and adults about the interrelationship of our waters, soils, plants, animals and people.
- ◆ **Advocacy:** Promote and advocate for the environmental integrity of the Westport River Watershed.
- ◆ **Community Engagement:** Increase public awareness, appreciation, and support for our work on behalf of the environment and the community.
- ◆ **Financial Sustainability:** Procure adequate and diverse sources of funding to support and expand our mission.

OUR ROAD MAP TO ACHIEVING OUR GOALS

Science Goal: Provide the scientific basis for policies and actions to ensure clean water and a healthy watershed

Objective	Action Steps
1. Continue to be the primary source of water quality information for the community and evaluate/implement additional testing if needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain water quality assessment program for fecal coliform and nutrients • Analyze and report test results • Maintain certifications • Integrate on-site weather station on our website
2. Initiate scientific studies to guide preventive or remedial action aimed at improving water quality and ecosystem health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that our actions and advocacy are based on scientifically proven needs and methods • Partner with educational and civic organizations
3. Research and evaluate innovative technologies to improve water quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep up-to-date with research of other environmental and academic entities
4. Explain the technical basis for information distributed by WRWA to the community and to relevant town boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write articles for various communication channels • Develop and maintain scientific and educational displays in River Center • Develop a digital information collection of research related to the watershed

Resources: Science Director, Science Committee, Interns, Volunteers, WRWA skiff, testing through Bay Watchers Program, WRWA Board, and Funding

Measurements: Periodic reports to the community in on-line articles and in town-wide mailings explaining water and River issues and possible solutions





Education Goal: Educate children and adults about the interrelationship of our waters, soils, plants, animals, and people

Objectives	Action Steps
1. Inspire the next generation of River stewards through high quality science education programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide and teach in-class lessons and field studies for students in pre-kindergarten through high school • Lead summer field experiences and programs for local children • Create after-school and weekend science programs for families
2. Train future teachers and leaders in environmental stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solicit and train Environmental Education Service Members • Seek and train summer college interns and high school leaders-in-training • Invite new adult volunteers to join team
3. Create an updated online experience for the general public to learn about and become involved in WRWA's mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign the Westport River Watershed Alliance website • Develop and implement a social media plan to update and inform the watershed community
4. Design interactive educational programs for the new River Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and construct seasonal displays highlighting local animals and habitats • Purchase and install augmented reality watershed model and maps • Create hands-on learning opportunities, featuring a video microscope • Build and maintain aquariums of local flora and fauna

Resources: Education Director, Education Committee, Science Director, Community Outreach Manager, Interns, Volunteers, and Funding

Measurements: Periodic and annual reports to Executive Director, Board members, and WRWA membership





Advocacy Goal: Promote and advocate for the environmental integrity of the Westport River Watershed

Objective	Action Steps
1. Maintain effective collaboration with local, regional, and state decision makers, officials, and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WRWA volunteers attend and report on local boards and commissions on water resource and wetland related topics • Keep current on state regulations, environmental policy, and legal requirements • Establish and promote relationships with other environmental organizations
2. Develop sound strategies and solutions to environmental challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Town of Westport to: • Meet the state required Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for nitrogen and pathogens • Study and plan for climate change • Develop solutions for storm water and erosion problems • Study waste water issues • Advocate for debris removal at Hix Bridge • Work with the Agricultural Commission, USDA Soil Conservation, and local farming community to promote and fund Best Management Practices
3. Promote responsible commercial and recreational use of our natural resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Division of Marine Fisheries, local Fish Commissioners, the Shellfish Advisory Committee, the Shellfish Constable, the Harbormaster, and local fishermen to maintain and revive the historic Westport fisheries (eels, crabs, scallops, clams, oysters, etc) as well as shellfish aquaculture • Promote sustainable recreational use and enjoyment of the Westport River • Advocate for continuing to allow marine related industries to locate along the River in an environmentally sustainable fashion • Advocate for continued public access to our waterways

Resources: Advocacy Committee, WRWA Staff, WRWA Board, Volunteers, Science Director, Science Committee, Outside Experts, Project Specific Funding

Measurements: Periodic and annual reports to the Executive Director, WRWA Board, and membership

Community Engagement Goal: Increase public awareness, appreciation, and support for the work WRWA does on behalf of the environment and the community

Objective	Action Steps
1. Engage our board members, staff, and committee volunteers to act as ambassadors in the community in support of our programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create periodic WRWA position papers • Publish updates on current projects • Plan board training and development
2. Increase membership and volunteer participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate effectively what we do and how we benefit the watershed community • Enlist a younger and more regionally diverse group of individuals
3. Bring our communication programs into the 21st century by more fully utilizing social media platforms, while maintaining use of traditional media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate and utilize effective communication tools such as: Facebook, YouTube videos, and other social media • Write and submit newspaper articles • Publish River News in hard copy and electronic version • Design town-wide mailings
4. Offer opportunities for community members to get involved in environmental action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide volunteer opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Water Quality Monitoring · Field Studies with Local Youth · Annual Beach Clean-Ups · Electronics Recycling • Provide experiential opportunities in collaboration with other organizations • Create informational outreach and educational opportunities in collaboration with other organizations

Resources: Executive Director, Community Engagement Manager, Science Director, Interns, WRWA Board, Volunteers, and Funding

Measurements: - Monitor website activity, volunteer participation, and membership
Periodic reports to WRWA Board on current projects

Financial Sustainability Goal: Secure adequate and diverse sources of funding to support and expand our mission

Objective	Action Steps
1. Continue to balance annual operating income and expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop budgets for new programs and initiatives associated with the move to the River Center • Develop corresponding revenue targets • Leverage budgeting, financial tracking and data analytics
2. Diversify and expand additional revenue sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and seek new foundation support • Initiate a comprehensive planned giving program • Continue to pursue increased corporate support • Identify and cultivate major donor revenue
3. Determine funding needs and revenue sources for current and future initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create endowment to operate and maintain new River Center • Secure revenue to establish and complete WRWA programs and projects

Resources: Executive Director, Development Director, Finance and Development Administrator, Treasurer, Finance Committee, Development Committee, WRWA Board, and pro bono services of fund raising experts

Measurements: Budget review at each WRWA Board meeting, annual reports to WRWA Board and WRWA membership, timely balanced annual budget report



A Voice for the River

We can all agree that the Rivers and waterways of Westport speak to us. The sounds of water, wind, and birds bring back pleasant memories of some of the happiest and most free moments of our lives. Yet the waters cannot speak for themselves. They cannot tell us when they are harmed by human activities or by the lack of care and attention that is needed to maintain a clean and healthy environment.

WRWA was founded to do just that, to protect the waters. Now, we provide real data so that we know how best to preserve and nourish this place we so love. In an advisory role, we bring scientific information to decision makers. We assist them as a collaborative partner in making appropriate decisions to better manage our watershed.

Our purpose is first and foremost to understand and respond to the issues that affect or have the potential to degrade the watershed. WRWA reaches out to provide its resources to any and all. We work with municipal leaders and watershed residents to protect and preserve the Westport River Watershed now and for future generations.

Contributors and Accountability

The WRWA Strategic Plan was developed in-house by Rich Castenson, Linda Findlay, Dave Forney, Tom Jansen, Ward Mooney, Marilyn Packard-Luther, Deborah Weaver, and Jim Whitin. Further input and guidance was provided by WRWA committee members, staff, and the Board of Directors.

The five-year strategic plan is intended to be a living document. We recommend that it be reviewed annually by the WRWA Board of Directors and used to guide programming and budgeting decisions.

Front and back cover photos by Mark Goulding