



Westport River Watershed Alliance

2023 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, advocacy and research 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 this?

- **Through research.** 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

2023 Board of Directors

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Deborah Weaver, *Executive Director*

Kim Botelho, *Education Director*

Roberta Carvalho, *Science Director*

Steve Connors, *Community Engagement Manager*

Jennifer Lynch, *Development and Finance*
Administrator

Michaelah Vasconcellos, *Environmental Educator*



Photo by: Richard Cottrell

Dear Members and Friends:

Thank you to all of our members and friends who have continued to support the Westport River Watershed Alliance into its 48th year! The staff continued to demonstrate their creativity and resiliency, initiating multiple new projects. The most visible of these was the residency of the Wampanoag tribe in the spring, in collaboration with The Trustees and the Westport Land Trust. The “mishoon”, a canoe built by the tribes, is featured in our film “Burning the Mishoon” on our website www.westportwatershed.org

Our finances are in excellent shape thanks to the support and generosity of our loyal membership, and the careful management by our Board of Directors and staff. We are honored to be the grateful recipients of several unexpected bequests from our membership and supporters.

Our education program expanded in the local schools, and we welcomed Kim Botelho as our new Education Director. Kim brings over 30 years of Environmental Education experience, we are tremendously proud that she was selected as one of 30 international recipients of a prestigious Environmental Fellowship. Our children’s summer programs were fully subscribed, and we provided 10 full scholarships, through the Gay Gillespie Summer Scholarship Fund, to children in Grades 1-4. The River Center was regularly open to the public, with multiple free family programs. We held a number of meet the author series, outdoor experiences in the watershed, and educational workshops– both remotely and in person.

Science research projects delve further into the problems of two major challenges facing the health of our River: salt marsh loss and excess nitrogen. We worked closely with the Town and other nonprofit and research organizations to address these challenges.

We enter 2024 in a strong position to continue our commitment to serve the Westport River watershed community in the areas of education, research and advocacy. As we prepare to celebrate 50 years of service in the community 2026, we thank you for your part in getting to this milestone. Together we have made a difference in the water quality of the Westport River and protecting the watershed that surrounds it.



R. Michael Sullivan
WRWA President



Deborah Weaver
Executive Director



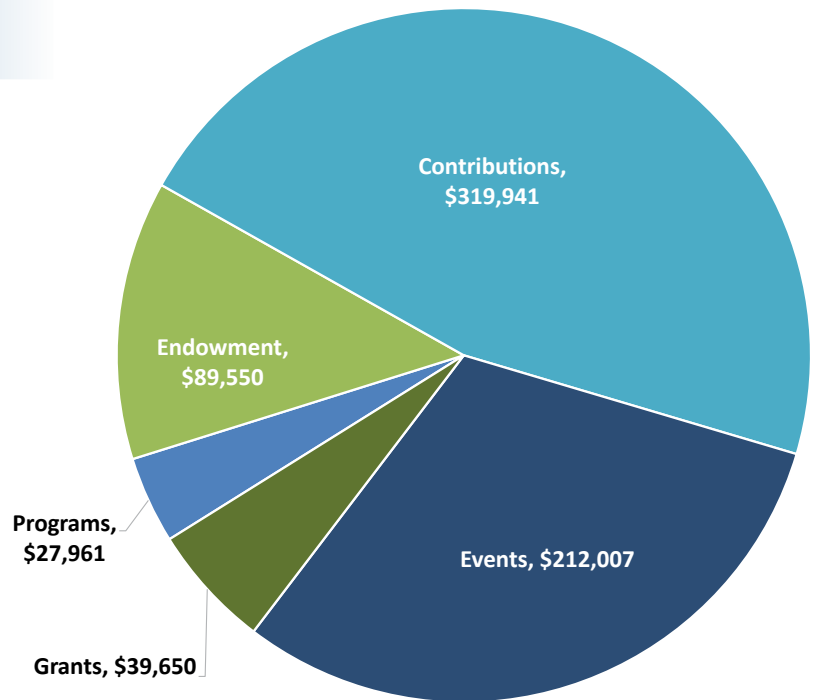
Westport River Watershed Alliance

2023 Finances*

2023 Operations showed Net Income of \$49,046, or approximately 7% of Operating Income. While Program Revenue increased slightly from 2022, Events Revenue and Grant Revenue were slightly lower in 2023 versus 2022. Importantly, however, Gala Revenue and Annual Fund Revenue surpassed our budget goals. Expenses increased year over year due to budgeted expansion of support staff; and increased investments in Science and Advocacy, Community Engagement and Education, which increased 6.5%, 13.2% and 32.88%, respectively.

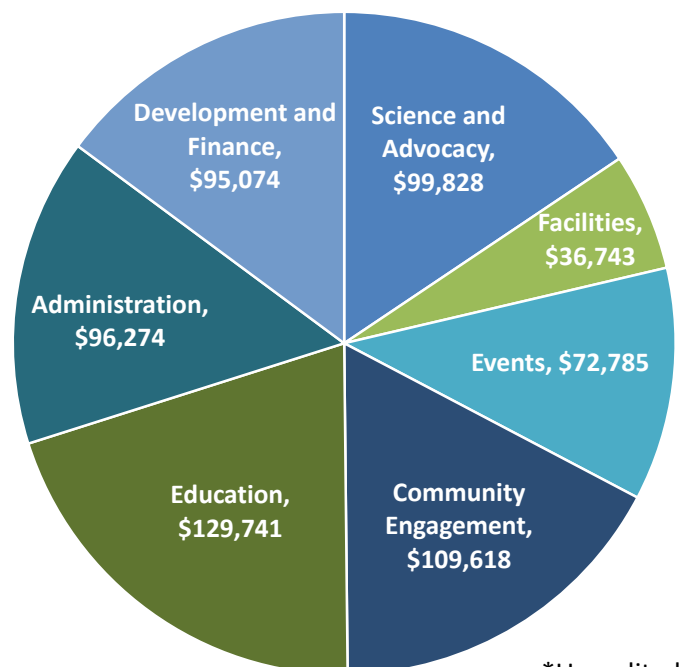
Revenue \$ 689,109

Contributions	\$319,941
Endowment to Operations	\$89,550
Events	\$212,007
Grants	\$39,650
Programs	\$27,961
Total	\$689,109



Expenses \$640,063

Administration	\$96,274
Community Engagement	\$109,618
Development and Finance	\$95,074
Education	\$129,741
Events	\$72,785
Facilities	\$36,743
Science and Advocacy	\$99,828
Total	\$640,063



*Unaudited

2023 Education Programs

Kim Botelho, Education Director and Michaelah Vasconcellos, Environmental Educator
Claire Keeley and Alex Cameron, Summer Educators

- WRWA connects children to the Westport River and its watershed through the Watershed Education Program (WEP), a model for district-wide environmental education. This year we provided hundreds of hours of programming to approximately 2,000 students through monthly classroom visits, field studies, afterschool programs and summer science classes. We also began to build more public programs.
- In February we welcomed Kim Botelho as the new Education Director. She joined us with nearly 30 years of experience in environmental education. Under her leadership, WEP is being re-envisioned to include more watershed specific lessons, updated to meet current standards and teacher goals, and redesigned to be more equitable so classes can be offered to other watershed towns in the future.
- We provided monthly programs for every Pre-K and Kindergarten class at the Macomber Primary School. Preschoolers learned about marine animals and kindergarteners learned about plants, grew seeds in their classrooms and planted an outdoor garden.
- Four AP Biology Students from Westport High School received training and helped lead the Kindergarten field study focused on exploring the outdoors using their senses.
- At the Westport Elementary School, WRWA provided bimonthly programs for every first and second grade class, monthly programs for every third grade class, and a field study for fourth graders.
- At the Westport Middle High School, fifth graders participated in a dune ecosystem field study and restoration project. Every seventh grade class received program focused on the anatomy, life cycle, and importance of horseshoe crabs for coastal birds, the bait industry and medical applications. Every eighth grade class examined marine currents, plankton, climate and food webs.
- In 2023, WRWA completed its twenty-sixth summer of science programming. We were thrilled to expand free public programs for the community. The River Center was open for six weeks during the summer, Thursday - Saturday, completely free-of-charge. Each week featured a different theme with related hands-on activities. We also provided monthly open days during the spring and fall.
- The summer field-based classes were rebranded as Watershed Discovery Programs and, for the first time, WRWA offered drop off programs for 5-6 year olds and incorporated technology lessons for older participants including digital photography and science apps.
- We gave out a total of ten scholarships valued at \$2150 from the Gay Gillespie Scholarship Fund.
- Thanks to Bristol Community Agricultural High School and their grant from EcoRise, we were able to host two high school interns during the summer.
- During the fall we also provided free guided shorebird walks in partnership with the Westport Land Conservation Trust.



WRWA's Education Program is
made possible by
generous support from

BayCoast Bank

Gay Gillespie Scholarship Fund

Heath Family Fund

Lawrence Family Fund

Lees Market

Tom and Kate Schmitt

Wattles Family Fund

Van Sloun Foundation

2023 Science and Advocacy

Roberta Carvalho, Science Director

Water Quality Monitoring

From June to August, we conduct weekly tests on the Westport River, focusing on bacteria levels relevant to swimming and shellfishing standards. These are reported in cfu or colony forming units. By analyzing the 2023 data, we found that roughly 22% of our samples exceeded the safe swimming standards (primary contact recreation) this summer. Compared against last year, when we found only 8% exceedance rate for swimming. This may seem like a concerning rise, however, the increase is not surprising given the large amount of rain we received this summer (June-August). In fact we recorded 16.94 inches at the River Center with some intense downpours. In 2022, we experienced a very dry summer, with about 6.2 inches of rain bringing less bacteria into the watershed via runoff.

We also pay tribute to the late Dr. Brian Howes. He worked on numerous programs and projects in collaboration with WRWA, focusing on the evaluation of health and water quality conditions in the River. He crafted the original nutrient testing program for the River during the 1990s. Dr. Brian Howes' legacy lives on through the impact of his invaluable contributions to our understanding and preservation of the Westport River. We continue to work in partnership with the Buzzards Bay Coalition to monitor the nutrient related health of the River.

Salt Marsh Resilience Studies

- WRWA Board President Mike Sullivan and volunteers continued to work with researchers from Providence College to survey salt marsh conditions in the River. Five tide measurement stations were deployed this summer with a focus on the Let, allowing us to round out our survey of the entire river system which has been conducted over the past two years. Months of data was collected to measure tide height, current velocity and temperature of the river water. Tide information will be combined with marsh elevation measurements to help determine marsh inundation rates.

Collaboration with the Decision Makers

- Worked with Town committees and consultants to insure scientifically valid approaches to environmental issues affecting the watershed.
- Advocated for MassDEP Title 5 septic regulations. We commented on MassDEP's draft modifications to Title5 regulations and succeeded in warding off DEP's unnecessarily severe treatment of Westport.
- Led a successful advocacy campaign for expanded MA tax credit for owners to repair or replace failed septic systems.
- Climate Resilience Committee—WRWA volunteers collaborated with the Town to comprehend the evolving dynamics of the River. In light of the changing climate, it is imperative that our land use practices within the watershed are less disruptive, to facilitate the resilience and restoration of the River's health and benefit our community as a whole.

WRWA Water Quality Results 2023								
Test Dates	Head of Westport	Doctors Point	Hix Bridge	Cadman's Neck	Westport Point	West Branch near 448 River Rd	Charlton Wharf (mouth of River)	Rainfall in last 48 hours (inches)
7-Jun	56	4	10	4	32	2	2	0.07
14-Jun	146	32	30	10	2	2	6	0.68
21-Jun	160	16	6	2	2	6	2	0.00
28-Jun	2,900	1,400	770	80	10	4	8	1.97
5-Jul	5,300	2,100	760	780	1,000	6	2	1.66
12-Jul	130	1,110	490	44	10	6	6	0.00
20-Jul	170	60	160	50	2	2	2	0.00
26-Jul	108	76	38	18	2	2	6	0.00
2-Aug	258	24	4	4	2	2	2	0.00
9-Aug	5,100	16,800	15,200	770	32	394	208	2.72
16-Aug	470	16	22	8	2	8	2	0.42
23-Aug	3,100	22	12	2	2	2	2	0.00
30-Aug	3,900	~	58	28	50	30	40	0.82

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



2023 Community Engagement Programs

Steve Connors, Community Engagement Manager

WRWA experienced a new energy in 2023, with successful programs catching on with the public at the River Center and fresh ideas taking shape thanks to our environmental educator Michaelah Vasconcellos and new education director Kim Botelho.

We presented some very interesting Zoom lectures in the winter, with relevant topics relating to Climate Change and the environment. Richard Heinberg, Senior Fellow at the Post Carbon Institute presented a lecture on his latest book "*Power: Limits And Prospects For Human Survival.*" Author Nicholas Sullivan, gave a fascinating overview of his recent book "*The Blue Revolution: Hunting, Harvesting, and Farming Seafood in the Information Age.*" Tom Kearns, President of DSK Architects + Planners spoke on his company's sustainable building projects, locally and internationally. And Madeline Ostrander presented an engaging talk on her book, "*At Home on an Unruly Planet, Finding Refuge on a Changed Earth.*"

Clean-ups

Our springtime activities included our twice-annual beach clean-ups at Cherry & Webb Conservation Area, with over fifty volunteers filling bags with trash. We also continued our sponsorship with C.O.W. – Clean Our Westport—for town-wide clean ups of roadsides, and scores of volunteers collected hundreds of pounds of trash from all around Westport. WRWA acts as fiscal agent for C.O.W., accepting donations on their behalf and hosting their meetings.

Electronics Recycling

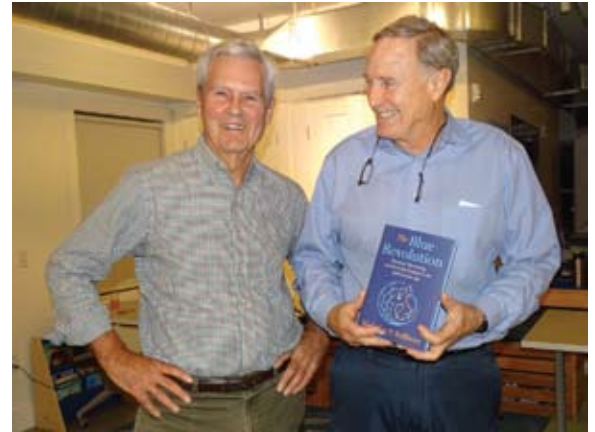
We filled two large box trucks with old computers and electronic equipment, dropped off by residents of Westport and nearby towns. This event has proved to be a very popular and valuable twice-annual event, conducted along with IndieCycle, a nonprofit organization dedicated to recycling all the materials from electronic devices. Over the years, we have helped recycle close to 50,000 pounds of electronic waste that would otherwise end up in landfills.

The Wonders of the Watershed

In the month of June, we again featured a whole month of outdoor activities. We called it Experience WOW, the Wonders of the Watershed, and members and friends came out to enjoy bird watching on Gooseberry with Paul Champlin, hiking to the headwaters with Everett Castro from Green Futures, a dune hike with WRWA, and oyster tasting at Westport Sea Farms.

River Day 2023

We featured many of the same vendors and exhibitors as in years past, with the exciting addition of showcasing the Wampanoag Experience, a group demonstrating their traditions, culture and lifeways. The highlight of the event was the arrival of the Mishoon (canoe) which was created on site in Westport through a collaboration of the Land Trust, The Trustees and the Alliance. The history and vision for the future came alive at River Day.





2023 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, 2022. Every effort has been made to ensure that these are accurate and inclusive. If you see an error, please contact the WRWA office.

\$10,000 and above

Anonymous (2)
Robert and Pam Beck
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Harvey Family Fund
L.Knife and Son Charitable Gift Fund
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Joop and Ria Nagtegaal
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R. Michael and Martha Sullivan
Don and Maggie Swift

\$5,000 to \$9,999

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Judy and Martin (late) Kelly
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Bobo Widing Jonson
Van Sloun Foundation
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\$1,000 to \$1,999

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Winter Art Show 2023

We were thankful to utilize the beautiful Dedee Shattuck Gallery for our 10th Annual Winter art show in late February. The theme for the art works was Reflections, and this concept inspired some truly creative pieces. Forty artists participated, delivering to us a remarkable variety of artwork inspired by our coastal environment. We estimate that over four hundred people visited the show, and with the help of online bidding through 32 Auctions.com, we exceeded our target income for the auction.



Artists

Phyllis Dobbyn Adams
Ray Audet
Carol Bliven
Marianne Boucher
Cheryle Cantin
Desiree Cantwell
Janet Carney
Pam Clarkson
Randy Clarkson
Merri Cyr
Susan Czernicka

Bob Daylor
Iria DeValles-Vieira
Faith Duarte
Midori Evans
Anne Marie Fallon
Rita Gardent
Gay Gillies
Sandra Hall
Barbara Edlund Healy
Anna Hitchcock
Trintje Jansen

Paula Kochanek
Jill Law
Tom Leverett
Pamela Lowell
Alexandria Mauck
Betsey MacDonald
Dick Manchester
Robin Nunes
Nathan & Rebecca Orié
Josie Richmond
Beth Russo

Tom Schmitt
Brenda Wrigley Scott
Nancy Shand
Greg Stone
Amelia Tripp
Amir Viskin
Elizabeth Wade
Nancy Whitin
Faith Wilbur

Summer Concert 2023

We are grateful to Westport Rivers and the Russell family for their generosity in hosting the event, and to our generous sponsor DSK Architects + Planners. We thank Bayside Restaurant, Lees Oil Service and Milbury & Company Real Estate for their additional support. Our raffle items were provided by our good neighbor, Osprey Sea & Surf Adventures.

WRWA's Summer Concert at the Westport Rivers Vineyard took place on a lovely July evening, with a cheerful crowd thoroughly enjoying our featured artist, straight from Nashville, Darrell Scott. High-spirited Boston based singer/songwriter Mark Erelli opened the show. This was WRWA's ninth annual summer concert, another success for our organization.



River Day 2023

River Day featured many fun, nature-oriented activities for children, as well as over thirty local vendors and nonprofit exhibitors. The Wampanoag Experience group was represented, with a dedication of the mishoon canoe recently completed at the Westport Town Farm. Other Native American traditions were exemplified with Native dance and drumming in the morning, as well as crafts and exhibits all day. The River Center was open to the public for viewing of the fish aquariums, the high powered microscope and interactive sand table.

A comprehensive video documentary of the burning of the mishoon, made by Alex Haggert, can be found on the WRWA YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3LYjGqTAB0>

The Westport River Watershed Alliance and the Westport Land Conservation Trust (WLCT) hosted the Wampanoag Experience, highlighting Native history in the South Coast area and sharing the deep traditional knowledge and life ways of Wampanoag culture. Wampanoag members camped at the Westport Town Farm, a Trustees property, and performed the traditional burning of a mishoon, the act of making a canoe by burning out the interior of a large log. The process took 7 days and all-day monitoring by an experienced group of Wampanoag. The public came to observe the burn daily with educational programming.



All the host nonprofits collaborated to connect with visitors to witness the burning which also demonstrated the various cultural practices and techniques of this pre-colonial, indigenous boatbuilding method. The mishoon builders and artists supervised the burn and facilitated appreciation of these experiences in the process.



2023 River Day Sponsors



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2023 Summer Gala

Over 500 people attended the Summer Gala, off River Road, with magnificent views of the Harbor and West Branch. The catering by The Westporter was as good as it gets, the music from the Joe Mulholland Trio provided a mellow vibe to the evening, and the Silent Auction was filled with remarkable and unusual items! We thank the hosts for welcoming us, the Benefactors, Patrons and Sponsors who make it a financial success, and the many volunteers who plan and staff this complex and enjoyable annual event.

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Bequest in memory of Nancy Meeker
Talented artist and devoted beachcomber

Bequest in memory of Margaret (Gay) Thomas
*Founding member of the Westport River Defense Fund,
now WRWA*

High School Merit Scholarships

Each year, for the past 24 years, the Westport River Watershed Alliance has awarded a Merit Scholarship to one or two graduating seniors. In order to qualify, the student must demonstrate academic excellence and a commitment to protecting the Westport River and its watershed.

In 2023, Nina Cunha of Dartmouth earned the first place scholarship and was awarded \$2000. Nina plans to earn a degree in Environmental Science and hopes to work for the Environmental Protection Agency. She has already demonstrated a commitment to this field by serving on the environmental club at her high school, volunteering at Buttonwoods Zoo, and in her role as a Sea Lab Intern where she helped educate children about the ocean.

The second place scholarship of \$1000 was awarded to Noah Sowle of Westport. Noah volunteered at WRWA and helped with our pollinator garden and the vegetable garden at the Alice A. Macomber School. He plans to attend medical school after pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in biology.

The Merit Scholarship was made possible by the generosity of donors including the late Margot Boote and by Bill Heath Jr. who gave a gift in celebration of his parents, William and Ruth Heath. Both parents demonstrated a profound commitment to the Westport community, the environment, social justice, and global peace.



Nina Cunha,
Dartmouth High School

Noah Sowle,
Westport High School

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Westport River Watershed Alliance

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*a healthy watershed
where people, wildlife and the River thrive.*

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