



Westport River Watershed Alliance

2021 Annual Report

The background of the report is a scenic photograph of a river flowing through a marshy area. In the foreground, there is a wooden structure that appears to be a nest or a birdhouse, supported by three legs. The river is blue and flows towards the background. The shoreline is covered in green grass and reeds. In the distance, there is a dense forest of green trees. The sky is blue with some white clouds. Two birds are visible in flight: one on the left and one on the right.

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 2021 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*

Bailey Sweet, *Community Engagement Assistant*

Terra Corps Service Member

Michaelah Vasconcellos



Photo: Judith Frampton

Dear Members and Friends:

Dear Friends,

Despite another year of dealing with the ups and downs of COVID, WRWA had a banner year. The staff continued to show their creativity and resiliency through ever-changing restrictions. Our finances are in excellent shape -- thanks to the support and generosity of our loyal membership and to careful management by our Board of Directors and Executive Director.

Our education program continued in the local schools, and our staff adapted deftly to changes. Our children's summer programs returned after a year's hiatus and were almost fully subscribed. The River Center was regularly open to the public, and we held a number of speaker series and educational walks -- both remotely and in person.

Science research projects continued 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 2022 in a strong position to continue our commitment to serve the Westport River watershed community in the areas of education, research and advocacy. Together we can make a difference in the water quality of the beautiful Westport River.



Linda Findlay
WRWA President



Deborah Weaver
Executive Director

Photo: Amelia Tripp

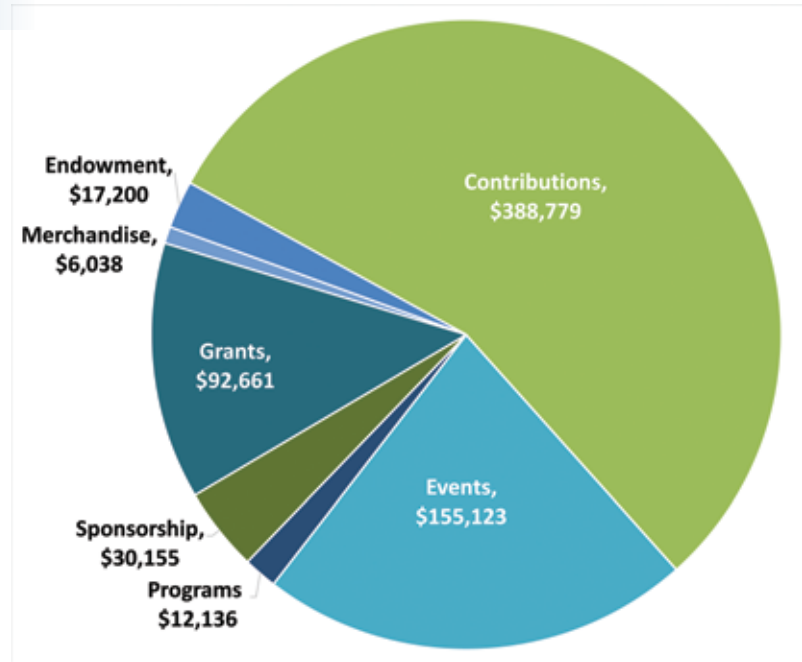


Westport River Watershed Alliance 2021 Finances*

Sources \$ 702,092

SOURCES:

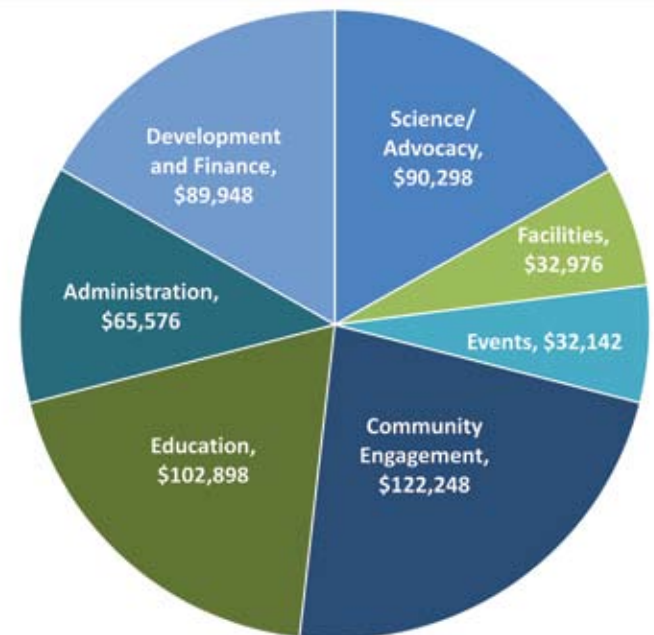
- Revenue increased due to quick adaptation to virtual programming.
- Adult engagement increased through a series of video presentations and communications and in person visits to the River Center.
- Endowment spending limited to 1.4%.
- Exceeded all philanthropy goals.
- Gala and Summer Concert resumed with adaptations for Covid Safety.



Uses \$ 536,085

USES:

- All staff remained full time and added half time position for Community Engagement.
- Water testing and science projects continued without interruptions.
- Educational programs K-12 held outdoors or remotely with no reduction in children served.
- Increase of Open House hours in Summer and Fall at the River Center.



Assets

ASSETS:

- Received substantial bequest December 31, 2021.
- Endowment up 87% (appreciation plus contributions).
- River Center Endowment is fully funded.
- Dedicated staff and Board Members.
- Committed members and generous donors.
- River Center Offices and Public Space.

2021 Education Programs

Shelli Costa, Education Director

Throughout 2021, WRWA's Watershed Education Programs continued to evolve and adjust to the changing "new normal". We created new ways to deliver meaningful content as we shift with the latest guidelines. This year the education staff and volunteers were able to offer outdoor education lessons in the winter and spring. Then as the year progressed, field studies returned in the later part of the school year. Finally as the new school year began this fall we were allowed to return to in-classroom programming. It has been a rollercoaster of a year but we continue to inspire the next generation of watershed stewards, reaching over 2,000 students in 2021!

The WEP Program, continued to improve throughout the year by completing the following accomplishments:

- WRWA hosted 2 full-time Commonwealth Corps volunteers to build on our education and outreach programs. Our service members, Jennifer Burns and Chelsea Thiboutot, 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. We hosted several scout troops, family open house days and summer and fall visitors in 2021.
- The education staff continued to support an organic school garden curriculum with the Westport Kindergarten students. Students were led on a field study to a local site, Westport Land Conservation Trust's Mill Pond Site as part of their science learning.
- Our youngest learners in PreK had monthly visits in 2021 to expand their awareness of the creatures that live in the Westport River through lessons, books, crafts and hands on activities.
- WRWA has also continued to educate students about the importance of local wetlands like vernal pools. 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.
- BayCoast Bank continued their support of WRWA with funding to host 2 local college summer interns to assist with our education and water quality monitoring programs. This generous donation funded two interns this year, Kassidy Cestodio and Michaelah Vasconcellos. They brought new ideas and energy to WRWA for the season.
- Summer science education programs were completely booked for the 2021 season. We hosted seven weeks of summer programs, reaching over 100 participants ages 3 to 16 throughout the season. The Gay Gillespie Scholarship fund supported 8 students from 2020 and 8 additional students from 2021 as essay contest winners to attend the summer programs in 2021, at no cost to their families.



2021 Community Engagement Programs

Steve Connors, Community Engagement Manager

We adapted to a somewhat changed environment, with Covid waxing and waning throughout the year, and with people becoming more accustomed to online events, masks and social distancing. Despite the caution and concerns, WRWA resumed many of our traditional community engagement events and programs. At the same time, we continued making interesting and informative videos with our education staff and Commonwealth Corps volunteers, and presented some very popular Zoom lectures in the winter, including Dan Gibson talking about Horseshoe Crabs and Greg Skomal discussing sharks.

Clean-ups

Our springtime activities included getting back to our twice-annual beach clean-ups at Cherry & Webb Conservation Area, with over fifty volunteers filling bags with trash. We also partnered 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 witnessed the pent-up demand for our Electronics Recycling, after not doing it at all in 2020, and we filled two large box trucks with old computers and electronic equipment, dropped off by residents of Westport and nearby towns. It was wonderful to be able to get back to this very popular and valuable event, conducted along with IndieCycle, a nonprofit organization dedicated to recycling all the materials from electronic devices.

The Wonders of the Watershed

In the month of June, we tried something new and 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.

Family Programs at the River Center

We opened up our well-equipped education center for Saturday visitation during the warm months of 2021, with our community engagement assistant Bailey presenting interesting science-based activities and presentations for kids and adults alike. While we still were careful and cautious with masks and other measures, it was a pleasure to begin to share this wonderful public engagement asset with the community.



2021 Science and Advocacy

Roberta Carvalho, Science Director

The WRWA has been sampling water quality at 19 sites along the Westport River and contributing streams for Rivers for more than 20 years to evaluate the health of the rivers. We test the Westport River weekly from June-August. In 2021 the rainy summer weather resulted in higher bacterial counts; in June-August there was 15 inches of rain recorded, much higher than typical amounts. Bacteria levels can change by the day; each week's results refer only to conditions the morning on which the samples were taken. We monitor a type of bacteria used for swimming and shellfishing standards, which have specific concentrations of bacteria that are considered safe for humans, reported in cfu or colony forming units. This summer areas in the upper East Branch failed standards for recreational contact many times (see chart).



Bacteria levels are usually elevated during wet weather events. 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.

Over the years bacteria counts have diminished in the rivers due to Title V septic improvements and better treatment and minimization of stormwater runoff – all of which the WRWA has advocated for using these data to make the case for reducing pollution sources. Thank you to the dedicated volunteers who helped with this program and the Baywatchers Program done in partnership with the Buzzards Bay Coalition. WRWA has worked in partnership with the Buzzards Bay coalition for over 30 years to collect data on the nutrient related health of the River.

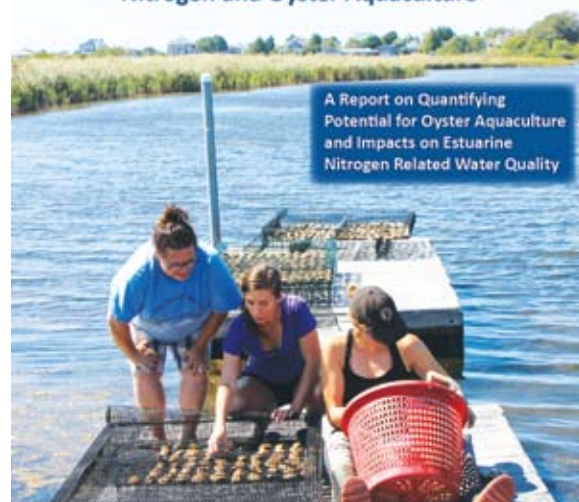
Cockeast Pond and Oyster Aquaculture Experiments

The Coastal Systems Program at the School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) at UMASS Dartmouth completed a project funded by the USEPA Southeast New England Program (SNEP) Watershed Grant with WRWA as a project partner using Cockeast Pond as a “natural laboratory”. As communities across Southeast New England seek new approaches to lessen the impact and impairment from increased

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)
2-Jun	210	168	324	90	18	6	2	0.50
9-Jun	450	140	500	10	10	14	22	0.00
16-Jun	250	6	8	12	4	2	2	0.30
23-Jun	520	62	16	10	6	6	2	0.00
30-Jun	180	4	18	2	2	2	2	0.00
7-Jul	80	150	80	8	2	2	2	0.00
14-Jul	690	28	20	2	2	8	2	0.00
21-Jul	104	322	204	58	2	8	4	0.00
28-Jul	260	10	6	8	4	4	2	0.04
4-Aug	80	28	14	2	4	2	2	0.03
11-Aug	84	44	6	28	14	2	2	0.27
18-Aug	150	166	162	20	12	10	2	0.00
25-Aug	328	272	178	388	2	2	4	1.99
1-Sep	106	220	134	84	2	2	10	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

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

nitrogen levels, oyster aquaculture is a commonly-identified approach that is gaining momentum across the region. While the plans to use aquaculture continue to grow, there has been almost no quantification of the effectiveness of this approach. To address this gap, this project used Cockeast Pond—a saltwater pond with a high level of nitrogen enrichment as shown in the previous years of water monitoring by the Alliance and SMAST team. The project was designed to quantify the oyster aquaculture as a method for estuarine nitrogen remediation.

In 2021 we mailed our members a booklet documenting research done in Cockeast Pond. To view an online version visit: <https://westportwatershed.org/whats-being-done/oyster-experiment-in-cockeast-pond/>

Salt Marsh Degradation Studies

WRWA sponsored a salt marsh study which began in 2018/19 by Professors Patrick Ewanchuk and Catherine Matassa of Providence College and University of Connecticut respectively. The results of this project indicate that the prime drivers of degradation are not nutrient driven, rather related to a change in flow within the River system and its accompanying consequences including inundation and sedimentation changes. WRWA is working to better understand the mechanism for the loss of marsh area in the Westport River. New research is being done to fully understand the changes in water flow and sediment dynamics. This information is vital to any possible future successful restoration or mitigation project. Analyses of historical aerial photography indicate that this loss of marsh has been occurring over several decades, and is thought to have been accelerating over the past 10-15 years.

WRWA Board member Michael Sullivan has generously donated his time to begin collecting tide data within the River. Mike has built and deployed tide gauges in the River at a number of sites across the West Branch. Data generated will provide answers to questions of how differences in water flow, submergence time, and relative sea level relate to marsh conditions.

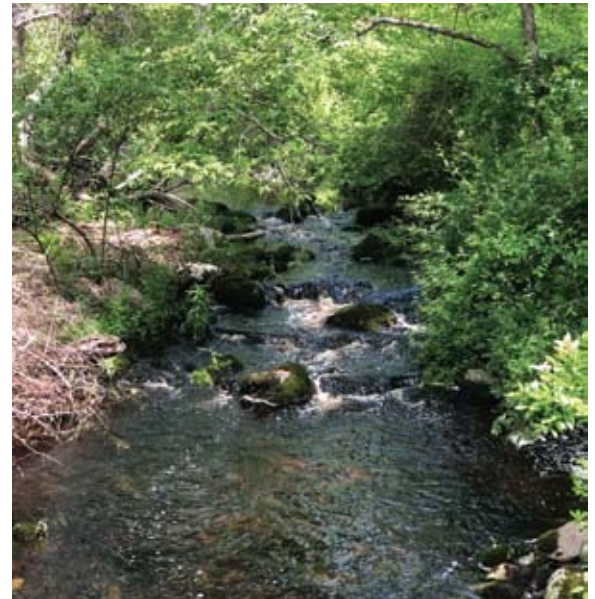
Collaboration with the Town of Westport

Westport Targeted Integrated Water Resource Management Plan

WRWA continues to work with the Town committees and consultants to insure scientifically valid approaches. In 2021 WRWA collaborated 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. WRWA had an active role in the public outreach and education component.

Climate Resilience Committee

WRWA has members in the Town's new committee. WRWA volunteers worked with the Town to understand how the River is changing. The climate is changing, and our land uses in the watershed must be less impactful to help the River and our community at large regain its health.





2021 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, 2021. Every effort has been made to ensure that these are accurate and inclusive. If you see an error, please contact the WRWA office.

\$50,000 and above

Anonymous

\$25,000 to \$49,999

Joop and Ria Nagtegaal
Rupert Thompson Fund at the Rhode
Island Foundation

\$10,000 to \$24,999

BayCoast Bank
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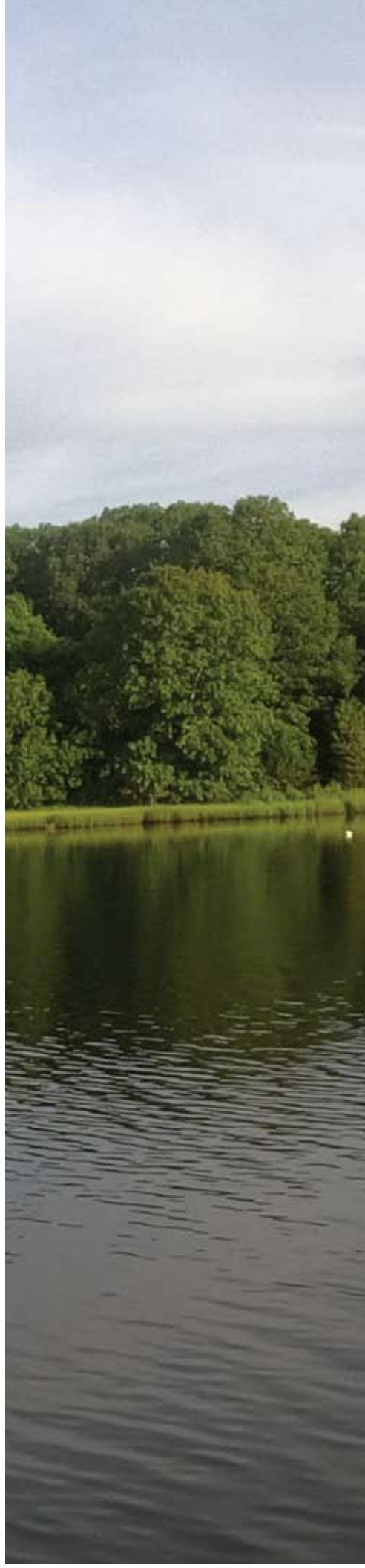
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Winter Art Show 2021

We tried something new with our winter art show in 2021, and held the live display at the River Center instead of our traditional Dedee Shattuck Gallery showing. We graced our stairwells and hallways with beautiful art donated by 40 local and regional artists, and held the auction completely online.

While in-person attendance was lower due to the ongoing pandemic, on-line visitation to the show was very high. Each year we notice the caliber and quality of the artwork getting more and more impressive, as the art show is becoming established as a serious and widely popular event taking place each winter.



Artists

Ray Audet
Marianne Boucher
Stanley Cornwall
Sarah Daughn
Mike Davis
Rose Esson Dawson
Phyllis Dobbyn Adams

Faith Duarte
Linda Fitzgerald
Rita Gardent
Gay Gillies
Christina Glaser
Sandra Hall
Sharon Hardin
Barbara Healy
Anna Hitchcock
Rebecca Janzen
Janie Kinnane
Paula Kochanek
Jill Law
Tom Leverett
Betsey MacDonald
Dick Manchester
Alexandria Mauck
Nancee Meeker
Nathan Orié
Elizabeth Wade
Kimberly Ward
Faith Wilbur
Cory Windham
Sarah T. Windham
Anne Winner

Summer Concert 2021



In July of 2021 we were pleased to return to Westport Rivers Vineyard with our annual summer concert, presented with the Narrows Center for the Arts. Amy Helm and her band were the featured performers, with solo artist Brian Dunne as the energetic opening act.

It was a sellout crowd on a beautiful summer evening, with everyone pleased to get out and enjoy live music again. We felt confident that all would be safe in the outdoor environment this summer.

Our thanks to Dewing, Schmid & Kearns, Architects and Planners, for their lead sponsorship for the event, along with Lees Oil Service, Milbury and Company Realtors, Buzzards Bay Brewing and Westport Rivers.

2021 Summer Gala

We all had the pleasure of gathering again for our annual Summer Gala on a warm August afternoon. The breeze from Richmond Pond and Rhode Island Sound kept it comfortable on the Brayton Point hillside at the home of Linda and Spinner Findlay. We offer our special thanks to the Davis, Law and Patterson families for their hospitality in providing a large parking area.

Great food from Wilhelmina's Catering and Sakonnet Events, live music from the Joe Mulholland Trio, and the highly anticipated silent auction capped off a very successful event. Our thanks to the many volunteers who helped make it happen, and to the dedicated members and supporters who attended.

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High School Merit Scholarships



The Westport River Watershed Alliance (WRWA) offers a \$1000 merit award for graduating seniors living in the watershed. WRWA has a proud 40-year record of environmental stewardship. The merit award offers an opportunity for us to honor students who have demonstrated their concern to protect our watershed environment. WRWA is fortunate to have additional funds this year to give out two merit award scholarships to deserving applicants.

This year's merit award winners are Isabella Glennon and Nora Kearney. Isabella Glennon is senior from Westport's Junior/Senior High School and plans to attend the Providence College in the fall as biology major. Nora Kearney is a local Westport student who is completing high school independently at home this year. Nora will be attending Hartpury University in England in the fall as an equine science major.

The Westport River Watershed Alliance Merit Award was created to celebrate the lives of William and Ruth Heath and Margo C. Boote. William and Ruth Heath were committed to environmental issues and protection of the natural world, as well as to social justice and global peace and harmony. Margo C. Boote was very involved in her community and the world around her. She not only portrayed an active commitment to the environmental mission in her actions, but also had a deep spiritual connection with the environment as was shown in her poetry.



Nora Kearney, Westport



Isabella Glennon, Westport High School



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Photo: Brian Mullaney

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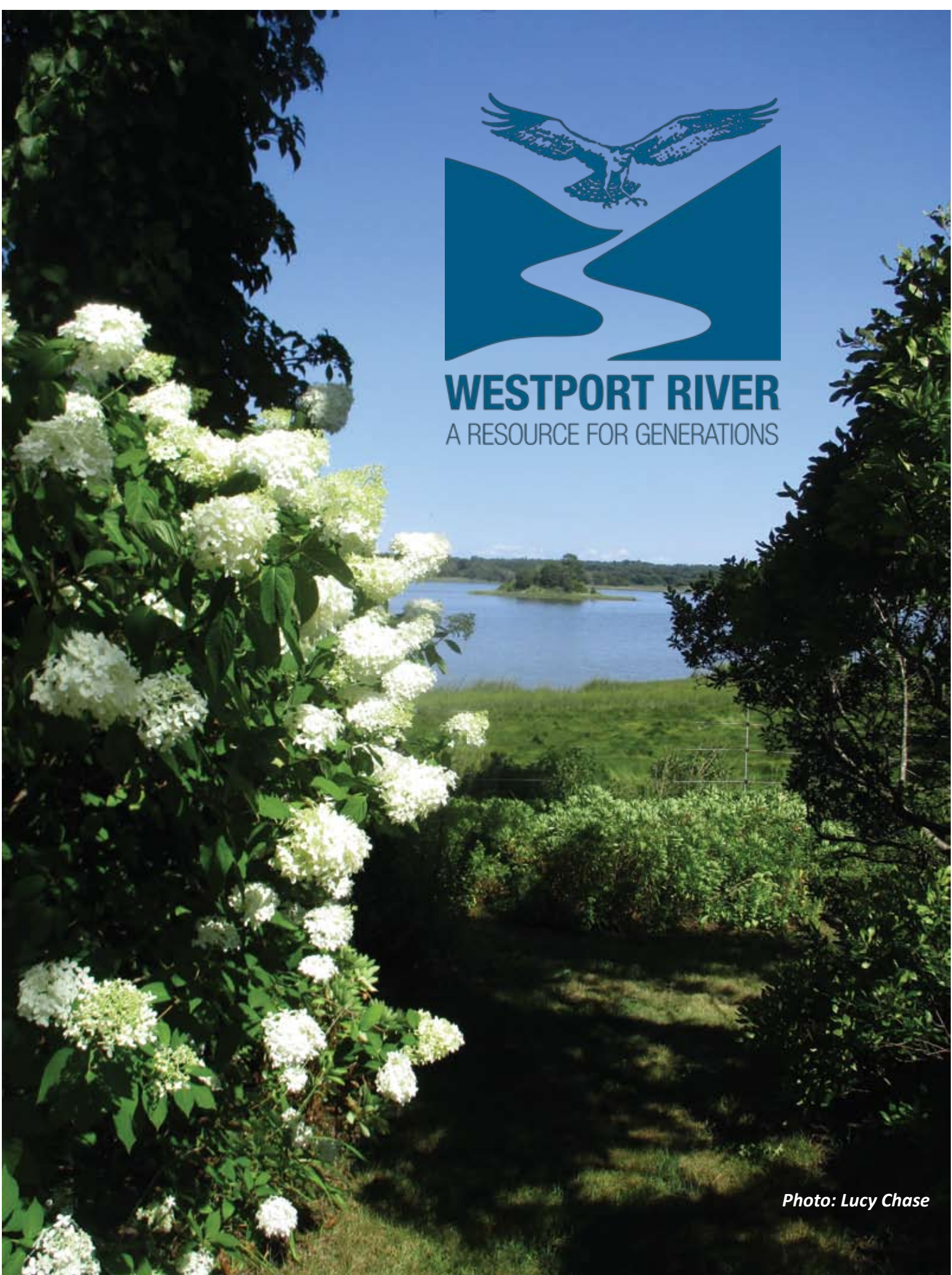


Photo: Lucy Chase



Westport River Watershed Alliance

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

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