

Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

Strategic Plan 2015-2018

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association is a member-supported organization dedicated to ensuring that the natural beauty of the Wood and Pawcatuck river watersheds are maintained for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

Our major role is helping people understand the link between their quality of life and the quality of the natural environment that supports them, with the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed as our teaching tool. Our actions are a blend of advocating on behalf of the natural, bountiful wonders of the watershed to improve management and sustainable use, and rolling up our sleeves and directly engaging in activities that benefit the watershed, it's residents and it's users.

Our VISION — *an abundance of clean, cool water cared for by informed, concerned people who live in and use the watershed* — is our ideal for this prized natural resource.

Our MISSION — *to preserve and protect the lands and waters of the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed for natural and human communities* — is our rallying point for achieving our vision for the watershed.

Our CORE VALUES — *be honest, embrace change, be passionate, make it fun, be fiscally prudent, treat each other as family, and be a mentor for watershed stewardship* — guide us in all that we do on behalf of the watershed and its users.

Our efforts focus on five broad areas — fresh waters, salt waters, plant and animal diversity, recreational access, and environmental education. This strategic plan focuses our efforts in these areas for the 2015 to 2018 timeframe, and acts as a guidepost for our activities on behalf of our membership, and the natural communities of plants and animals that live in and use the watershed.

Clean, Cool, Abundant Fresh Water

The most precious resource on planet Earth is water. People, plants and animals, all need water to live, and we all need it clean to thrive. Some native species, like brook trout, also need it cool. In order to help ensure there continues to be plenty of clean, cool water we will:

- Continue support of water quality monitoring in the watershed, adding the collection of water temperature data so that impacts of climate change on the watershed can be tracked and documented.
- Continue to be a strong voice for smart water use so that there is plenty for people and environment long into the future. Our focus will be on helping state, municipal, and private water suppliers create and apply smart water use programs.
- Work with local town boards, commissions, and planners to develop ways to reduce polluted water flowing into waterways during flood events, which is a growing problem resulting from increased storminess as our climate changes.

Healthy Saltwater Environment

The lower Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay are the gateway to the ocean and the doorway through which migratory fish enter the watershed. Considerable effort has been expended over the past decade opening the entire Pawcatuck River to migrating fish. In order to ensure we have a healthy estuary we will:

- Actively partner with existing environmentally focused organizations located in the estuary, such as Save The Bay and Watch Hill Conservancy, to offer joint programs and activities, and to advocate in one voice around common causes.

Thriving Native Plants and Animals

One of the joys of living in the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed is the great variety and abundance of plant and animal life with which it is blessed, both in the water and on the land. Birders, berry-pickers, nature photographers, and mushroom foragers all find great value in the bounty of the watershed. We find the preservation of this variety and abundance as critically important to the long-term health of the watershed. In order to protect our natural heritage of unique plants and animals we will:

- Participate in and support statewide and regional programs such as RhodeMap RI and the State Wildlife Action Plan.
- Assist the Nature Conservancy and the host communities of Westerly and Stonington in removing the White Rock dam on the lower Pawcatuck River.
- Work with the Rhode Island Natural History Survey and other conservation organizations in controlling, and to the extent possible, eliminating non-native plants and animals.

Plentiful Access To Recreation

Recreational access to hiking trails, paddle craft launch sites, and fishing areas are important to the quality of life for both residents in, and visitors to the watershed. People find peace and tranquility on its waters, and in the surrounding natural beauty of its lands. To ensure plentiful access within the watershed we will:

- Maintain existing WPWA access points, ensuring they remain safe and clean.

- Partner with other organizations to improve and increase public access.
- Promote public awareness of responsible recreational access and use of the watershed.

Helping People Care About the Watershed

Interacting directly with watershed resources helps people create emotional bonds, such as respect, affection, and pride. These bonds provide a powerful means for inspiring a sense of environmental responsibility, called stewardship, for watershed resources. Educational programs are a primary way we directly engage people. In order to promote and expand environmental stewardship in the watershed we will:

- Continue our tradition of engaging children in educational programs, both within the school and at our campus on the Wood River, and where practical, work with teachers to include watershed study in their curriculum.
- Continue our long-standing outdoor recreational programming for our members and the public, greatly expanding the number of opportunities for people, especially children, to participate in a broader variety of outdoor, educational, and recreational programs and activities.