A publication of The Watershed Institute. Keeping central New Jersey's water clean, safe, & healthy since 1949.

### Helping Towns Address Pollution The Watershed Institute is updating local stormwater management with green infrastructure.

Celebrating 

### Remembering p4... Watershed Champions





# Rays of Hope Shine Through

by Jim Waltman

the Darkness

This spring is like none other that I can remember. Green shoots, bird song and warm breezes are finally here after a long, brutal winter that seems like it's been with us since mid-March 2020. The pace of COVID-19 vaccinations is accelerating, giving me hope that we are through the worst of the pandemic.

This is our first issue of the Wellspring since Spring 2020. We suspended publication of the newsletter as one of the cost-cutting strategies we deployed in response to the virus last year.

I am tremendously grateful for the generosity of our members and donors over the last year. Your support has allowed The Watershed Institute to weather the pandemic storm. After a challenging year, I am very hopeful for the future.

As a sign of our optimism, we're bringing back our popular Watershed Nature Camp this summer, although at a lower capacity than in pre-COVID times. Our camp "sold out" in under two hours this year, a sign of how eager families are for a more "normal" summer.



Campers enjoy a hike on the Watershed Reserve.

President Biden has put environmental protection back on the national agenda, including climate change among the four issues he repeats virtually everywhere he goes (along with COVID-19, the economy and racial justice).

The nation has its first Native American Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, and first Black male Administrator

of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Michael Regan. Both bring a deep commitment to environmental protection and social justice.

There is even hope that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), long considered to be captive to the fossil fuel industry, is evolving. President Biden's choice to chair FERC, Richard Glick, is a vocal proponent of renewable energy and a critic of the process that the Commission has used to determine whether new gas pipelines are necessary. (Having lobbied Glick back in the 1990s when he worked for former Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-AR) and I worked as an environmental advocate in Washington, I can attest to his "green" credentials.)

There are also strong signs of change from the private sector. Automakers have pledged to work with the Biden Administration on stronger fuel efficiency standards and GM made the bold declaration that it would stop selling vehicles that run on gas or diesel by 2035.

At the local level, the Watershed has been working successfully—via ZOOM—with towns across the state to strengthen local ordinances that protect communities from flooding and polluted stormwater runoff. Dozens of residents have joined our effort through our new Community Watershed Advocates Program (CWAP).

NJ Governor Phil Murphy issued an Executive Order for state agencies to address climate change and a range of aggressive actions are expected this spring as part of the NJ PACT (Protecting Against Climate Threats) initiative.

None of us will ever forget the loss, grief and anxiety of the last year. But there are rays of sunshine bursting through the clouds and signs of recovery on the horizon. Just please continue to wear your mask, stay socially distanced, and take care of yourself.



#### **CONSERVING & RESTORING HABITATS**

### **Hightstown Park Gets Rain Gardens!**

The Watershed Institute installed two shallow rain gardens and a pollinator garden to manage stormwater runoff and foster wildlife habitat at the Rocky Brook Environmental Resource Center in Hightstown.

\* # 25

Funded by a grant from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the Watershed teamed up with experts from Rutgers Landscape & Nursery to install the plants and soil amendments in the 2,050 square-foot gardens last summer. Watershed scientists have assessed hundreds of sites across 16 municipalities in central New Jersey under a multi-year NJDEP grant and have approached towns and cities with possible solutions using green infrastructure to manage polluted stormwater runoff. This site was chosen as a demonstration project to wrap up the grant.



A newly planted Hightstown Park rain garden.

Steve Tuorto, PhD, the Watershed's Director of Science & Stewardship, said the two gardens, totaling about 1,050-square-feet, mimic nature by capturing runoff and filtering out any oil, salts, pet waste and other contaminants, improving the water quality before it flows into Rocky Brook.

Volunteers from the Hightstown Environmental Commission will assist with watering the new gardens as part of a practical solution to flooding from the parking lot, as well as beautification of the park. Additionally, the Rutgers team will maintain the garden for several years.

#### Watershed Scientists Tackle Harmful Algal Blooms in Rosedale Lake

During the summer of 2020, Rosedale Lake in Mercer County was hit by harmful algal blooms (HABs) caused by the excessive growth of small organisms that produce toxins in the water — posing perils for public health and safety.

HAB's can become a chronic problem without better controls on the use of lawn fertilizers, farm run-off, septic leaks, polluted stormwater runoff and other contaminants flowing into the waterways. A combination of hot weather, nutrients from fertilizers, pet waste and other sources create conditions where cyanobacteria grow too rapidly, producing toxins that are harmful to people and pets.

This summer, The Watershed Institute will assist county officials with possible remedies at the 32-acre Rosedale Lake. Funded by a \$185,000 NJDEP grant, the floating wetlands and aeration devices will be deployed, along with the use of barley bales to filter stormwater runoff.



Floating wetlands are manmade rafts that are planted with iris, willows and other vegetation that have long roots. The plants and soil medium soak up the nutrients and help mitigate the algae blooms without the use of chemicals.

While New Jersey alone can't halt rising global temperatures that fuel the bloom growth, environmentalists say the state can take steps to reduce the polluted stormwater runoff that carries bloom-inducing contaminants.

# **Remembering Watershed Champions**

This past year has been challenging for everyone, in so many ways. We've heard heartbreaking stories from our members who have lost family and friends, had to forego memorials, and cancel celebrations and holiday gatherings. Sadly, the Watershed family has lost dear friends and long time members, including the following individuals.



**Betty Wold Johnson** 

Mrs. Betty Wold Johnson, stalwart friend, donor and champion of the Watershed and its mission, passed away in May of 2020 at the age of 99.

Mrs. Johnson bequeathed to the Watershed an exceptionally generous gift to establish a new endowment fund that will provide for the long-term financial support of The Watershed Institute and its essential mission of protecting water and the natural environment in central New Jersey.

Mrs. Johnson was a long-time member of the Watershed's Advisory Board, a group comprised of some of the Watershed's closest friends that includes many former members of our Board of Trustees. She served on that body for more than two decades.

Her generosity helped sustain The Watershed Institute. Her investment in the creation of the Watershed Center for Environmental Advocacy, Science & Education and the initiation of our endowment fund helped transform the Watershed into the robust institution it is today.

"The Watershed will be forever grateful for Mrs. Johnson's leadership," said Executive Director Jim Waltman. "Her sharp mind, kind spirit, and enthusiasm for our efforts were infectious and I am personally grateful for her support, advice and encouragement."

**Jim Gaffney** died peacefully at home in May 2020 surrounded by his loving family. Jim was the Watershed's executive director from 1980 to 1985, leading the organization through a pivotal time in its history.

Jim moved to New Jersey in 1980 to become the executive director of the Watershed, known then as the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association. Jim was one of the state's leading advocates for clean water and was instrumental in protecting its waterways. Jim also helped engineer a management plan for the Watershed Reserve, initiated the Watershed Organic Farm, and ushered in a new era of environmental education by hiring Jeff Hoagland as education director in 1984.

Later he worked for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) in water policy and planning for the Passaic River watershed.

Jim was active locally as a Treasurer of the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space and was chairman of the Environmental Commission in Pennington for seven years. He was a member and treasurer of the Princeton Ski and Sailing Club.



**Jim Gaffney** 

**Robert Jefferson Wolfe** died in March 2020 in West Palm Beach, Florida. Bob was a Watershed trustee in the 80s and 90s and then became a member of the Advisory Board. He was 72 years old.

A 2 30



**Bob Wolfe** 

Bob was born on April 13, 1947 and was raised in South Orange, New Jersey and was senior class president of his high school. He graduated from Princeton University in 1969 with a degree in Philosophy and rowed crew for two years, sparking an interest in sculling that became one of his lifelong interests.

After Bob graduated with an MBA in 1972 from Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, Bob worked for Stanford University and, in 1974, was the Assistant Treasurer of Princeton University.

He helped lead the development of the Princeton Forrestal Center in 1976, a mixed use real estate development project. Bob believed that real estate development should be concentrated in areas with appropriate infrastructure, while rural lands should be protected and the environment preserved.

Along with being on the Watershed's board, he served on the boards of McCarter Theater and Princeton in Community Service.

**Barbara R. Delafield**, known to her friends as Barby, passed away in May of 2020 at the age of 83 from complications of COVID-19. Barby was a long time member of The Watershed Institute and a Stream Watch volunteer from 1994-2013. Her monitoring site was in Montgomery, just downstream from the Bedens Brook Club.

Barby had many interests including traveling, gardening and fly fishing. She was active in the Stony Brook Garden Club and served as a Garden Club of America judge at national competitions. Extremely civic minded, Barby was also active in the Historical Society of Princeton and the Hopewell Valley Arts Council. Barby owned and trained AKC award-winning English Cocker Spaniels, with her dog Maggie serving as a Therapy Dog for 10 years, visiting nursing homes and comforting families of the 9-11 tragedy.



Barbara R. Delafield

According to Marion Kvidahl, Barby's longtime friend, protecting land and water was very important to her, which is why she volunteered and supported The Watershed Institute. It was not until after her passing, that her deep connection to The Watershed Institute became known when we learned that she had left a sizable portion of her estate.

#### **Muriel Gardiner Buttinger Society**

The Watershed Institute's Muriel Gardiner Buttinger Society recognizes those individuals, both living and deceased, who have chosen to name the Watershed as a beneficiary in their estate plans. Legacy gifts of all sizes support our endowment, funds invested to ensure that in good times and bad, The Watershed Institute will be here to protect water and land for the future. We hope as you think about your legacy, you will consider naming The Watershed Institute in your will as part of your planned giving. If you have already done so, and would like to be recognized in our Legacy Society, please contact Development Director, Jenny Kershner, at 609 737-3735 ext. 36 or jkershner@thewatershed.org.

#### WATERSHED NATURE CAMP & ACADEMY

## **Welcome Back to Camp & Academy**

n 2020 we were not able to offer traditional nature camp or the Watershed Academy due to COVID-19, but we quickly pivoted and offered Family Camp for 160 cooped up families who craved a combination of safe activities and outdoor fun. With experience teaching outdoors, Watershed educators and camp counselors blended fun adventures with nature-based education.



Tie-dying shirts is a camp favorite.

The Watershed, eager to sustain its outreach efforts in Trenton despite COV-ID-19, reached out to Christina Seix Academy (CSA), a vibrant preK-8 school for advanced students from underserved communities and hosted many families.

At one of the outings, CSA student Deepanshu Mukheja, 10, dipped a test tube into the Stony Brook to get some sample water for a pH balance test. He and his mother, Gunjan, attended several sessions and enjoyed tie-dying t-shirts. "This was my golden chance to attend this camp and spend some time with him," said Gunjan, who worked 60-hours a week before the pandemic curtailed her hours.

After a year of living with COVID, we are pleased that this summer our camp and Watershed Academy for High School students will be open! Camp Director Michelle Perkins has created a safe and fun summer program for children ages 5-17. Safety measures including outdoor activities, mask wearing and social distancing will be followed and the activities will occur on the Watershed Reserve.

We are grateful to our corporate partners Bristol Myers Squibb and Educational Testing Service for providing scholarship funding to children from underserved areas.

# **Spring Programs 2021**

Celebrate the return of longer days and milder weather. Join us during the season of rebirth, renewal, and mud, as we explore spring on the Watershed reserve.

Our Watershed Educators are running many safely distanced in-person family events as well as remote programs via Zoom. We are busy planning exciting events for the spring season. Be sure to visit our website for all the details.



#### **Online Programs:**

Weekly Preschool sessions every Tuesday morning. Monthly Nature in Literature Book Club on Thursday evenings.

#### Safely Distanced In-Person Programs:

Weekly Homeschool and After School programs on Tuesdays. Schools Out family events during Spring break. Hikes, Campfires and family fun events. Adult sessions on birds, lichens and more.

#### **SAFEGUARDING OUR COMMUNITIES**

# **Helping Towns Address Pollution**

he Watershed Institute is assisting towns and cities in revising local stormwater management ordinances to use green infrastructure, while also galvanizing residents to learn and encourage their leaders to take action.

Since spring, the Watershed's policy team has crafted a model stormwater control ordinance that is stronger than the state's basic rule requiring green infrastructure – such as rain gardens, swales and other tools that mimic nature and clean up polluted stormwater runoff.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) has required each municipality to update its stormwater management ordinance to make it consistent with the new state rule by March 2021. The new rule mandates the use of green infrastructure to treat stormwater runoff for new major developments, which it defines as those that disturb more than one acre of land and/or add a quarter acre of impervious surface. Towns have the latitude to add green infrastructure requirements for redevelopment projects and smaller developments as well.

While the policy team has visited about a dozen local Environmental Commissions, they've also reached out to those residents, educated them about green infrastructure solutions to flooding, and empowered them to ask questions and take part in these virtual meetings.



Green infrastructure integrated into a city street.

"Since the pandemic, there has been the ability for residents to call in and watch the presentations and ask questions without leaving their homes," said Sophie Glovier, municipal policy specialist. "We're getting requests from a lot of municipal governments to review our model ordinance and really consider the enhancements that are stronger than state standards and that is really exciting."

Using online platforms like Zoom, our policy team has extended its reach across the state. Registration for our policy webinars has been as high as 350 individuals, including scores of elected officials, municipal engineers and planners, and other key decision makers. We've continued to pay particular attention to local towns, making presentations to key boards and commissions in Cranbury, Ewing, Franklin, Hightstown, Hopewell Township and Borough, Lawrence, Millstone Township, Montgomery, Pennington, Princeton and Trenton.

While it is "a heavy lift" for towns to decide to redo their stormwater ordinance, the Watershed is helping officials understand that they can go farther than the state standards and what the most impactful approach is to do so.

"Our water quality really needs help and we think it is worth investing in green infrastructure to manage stormwater for new development and redevelopment," Glovier said. "If we don't make this investment, we'll all pay with increased flooding and reduced water quality."



Workers install a Watershed garden design in Hopewell.

#### **OUR DONORS**

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The Watershed Institute family extends its tremendous gratitude for your critical financial support, volunteerism, and in-kind donations. *Without you, our work protecting clean water and the environment would not be possible.* 

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