

Inspiration, Innovation, Action, Collaboration & Exploration:
Keeping Water Clean, Safe and Healthy since 1949



As we approach
The Watershed
Institute's
75<sup>th</sup> anniversary,
we reflect on
our journey of
impact and
accomplishment.

Clean water is essential to humankind, the diversity of life on Earth, and the global economy. But this most precious and fragile resource faces a multitude of threats, from climate change to industrial pollution. The Watershed Institute is dedicated to the urgent task of keeping our water clean, safe, and healthy. We pursue this mission through educational programs that inspire change, science-based advocacy that prompts meaningful action, innovative restoration projects that provide solutions to pressing environmental threats, collaborative regional approaches to environmental protection, and transformational opportunities for exploration of the natural world.

Today's threats to our water resources are different than those we faced at the time of our founding in 1949. The Clean Water Act of 1972 and a suite of state legislation that the Watershed was instrumental in advancing, ended the intentional discharge of raw sewage and industrial pollution into our waterways and wetlands. Today, we understand that climate change is the most pressing issue of our time and the greatest threat to water. Its far-reaching impacts—from devastating flooding to toxic algal blooms to extended droughts—threaten our water and our way of life.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, rainfall amounts in our heaviest storms increased by 55% since the middle of the 20th century. Today's larger storms create more stormwater runoff, which picks up the pesticides and fertilizers we spread on our lawns, petroleum and antifreeze that spill from our cars, leaks from failing septic systems and broken sewer pipes, waste from our pets, soap from washing our cars, road salt we spread on our driveways and sidewalks, and a wide variety of other toxins that are dumped, untreated, into our waterways. According to climate scientists, these storms are likely to become larger and more destructive over the coming decades, adding to our flooding and water pollution problems.

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) are a related concern. The nutrient pollution of our waterbodies from polluted stormwater runoff, in combination with higher water temperatures, creates ideal conditions for these harmful blooms caused by cyanobacteria (also called blue-green algae). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cyanobacteria can produce toxins that make people sick and can kill pets and wildlife that ingest, inhale or come in direct contact with these poisons.

As we address these pressing issues, we understand that our success in protecting and restoring healthy watersheds requires a broader mindset that demands attention to the essential issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. We

know that overburdened communities like Trenton are particularly vulnerable to flooding and water pollution. According to a study by the real estate brokerage Redfin, for example, homes in US neighborhoods with large Black or minority populations once marked by governments as undesirable for loans through a discriminatory process known as "red lining" are in greater danger of flooding caused by climate change.

As alarming as today's environmental issues are, it's important that we find ways to bring joy through our efforts. Our work connects people with the natural environment and empowers curiosity, exploration, and discovery. Our engagement with children and teenagers is infused with joy. We believe that all children deserve the opportunity to spend time exploring nature with their peers. After the isolation of COVID, such experiences are more important than ever.

As we approach The Watershed Institute's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we reflect on our journey of impact and accomplishment. None of our achievements would have been possible without the unwavering support of our donors and volunteers. Your contributions of time and resources have been invaluable. We express our deepest gratitude for your commitment to our cause and our shared vision of a sustainable future.

Sincerely,



Barbara Griffin Cole

Board Chair



Jim Waltman

Executive Director

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**Financials** 





#### Our Watershed Nature Camp pro-

vides a safe, educational, and immersive environment where children can explore and discover the wonders of the natural world. By engaging our campers in hands-on activities and guided experiences, we instill a deep appreciation for the environment and impart valuable knowledge about conservation practices.





Our Watershed Academy for High School Students offers a unique opportunity for motivated students to delve deeper into environmental research, policy, and analysis. Through this program, we equip aspiring young environmentalists with the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to tackle the complex challenges facing our planet.

**Our in-school STEM initiatives** provide educators and students with the necessary resources and support to integrate environmental education into their curricula. Our

environmental education into their curricula. Our programs are aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards, teaching scientific principles and real-world problem solving.



Camp Counselors Share Thoughts on The Watershed Institute on the 50th Anniversary of Nature Camp

"Most of us have been part of the Watershed for more than a decade as campers, Academy students, CITs and counselors. Some of us travel long distances to be here."

"The Watershed Institute has influenced us in many ways including our passions, such as art and songwriting, and our career interests. About two-thirds of us are pursuing studies in areas like environmental science, biology and ecology and are inspired to be advocates for the environment in whatever we do in the future."

"We really enjoy our stream walks and the friends we've made at the Watershed. It is inspiring to see the profound changes in the young campers each week as they become comfortable outdoors and learn respect for nature."

Approximately **3,000** students took class trips to the Watershed Center in the 2022-23 school year. **40%** of our programs for schools served students from Trenton.

We hosted more than 100 children per day during our eight-week camp season - nearly 25% of our campers - 90 children - attended for free and received scholarships, transportation, lunch and supplies.

More than **600** people attended Trenton Rivers Days and **300** people attended World Water Day.

This year about **3,000**people participated in our Public Education
Programs, such as minicamps, preschool, adult, and homeschool programs, and Butterfly House Tours.





can combat nutrient pollution while providing habitat for fish, birds, and other wildlife. In Rosedale Lake, the Watershed installed floating wetlands to counteract a Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) that posed a health threat for people, pets, and wildlife

Instead of using chemicals, we deployed artificial floating islands, planted with

fast-growing grasses, and flowering plants. These hardy, long-rooted plants soak up excess nitrogen and phosphorus that stimulate the growth of HABs, cyanobacteria

also referred to as blue-green algae. According to the federal Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA), the warmer days caused by climate change may result in

and had forced the suspension of boating and fishing in the lake.

more HABs.

The Watershed Institute

Thank you to our many volunteers who make our work possible.



Since 2021 volunteers have planted almost 2,000 trees at the Watershed Reserve to replace those destroyed by the Emerald Ash Borer, improve the native plant pallet, and enhance the forest understory that has been stressed due to the overabundant deer population.



This year nearly **250** volunteers conducted about 2,200 water quality tests as part of our StreamWatch program.

More than a dozen scientists

For more than thirty years, the

Watershed has monitored local streams for

pollution through our StreamWatch pro-

gram. This year, our volunteers have begun

using new state-of-the-art digital handheld

meters to sample and test water streamside.

With just a simple immersion of the probe

into the source water, these meters can de-

tect pH, dissolved oxygen, and salt levels

with improved accuracy, reducing errors

and variations in results. With faster and

more precise readings, our volunteers can

now visit more sites and collect more data

from Princeton University and other institutions are conducting research at the Watershed Reserve on pressing issues that include carbon sequestration during the mineral weathering process, plastics as vectors for inorganic pollution, nutrient cycling, and the geomorphology of agricultural soils. To foster greater collaboration and communication among the researchers, we established the Watershed Institute Research Collaborative (WIRC). WIRC aims to facilitate a robust exchange of ideas and support for collaborative research projects.



"The Watershed Institute recognizes that not everyone has had the same access to environmental programs and protections. In my role, I am committed to listening to the community and guiding the Watershed toward achieving environmental justice through proactive and intentional engagement."

Outreach and Inclusion Manager Priscilla Oliveira





## **Action**

Protecting our water and watersheds takes strategic, decisive, and timely action.

The Watershed Institute is engaged in advocacy efforts at the state and local level to address threats to the environment and mitigate the impacts of climate change, flooding, and polluted runoff. Our goal is to secure forward-looking policies and regulations that prioritize environmental protection, restoration, and resiliency while engaging community members in the decision-making process.

The Watershed Institute actively works with the state legislature and state agencies to strengthen critical environmental laws and regulations, particularly those tied to the Clean Water Act, Water Pollution Control Act, Flood Hazard Area Control Act, and Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act. We work with municipalities to draft local land use and water protection or

dinances that are even stronger than state environmental laws and encourage local leaders to adopt these more protective measures.

Our policy experts closely monitor the

decisions made by local officials regarding land use, development, and water management. When we believe that a stream or important forest or other natural area is threatened by a particularly ill-suited development proposal, The Watershed Institute is prepared to take swift action in opposition. This proactive approach aims to prevent irreversible damage and protect the natural integrity of the region's water resources. Often our efforts to oppose developments eventually lead to the preservation of open space or at least modifications to the proposal.

**Our two highest policy priorities** are to require more robust mitigation of polluted stormwater runoff and to protect streams from encroaching development. Measures to advance both of these priorities were included in a new rule adopted by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection called the Inland Flood Rule. These long-awaited rules, promised by Governor Murphy more than three and half years ago, are a vital step forward in protecting New Jersey's communities from the devastating impacts of flooding.

**The Watershed Institute** has been working for decades to protect mature forests and their diverse biota on an area known as the Princeton Ridge. The area's diabase rock geology and steep slopes have made it one of the last areas in the town of Princeton to be fully developed, but housing and other development proposals have proliferated in recent years. The Watershed has opposed more than a half dozen such proposals and as a result several of those areas have been preserved as open space. The most recent such area is the 153-acre Province Line Woods. We are currently working with partners to preserve another 90-acre forested tract on the Ridge.

#### The recent proliferation of proposed warehouse projects

threatens to permanently alter hundreds of acres of New Jersey land and exacerbate flooding in already flood-prone areas. The Watershed Institute has been working with community members and our partners, including the Eastern Environmental Law Center, to raise awareness of the potential impacts of Bridge Point 8 project in West Windsor. This 5.5 million square foot project would destroy 400 acres of natural habitat – approximately half the size of Central Park in NYC.

Earlier this year, we filed a lawsuit challenging the permit issued to the developer under the Flood Hazard Control Act—a law designed to prevent new developments from causing flooding of downstream neighbors and communities. Our engineer concluded that the enormous expanse of proposed new buildings, parking, and roadways could significantly worsen flooding in the already flood-prone area. We must all keep our sights on our priorities and focus on protecting clean water, refraining from actions that create more flooding, and sustaining the character of our communities in the face of rapid warehouse development.



Our experts work with community members throughout central New Jersey to offer guidance on how to manage excess water to prevent polluted runoff from entering the waterways. We offer workshops on building rain barrels, rain gardens, meadows, and other green infrastructure.



We have been protecting clean water in central New Jersey for **74 years**.



Our work is focused within **29** towns in **5** counties and we lead several statewide initiatives.



950 acres of watershed land with 10 miles of trails are preserved at the Watershed Reserve.

Sometimes it takes a long time to see the results of advocacy work, but when we recently discovered American Shad and other fish migrating up the Millstone River, it made a decade of persistence by The Watershed Institute worthwhile. Until 2017, the Weston Mill Dam in Manville would have made the discovery of these migratory fish at this site impossible. Still one more dam remains as the final blockage between Raritan Bay

and Princeton. The Watershed will stay focused on the goal of restoring these fish and their habitat.

We all live downstream is a quote that serves as a poignant reminder of our interconnectedness within a watershed.

## Collaboration

Watersheds are not defined by political boundaries but rather by the hills and ridgelines that separate their streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes.

The Watershed Institute works intensively in the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed and the Central Delaware River Watershed. Each of these watersheds contains multiple counties and municipalities and numerous other policy-making institutions, requiring collaboration with dozens of partners. Our work at the watershed level informs the development of effective statewide policy solutions to the climate-related challenges of flooding and water quality. These statewide initiatives are also most often advanced through collaboration.

We all live downstream is a quote that serves as a poignant reminder of our interconnectedness within a watershed. By recognizing the need for

collaboration and adopting a regional approach, communities can better address the environmental challenges brought about by climate change and ensure the sustainable future of their shared water resources.

In our commitment to collaboration, The Watershed Institute strives to create meaningful and lasting change. We understand that by working together, we can strengthen environmental protections, promote sustainable practices, and secure a better future for our watersheds. We invite individuals, communities, and decision-makers to join us in this crucial endeavor, as we all play a role in protecting and preserving our shared wa-



Understanding that young voices often go unheard, The Watershed Institute has partnered with NJ Rise, a center of social support that serves central New Jersey, to develop an Environmental Youth Leadership Program. In its first two years 20 students from Hightstown have attended programs at The Watershed Institute and have been encouraged to speak up on issues that are important to them such as the quality of their drinking water, the amount of impervious cover in their hometown, and Harmful Algae Blooms (HABs). The programs, led by a bilingual Watershed instructor, encouraged students to advocate for the environment using their diverse language skills to engage with the community. As part of the program, students helped plant a pollinator garden at Meadow Lakes Senior Living Community. Funding for this program was supplemented by the Borough of Hightstown.



17 years of Stream Cleanups

759 volunteers removed more than 5 tons of trash from the waterways in 2023

1,000 volunteers logged 7,600 volunteer hours



15 Municipalities 7 Golf Courses

**Stormwater runoff** is an increasingly severe problem as our area experiences more frequent and intense rainstorms. All this runoff is a perfect conduit for pollution from construction sites, pesticides, fertilizers, septic leaks, broken sewer pipes, pet waste, and road salt. One of the Clean Water Act's provisions requires towns to secure a permit that holds them responsible for managing the stormwater runoff under their control. This permit, known as the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Permit (MS4), is a crucial tool for protecting our waterways. The Watershed Institute has been urging that these permits require greater action by towns to combat polluted stormwater runoff and even sued NJDEP to advance that goal.

Thanks to the efforts of The Watershed Institute and partner organizations, a new version of the MS4 permit was recently issued that requires towns to create Watershed Improvement Plans to address water pollution resulting from runoff. The Watershed is encouraging towns to adopt a regional approach to cleaning up water pollution and implementing these requirements. Through the Stony Brook Watershed Towns initiative and the Assunpink Roundtable, collaborative efforts are underway. These regional meetings led by The Watershed Institute, in addition to another led by the Somerset County Planning Department for towns within Somerset County, give engineers and elected officials a chance to take a "big picture" view of how the actions of each community affect the others. We support these meetings with the experts and data the members need to make decisions that benefit every-

#### Flooding is a significant challenge

that requires the cooperation of local governments within watershed communities. The impacts of flooding accumulate from upstream to downstream in a watershed, and projects and policies implemented upstream can reduce polluted runoff and flooding downstream. In September 2021, severe flooding as a result of Hurricane Ida destroyed homes and businesses and 30 people were killed in New Jersey. The Watershed Institute is collaborating with Rutgers University's Water Resources Program, Hillsborough Township, and Manville Borough on a project to design stormwater and flood control measures in the Royce Brook Watershed, a sub watershed of the Millstone River where two people died during Hurricane Ida.

The Watershed Institute has been collaborating with the New Jersey **Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP)** to lead the New Jersey Watershed Watch Network for the past three years. As part of this effort, we track, train, and audit watershed monitoring across the entire state of New Jersey. Our team of experienced scientists has been sharing knowledge and expertise with other watershed organizations around the state, helping the NJDEP collect consistent data and reduce data gaps in areas that have not had regular monitoring. We believe that this collaborative approach is crucial to ensure the health and sustainability of New Jersey's water resources.

"I have always believed that it is important to be conscious of your impact on the Earth we live on, but The Watershed Institute challenged me further. The Watershed Internship taught me how to advocate, which means to take a cause close to your heart, become keenly aware of it, and voice it aloud to people who can make the change you yearn for. They taught me that being young isn't a hindrance; it's a power. We have been made aware of a world so precious and strong but also in dire need of care, and we are looking to speak on its behalf. I am aware and ready to advocate now."

-Carole Cobos, Hightstown High School senior and student leader of the NJ Rise Environmental Youth Leadership Program



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# **Exploration**

All children deserve the opportunity to spend time exploring nature with their peers.

Not only do such experiences build creativity, agency, and joy, there is mounting evidence that exposure to nature also benefits our health. According to an article in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, "we found evidence for associations between nature exposure and improved cognitive function, brain activity, blood pressure, mental health, physical activity, and sleep."\*

Today, more than ever, The Watershed Institute's 950-acre nature reserve has become a place of solace and refuge for those seeking respite outdoors. The reserve remains a haven for walkers, hikers, birders, and anyone who appreciates being in nature. With ten miles of trails accessible year-round, visitors can enjoy the beauty of the reserve every day. Our Watershed Center, which welcomed more than 20,000 visitors in 2022, is located at

the jumping off point for our trails. Through engaging exhibits, we educate visitors about the importance of water and watersheds, the water cycle, and the benefits of managing stormwater to reduce flooding. People can learn about our native fish, turtles, and other animals, fostering a deeper appreciation for the diverse ecosystem we strive to protect. Thanks to a generous grant from an anonymous donor, our exhibits received a major refresh in 2023.

As we look to the future, The Watershed Institute remains dedicated to its mission of preserving and protecting our water resources. We strive to make a lasting difference in the lives of individuals and the health of our environment. We invite everyone to join us on this journey of environmental stewardship and embrace the wonders of our shared natural world

\*Jimenez et al. - International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health – 2021

The Watershed Institute officially opened the new Hickory Loop Boardwalk

with a ribbon cutting ceremony at our Annual Meeting. The fully accessible

0.7-mile raised walkway winds through an oak-hickory forest and passes next to a vernal pool that fills will tadpoles each spring. Additionally we will be launching the "Tree Frog Trail," a nature play space located adjacent to the boardwalk and specifically designed for young children, providing them with a unique and educational outdoor experience.



The Watershed Center and Reserve are open and free to all people, and we are eager to facilitate visitation. In 2022, we sponsored transportation and programs at the Watershed with several of our newest partners, including the East Trenton Collaborative, Trenton Urban Promise, the Millhill Child & Family Development Center, and NJ Rise.

To better connect residents of the Greater Trenton Area to the **Delaware River,** in 2019 The Watershed Institute, the Mercer County Parks Commission, and the City of Trenton launched Trenton River Days at South Riverwalk Park. We continue to co-sponsor this annual event, which has grown to include about 20 partners and to attract about 600 participants.





In our warming climate, trees provide essential shade, cooler air, and stormwater control. According to analysis by the nonprofit American Forests, America's wealthy neighborhoods have nearly twice as much tree cover as neighborhoods with high poverty rates. In 2022, The Watershed Institute began a collaboration with the City of Trenton, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Isles, the New Jersey Tree Foundation, Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, and the Outdoor Equity Alliance to plant 1,000 trees in Trenton. The multi-year project is supported by a Natural Climate Solutions Grant from NJ Department of Environmental Protection.



Scan below to download the **JEDI Report** 





**2,000** people attended our Butterfly Festival in 2023



20,000 people visited the Watershed Center in 2022



About **300** runners participated in the Solstice Trail Run raising \$30,000 for the Watershed

## 2022-23 Donors

We gratefully acknowledge all the donors and partners who support our mission. Without you our work protecting clean water would not be possible. The lists below represent donations received between January 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023. We appreciate all our supporters, and donations of any size are crucial to our success. Due to space constraints in this report, we cannot list the many donors who gave less than \$250.

A special thank you to our loyal donors who have provided long-time support to The Watershed Institute.

Donors 25 plus years

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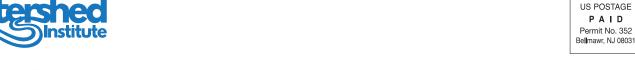


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