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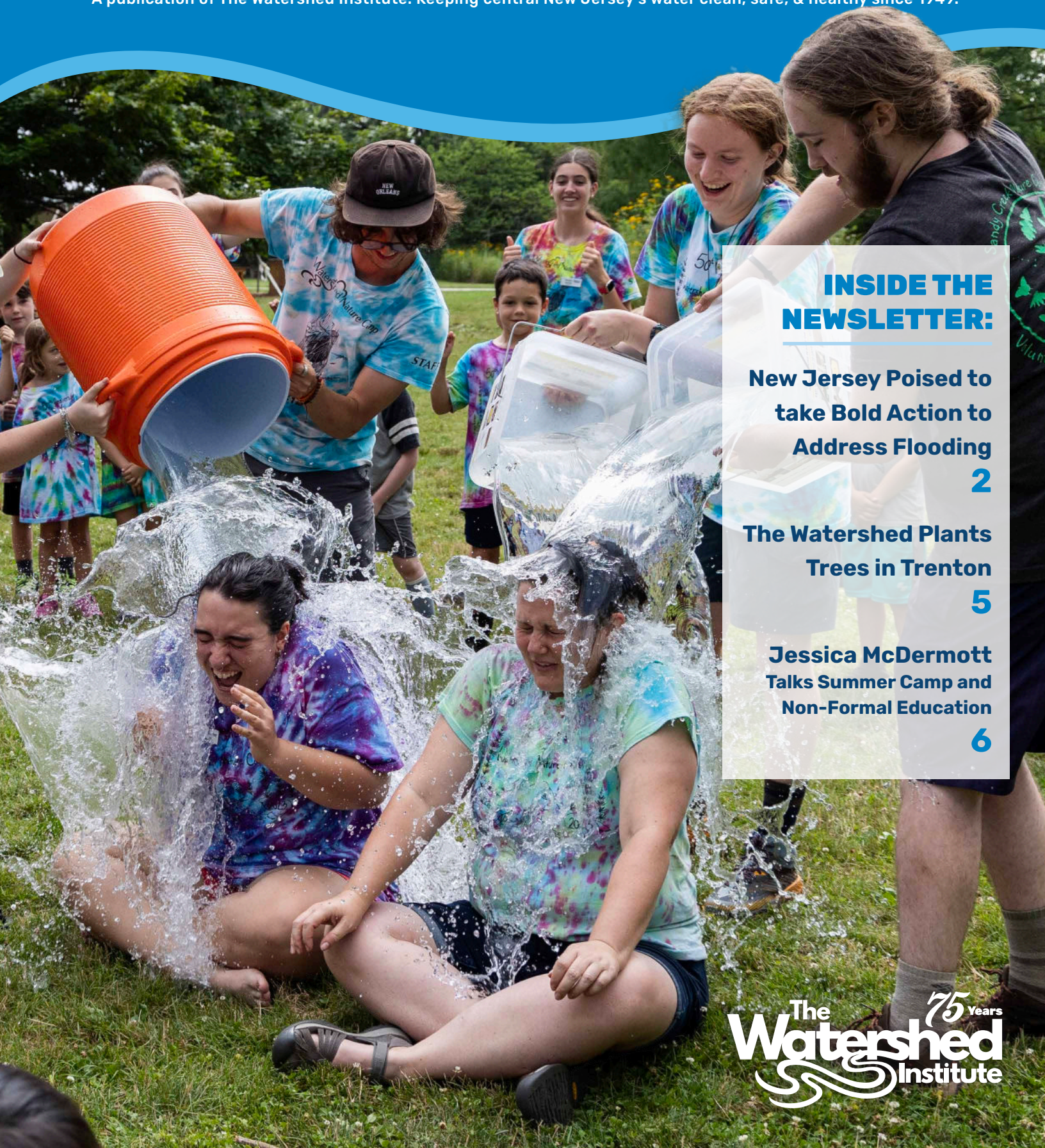
WELLSPRING

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



INSIDE THE NEWSLETTER:

New Jersey Poised to take Bold Action to Address Flooding 2

The Watershed Plants Trees in Trenton 5

Jessica McDermott Talks Summer Camp and Non-Formal Education 6

The Watershed Institute 75 Years

New Jersey Poised to take Bold Action to Address Flooding

For too long, New Jersey's environmental protection rules have looked backwards, seeking to protect the state's residents and environment from events that occurred in the past rather than attempting to address issues that are anticipated in the future. Solutions that only address yesterday's problems will fail to meet tomorrow's challenges. Nowhere is this truer than with climate change, which most scientists agree is resulting in larger storm events and more flooding in our state—trends that are expected to continue.

Four years ago, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy made a bold commitment to modify the Department of Environmental Protection's (NJDEP) regulatory and permitting programs to better prepare our state for projected changes to sea level, precipitation, flooding, and other manifestations of climate change through a program he calls NJ PACT—Protecting Against Climate Threats.

NJDEP took an important step towards fulfilling NJ PACT with the adoption of the Inland Flood Protection Rule last summer. Under the rule, builders of new developments are required to manage polluted stormwater runoff anticipated from the larger storms that are projected at the end of the century and refrain from building in the larger floodplains that are also expected. The premise is simple: we shouldn't locate new buildings in areas that we expect to be under water in the foreseeable future and we shouldn't allow new developments to be built in a manner that will flood those living downstream.

After years of advocacy from The Watershed Institute and our partners, Governor Murphy and NJDEP announced another bold action to make New Jersey more resilient to the anticipated impacts of climate change by proposing REAL—the Resilient Environments and Landscapes Rule. The goal is to use the best available science to anticipate future conditions so that we can avoid many millions of dollars in property damage, destroyed businesses, and loss of life.

The proposed rule will increase safeguards for communities along the coast by acknowledging sea level rise—both that which has already occurred and the additional sea level rise that is anticipated over the rest of the century. The rule adds restrictions on how development can occur in areas that will be affected by sea level rise, requiring that we take additional measures to reduce the threat to life and property.

Critically, the rule will also require that we begin to address the stormwater runoff and flooding created throughout New Jersey from hundreds of years of development that occurred in the state before there were any requirements to mitigate runoff. In fact, until the 1980s, most developments had no measures to address the polluted stormwater runoff that they created, contributing to ever-increasing flooding problems and water pollution.

Major new developments in New Jersey are required to incorporate stormwater mitigation measures to limit the extent to which such projects make our flooding and water pollution problems worse. But currently, when a previously developed site is converted into a new use through redevelopment, modern stormwater management strategies are rarely implemented. In fact, many redevelopment projects are effectively exempted from our stormwater mitigation rules.

One of the best ways to reduce our existing flooding and water pollution problems, and those anticipated in the future, is to require that stormwater mitigation measures are incorporated into all development projects, whether they involve new construction on currently undeveloped properties or redevelopment of previously developed sites. The proposed rules would begin to address the redevelopment loophole and ensure that redevelopments are equipped with measures that manage runoff better than the old developments they replace.

Climate change has already caused a massive financial and human toll on our state. NJDEP cites a Moody's Investors Service study finding that flooding and storms have cost nearly 6% of the state's gross domestic product in damages since 1980. And we must never forget the 39 people who lost their lives during Hurricane Ida.

The proposed REAL Rule is an important step towards protecting New Jersey's residents and environment from the serious threat of climate change. It is critical that the rules be published in the New Jersey Register and adopted as soon as possible. Until these rules are adopted, we are unnecessarily putting lives and livelihoods at risk. With ever increasing havoc from climate change, we can't afford to wait.

Jim Waltman
Executive Director
The Watershed Institute

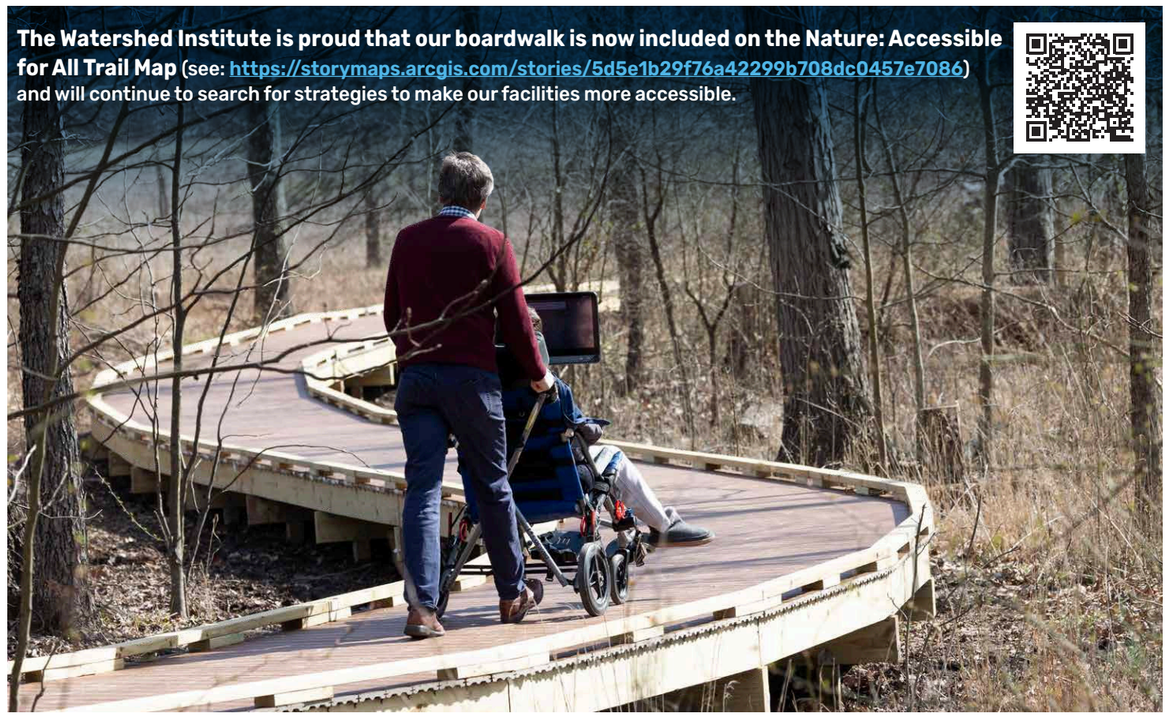
The Watershed Institute Enhances Accessibility on its Reserve

Sean Kane-Holland is an Access Nature Disability Advocate with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance. Born with spina bifida, Sean uses leg braces and forearm crutches. He calls himself an "avid outdoorsman" and enjoys kayaking rivers in the Pinelands and exploring natural and historic sites. He also has a passion for improving access to natural places for people with disabilities, their families, and allies.

Sean attended the opening of the Watershed's Hickory Loop Boardwalk in April 2023 and served as a guest speaker at a recent Watershed staff meeting. He encouraged us to think broadly about accessibility at the Watershed Center and Reserve, to have empathy for individuals facing all manner of disabilities, and to make accommodations wherever we can.

Priscilla Oliveira, the Watershed's Outreach and Inclusion Manager, has taken Sean's urgings to heart. "We acknowledge that improving accessibility is an ongoing journey," said Oliveira, "By continually striving to enhance our facilities and programs, we hope to make a significant difference."

The Watershed Institute is proud that our boardwalk is now included on the Nature: Accessible for All Trail Map (see: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5d5e1b29f76a42299b708dc0457e7086) **and will continue to search for strategies to make our facilities more accessible.**



Your Input Matters

We are deeply grateful to our supporters who have helped identify areas for improvement over the years. For example, symbols were added to our trail maps and markers based on a supporter's recommendation to assist those who are colorblind.

As Sean pointed out, while we may never reach 100% accessibility, we can and should do everything possible to make nature more inclusive. Whether it's enabling those with mobility issues to experience the Stony Brook or incorporating sensory activities for the visually impaired, every effort counts.

We invite you to share your ideas on how we can continue to improve accessibility at The Watershed Center and Reserve. Your experiences and suggestions are invaluable as we strive to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable and safe exploring and enjoying nature.

With partners like Sean and the support of our community, we look forward to making continuous progress in our accessibility initiatives.

The Watershed Institute Celebrates its 75th Anniversary at its Annual Meeting

The Watershed Institute celebrated its 75th Anniversary at its 2024 Annual Meeting on Monday, May 13 at the Watershed Center, the organization's LEED-Platinum headquarters on its 950-acre nature reserve. About 150 guests joined the festivities to mark this historic anniversary—a testament to the organization's enduring commitment to conservation, advocacy, science and education.

"For 75 years, The Watershed Institute has worked to protect and restore clean water and healthy watersheds," said Jim Waltman, the organization's executive director. "I am truly grateful for the hundreds of staff, trustees, members, volunteers, and partners who have sustained the Watershed over seven and a half decades."

Waltman thanked the 360 men and women who have served on the Watershed's Board of Trustees over the years, 29 of whom have chaired the organization. He praised the 10 men and women who preceded him as the Watershed's executive director, including Jamie Kyte Sapoch and George Hawkins, who were in attendance.

The Watershed Institute honored four outstanding leaders and partners for their invaluable contributions. The Edmund W. Stiles Award for Environmental Leadership was awarded to Shereyl Snider, community organizer with Urban Promise-Trenton and the East Trenton Collaborative and Annette Loveless, chair of the environmental committee in Lawrence Township. The Richard Rotter Award for Excellence in Environmental Education was awarded to Jeanne Muzi, principal of Slackwood Elementary School and Stephen Laubach, director of sustainability and science teacher at The Lawrenceville School (see environmental education story at right).

LEARN ABOUT OUR AWARD WINNERS

In recognition of the 75th Anniversary of The Watershed Institute, Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman issued a proclamation to Jim Waltman celebrating and recognizing the organization's past and present accomplishments and supporting all future endeavors.

Teaching students about the science of water through experiential learning and innovation

Together We Can – A Green Partnership is a community service-based environmental education partnership between The Lawrenceville School, Slackwood Elementary School in Lawrence Township, and The Watershed Institute.

According to Pat Heaney, assistant director of education at the Watershed, Russian matryoshka nesting dolls are an apt metaphor for the collaborative nature of the partnership between the schools and Watershed educators.

"I look at it as one of those nesting dolls because right inside is this little gem," Heaney said. "To me, the gems inside are the third graders at Slackwood. They're there to have fun at the park next to their school and to learn and to be engaged in the outdoors. And we always tell them that the goal of the day is to stay safe, learn, and have fun, and that's what it's all about."

The next layer, Heaney said, are the students from Lawrenceville who participated in the program as part of their LCAP, or Lawrenceville Community Action Project – a one-term weekly project coordinated by the Community Service Office. Surrounding them are Watershed Institute interns who "were honing their skills as environmental educators by teaching the Lawrenceville students who were then teaching the third graders."

"The big doll on the outside was Steve Laubach, Jeanne Muzi, and the educators here who worked to put this program together," Heaney said.

The structure of the program is both intensive and immersive. It includes an overview day at Lawrenceville, followed by a training day with The Watershed Institute at Slackwood Elementary. The Lawrenceville students then lead two cycles of educational activities for third graders, teaching the same lessons the following week to a new group of students. The model not only reinforces the high school students' learning but also maximizes the educational impact for the elementary students. The program ran from September 2023 through the end of April 2024 and culminated with a water testing event at the Shabakunk Creek.

The program is just one example of how New Jersey, the only state that requires climate change be taught to all students from kindergarten through 12th grade, takes a problem-solving approach and incorporates hands-on access to the natural world.

"I think that sustainability and environmental challenges are only becoming more pressing and integral to our everyday lives, so I find it really important to start educating children at a young age," says Sophia Kohmann, Lawrenceville '24. "I really liked The Watershed Institute's program because it met students where they were at, planting the seeds of environmental consciousness in a fun and comprehensive way that resonated with the young students."

Pat Heany works with students from the Lawrenceville School and Slackwood Elementary School providing hands-on access to the natural world.

Sahas Chodhuri '24, shown above, who was so inspired by his environmental education work at Lawrenceville that he plans to continue studying the discipline at Cornell University next year, says the combination of community service and sustainability "transcended my experience at Lawrenceville, and exploring the intersectionality of both areas of interest always compelled me."

"Getting involved with the youth and kids is essential for promoting new ideas and inspiring kids to love learning," he says. "As a society who downplays the importance of environmental science, teaching kids about the environment is important to cultivate leaders who will address and make these changes in the future."

The Watershed Plants Trees in Trenton

The Watershed Institute and its partners began planting trees in Trenton to improve climate resiliency and promote a better environment as part of a plan to increase the tree canopy, provide habitat, and add shade in the city.

"The Watershed Institute is excited to be working with the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, the City of Trenton, and other partners to plant 1,000 trees in Trenton," said Jim Waltman, the Watershed's executive director. "Trees address numerous environmental problems by soaking up floodwaters, capturing carbon dioxide from the air to protect our climate, and cooling our cities in the summer heat."

"Cadwalader Park is one of Trenton's most important public open spaces and is loved by many. We are very fortunate to have so many nonprofit partners working with the City to restore the landscape in this incredible historic park" said Mayor Reed Gusciora. "This planting of 100 trees is just the beginning of a 3-year project that will see a thousand shade trees planted across the City for our residents and visitors" he said.

"When putting this grant request together, we assembled the very best organizations working in this space to join this project. These organizations are all dedicated to a green and healthy Trenton, and I am so happy that we began with this initial planting of 100 trees in Trenton's crown jewel, Cadwalader Park" said Jay Watson, Co-Executive Director of New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

The Trenton tree planting initiative is being funded by the NJDEP's Natural Climate Solutions Grant Program and an anonymous donor to The Watershed Institute.

The NJDEP's Natural Climate Solutions Grant Program is funded by auction monies received through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). Those proceeds are slated for natural resource restoration and enhancement projects that increase carbon stored in natural lands.

Does Your Company Offer Matching Gifts?

Employer matches are an effortless way to double your impact.

Ask your Human Resources department today to see if your donations can go twice as far to support the mission of The Watershed Institute!

Together we can help keep water clean, safe, and healthy.

New Grant Allows the Watershed to Expand StreamWatch Schools Program

The Watershed Institute has been awarded an American Water Charitable Foundation 2024 Water and Environment grant to expand its StreamWatch Schools Program.

"We are grateful to the American Water Charitable Foundation for helping The Watershed Institute expand its StreamWatch Schools program," says Executive Director Jim Waltman. "StreamWatch Schools is a unique water quality monitoring program led by children. The program enables students of all ages to contribute water quality data to a central online platform and to download data from other schools and water monitors."

The StreamWatch Schools program teaches STEM skills to students while fostering an appreciation for nature and preparing students for future careers.

The Water and Environment grant is part of the American Water Charitable Foundation's Keep Communities Flowing Grant Program. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization established by American Water, the largest regulated water and wastewater utility company in the U.S., and aims to support high-impact projects and initiatives that further American Water's commitment to Environmental, Social, and Goverance (ESG) standards, as well as inclusion, diversity and equity.

"The American Water Charitable Foundation is committed to participating and investing in organizations and programs that benefit the diverse communities served by American Water," said Carrie Williams, President, American Water Charitable Foundation. "We take pride and are proud to further American Water's ongoing commitment to being a good neighbor and strong partner in the community."

Jessica McDermott Talks Summer Camp and Non-Formal Education

The Watershed Institute is geared up for its summer camps, led by Camp Director Jessica McDermott.

Jess joined The Watershed Institute in 2021, and her passion for youth programs paired with her love for nature continue to equip her for success year after year. With an educational background in biology and Museum Education and extensive professional experience in education, Jess has embarked on a fascinating journey to arrive where she is today.

Jess studied biology in college, conducting field work and data collection until she eventually found her calling in youth programs. Jess knew early on in her career that she wanted to pursue non-formal education, and quickly fell in love with education outside of the classroom. She went on to get her master's in museum education from University of the Arts in Philadelphia and began working at the Franklin Institute running educational programs. When pandemic layoffs impacted her tenure in 2020, she landed at The Watershed Institute, and the rest is history.

Beyond the Classroom: Jess is a strong advocate for the mental health benefits of immersive childhood education in nature. Today, it is more important than ever for children to disconnect from screens and spend time outside, socializing with their peers and exploring the great outdoors.

Non-traditional education, particularly in nature, is a great opportunity for those who have trouble sitting still in a regular classroom environment to learn and thrive.

Jess is determined to spread the joy of nature to children through her work.

Maintaining Camp Traditions: Each year, Jess is committed to keeping beloved camp traditions alive. Campers can look forward to taking on nature's art projects, such as "rock painting" by rubbing rocks together to make different colored pigments, as well as clay modeling with streambank clay. Additionally, weekly campfire ceremonies are here to stay, at which campers gather at the end of the week to roast marshmallows, sing songs, and reflect on their accomplishments. Finally, campers can embark on a challenging trek to Big Boulder, a roughly 6-mile hike on the Watershed Reserve, which remains a longstanding tradition and significant milestone for camp groups.

...her passion for youth programs paired with her love for nature continue to equip her for success year after year.

Changes This Summer: This summer, some old camp traditions are making a return. Wargo Pond has been restored and Jess plans to bring back kayaking, canoeing, and fishing. Additionally, she is expanding overnight trips, an exciting opportunity for campers to enjoy the wilderness. Planned trips include canoeing at the Delaware Water Gap, camping in Wharton State Forest in the Pinelands, and hiking the Appalachian Trail at Wawayanda.

The Watershed will host **115-120 campers** per day over 8 weeks this summer

About **117 campers** will receive scholarships for a total of **220 sessions**

Campers on scholarship are offered **transportation, lunch, a backpack, water bottle,** and **water shoes**

Introducing **Tree Frog Trail**, our children's play area nestled within the serene beauty of the Watershed Reserve, right next to the Hickory Loop Boardwalk behind the Kate Gorrie Butterfly House. Get ready to dive into a world of fun and imagination!

This spring The Watershed Institute welcomed passionate students from across New Jersey for the **NJ Youth Climate Justice & Action Summit**. We were honored to have **Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman** join us, applauding their leadership and offering to lend an ear to their concerns. We are grateful for the support from our partners the Environmental Education Fund and HVCHS Youth Environmental Society. Together, we're fostering change and empowering the next generation of environmental leaders!

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The Watershed Institute 24TH ANNUAL

Butterfly Festival

Explore the Kate Gorrie Butterfly House

Watch the Eyes of the Wild Animal Show

Enjoy cuisine from local truck vendors

Play games, make arts & crafts, and much more!

Saturday, August 3 | 9:30AM – 3:00PM

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Your Donation Will Help Us Keep Water Clean, Safe & Healthy!

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