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WELLSPRING

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

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The Watershed Institute

A Letter from the **Executive Director**

To put it mildly, this has been a very challenging year. Climate change and other environmental forces continue to bear down on us even as we face political turmoil from our national government. There is plenty to be discouraged, anxious, and even angry about.

But it's essential that during these tumultuous times, we don't shrink in despair. Instead, let's be inspired that our mission is more important than ever, and that our work as stewards, teachers, advocates, scientists, and leaders is making a real difference for people and the environment.

One of the Watershed's great strengths is our capacity to serve in different roles, as necessary, depending on the circumstances. When we were tipped off to the accidental release of tons of clay and other sediment into the Stony Brook by a contractor near the Hopewell Valley Golf Course this fall, we sprang into action as your water watchdog. Our voice helped press the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) into pursuing legal action against the contractor and demanding that the accident be remediated.

Sometimes, our mission requires us to speak out over extended periods in opposition to proposed developments that we believe will harm our water and environment, like the enormous warehouse proposal in Hillsborough Township that we fought for more than three years (see page 6).

At other times, like in our efforts to create regional, watershed-based plans to address flooding and water pollution, we play the role of convener, advisor, collaborator, and cheerleader. We were honored to be recognized by NJDEP with the *Our Water's Worth It* award for our leadership in fostering these regional stormwater management plans (see facing page) and to receive a major grant from the agency to support this work.

Let's also celebrate the generosity and spirit of our community. This year marked the end of Barbie Cole's remarkable tenure as our Board Chair. I am grateful for Barbie's extraordinary leadership over the past four years, which has strengthened the organization in innumerable ways. Our Board elected Ger Brophy and Peter Tovar (photo page 4) to serve as co-chairs and I'm excited to be working closely with them as we move into our next phase of environmental stewardship and leadership.

I hope that you share our pride in the work we are doing together to protect clean water and healthy watersheds. We're very grateful for your support, which makes our efforts possible.

With deep appreciation,

Jim Waltman
Executive Director
The Watershed Institute

Watershed Institute Honored with ***OUR WATER'S WORTH IT*** Award During NJ Climate Week

The Watershed Institute was proud to be recognized by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) with the *Our Water's Worth It* Award during NJ Climate Week. The NJDEP sees this award as an "opportunity to share the most recent climate science and actions being taken to address the causes of climate change and help residents, businesses, and communities across the state better adapt to and prepare for worsening climate impacts."

Governor Phil Murphy opened Climate Week by emphasizing New Jersey's growing vulnerability to climate impacts such as flooding and severe storms, noting the need for innovative strategies that protect communities and reduce emissions. **"Through the work of NJDEP and coordination across many other state agencies, we are driving down greenhouse gas emissions and providing the strong leadership and investments needed to equip our communities to better protect lives, property, and infrastructure,"** the Governor said.

The NJDEP's *Our Water's Worth It* awards shine a spotlight on organizations that make outstanding contributions to protecting and improving New Jersey's water resources. In presenting the award, Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette praised The Watershed Institute for its regional leadership in stormwater management and community engagement. "The Watershed Institute understands the urgency to create a more climate-resilient future for all New Jersey residents," LaTourette said.

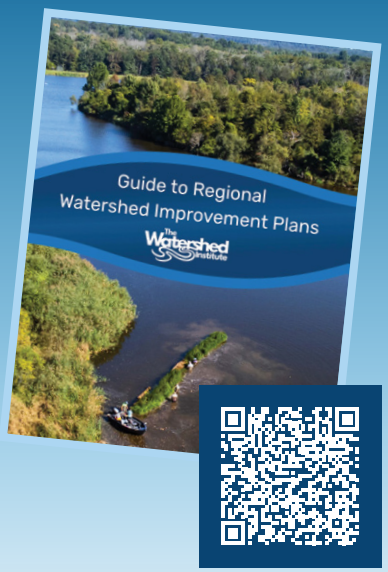
Watershed Institute Executive Director Jim Waltman accepted the award, expressing pride in the organization's collaborative approach to addressing stormwater and flooding challenges. "Communities across New Jersey are experiencing the harmful impacts of climate change—from increased flooding to polluted stormwater that threatens both our health and our waterways," Waltman said. "Addressing these challenges requires regional collaboration, and we are proud to help bring together municipalities, community leaders, and residents to find shared solutions."

The Watershed Institute and our partners' efforts continue to expand across New Jersey, uniting science, education, and advocacy to protect clean water and help communities adapt to our changing climate.

Joining Jim Waltman (fourth from left) at the ceremony were (from left to right) Ewing Mayor Bert Steinmann, Hopewell Borough Councilwoman Debra Stuhler, Hopewell Township Mayor Courtney Peters-Manning, NJDEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette, Montgomery Township Mayor Neena Singh, NJ Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli (NJ-15), and Mercer County Planning Director Maria Connolly.

Watershed Improvement Plan Guide

The Regional Watershed Improvement Plan Guide offers clear, practical steps to identify pollution sources, restore waterways, and build a healthier environment for all. Download your free copy today and learn how you can help keep New Jersey's waters clean and resilient.



Celebrating 50 YEARS of Watershed FEST Magic!

Alix Gerry, Meg & Tom Gorrie

Jeff Hoagland, Bill Carmean

What a night! On October 4, nearly 300 friends and supporters joined us under the big tent at the Watershed Reserve to celebrate the 50th Watershed FEST: Streams & Dreams—and what a dream it turned out to be! Together, we reached new heights, raising a record-breaking $254,000 in net proceeds to support clean water and a healthy environment for New Jersey.

What began in 1976 as a small neighborhood gathering has grown into one of central New Jersey's most beloved galas, drawing generations of advocates, educators, and community leaders. This year's milestone celebration sparkled with gratitude, laughter, and that unmistakable Watershed spirit that keeps our mission flowing strong.

Executive Director Jim Waltman captured it best: "Our 50th FEST is not just a celebration of the past, but a commitment to the future. For fifty years, our supporters have helped us safeguard streams, protect open space, and inspire the next generation of environmental leaders."

> **"FEST is so much more than a party—it's a celebration of our community's love for clean water, healthy lands, and each other."**
>
> — Meg Gorrie, Trustee Emeritus and Longtime Supporter

Guests reminisced about five decades of FEST fun—including creative themes like Passport to Cuba, Under the Autumn Moon, and FEST, Rattle, and Roll—and toasted to the enduring dedication of those who make it all possible. The night's success fuels year-round education, advocacy, and conservation programs—bringing science alive for students, strengthening flood protections, and restoring the waterways that connect us all.

We are grateful to everyone who helped make the Watershed FEST a terrific success and to our many supporters whose donations throughout the year continue to sustain our work.

Ger Brophy, Peter Tovar

Jackie Rooke, Karin Belgrave

Maria & Eric Wimmers

Jim Waltman, Sue Randall, Matthew Drago

Scan Here to View Our Annual FEST Video and Photo Gallery

Meet the Residents of the Watershed Center – and What's on the Menu!

It takes a lot of heart—and quite a few crickets—to keep the Watershed Center's animal ambassadors healthy and happy. Every creature plays a special role in connecting our visitors to the wild world around them. Let's peek at who's living (and snacking) behind the glass!

Our **Painted Turtle** is the social butterfly of the bunch. He splashes for worms and greets each visitor with his signature plip-plops. At nearly 30 years old, his appetite for nightcrawlers and attention is as strong as ever.

In the Pond Life Tank, a tiny universe of **tube worms, seed shrimp, and an industrious crawfish** make their meals from the microscopic buffet of nature's stew. It's a live-action reminder that healthy water is bustling with life—even if some of that life needs a magnifying glass to see!

Hopping quietly between the leaves, our **Green Tree Frog** awaits his favorite snack—crickets. He's an expert in hide-and-seek, but the thrill of mealtime always brings him out eventually.

Then there's the **Western Hognose Snake**, digger of dirt hats and eater of frogs. With her quirky upturned snout and fierce devotion to education, she proves that snakes can be surprisingly lovable—especially when dinner time rolls around.

Have you met the **Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches**? These shiny "janitors" from across the globe are nature's cleanup crew. They thrive on decaying matter—and occasionally turtle leftovers—with the satisfying hiss of a good day's work.

The **Corn Snake** is a designer reptile with both style and substance. Crickets and thawed mice fuel his adventures while he helps teach visitors why wild snakes should stay wild.

Back on land, the **Fowler's Toad** may look a little cranky, but a dish of fresh crickets turns her right around. She's a reminder that even prickly personalities have an important place in the ecosystem.

The **Mud Turtle** prefers a quieter life, peeking out just enough to breathe between naps and snacks. Still, she sometimes surprises visitors by swimming right up for a closer look—especially if she thinks worms might be involved.

In the Stream Tank, fish and eels swirl through clear, cool water. The trio of eels love a good worm treat and even seem to enjoy a gentle chin scratch. Nearby, sleek minnows and bluegills dart about, each part of this underwater classroom that shows what a thriving stream should look like.

And presiding over it all is **Houdini, our 65-year-old Red-Eared Slider** and true Watershed legend. Her taste in food is as refined as her reputation—red bell peppers, strawberries, raspberries, and nightcrawlers are her favorites. Her favorite color just might be the same shade as her personality: bold and brilliant red.

Together, these remarkable animals are more than exhibits—they're teachers, companions, and everyday reminders of why caring for the natural world matters.

You can Help us Feed the Critters

Here's the secret our animal roommates can't tell you themselves: all that love and frog food adds up. It costs approximately $30,000 each year to feed and care for our Watershed residents and keep their tanks, terrariums, and bellies healthy.

Would you help keep the hisses hissing, the eels wriggling, and the Painted Turtle's plip-plops going strong? Your gift helps us feed, care for, and share these creatures with thousands of visitors each year.

Donate today—and make a difference for every whisker, wing, and webbed foot at the Watershed Center.

Nature's Tiny Clean-Up Crew:
Mussels at Work in Wargo Pond

Wargo Pond has welcomed new residents with a big job—freshwater mussels. These small but mighty filter feeders can each clean 8–15 gallons of water a day, removing pollutants and even the microorganisms behind harmful algal blooms (HABs).

This summer, scientists from The Watershed Institute teamed up with the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary and NJ Sea Grant Consortium to introduce 300 juvenile mussels into the pond. The team will track their progress, hoping to boost water quality and set the stage for future restoration projects across the region.

"If successful, these *underwater superheroes* could help tackle water pollution and support healthier ponds and rivers throughout New Jersey and beyond—all while working quietly, one gallon at a time," said Steve Tuorto, PhD, Science Director.

Watershed Institute staff have teamed up with the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary and NJ Sea Grant Consortium to study the effectiveness of mussels in removing pollutants in Wargo Pond.

Major Win for Clean Water

In a victory for the environment and local residents, the Hillsborough Planning Board has denied a massive warehouse proposal that would have destroyed wetlands, filled in a stream, and worsened flooding in the Royce Brook watershed.

After three years and 25 hearings, the public's persistence paid off. The Watershed Institute joined Local Citizens Against Traffic, Stop Warehouses and Trucking, the Sourland Conservancy, and many others to highlight the project's environmental risks.

We're deeply grateful to the Planning Board for protecting the community and our shared waterways. This decision proves that when we stand together, our voices can—and do—make a difference.

It's Groundhog Day for New Jersey's Climate Protection Rules
And We Need You to Act ... Again

If it feels like we keep asking for the same action — we are! Just like in the movie *Groundhog Day*, the day seems to be repeating itself. Once again, New Jersey's critical Protecting Against Climate Threats – Resilient Environments and Landscapes (REAL) rule is stuck in limbo, and your voice is needed to break the cycle.

After years of advocacy by The Watershed Institute and others for changes to the state's land use rules to make our communities more resilient to climate change, the REAL Rule was proposed in August 2024. This landmark rule, which requires builders to plan for climatic conditions forecast for the year 2100, was supposed to be adopted by August 2005. Instead, pressure from opponents — driven by misinformation — pushed the Murphy Administration to weaken and delay vital protections for our communities.

As a result, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) issued a revised version on July 21, 2025, and is now reviewing public comments to decide whether to move forward. But the same opposition forces that stalled the rule the first time are still working hard to block its adoption.

The REAL rules are designed to protect New Jersey residents, businesses, and visitors from escalating flooding and increasingly severe storms — threats that can no longer be ignored. They use science, data, and common sense to make sure development and infrastructure can withstand climate change impacts.

"We know the opposition is loud. That's why the Governor needs to hear from you — again. Last time, nearly 1,000 Watershed supporters and followers wrote to the Governor urging adoption of the REAL Rule. Now we need that number to double," said Mike Pisauro, Policy Director.

The science is clear. The need is urgent. And the people of New Jersey expect their government to act.

Tell the Governor: Get REAL on Protecting New Jersey — Adopt the REAL Rules Now

The 9th Annual NJ Watershed Conference:
All Hands on Deck for Resilience

The 9th Annual New Jersey Watershed Conference will bring together more than 300 stakeholders for a full day of learning, collaboration, and action. What began as a small gathering of environmental professionals has grown into a statewide event that reflects the diverse expertise and commitment driving watershed protection and restoration in New Jersey.

This year's theme—All Hands on Deck: Multidisciplinary Approaches for Watershed Resilience—underscores the importance of collective effort in addressing the complex challenges facing our waterways and communities. The conference will take place both in person at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) and online, offering broad access and flexible participation.

With four dynamic tracks, the program will feature sessions designed to engage state, municipal, and county officials and staff, as well as environmental nonprofits, professionals, teachers, academics, college students, and advocates. Together, participants will explore innovative tools, policy strategies, and on-the-ground practices that strengthen watershed resilience for a sustainable future.

New Board Members

Meet the dedicated individuals joining our Board of Trustees this year! These new members bring a wealth of experience, passion, and fresh perspectives to help advance our mission. We're proud to welcome them to the team.

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The 9th Annual NJ Watershed Conference

ALL HANDS ON DECK

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Multidisciplinary approaches for watershed resilience

The Watershed Institute

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