

# WELLSPRING

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



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# A Letter from the Executive Director

## Dear friends and partners,

The outlook for environmental policy at the federal level remains grim, with federal budget cuts, layoffs, and policy reversals hitting across the spectrum of environmental programs.

Environmental leadership from states, municipalities, businesses, and the nonprofit sector is therefore more important than ever. So, too, is the need for everyone—scientists, advocates, educators, planners, volunteers, and you—to pull together. As we discussed at our recent New Jersey Watershed Conference, this era of accelerating climate impacts and declining federal leadership truly requires an **All Hands on Deck** approach.

In one of its most far-reaching actions, the Trump Administration recently reversed more than 25 years of policy on climate change by repealing the EPA's 2009 "endangerment finding," which recognized carbon dioxide, methane, and other greenhouse gases as pollutants endangering public health and welfare. Repealing the endangerment finding threatens key federal climate protections like vehicle emissions standards, limits on power plant emissions, and methane controls from oil and gas operations—rollbacks that could worsen climate threats and spike pollution in our watersheds.

Fortunately, states like New Jersey are stepping up to fill the leadership vacuum. On the last day of Governor Murphy's administration, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) adopted the REAL Rule (Resilient Environments and Landscapes) under the Governor's Protecting Against Climate Threats initiative (see page 3).

Like the Inland Flood Protection Rule adopted two years ago, the REAL Rule modifies several of New Jersey's land use

regulations to prepare the state for the more intense storms of the future that have been forecast by climate scientists. These rules will help ensure that towns don't approve new homes and businesses that will eventually be underwater or allow structures to be built in a manner that increases the potential for flooding downstream.

New Jersey's new Governor Mikie Sherrill and her nominee for Commissioner of NJDEP Ed Potosnak need to be bold in pressing an aggressive environmental agenda, as many of their predecessors have. We look forward to working with them to build on the progress made under Gov. Murphy and former NJDEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette.

New Jersey's leadership in fostering resilience to climate change, preserving open space, restoring degraded watersheds, vigorously pursuing penalties against polluters, and so many other environmental issues, is the direct result of its residents demanding action. That pressure must continue.

In this period of declining federal funding, we also need your continued financial support. In this issue, our "What's Your Why?" story spotlights the motivations driving supporters like you to give, act, and stay engaged. Your conviction that protecting water is essential to life fuels us all. If we've made a difference for you, please join them today at [thewatershed.org/donate](http://thewatershed.org/donate)—your gift at any level sustains vital work when it's needed most.

Thank you for being part of this community—grounded in science, powered by hope, and committed to New Jersey's waters and lands. Together, with **All Hands on Deck**, we'll move forward with resolve.

**On the cover:**  
Bernadette Woods Placky, Chief Meteorologist at Climate Central joins Lucia Middleton, Water Policy Associate at the Watershed Institute, and Jim Waltman, Executive Director at the Watershed Institute, to discuss the effects of climate change on our planet in our first episode of *Watershed Matters* podcast (see story on opposite page)



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jim'.

**Jim Waltman**  
Executive Director  
The Watershed Institute



# NJPACT REAL Rules Adopted: A Landmark Win for New Jersey's Future

New Jersey has made history as the first—and only—state to adopt proactive land use regulations safeguarding against sea-level rise, chronic flooding, and climate-driven storms projected for the end of the century. The NJPACT REAL (Protecting Against Climate Threat Resilient Environments and Landscapes) rules took effect on the last day of Governor Murphy's administration upon publication in the New Jersey Register, capping years of tireless advocacy by The Watershed Institute and allies statewide.

## Celebrate with us!

These science-driven rules require new development to rise above projected 2100 sea-level rise levels, introduce smarter stormwater management for previously exempt projects, speed up nature-based solutions like wetland restoration, and strengthen wetland protections. With nearly two-thirds of our coastline already at high erosion risk and 98% vulnerable to sea-level rise—plus over half a million acres of land in peril—these measures promise to save lives, cut damages, and fortify ecosystems for generations to come.

This victory fills us with optimism that New Jersey can become more resilient in the face of a changing climate. As Jim Waltman, Executive Director of The Watershed Institute, shared: "This action is a bold move to align New Jersey's land use rules with the realities of climate change... By planning for higher seas and more intense storms, these rules will save lives, reduce costly damages, and safeguard the natural systems that make our state more resilient. We applaud Governor Murphy, Commissioner Shawn LaTourette, and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for the bold, forward-looking leadership New Jersey needs to meet the climate crisis head on."

Former NJDEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette echoed the optimism, emphasizing how these rules "better support New Jersey communities, residents, and businesses in building their resilience to sea-level rise, extreme weather, chronic flooding, and other impacts of our changing climate."

With New Jersey's shore communities facing a billion-dollar storm every 32 weeks, and inland areas dealing with more and more life-threatening flooding events, NJPACT REAL turns urgency into action. Yet the real work starts now.

While this is a major accomplishment, the rules are already under threat of being weakened or overturned. Rolling them back now would undermine hard-won, science-based protections and put homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure at greater risk just as climate-driven storms and flood hazards intensify across our nation.

We need Governor Mikie Sherrill to hear loud and clear that New Jerseyans support these rules and want strong, forward-looking climate resilience. Please contact Governor Sherrill today and urge her to fully defend and implement the NJPACT REAL rules.

**Your voice matters.**

Scan here to send your message to the Governor.



## WATERSHED MATTERS Podcast Launches

The Watershed Institute is excited to launch *Watershed Matters*, our new podcast sharing frontline stories of clean water protection, climate resilience, and community action across New Jersey's watersheds.

### FIRST EPISODES NOW LIVE

#### EPISODE 1:

##### Why Water Matters

Discover the basics: how streams, wetlands, and aquifers sustain life, ecosystems, and communities—and why protecting them starts with us.

#### EPISODE 2:

##### Salt Watch - The Impact of Road Salt on Our Water

Unpack winter road salt's effects on streams, wildlife, and drinking water, with tips from NJ Salt Watch to make a difference.

#### EPISODE 3: COMING SOON

##### NJPACT REAL Rules - A discussion with former NJDEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette

Learn how the rules will help protect NJ from dangerous flooding and what you can do to ensure speedy implementation. Hear from Shawn LaTourette about his work on the rules and his legacy for New Jersey.

### Join the movement

to keep water clean and conversations flowing!



### Thank You to Our Key Supporter



The Kentfields Foundation made this podcast possible with a generous grant—thank you for helping us reach listeners with vital environmental stories.

# What Is Your Why?

Every gift to The Watershed Institute begins with a feeling. For one person it is the shock of seeing a favorite stream choked with pollution; for another, it is the opportunity for quiet contemplation offered on our trails after a hard week and finally being able to find peace. Somewhere between those moments and the click of a “Donate” button lies a powerful personal why.

Some supporters give because they see the climate crisis as the defining challenge of our time and want to be part of tangible solutions in New Jersey. They know that protecting forests, wetlands, and clean water here in our region is one way they can push back against a global problem. Their why is activism in action: restoring streams, monitoring water quality, and advocating for policies that safeguard the places we all depend on.

Others are moved by the hope they see with the next generation. Their why is a camper racing home from Watershed Nature Camp chattering about frogs, wetlands, and solar panels, or the teenager who discovers a love of science while testing water in a stream. Scholarships make

those experiences possible for many families, and donors who support scholarships often talk about wanting every child to feel they belong in nature, not just those who can afford tuition.

Some donors talk about love of our reserve. Their why is a favorite trail through the meadows, the boardwalk through the wetlands, or the sight of a great blue heron lifting off from the restored Wargo pond. They give because they want those 10 miles of trails, fields, and forests to stay wild, welcoming, and well cared for—now and for the people who will walk them long after we are gone.

There are also quieter motivations. Some people give to honor a parent who taught them the names of birds, a friend who always showed up for stream cleanups or a child who marveled at all the wonders of nature. Others describe a sense of duty: if they are able to give, they feel a responsibility to help protect land, water, and wildlife for the whole community. For many, donating becomes part of the story they tell themselves about who they are—someone who shows up, who cares, who acts.

As you read the donor reflections in this newsletter, we invite you to pause and ask yourself: What is your why? Maybe it is the rush of a child discovering a tadpole for the first time, the satisfaction of seeing a restored stream run clear, or simply the knowledge that you are helping to care for this place we share. Whatever your reason, your why keeps this work moving forward—one trail, one stream, one camper, one act of generosity at a time.

**“Your support for Hillsborough is invaluable.**

—Suzanne Ochse wrote, in appreciation of our role in helping defeat the proposed warehouse project.



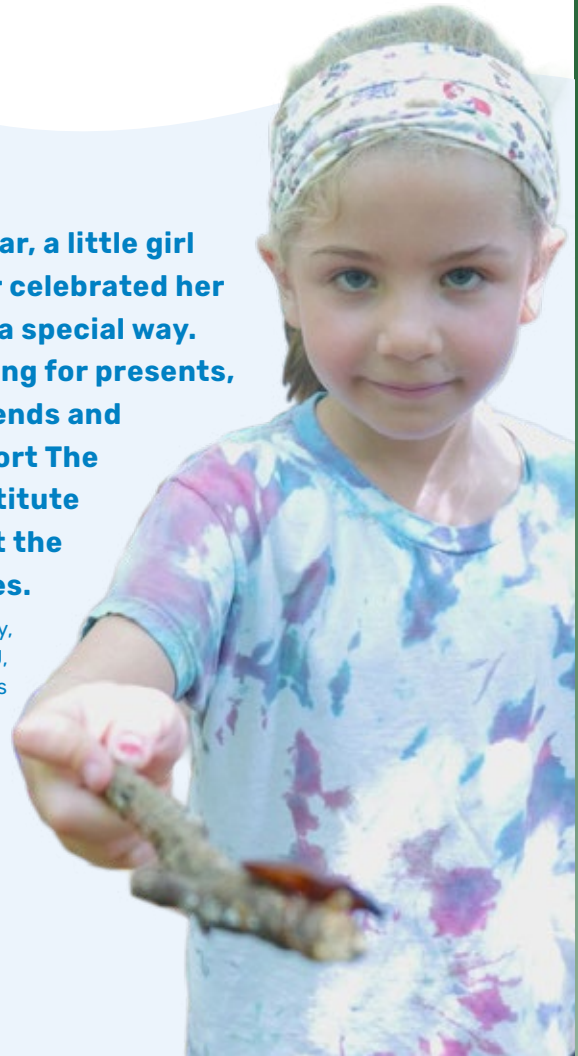
After Supporter Tom Marion’s passing in April 2025, we received several gifts in his memory. One included a touching note from Diana Marciniak:

**“Thank you for introducing our family to The Watershed Institute. It’s such a lovely, tranquil place. We’re glad Mr. Marion enjoyed many peaceful hikes there, and we plan to do so as well.**



**“Last year, a little girl named Eleanor celebrated her 6<sup>th</sup> birthday in a special way. Instead of asking for presents, she invited friends and family to support The Watershed Institute to help protect the planet she loves.**

Eleanor and her family, who live in Sparta, NJ, inspired five generous gifts—many arriving with happy birthday wishes just for her.



# Gearing Up for Watershed Nature Camp

Watershed Nature Camp brings a burst of energy to the Watershed Reserve every summer. Preparations are underway for us to welcome approximately 115 campers per day during our eight-week camp season. Behind the scenes, there is a flurry of planning, training, and trail-checking so that, on day one, campers are free to simply explore, play, and fall in love with nature.



Thanks to generous donors and volunteers, children, teens, and adults discover the wonders of nature at the Watershed Center, on the trails, and at Watershed Nature Camp. Your giving turns curiosity into lifelong care for the environment.

Program staff are finalizing each week's themes and activities, shaping days that balance free exploration with guided discovery. They are mapping hikes to streams, ponds, meadows, and forests, preparing hands-on science investigations, and updating games and crafts so that returning campers find fresh adventures along with familiar favorites. Every plan is grounded in the same goal: helping children build confidence outdoors, deepen their connection to the land and water around them, and go home brimming with stories to tell.

We are also investing in people. Seasonal counselors and leaders are being hired and trained not only in safety and group management, but also in nature interpretation, inclusion, and how to support a wide variety of learning styles. They are practicing songs and icebreakers, rehearsing how to guide a group on the trail, and learning how to turn a child's simple question—"What's that bug?"—into a moment of curiosity and wonder. For older youth, counselor-in-training opportunities are being prepared so that former campers can step into leadership roles and mentor the next generation.

Out on the reserve, our stewardship team is walking the trails, checking bridges and boardwalks, and flagging any maintenance work so that camp groups can move safely and easily from woods to meadow to stream. We're reviewing equipment—from nets and field guides to first-aid kits and rain gear—and refreshing supplies so that counselors have what they need at their fingertips. Indoor spaces are also getting attention, with plans in place for cool-down time, rainy-day activities, and hands-on lessons that bring the outdoors inside when needed.

Families are part of this preparation, too. Registration information, FAQs, and packing lists help caregivers know what to expect and how to set their children up for success—comfortable clothes, sturdy shoes, full water bottles, and a readiness to get a little muddy. For families who need financial support, camp scholarships are being organized so that cost is not a barrier to a summer spent outdoors. Our goal is that every camper, regardless of background or experience, feels welcomed, supported, and excited to be here.

As we gear up for Watershed Nature Camp, one thing guides every checklist and planning meeting: the image of a camper's wide-eyed excitement at discovering a frog, building a shelter with new friends, or standing in a stream and feeling the current tug at their boots. We are preparing the details now so that, very soon, children can step onto the reserve and dive into a summer of exploration, friendship, and unforgettable moments in nature.

**I donate to the camp because when I was growing up in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, I spent a lot of time at a local arboretum, and I always thought that everyone should have that experience.**

—Yvonne Kunz, friend of The Watershed Institute

# Pathways to the Future: Teens Can Dive into a Summer of New Green Career Prep Offerings

The Watershed Institute is expanding its summer 2026 opportunities for teens with a new focus: helping high school students explore real environmental careers and build skills they can use right away. This year's Summer Programs for High School Students feature enhanced Career Prep offerings that connect teens directly with scientists, engineers, and sustainability professionals.

Through these programs for High School Students, participants will spend intensive, weeklong sessions diving into topics like climate science, green infrastructure, and environmental research. In each track, students will work side-by-side with professionals—testing water quality in the field, exploring sustainable landscape design, or learning how data and modeling inform real decisions. These aren't simulations; they are windows into the day-to-day work of people building solutions to environmental challenges.

The new Career Prep emphasis is woven through every part of the program. Students will practice practical skills that matter for college and job applications: collecting and analyzing data, working on a team, presenting their findings, and talking with mentors about academic pathways and jobs. Some sessions incorporate resume-ready elements such as project portfolios, certificates, or exposure to widely used tools and methods, helping participants stand out when they apply to internships, college programs, or their first environmental jobs.

Equally important, the programs help teens explore their own interests and values. Whether a student pictures themselves in a lab, designing greener cities, restoring habitats, or organizing community action, the summer sessions give them space to test ideas, ask questions, and see a range of career possibilities. Along the way, they build confidence as emerging leaders who know how to speak up for clean water, healthy ecosystems, and climate resilience.

As we gear up for this summer, the message to high school students is simple: if you care about the environment and you're curious about what a future in this field could look like, these Career Prep programs are for you. A week at The Watershed Institute can be more than a great summer experience—it can be the first step on your path toward an environmental career that makes a real difference.



# Road Salt: Winter's Threat to Our Waterways



Tons of road salt keep New Jersey roads safe every winter—but much of it ends up in our streams, wetlands, and drinking water. As snow melts and spring rains arrive, de-icing salts wash from roads and sidewalks into storm drains and soils, eventually making their way into local waterways without treatment.

The impacts are serious and lasting. NJDEP data shows that median chloride levels in NJ waters have tripled since 1997. Effects linger long after winter ends as salt is slowly released from soils and groundwater through the spring and summer. Streams turn saltier year-round, threatening fish, amphibians, and biodiversity already pressured by climate change and low flows. Elevated chloride levels harm freshwater ecosystems: slowing growth and reproduction, reducing biodiversity, and even proving lethal at high concentrations.

People feel it too. Road salt infiltrates private wells and public supplies—a health concern for those on low-sodium diets—and corroding plumbing, which can leach lead or other contaminants. Salty runoff also damages vegetation, attracts wildlife to roads (increasing accidents), and disrupts lake mixing, creating oxygen-deprived “dead zones” at the bottom.

New Jersey's recent drought conditions combined with the winter road salt already stored in soils, streams, and groundwater amplify harm to water quality and ecosystems. With less rain to dilute and flush chloride, salty conditions persist—stressing aquatic life, raising sodium in drinking water, and worsening “physiological drought” for roadside plants as salt binds available moisture. At The Watershed Institute, our NJ Salt Watch program empowers community scientists to monitor salt pollution and learn more about how they can reduce their own salt footprint. Smarter salting practices—by public works, businesses, and homeowners—can protect public safety while safeguarding clean water. Join The Watershed Institute's NJ Salt Watch program now at [thewatershed.org/saltwatch](http://thewatershed.org/saltwatch).

**“ I recently ordered salt test kits from you and am sending this check to thank you for all that you do and your work to monitor and keep our waterways as safe as possible. As a scuba diver since June of 1997 and as an environmental health nurse, I thank you.**

—Jill Aquino - RN, MS

# It's Freezing— But the Planet is Still Warming

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, nine states experienced their warmest winter on record this year and none experienced their coldest.



## WEATHER VS. CLIMATE: THE BIG DIFFERENCE

Weather is your backyard forecast—hourly rain, a surprise frost, or that biting wind off Stony Brook. Climate is the long-term average of those patterns over 30+ years. Global warming means Earth's average temperature is rising (about 2°F since 1880, accelerating lately, and expected to increase another 2.7°F by 2100, driven by trapped heat from greenhouse gases like CO<sub>2</sub> from fossil fuels.

A chilly February doesn't undo that. Think of it like your body's fever: one cold hand doesn't mean you're healthy overall.

## WHY COLD SNAPS STILL HAPPEN

Warming shakes up the jet stream—the high-altitude river of air steering storms. A wavier jet stream can trap Arctic air over the eastern U.S., delivering deep freezes amid a hotter planet. Since the 1990s, these “polar vortex dips” have become more frequent and intense, even as global averages climb.

New Jersey feels it: Record floods from Ida in 2021 followed by harsh winters. Our streams see warmer summers killing fish, then salt-laden runoff from icy roads stressing what's left.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR WATERSHEDS

Local impacts are clear. Warmer winters mean less snowpack to feed springs and aquifers; worsening droughts like we're seeing now. Road salt—essential for safety—builds up in low-flow streams, turning fresh water brackish and harming frogs, fish, and drinking supplies.

Climate models predict more extremes: hotter heat waves, wetter storms, wilder swings. New Jersey's NJPACT REAL rules (just adopted!) proactively elevate development against these shifts.

## ACTION OVER CONFUSION

Next cold blast, check NOAA's trends too. Global warming amplifies chaos, not uniformity. At The Watershed Institute, we're monitoring streams, advocating smarter policies, and teaching kids to read these changes firsthand.

Stay warm, stay curious. Support our work restoring resilient watersheds and monitoring our streams and rivers for water pollution. Together, we adapt to the new normal—one informed step at a time. Learn more at [thewatershed.org/climate](http://thewatershed.org/climate).

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Employer matches are an effortless way to double your impact. If your employer only takes paper forms, our EIN is 21-0649717.



Scan here 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.

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Learn more at  
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