



Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028

Restoration to Resiliency



Our Message

The Nashua River system is the lifeline of our communities. It brings fresh drinking water to many; it gives us a place to play; and it inspires us with its dynamic beauty. Our rivers and streams link rural and urban areas, they draw us together, and connect our lives. Further, the Nashua River system acts as a critical corridor for wildlife survival, providing both habitat and safe passage for the creatures who share our landscape.

The Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA) protects and guards this precious resource, not just for today, but for the future. The NRWA puts forth thoughtful, well-conceived plans to safeguard our water and our land. We educate our communities about the natural wonder and beauty around us. Working with scientific data behind us, we pursue priority conservation, restoration, education, and advocacy projects that forward the goal of clean water for all.

However, today we face many challenges. Our river network is still threatened by combined sewer overflows, nutrients like phosphorus, lack of land-use planning, and toxins in our groundwater, among many others. Our approach at the NRWA is to tackle these issues and solve the puzzles that they present. This strategic plan offers our insight into the most pressing challenges that our watershed faces, including climate change. We asked for input from our community in forming this plan and we have listened. Thank you to all who offered your insight, it has enabled us to create an authentic plan, unique to the watershed, that digs deep into the problems and offers viable solutions.

We look forward to implementing our five-year plan and taking our solutions into the future with you all. To quote our founder, Marion Stoddart, whose vision inspired so much progress in safeguarding our natural environment, “The work is never done.” This statement is more true now than ever.

Our Pillars

Our foundational beliefs are our guiding principles and the underlying values of our organization. They guide our decision-making and represent the core of our organization.

Science

We use science as the basis to address the complex issues of our environment, drawing on our knowledge and deep understanding of the watershed.

Education

We inspire with thoughtful environmental education that connects us to the world, raises awareness of important issues, guides actions to restore and sustain our watershed, and cultivates the next generation of environmentalists.

Stewardship

We protect and restore our natural resources sustainably for today and tomorrow.

Community

We collaborate with our watershed communities and partners to achieve our common goals.

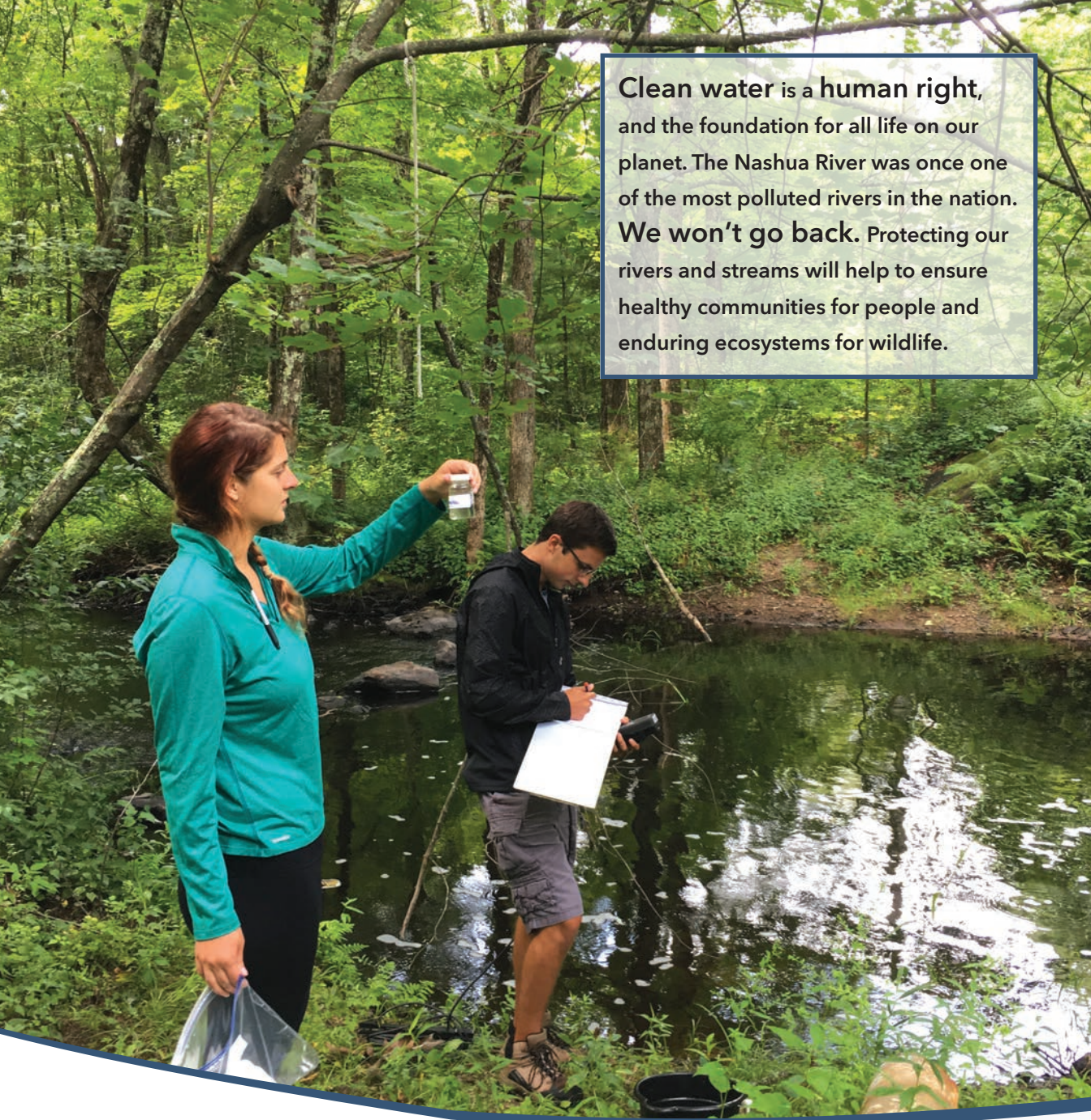
Advocacy

As stewards of our environment, we support actions necessary to keep our watershed healthy.

What is a watershed?

A watershed is a geographic area of land in which all surface and ground water flows downhill to a common point, such as a river, stream, pond, lake, or wetland.

Clean water is a human right, and the foundation for all life on our planet. The Nashua River was once one of the most polluted rivers in the nation. **We won't go back.** Protecting our rivers and streams will help to ensure healthy communities for people and enduring ecosystems for wildlife.



Goal 1

Protect and advocate for our water resources

What are our priorities?

- Advocate for clean water resources for all of our communities
- Work with communities to ensure safe drinking water
- Monitor water quality for healthy aquatic life and safe recreation in and on the water

What we'll do:

- Build expertise, education, and advocacy programs for PFAS and other emerging toxic chemicals that may contaminate the river
- Build advocacy program for volunteers, attorneys, and legal students with a focus on our environmental justice and other vulnerable communities
- Increase monitoring of our waterways for basic water chemistry and bacterial indicators
- Target federal and state grant programs to help fund our monitoring program
- Expand the monitoring program to provide more phosphorus monitoring and help develop a safe level for phosphorus loadings to the river
- Create public education programs about road salt usage and advocate protecting waterways from salt contamination



A founding vision of the NRWA is **clean** and **flowing** water with a **ribbon of green** alongside it. Riverside greenways improve water quality, provide wildlife corridors, and allow people to access the scenic beauty of our rivers. Free flowing streams, unobstructed by outdated dams and culverts, aid a healthy aquatic habitat and improve climate resiliency.



Goal 2

Restore and protect river and stream corridors and aquatic ecosystems

What are our priorities?

- Forward the greenway vision to protect riparian buffers along our rivers and streams
- Stabilize riparian buffers with native plantings
- Restore connectivity of waterways
- Protect cold-water fisheries
- Improve flood resiliency in our communities
- Reduce effects of summer droughts on streams and wetlands

What we'll do:

- Develop a plan and work on greenway protection
- Expand capacity to work on riparian and wetland restoration projects, including shoreline stabilization, dam removal, and culvert replacements, to combat impacts of climate change and to support biodiversity
- Advocate for dam removal projects which will restore connectivity and flow, improving water quality and aquatic habitat
- Replace culverts to meet stream crossing standards, to allow for free wildlife and fish passage, and to aid community climate resiliency during extreme weather events
- Plant native species and remove invasives in riparian buffer corridors
- Use water temperature monitoring to protect cold-water refugia
- Advocate for increased infiltration of stormwater



A photograph of a winter forest. The ground is covered in a thick layer of snow. Several tall, dark tree trunks stand vertically, some with snow clinging to their bark. The branches of the trees are also covered in snow, and some evergreen needles are visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white, suggesting a deep snow cover or a bright, overcast day.

Protected natural areas are **essential** to ensure **healthy habitat** for a diversity of plant and animal life. Unfragmented corridors allow for natural movement of wildlife protecting biodiversity and lessening the impacts of climate change. Natural places inspire and give us room to dream.

Goal 3

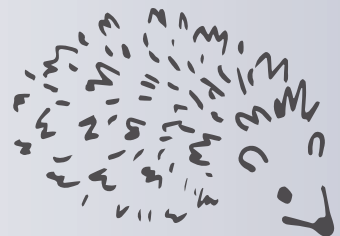
Protect and advocate for our land resources and terrestrial ecosystems

What are our priorities?

- Conserve forests and undeveloped lands, especially wildlands and agricultural lands
- Enhance connectivity of undeveloped lands in the watershed to provide wildlife migration corridors and unfragmented ecosystems
- Promote regional land stewardship programs

What we'll do:

- Coordinate execution of priority forestland protection under USDA Forest Legacy Program
- Forward greenway protection through Marion Stoddart Greenway Fund projects
- Form a regional conservation partnership to plan open space and conservation both for recreational use and ecological resilience
- Educate, consult, and advocate with watershed communities for by-laws and regulations on stormwater, zoning, and conservation based on model by-laws
- Work with our communities and developers to encourage sustainable land use that protects our water and ecological resources



A vibrant rainbow arches across a dramatic, cloudy sky, its colors vivid against the dark, moody clouds. Below the rainbow, a dense line of green trees stretches across the horizon, with a single, slightly taller tree standing out in the foreground. The ground is a mix of green grass and patches of brown, suggesting a natural, perhaps rural, setting. The overall scene conveys a sense of hope and resilience, with the rainbow symbolizing a bright future despite the challenges of climate change.

It is **essential** to take what **action** we can to reduce the negative impacts of climate change. We strive to help our communities become more climate resilient through the implementation of nature-based solutions. Our focus is on our most vulnerable communities that may bear the brunt of change with less access to resources to address the problems they face.

Goal 4

Address impacts of climate change with nature-based solutions

What are our priorities?

- Forward planning for climate resiliency for watershed towns and cities, with a focus on our environmental justice communities
- Implement nature-based solutions and use green infrastructure to mitigate impacts of climate change
- Prepare communities for increased flooding and drought

What we'll do:

- Identify, conserve, and restore critical riparian buffer corridors and greenways
- Forward plans for climate resiliency through the MA Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program, and seek similar opportunities for NH communities
- Work with and advocate for our urban centers and environmental justice communities to reduce impervious surfaces and to increase greenspace through green infrastructure, such as rain gardens and pocket forests
- Prioritize forest protection that will ensure protection of old growth and mature forests





We know that when people **understand** and form a **connection** with our natural world, they will work to protect it. Connection with nature forms at an early age, making it essential for young people to spend time in nature. These opportunities need to be available to all, inspiring our next generation of environmental advocates.

Goal 5

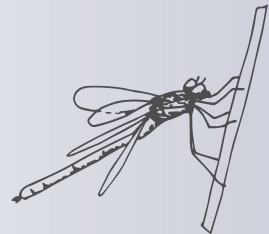
Provide science-based, hands-on environmental education for adults and youth

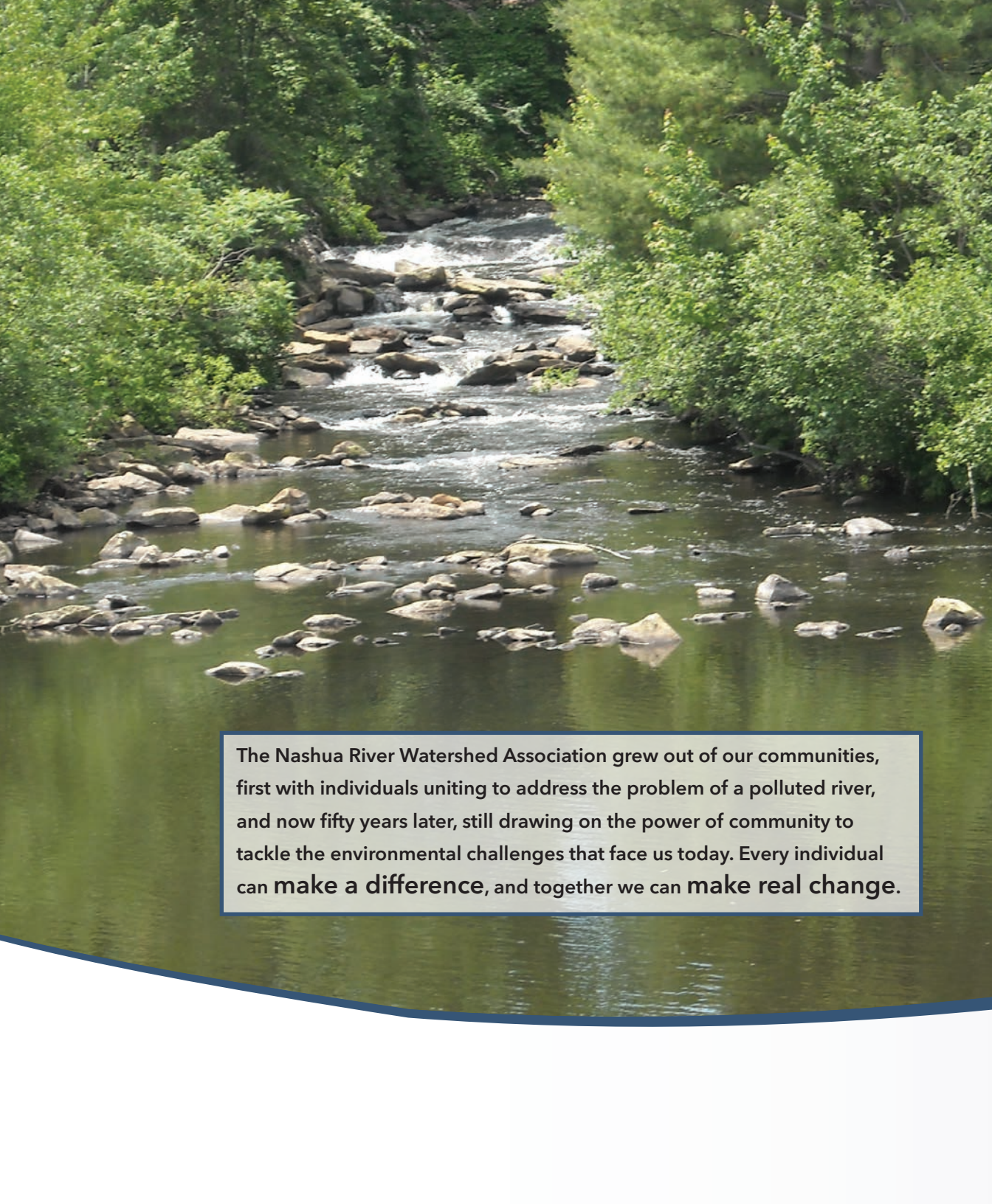
What are our priorities?

- Expand the reach of our programs to all communities in the watershed
- Focus efforts in vulnerable and low income communities
- Develop the next generation of environmental stewards

What we'll do:

- Increase capacity and outreach to underserved schools
- Build branding and awareness of programs and provide information to existing and new school administrators twice a year
- Work with local colleges, such as Fitchburg State University and Mt. Wachusett Community College, on teacher training; partner on student teaching projects and chaperone opportunities
- Develop on-site after school programs for watershed schools, especially in underserved communities
- Develop a plan for continuity of River Classroom® program
- Develop learning center at the River Resource Center with mobile learning materials, classroom kits, and on-site exhibits, including microscopes, enviroscape, adventure backpacks





The Nashua River Watershed Association grew out of our communities, first with individuals uniting to address the problem of a polluted river, and now fifty years later, still drawing on the power of community to tackle the environmental challenges that face us today. Every individual can **make a difference**, and together we can **make real change**.

Goal 6

Build an equitable and enduring organization

What are our priorities?

- Build a financially stable organization
- Develop staff and Board capacity and diversity
- Create a professional and updated physical workspace
- Establish efficient internal systems

What we'll do:

- Achieve a balanced budget on an annual basis through:
 - A mix of individual, business, and grant revenue
 - Securing significant revenue from major grants and multi-year pledges, and pursuing long-term support from planned gifts
 - A strong endowment
- Create a plan for short and long-term River Resource Center requirements
- Seek grants and/or fundraising opportunities for improvement of the River Resource Center
- Build brand awareness through increased community outreach, website redesign, and increased social media presence
- Employ the compelling story of Marion Stoddart and the NRWA's history to engage our communities in ongoing efforts
- Leverage Board, staff, and supporter expertise to improve internal systems and efficiency, i.e. technology
- Undertake training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) topics
- Develop hiring and succession plans to meet the Association's evolving needs, increasing diversity and inclusion
- Build a robust internship program





The Nashua River Watershed Association

Our Work

Water Protection

Land Protection

Climate Resilience

Education

Our Mission

To work for a healthy ecosystem with clean water and natural spaces for human and wildlife communities, where people work together to sustain mutual economic and environmental well-being in the Nashua River watershed.

Photo credits: NRWA Archives,
Kimberly King, and
Roy Rumbaugh



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