To help commemorate our 40th anniversary, we have big plans for the river in 2017. Guided by our new Strategic Plan and galvanized by the tragic consequences of the 2016 drought and renewed development pressure, we hope to make significant progress on the major issues facing the river.

Chief among these issues is water withdrawals. Although we have made steady progress in this area, the drought showed us that we have much more work to do. Moreover, the State’s 20-year water withdrawal permits are due to be renewed this year, giving us a once-in-a-generation opportunity to influence how much and under what conditions water can be taken by our cities, towns, and large private users. We will also work on several other avenues to keep more water in the river to help make it more resilient to climate change. We will tirelessly advocate for more effective regulations, promote new water conservation techniques, and identify alternative sources of water to supplement local supplies.

We are also poised to take major strides forward in our River Restoration Program. Now that our cutting edge assessment of more than 1,000 man-made barriers (dams, bridges, culverts, roads, etc.) is complete, we will work with owners and other partners to increase the pace of removal and other improvements to reduce the impact that these structures have on flooding, water quality, and fish and wildlife. We will increase fish habitat monitoring and develop plans to restore the river’s once-thriving native fisheries. We will celebrate the 20th year of our Riverwatch citizen science water monitoring program by adding more sampling locations and pollution indicators to keep our drinking water clean and healthy, preventing anything like what happened in Flint, Michigan from happening here. We will redouble efforts to keep the river clean for everyone, including the 125 families that are dependent on a thriving clam industry, part of our regional economy that is most at risk from the impacts of pollution.

We will continue to get more people out on the river, especially new people. We will complete our 30-mile River Trail and its network of 20 boat landings and educational kiosks. Our new youth group outing program will expand during its second year. We will hold a bigger and better Paddle-a-thon at a more central location and will connect with more people than ever before, sharing this wonderful resource in our backyards. We hope you will all join us for a year-long celebration!
Celebrating 40 Years of Achievements!

- Grew from an all volunteer organization with zero budget to a highly effective and nationally-recognized watershed association with more than 1,000 members;
- Created one of the longest running citizen science water monitoring programs in the country, RiverWatch;
- Spearheaded a multitude of groundbreaking scientific studies on the impact of water withdrawals on the environment;
- Achieved a 100% success rate for legal actions to protect the river when necessary;
- Received national recognition for river protection including the River Network’s River Hero and the Environmental Protection Agency’s Merit Award, the two top national awards in our field;
- Convened the Parker-Ipswich-Essex Rivers Restoration Partnership (PIE-Rivers) which has become a model regional partnership network that helped to raise millions of dollars to restore our local watersheds;
- Developed our headquarters, Riverbend, into a model energy efficiency and low impact development site, as well as a beautiful riverside reservation for the public to enjoy nature;
- Helped create the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, which has become the leading river protection organization in the state, and played a leadership role in creating new laws and regulations to protect our rivers.

Join Us In Looking Ahead: Our Next 40 Years!

As we celebrate the successes and growth over the past 40 years, we also look to the future: What will the Ipswich River be like in 40 years?

Our vision is that in 40 years the river is healthy, beautiful, and flows year round. Streams, ponds, and coastal waters are clean and provide places where families can enjoy nature. Our drinking water is abundant and safe, and a diverse community of native fish and wildlife thrive throughout the region. Everyone treasures the river, viewing it as the lifeblood of our communities and local economy.

We will achieve this vision by working with many more partners: we will engage with communities, businesses, schools, other organizations, and all residents within the watershed. We will expand local support for protecting the river, with strong, community-wide conservation practices as the norm. More people, especially youth, will enjoy and learn about the river and will be involved with keeping it healthy.

We will continue and build upon our successes that document the river’s condition and work with our communities to be water-wise. We will take action to address problems and always defend the river when necessary.

In 40 years, the Ipswich River will be fully restored to health and will have a sustainable vibrant future, in perpetuity. Please join us to achieve this vision!

Wayne Castonguay
Executive Director

The Ipswich River Watershed Association’s Strategic Plan sets forth our vision for the next five years. Share your vision of the future with our online community by tagging your photos with #IpswichRiver40.

irwainfo@ipswichriver.org
Early Board Chair Keeps on “Caring for the River”

Ipswich resident Larry Eliot has been active in the Ipswich River Watershed Association since its early years and has witnessed many changes. We asked Larry if he would say a few words about his involvement over the last 40 years.

Q: When did you get involved at IRWA? I became involved at the request of founders Fred Winthrop and Jack Peirce who were looking to bring people together to create an organization to address the river’s problems. It was an all-volunteer organization back then and I became the chairman of the board shortly thereafter.

Q: Why did you get involved? I was intrigued with the idea of “caring for a river” and curious about what this involved. After a number of meetings, we realized that the organization being run by a part-time employee was not enough, and we grew from there.

Q: What were the big issues back then? The main issue was water withdrawals and the fact that withdrawals were not being adequately monitored by the state on a regular basis. We also determined that we needed to monitor the river on a regular basis due to water quality concerns.

Q: Where was the office back then? When I first became involved the office was in the basement of the Essex Aggie administration building. We then moved to the third floor of Mass Audubon’s Ipswich River Sanctuary and many other locations around the region since then.

Q: What do you think about how the organization has grown? Tremendous! The best developments have been the permanent office in Ipswich on the river, the creation of a larger membership, gaining corporate support, and actively publicizing the activities and threats to the river to influence decision-making. All of this progress has really had a big impact.

RiverWatch Still Going Strong in its 20th Year

During this big anniversary year, it’s appropriate to recognize another one: the 20th anniversary of our longest-running and signature program, RiverWatch. The volunteer-powered monitoring program began in 1997 to collect science data about ongoing problems and to detect emerging threats to river health. Having just completed the 20th year of this citizen science program we should take a moment to consider the accomplishments and future goals of this valuable program.

The RiverWatch program began in response to the need for high quality data about how low flows were impacting river life. Low flows from water supply withdrawals have been an ongoing challenge for the river, since plenty of cool flowing water is necessary to support the kinds of aquatic life that should naturally occur in the Ipswich River. There have been several hundred volunteers who have participated in the program over the years, including many that have served for all or most of the program’s 20 years. The data they have collected has been invaluable in identifying problems arising from low dissolved oxygen and poor habitat quality. This information is vital to identify what the problems are and to work on solutions.

Thanks to the dedication and commitment of many volunteers, the RiverWatch program has become a model citizen science program. There is a current trend for citizen science groups to play an increasingly important role in protecting our water resources and we are proud to be part of this movement. Many threats remain to be addressed, such as the impact of road salts, aquatic invasive plants, and nutrients. We are hopeful that with your continued support, we can generate the information needed to protect the river in many more ways.
Thank You for a Great 2016!

Just as every drop of water in our watershed counts, every gift counts, too! For 2016, you helped raise $91,285 for your watershed with your year-end gifts. Thank you so much!

It’s not too late to give. Every gift matters! Thank you for caring for the Ipswich River and its clean, wonderful water.

Then and Now

We’ve made a lot of progress over the last 40 years. The infamous stretch of the Ipswich River in the Reading Town Forest, which received national attention because it used to run dry most every summer (top), now stays wet every summer, even during the devastating drought of 2016. Progress!