

# Ipswich River Watershed Association

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2016 - 2020



**IPSWICH RIVER**  
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION  
*The Voice of the River*

## Did You Know ?

- The Ipswich River and its 45 tributary streams cover an area of 155 square miles and meander through all or portions of 21 towns.
- The Ipswich River watershed provides drinking water to 350,000 people and thousands of businesses in 14 communities including: Beverly, Boxford, Danvers, Hamilton, Ipswich, Lynn, Lynnfield, Middleton, North Reading, Peabody, Salem, Topsfield, Wenham and Wilmington.
- The Ipswich River was recognized as one of the most endangered rivers in the nation by American Rivers in 2003. Suburban sprawl has increased water use and overburdened streams and aquifers in the watershed. Despite recent improvements, sections of the the river and its tributaries still too frequently exhibit extreme low flows.



## Ipswich River Watershed



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At a day-long retreat, Ipswich River Watershed Association staff and board members further develop the Strategic Plan to guide the organization for the next five years.

# The Ipswich River Watershed Association

## *The Voice of the River*

The Ipswich River is one of the treasures of the North Shore, and it belongs to everyone. It is where our drinking water comes from, a great natural area to enjoy with family and friends, and a home for brook trout, river otters, bald eagles and other wildlife.

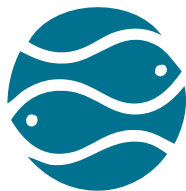
But the river is in danger from pollution, overuse and other threats. In fact, it was singled out as one of the most endangered rivers in the nation!

The Ipswich River Watershed Association is the voice of the river. We work to make sure there is enough clean water for people, fish and wildlife, now and for our children, and generations to come.

The Ipswich River Watershed Association is a small community organization with a big job to do: restore the river to health. Our small, experienced, professional staff works with partner organizations and many dedicated volunteers to monitor the river for pollution and other problems. We help develop solutions to the problems we find and work with state and local officials, businesses, and citizens like you to protect the river.

### Our Mission

*To protect and restore the  
Ipswich River and its watershed,  
now and for future generations.*





## Our Vision

The Ipswich River and streams, ponds and coastal waters of our region are healthy and beautiful. Clean water flows year-round, and native fish and wildlife thrive. Natural areas help keep the river clean and provide places for families to enjoy nature. Our drinking water is clean, safe and abundant. The Ipswich River Watershed Association works in partnership with communities, businesses, schools, other organizations and residents to protect the river forever.

## Our Goals

- 1. Protect and restore the health of the Ipswich River for people and nature.**
- 2. Engage our community through effective programs and communications.**
- 3. Bring people and partners together to protect the river.**
- 4. Make Riverbend a thriving center for people to learn about and have fun on the river and serve as an effective headquarters for the organization.**
- 5. Build and maintain a highly effective river protection organization.**





## Strategic Direction

As the size of our organization has increased, we want to continue to build local support for protecting the river and encourage our members to work to develop strong conservation practices in their communities. We will invite more people to Riverbend and throughout the watershed to enjoy and learn about the river and how to protect it. We will provide programs to engage new partners and strive to build the strongest organization we can.

Our highest priority is restoring the Ipswich River to health. We will continue and build upon our successes that document the river's condition, help our communities be water-wise, and take action to address problems and defend the river when necessary. We will achieve this by working more closely with our cities and towns and nurturing strong partnerships to achieve more impact.

We will create the most sustainable river protection organization we can. We hope to reduce our dependence on grants by increasing unrestricted fundraising and building towards an endowment to help ensure the long-term stability of the organization.



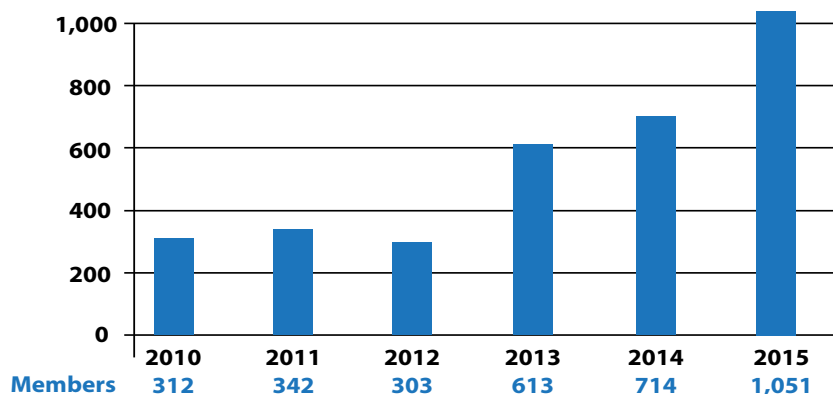


## Recent Accomplishments

**The past five years have brought tremendous growth to the Ipswich River Watershed Association.**

- We successfully launched a restoration program, with a full-time restoration manager. Through this program, barriers to fish and wildlife passage, including dams, bridges and culverts, have been inventoried, and many removed. The Curtis Pond dam was removed from an Ipswich River tributary, and the first main-stem dam – the S. Middleton Dam – is slated to be removed soon, with more to follow.
- We convened the Parker-Ipswich-Essex Rivers Restoration Partnership (PIE-Rivers), a regional network of organizations, agencies and individuals working to promote healthy ecosystems in the coastal rivers of northeastern Massachusetts. This partnership guides our collective work.
- With significant funding from our largest grant ever, we are working with communities to reduce risk from storms, flooding and sea level rise, and to increase the resiliency of the ecosystems that sustain the river. We have hired a full-time environmental planner to lead a new Municipal Services Program.
- Our Riverbend headquarters now offers more opportunities for everyone to enjoy the river. We have an enlarged trail system, a new road providing direct access to the river and a dock from which to launch small boats. A growing number of educational programs are available for the public.
- Our membership has tripled to more than 1,000 members.
- We successfully transitioned from our long-time executive director and have welcomed a new director who brings an extensive background in nonprofit management and natural resources.

**Ipswich River Watershed Association, Members 2010-2015**



# Goals, Strategies and Tactics

*To Restore and Protect the Ipswich River, IRWA works to:*

## **GOAL 1: Protect and restore the health of the Ipswich River for people and nature**

### **Water quantity: Ensure there is enough water for both people and nature**

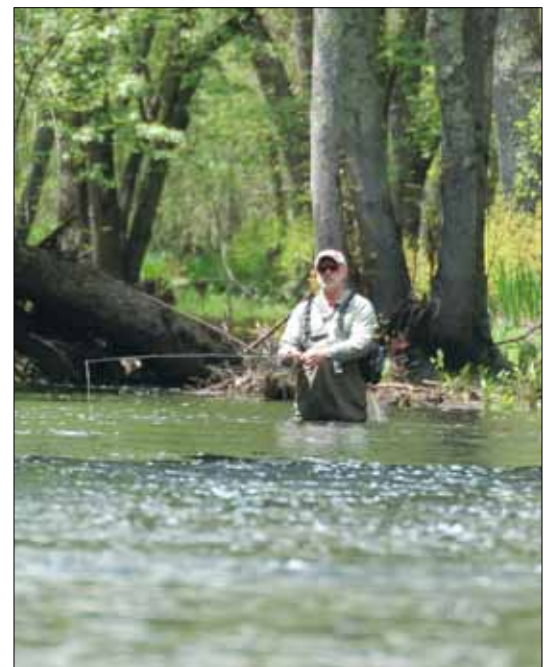
- Strongly defend the river by pursuing legal strategies when necessary to reduce the impacts of water withdrawals
- Investigate and provide incentives for municipalities to implement water conservation
- Empower citizens to push water suppliers/municipalities to implement water conservation measures
- Actively participate in the Water Management Act permit renewal process, maintain data on exempt withdrawals and work with regulators to ensure compliance
- Rekindle the Ipswich River Task Force and actively pursue alternative sources of water where possible
- Create an annual water use report card to document progress and highlight areas for improvement
- Improve the collection and analysis of data on the impact of water withdrawals, such as low dissolved oxygen or increased temperature

### **Water quality: Ensure there is clean water for both people and nature**

- Work with municipalities to improve stormwater monitoring and management
- Make data collected by citizen scientists in the Riverwatch Program more available and accessible to the public
- Incorporate new water monitors into the Riverwatch program with a focus on poor water quality hot spots
- Enhance our macroinvertebrate monitoring program and develop a set of indicators of changes in water quality
- Explore opportunities to implement land use and infrastructure best practices to improve water quality in problem areas. Focus on nature-based solutions and low impact development techniques
- Increase the use of the economic benefits of clean water and a healthy environment
- Strongly defend the river through the careful review of development projects

### **Plan and implement a comprehensive suite of river restoration projects**

- Prioritize habitat improvement opportunities and monitor their success
- Continue the herring monitoring program and publicize its results





- Improve fish passage at Willowdale Dam
- Develop and implement a comprehensive river herring and shad restoration plan throughout the watershed and explore opportunities for sea-run trout
- Partner with Trout Unlimited and the Department of Fish and Game to identify and restore coldwater fisheries throughout the watershed
- Develop and implement a comprehensive prioritized plan to repair and remove barriers such as dams and culverts
- Develop a priority list of habitat restoration projects based on impact, community need and opportunity

## **GOAL 2: Engage our community through effective programs and communication**

### **Increase awareness of the organization among the 350,000 people and businesses that rely on Ipswich River water.**

- Develop and implement a strategy to educate the public on water quality and conservation
- Engage an intern/marketing consultant to find more effective ways to engage people who use Ipswich River water
- Explain how river protection saves time and money and improves energy efficiency
- Identify and implement the best vehicles to reach our diverse audiences

### **Establish an audience-specific education and event program to help people learn about and have fun on the river**

- Maximize visibility and availability of our Paddling Map and Recreation Guide
- Publicize the recreation and education opportunities the river offers
- Install IRWA-branded network of river kiosks at all access areas
- Install road stream crossing and entering watershed signs in all watershed towns
- Offer a mix of educational and informational programs on the river's natural history and the challenges to its health
- Implement and grow a river classroom youth group outing program
- Hold events throughout the watershed to maximize geographic coverage

### **Enhance web, social media and technical outreach skills**

- Conduct regular trainings for staff and board
- Hire a consultant to evaluate our outreach program and conduct training on current trends and tools in the industry
- Develop a suite of measurement tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the outreach program



## **GOAL 3: Bring people and partners together to protect the River**

### **Maintain, support, and expand the Parker-Ipswich-Essex Rivers (PIE-Rivers) Partnership**

- Refine and simplify the PIE-Rivers action plan and engage nonprofits, communities, agencies and academic institutions in its implementation
- Ensure measurements, including those of water quality and flow, are meaningful, easy to understand and efficient to track.
- Work together to secure more funding to achieve the restoration goals of the action plan

### **Implement an effective Municipal Services Program**

- Meet towns needs by identifying opportunities that benefit both the municipalities and the river
- Support and organize water-related symposia and workshops with municipalities
- Nurture relationships with key officials and municipal committees

### **Restructure and enhance the Greenscapes Program to better meet the needs of the river**

- Develop strategies to engage municipalities that are not currently Greenscapes Coalition partners
- Work with the Greenscapes coalition to develop updated outreach materials
- Work with the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission & Salem Sound Coastwatch to make the Greenscapes-North Shore Coalition more effective and efficient

### **Support and enhance community-based citizen science groups**

- Evaluate and reorganize Stream Teams to maximize their effectiveness
- Support other citizen science and community-based environmental groups under the stream team umbrella
- Increase the number of monitoring stations and the measurements collected through the Riverwatch program
- Publicize and celebrate successes of citizen science programs, through newsletters, social media, the website and other media

### **Participate in and grow statewide policy and advocacy partnerships to improve protection of the river**

### **Sustain and support a robust volunteer program**

- Strengthen volunteer management and recruitment
- Strengthen the volunteer appreciation program
- Highlight stories of successful volunteer efforts

### **Explore new business partnerships, focusing on ways conservation efforts can be mutually beneficial**





## **GOAL 4: Maintain Riverbend as an effective headquarters for the organization and a thriving center for people to learn about and have fun on the river**

### **Upgrade the facilities at Riverbend to better serve the public, partners and the organization**

- Create a large multi-purpose space to enhance the visitor experience, accommodate the needs of partners and support educational programming
- Create a modest laboratory space for research and monitoring programs
- Improve the workshop to better support the volunteer program and maintenance needs of the property
- Increase and improve office and meeting spaces
- Create a long term building maintenance schedule with a dedicated budget

### **Implement the Riverbend Property Management Plan**

- Maintain the trail system to provide a safe and enjoyable visitor experience
- Maintain gardens, meadows, green roof and lawn areas to demonstrate landscaping best practices
- Make the property entrance inviting and welcoming to the public
- Maintain and enhance Riverbend signs and kiosks to interpret the river environment and provide for the best visitor experience
- Establish a caretaker position for the property as the opportunity arises
- Increase public awareness of the Smith property portion of Riverbend through signage and passive public use
- Develop and implement a five-year restoration plan for Riverbend to manage invasive species, restore the floodplain, enhance wildlife habitat and restore the Riverbend stream to its natural condition

### **Make Riverbend a premier paddling destination for the general public, members and group outings**

- Maintain and post regulations and instructional signs and materials
- Make the landing road, parking area, public landing and dock welcoming and functional
- Enhance and grow the members-only paddling program
- Design a structured group paddling program based at Riverbend



## **GOAL 5: Build and maintain a highly effective river protection organization**

### **Increase unrestricted fundraising**

- Grow membership to at least 1,500 by 2020
- Establish and hold an annual Signature Event to build members, raise visibility, engage supporters, celebrate the river and raise funds for clean water
- Explore and implement new income streams through fee-for-service programs
- Promote Leave a Legacy Program and expand to 20 members by 2020
- Build the River Steward program so it provides 50 percent of operating budget by 2020
- Seek to increase giving from existing donors

### **Build and retain a strong and effective staff**

- Maintain a strong salary and benefits package relative to peer organizations
- Provide regular opportunities for employees to advance skills

### **Strengthen the Board of Directors**

- Strategically recruit board members based on analysis of our needs
- Empower the Board to set and implement its own work plan and determine strategy for the organization
- Build and support board-driven fundraising
- Regularly assess and strengthen the board committee structure

### **Enhance our presence in the upper watershed**

- Assess options for establishing a physical presence in the upper watershed
- Focus on expanding partnerships in the upper watershed

### **Expand and strengthen formal Internship & Apprentice Program**

- Establish dedicated funding for internships
- Identify dedicated funding for the Kerry Mackin Internship Program

### **Establish a Sustainability Fund that could become an endowment of at least \$500,000 by 2020**

- Develop a memorial gifts policy in support of this fund





# Protect our River

## *Become a member today!*

### Implementation

Each year, the Board of Directors and staff will establish an annual workplan and budget that advances the goals of this plan based on an implementation schedule and the availability of resources.

### Acknowledgements

The Ipswich River Watershed Association wishes to thank everyone who participated in the development of this Strategic Plan. The planning effort was ably led by our President Christine Sandulli and a committed board of directors and supported by staff. We would like to specifically thank long-time member Amy MacNulty for her expert guidance and board fellow Kalee Whitehouse who provided administrative support. We also thank the many members who responded to our survey, the members' focus group and individual members who provided valuable input and feedback.

Special thanks go out to our volunteers, members and donors whose dedication to the Ipswich River makes it possible for us to do this important work. This plan is dedicated to Cam Steward for his long-time support and commitment to the Ipswich River.

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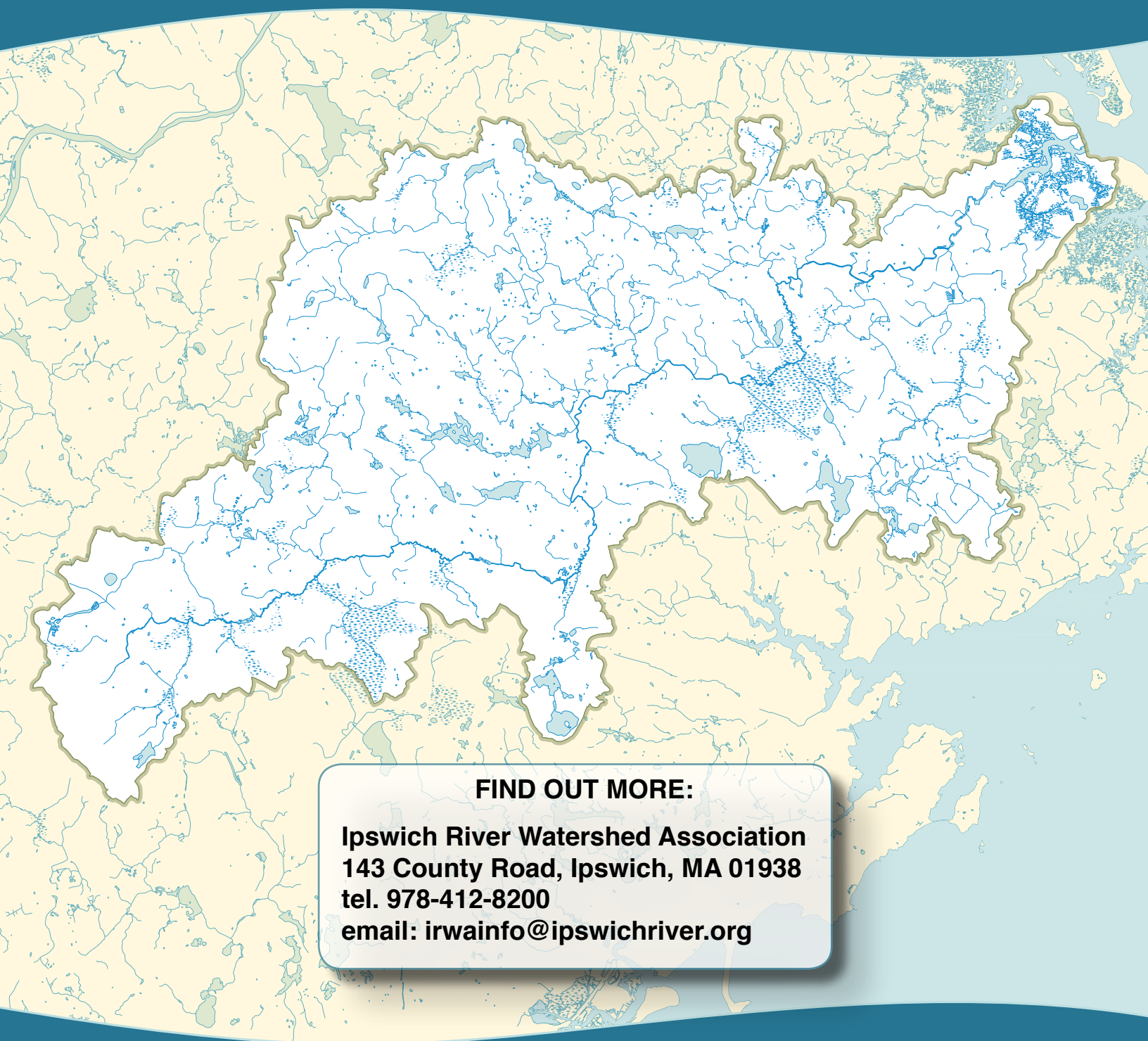
Staff: Trish Aldrich, Brian Kelder, Ryan O'Donnell, Kristen Grubbs, Cynthia Ingelfinger, Carolyn Favazza, Wayne Castonguay.

Board of Directors (2015): Christine Sandulli, David Comb, Peter Phippen, Art Howe, Suzanne Sullivan, David Williams, Painey Metcalf, Miriam Lasher, Judy Schneider, Richard Jacobson, Susie Winthrop, Greg Murrer, Erica Fuller, Brian Tinger.





# Ipswich River Watershed Association



## FIND OUT MORE:

**Ipswich River Watershed Association**  
**143 County Road, Ipswich, MA 01938**  
**tel. 978-412-8200**  
**email: [irwainfo@ipswichriver.org](mailto:irwainfo@ipswichriver.org)**

<http://www.ipswichriver.org/>



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