

Ipswich River Watershed Association 2021-2023 Strategic Plan



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IPSWICH RIVER
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION
The Voice of the River

The Ipswich River Watershed Association

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

But the River and its Watershed are in danger from excessive water withdrawals, pollution, climate change and many other threats. In fact, it has been singled out as one of the most endangered rivers in the nation. The Ipswich River Watershed Associa-

tion serves as the voice of the river. We work to make sure there is enough clean water for people, fish and wildlife, now and for generations to come.

The Ipswich River Watershed Association is a community-based organization with a big job to do: to protect and restore the Ipswich River to health. Our experienced professional staff works with partner organizations and many dedicated volunteers. We develop solutions to the problems we find and work with state and local officials, businesses and community members like you to protect the River, forever.

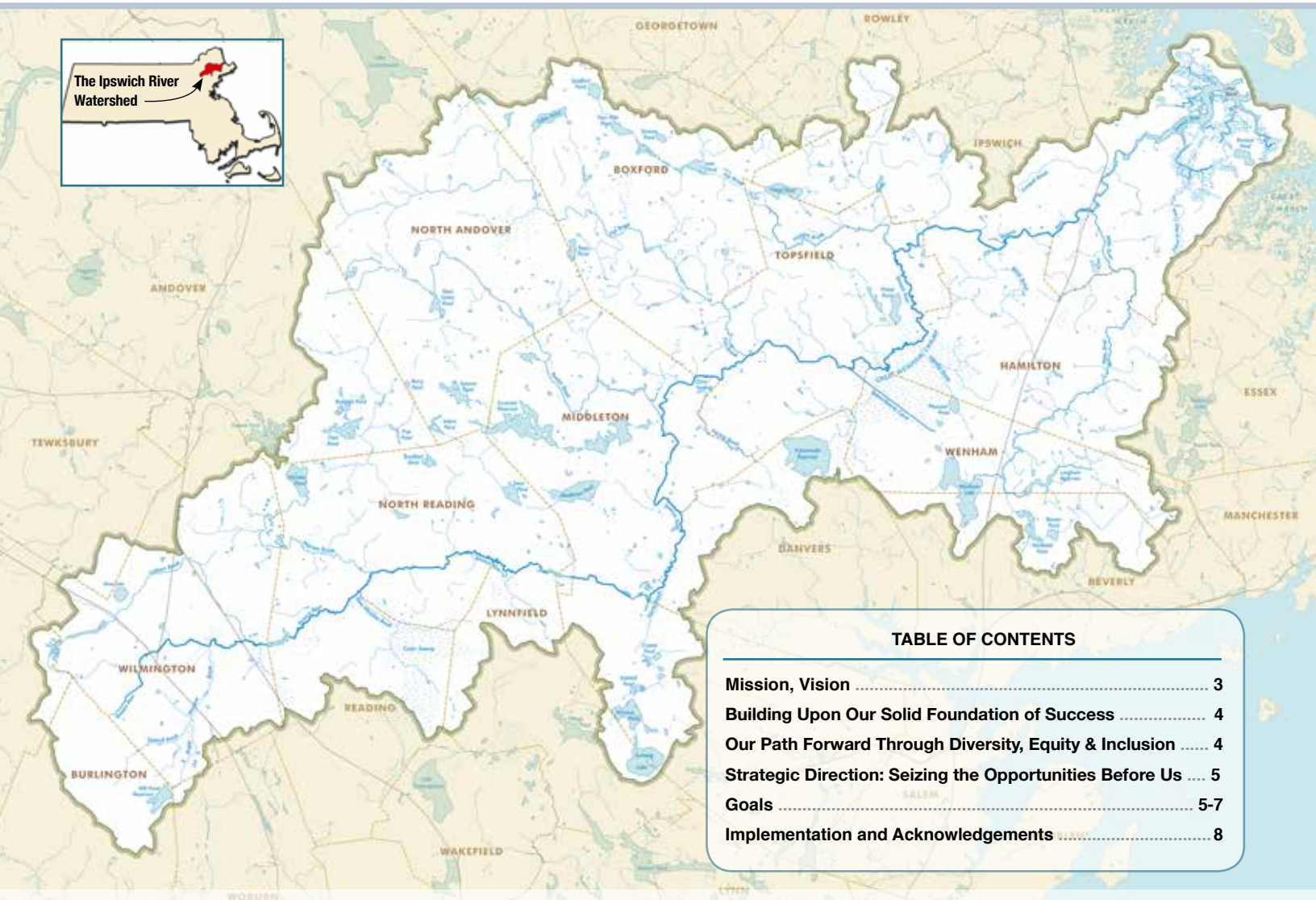


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The Ipswich River and its 45 tributary streams cover an area of 155 square miles, meander through all or portions of 21 towns and provides drinking water to 350,000 people and thousands of businesses . Suburban sprawl has increased water use and overburdened streams and aquifers in the watershed. Despite recent improvements, sections of the the river and its tributaries still too frequently exhibit extreme low flows.

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 waters flow year-round, native fish and wildlife thrive, and the river is resilient and adaptable to climate change. Natural areas keep the River clean and provide places for families and community members

to enjoy nature. Our drinking water is clean, safe and abundant. We work in committed partnership with communities, businesses, schools and other organizations to educate the public to protect the river and the watershed forever.



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Building Upon Our Solid Foundation of Success

The Ipswich River Watershed Association has a long track record of success and has earned a reputation as one of the leading Watershed Associations in the Northeast. During our 2015-2020 completed five-year Strategic Plan, we:

- Strongly advocated for the River by leading the charge to defeat the Northeast Direct Pipeline that would have been the most devastating development project in the River's history and by aggressively monitoring the dramatic increase in development projects throughout the Watershed
- Set the stage for a dramatic increase in the pace of river restoration and protection through successful planning, advocacy and policy work at the local, state and federal levels
- Were recognized as a national leader in assessing and remediating dams and culverts, resulting from our groundbreaking Great Marsh Watershed Barriers Assessment and Tidal Barrier Protocol Development Projects
- Garnered regional and national attention and acclaim for our response during the 2016 drought, the most impactful in the River's history
- Partnered with the National Wildlife Federation, America's largest conservation organization, to produce the Great Marsh Adaptation Plan. Significant as the first regional community-based planning effort for climate resiliency, it is now used as a model around the country
- Strengthened our leadership of the Parker, Ipswich and Essex Rivers Partnership (PIE-Rivers), among the first community-based and ecosystem-scale restoration programs in New England, inspiring similar efforts throughout the country
- With other organizations, received a multi-million dollar grant that dramatically increased the scope and impact of our work
- Were awarded our fourth EPA Region 1 Environmental Merit Award (New England's most prestigious environmental honor), more than any other organization
- Doubled our budget and tripled our membership

Our Path Forward Through Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

The Ipswich River Watershed Association recognizes our responsibility to promote racial equity and social justice in the communities we serve. We are committed to effectively supporting all people in the municipalities where we work by acknowledging the increasing diversity of our residents and the need to build more equitable and inclusive policies and programs.

Within our own association we pledge to make diversity, equity and inclusion integral to our policies, board of directors, staff, strategic goals and program delivery.



Photo: Courtesy of Ipswich River Watershed Assoc.

Strategic Direction: Seizing the Opportunities Before Us

Despite the unprecedented challenges brought on by climate change, economic uncertainties and social unrest, the River needs us more than ever. The Pandemic has highlighted the importance of the River to our daily lives as more individuals and families sought the solace and joy that our River provides. Consequently, we now have a larger, more diverse and more motivated audience receptive to our cause. Climate change increasingly affects our River and all our communities; therefore, we are compelled to increase the pace of our work. Fortunately, new financial resources and programs exist to help us accomplish our goals. The imperative for regional, multi-disciplinary partnerships is higher than ever, and funders are demanding such collaboration. We have a once in a generation opportunity to address the River's most pressing challenge: excessive water

withdrawals. The Ipswich River Watershed Association is positioned better than any other entity in our region to seize all these opportunities. Believing in optimism and a strong sense of purpose, over the next three years we aim to:

- Increase the effectiveness and pace of our advocacy, policy and restoration work to ensure that there is enough clean water for people and nature
- Engage a broader and more inclusive audience to join with us in protecting the Watershed now and into the future
- Strengthen our partnerships and engage our entire watershed community to help create healthier communities



GOAL 1: Ensure enough water for people and nature

- Promote and catalyze increased water conservation practices
- Demonstrate cost effective strategies to reduce commercial water use with business and institutional leaders
- Work with municipalities to implement town-specific plans to reduce water use, increase groundwater recharge and use of alternative sources
- Leverage and enhance statewide and regional partnerships such as the Rivers Alliance and Ipswich River Task Force to advocate for stronger water-use statutes, regulations, policies and programs
- Pursue legal strategies where necessary to reduce the impact of water withdrawals



Photo: ©Judy Schneider



GOAL 2 : Protect and restore healthy clean water for people and nature

Ensure clean water

- Enhance the Riverwatch Program to document trends in the River's health, increase pollutant and flow monitoring and remediate pollution sources
- Work in partnership with municipalities to implement town-specific plans to increase the adoption of low impact development practices and standards
- Expand capacity to review development projects to mitigate negative impacts and protect the river

- Increase municipal participation in the Greenscapes program and serve as an umbrella program to advance our property-based water quantity, water quality and land use management practices

Increase the pace of river restoration projects

- Promote and execute projects that restore and protect native habitat and wildlife populations
- Implement the restoration projects in the PIE-Rivers Action Plan
- Secure increased funding, regulatory efficiencies and public support to implement additional projects



Photo: Courtesy of Ipswich River Watershed Assoc.



GOAL 3 : Engage our entire Watershed community through strong and effective collaboration, communication, events and education programs

Strengthen messaging to the 350,000 people and the businesses that rely on the Ipswich River

- As a leading voice in our region, advance the issues of climate equity and resiliency
- Connect with diverse audiences and stakeholders across the Watershed: individuals, communities, business leaders, municipal officials, legislators and educators
- Engage the Watershed community on projects and issues facing the River
- Publicize and celebrate the successes of our Community Science programs
- Leverage the data generated by the Riverwatch Program; make it available, relevant and actionable to our communities

Engage more young people to participate in the organization and advocate for the river

- Expand the Greenscapes classroom program beyond the 5th grade to catalyze an ongoing lifelong connection to the River and water issues as a whole
- Build more partnerships with youth-development and educational organizations with a focus on diverse communities via the youth paddling program and others
- Increase partnerships with High School groups such as green teams, environmental clubs, Climate Café's and performing arts groups
- Expand Intern and Apprentice Program to advance our strategic priorities

Focus our events and recreation programs to strengthen engagement and understanding across the Watershed community

- Increase public access to and enjoyment of the river through our Water Trail Program
- Enhance marketing of our various recreational resources

Make Riverbend a welcoming, inclusive, and engaging center for the whole Watershed community

- Implement building and grounds improvements to create a highly functioning multi use facility to fully engage the public
- Develop more programs focused on young families and youth groups
- Promote educational programs and recreational opportunities at Riverbend

Create a more robust and effective volunteer program

- Enhance our ability to administer, train and appreciate our many volunteers
- Increase and enhance our partnerships with feeder schools for our volunteer, intern and apprentice programs
- Expand community-based and corporate volunteer work groups
- Market and optimize management of our signature River Warden program



Photo: ©Suzanne Sullivan



Photo: Courtesy of Ipswich River Watershed Assoc.

Implementation

Each year, the Board of Directors and staff will establish an annual workplan and budget that advances the initiatives in this plan based on an implementation schedule and the availability of resources. It is understood that successful implementation calls for additional resources that may require special efforts such as a capacity building and capital campaign(s). The emphasis in the Plan to increase and improve outreach and education programs warrant the development of a planning process to guide this effort.

Acknowledgements

The Ipswich River Watershed Association wishes to thank everyone who participated in the development of this Strategic Plan. The planning effort was led by our Vice President Ken MacNulty and a sub-committee

of the Board of Directors supported by staff. We would like to specifically recognize Jeff Lissack who graciously volunteered his time to guide and facilitate the effort. We also thank the many members who responded to our survey and the individuals who generously participated in our stakeholder interviews.

Board of Directors (2020): Officers: Susie Winthrop, Ken MacNulty, Dave Comb, Brian Tinger. Members: Paul Charos, Diane Dixon, Linda Fates, Lauren Fitzgerald, Dan Heiter, Richard Howard, Christine Sandulli, Judy Schneider, Bobbi Whiting.

Staff (2020): Wayne Castonguay, Trish Aldrich, Patrick Lynch, Ryan O'Donnell, Rachel Schneider, Gail Sorensen



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Protect our River: Become a member today!