

Ipswich River Watershed Association 2024-2028 Strategic Plan

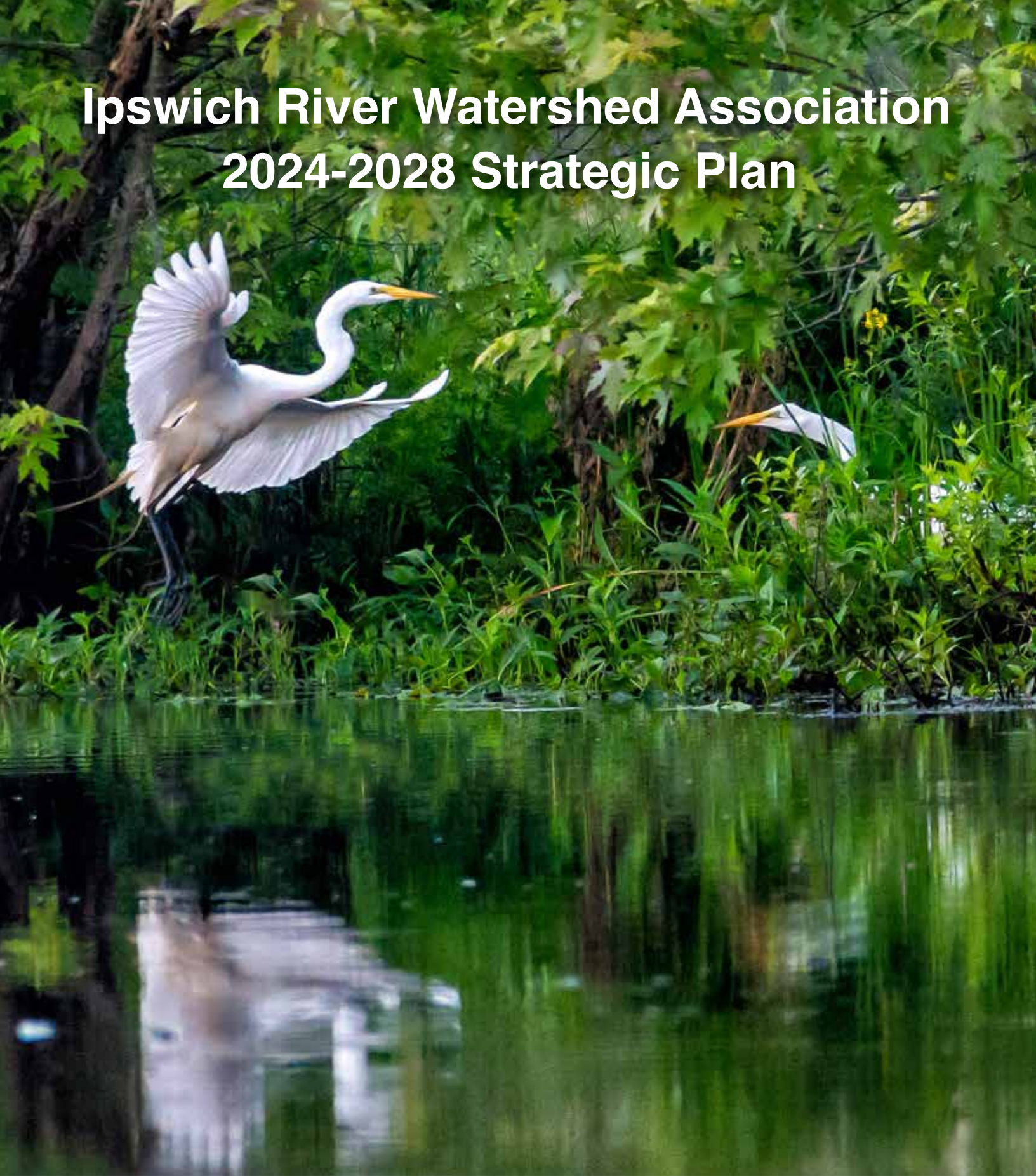


Photo: © Judy Schneider

OUR MISSION:

***TO PROTECT AND RESTORE THE IPSWICH RIVER AND
ITS WATERSHED, NOW AND FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS***



IPSWICH RIVER
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION
The Voice of the River

Executive Summary - The Voice of the River

Originally known as the Agawam River, the Ipswich River flows within the ancestral lands of the Pawtucket people who fished, hunted, paddled, and stewarded these lands and waterways for thousands of years. The Ipswich River, its streams, and tributaries remain invaluable natural resources that provide recreational opportunities and drinking water for people, and a habitat and home for wildlife, including brook trout, river otters, and bald eagles. Today, this watershed finds itself under threat, having been declared one of the Ten Most Endangered Rivers in America in April of 2021 by American Rivers, the country's leading river advocacy organization. With the population of the North Shore growing, coupled with the impacts of climate change, there is increasing concern over the resiliency of the river to support the needs of people and nature.

Consequently, the Ipswich River Watershed Association bears a significant responsibility to safeguard the river, its tributaries, and the surrounding watershed. As a community-based organization, our knowledgeable and skilled staff possess a strong voice, developed through collaborations with allied organizations, government officials at the state and local levels, businesses, schools, citizens, and dedicated volunteers. Our aim is to devise and execute solutions that will conserve our vital water resources both now and in the future. This five-year Strategic Plan represents our optimism and strong sense of purpose.

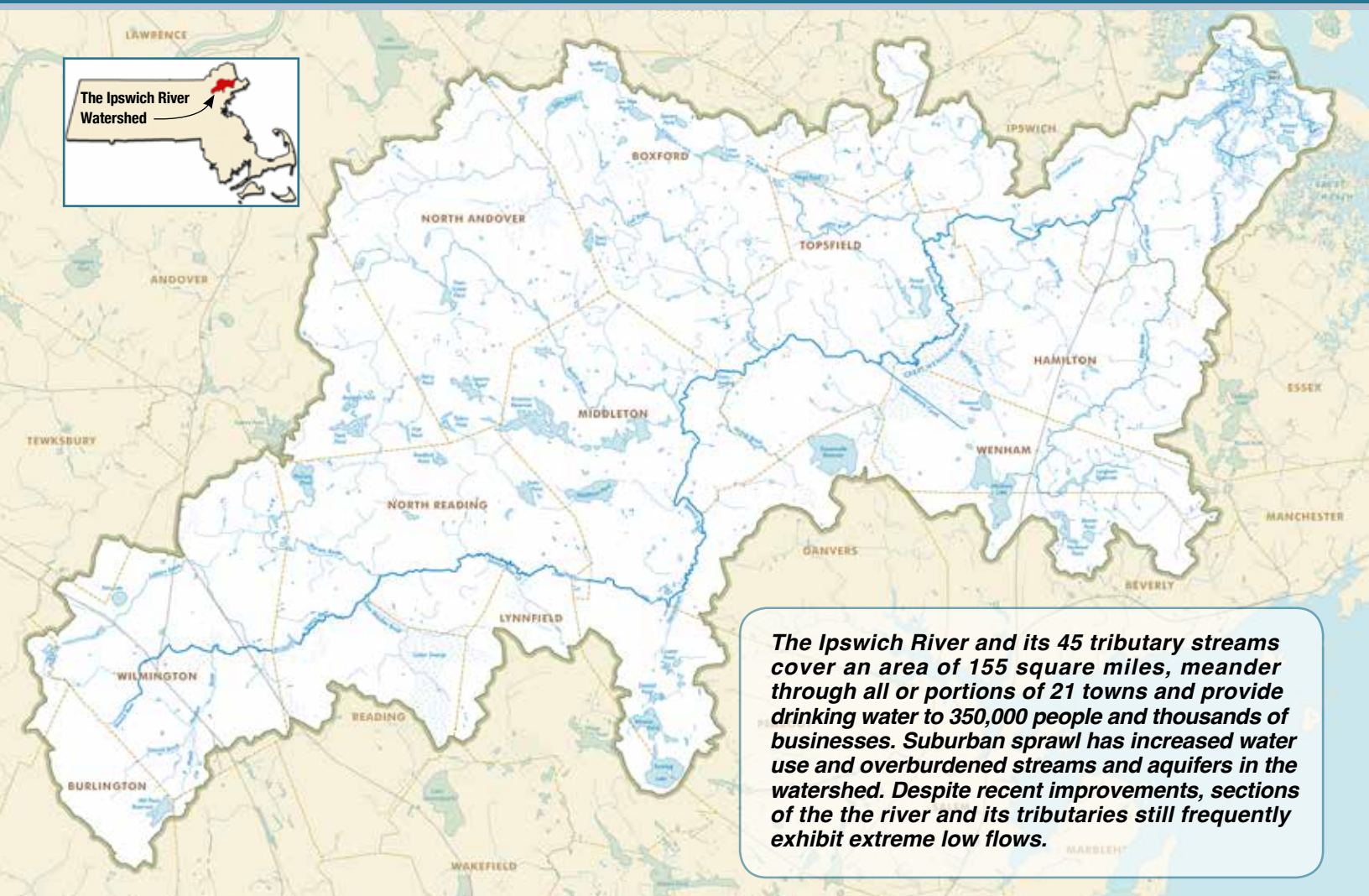
The Ipswich River Watershed Association is the voice of the river. As an organization with a big job to do, our primary approach to advance our work is to:

- Help municipalities and our citizens to conserve water.
- Monitor river health to ensure that our water stays clean.
- Promote sustainable water withdrawals from the river to avoid unnaturally low flows.
- Restore the river to support self-sustaining biodiverse ecosystems and ensure resiliency in the face of climate change.
- Educate children, youth, and adults about the river and how to care for it.
- Empower the community to advocate on behalf of the river.
- Facilitate the community's access to the river for recreation and solitude.



Photo: Courtesy of Ipswich River Watershed Assoc.

The Ipswich River Watershed



Building Upon Our Solid Foundation of Success

The Ipswich River Watershed Association has a strong track record of success and has earned a reputation as a leading watershed association in Massachusetts and nationally. Building upon this foundation, we look ahead with a solid record of accomplishments. Below are initiatives completed under our recently concluded 2021-2023 Strategic Plan:

- Earned the confidence of major governmental and private foundation funders, allowing for a dramatic increase in the scope and impact of our work.
- Recognized by American Rivers as one of the Ten Most Endangered Rivers in America resulting in an unprecedented amount of awareness, concern and commitment for our most challenging problems.
- Secured commitment from all 18 members of the North Shore Water Resiliency Task Force to resolve the river's low flow problem.
- Continued to provide leadership to the Parker, Ipswich and Essex River Restoration Partnership (PIE-Rivers), that has become a model for community-based and ecosystem-scale restoration programs.
- Leveraged the Great Marsh Adaptation Plan into a nationally recognized model for regional community-based resiliency planning, a project we co-authored with the National Wildlife Federation.

- Dramatically increased the pace of river restoration and protection through successful planning, advocacy and policy work at the local, state and federal levels.
- Strongly defended the river by utilizing legal challenges while continuing to monitor intensifying real-estate development throughout the watershed.
- Continued to demonstrate our national leadership in dam and culvert assessment protocol and remediation.

Seizing the Opportunities Before Us

The pandemic and recent droughts have demonstrated how important the river is to our daily lives. Our audiences have grown and are more motivated and receptive to our work. Recreational interest in the river has increased. Climate change continues to show how we must increase the pace of our efforts. In 2024, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address the river's most pressing challenge, excessive water withdrawals, via the 20-year Massachusetts Water Management Act Permit and Registration renewal process. In addition, the North Shore Water Resiliency Task Force has brought to the table for the first time all the major stakeholders who are committed to addressing comprehensively the river's low flow problem. Our organization is well positioned to effectively seize these opportunities. Fortunately, new financial resources and collaborations are now

available to assist us in our mission. To tackle the magnitude of the challenges we face, it is crucial to leverage regional partnerships that bring together diverse disciplines and populations.

Over the next five years, our aim is 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 in protecting, restoring, and enjoying the river now and into the future.
- Strengthen our partnerships to enhance our ability to protect and restore the river and help create healthier communities.



Photo: © David Comb

GOAL 1: Protect and restore the river to health for people and nature

Ensure enough water for people and nature

- Work closely with public and private water suppliers to enact win-win strategies to increase the resiliency of water supplies and improve ecosystem health.
- Work with business and institutional leaders to reduce commercial water use.
- Partner with municipalities to implement town-specific plans to reduce water use and increase groundwater recharge.
- Pursue legal strategies where necessary to reduce the impact of water withdrawals.

Ensure clean water for people and nature

- Increase awareness, availability, and reach of our Riverwatch data.

- Increase pollutant and flow monitoring and document trends in the river's health to better inform remediation efforts.

Expand our restoration efforts throughout the watershed

- Increase our dam and barrier removal efforts.
- Restore tributaries with a focus on restoring native fish populations – a key indicator of river health.
- Strengthen our municipal restoration partnerships to increase the adoption of low-impact development practices and standards, and seek to have active projects ongoing in each major watershed community.



IRWA's "Free the River" campaign promotes the removal of dams that will free up the river for migrating anadromous fish and allow paddlers to continue their paddle without having to portage their boats around dams for the first time in hundreds of years. Photo and Illustration: Courtesy of IRWA.

GOAL2: Utilize strong advocacy, partnership, and educational programs to increase the resiliency of the river

Increase participation in local, regional, and statewide strategic advocacy alliances and water-related resiliency efforts

- Partner closely with the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance to enhance watershed resiliency.
- Continue our leadership on the North Shore Water Resiliency Task Force.
- Continue our support of fisheries-based regional partnerships.
- Strengthen the Parker, Ipswich, and Essex Restoration Partnership (PIE-Rivers) to increase implementation of the PIE-Rivers Action Plan.
- Enhance the Greenscapes program to advance landscape-based water quantity, water quality, and land use management practices.
- Strengthen our municipal partnerships to increase the adoption of low-impact development practices and standards.

Increase our capacity as the river watchdog and undertake effective issue-specific advocacy campaigns to advance watershed resiliency initiatives

- Enhance our ability to track, monitor, and improve local development projects.

- Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan and update our outreach channels.
- Incorporate overarching themes and inclusivity into all aspects of communication and programming.

Nurture a robust and effective volunteer program

- Enhance our ability to administer, train, communicate with, and appreciate our many volunteers.

“RESILIENCY”
The ability of our river to withstand or recover quickly from challenges.

- Increase our partnerships with feeder schools and community-based organizations for our volunteer, intern, and apprentice programs.

- Support and engage IRWA volunteers of all

ages to include environmental education and advocacy training as part of their jobs.

Build upon our current education programs to generate a learner-to-advocate pipeline

- Continue to engage young people in our organization to become advocates for the river and provide age-appropriate opportunities for authentic involvement in IRWA’s work.
- Build upon our successful in-school fifth grade programming to middle and high schools.



Photos: Courtesy of Ipswich River Watershed Assoc.



GOAL3: Engage our entire watershed community through strong and effective communication, events, and recreational programs

Create inclusive experiential learning, collaboration, and public use spaces at Riverbend to engage people and partners at all levels

- Create classroom and outdoor space to host educational programming and trainings.
- Enhance our office space and infrastructure in support of growing staff and volunteer needs.
- Advance our Riverbend property as a public reservation and recreational asset to the general public and members.

Improve our ability to engage the public and stakeholders in-person throughout the watershed – Take our organization on the road

- Increase capacity to attend and partner with community events throughout the watershed.
- Develop and implement an annual engagement

plan for each major town in the watershed.

- Establish a physical presence in the upper watershed.

Focus our events and recreational programming to strengthen engagement and understanding throughout the watershed

- Leveraging our partnerships with other organizations, develop a suite of member and general public events.
- Market the Ipswich River Water Trail and improve our River Warden Program so the river remains a premier regional recreational asset.

Enhance corporate partnership program outreach and develop a robust corporate partnership program to advance IRWA's mission and strategic priorities

- Engage employees in membership, advocacy, recreation, volunteer, and educational opportunities.



Photo: Courtesy of Ipswich River Watershed Assoc.

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.*



Photo: Courtesy of Ipswich River Watershed Assoc.

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 President Ken MacNulty and Vice President Lauren Fitzgerald and a subcommittee of the Board of Directors supported by staff. We are also grateful to the many members and partners who generously participated in our stakeholder interviews.

As we move into the year 2024, the Board of Directors is actively seeking a new executive director. The watershed community extends its heartfelt gratitude to Wayne Castonguay, the former Executive Director of IRWA, for his dedicated service and unwavering commitment to the watershed. Under his leadership, hard

work, and successful initiatives, Wayne has garnered national recognition for IRWA in the field of watershed protection.

Board of Directors (2023): Officers: Ken MacNulty, Lauren Fitzgerald, Dave Comb, Brian Tinger.

Members: Chris Barendsfeld, Julia Casto, Paul Charos, Chris Davis, Diane Dixon, Linda Fates, Dan Heiter, Kim Honetschlager, Richard Howard, Deb Logan, Judy Schneider, Michael Searles, Ken Whittaker.

Staff (2023): Erin Bonney-Casey, Molly Courson, Sarah Dawson, Leah Feeney, Emma Huguen, Deb Lindahl, Ryan O'Donnell, Neil Shea, Tracy Sopchak, Gail Sorensen, Carla Villa.

Executive Director: Wayne Castonguay



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Protect our River: Become a member today!