



# Rhode Island Rivers Council

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**DRAFT FOR REVIEW** – Minutes of RIRC Meeting  
Wednesday, September 12, 2018 at 4:00 pm  
DEM Office of Water Resources - Conference Room 280C  
235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI

## Attendees:

Rivers Council: Veronica Berounsky, Rachel Calabro, Alicia Eichinger, Walter Galloway, Charles Horbert, Elise Torello, Ernie Panciera, Eugenia Marks

## Guests:

Jenny Paquet, Kate McPherson, Michael Zarum, Keith Gonsalves, Alicia Leher, Chris Fox, Sally Johnson, Eivy Monroy, Richard Grant.

4:00 Call to Order and Introductions

4:05 August 8, 2018 Minutes Approval

4:10 This month's will speaker: Kenneth Payne, author of the founding legislation for the RI Rivers Council and first chair of the RI Rivers Council, speaking on "The State Status of the RI Rivers Council and its state-designated Watershed Councils".

- In the early 1980s, after the combined efforts of Ecology Action for Rhode Island, the public, and state municipalities the 2018 Water Quality Management Plan was not adopted into the state guide plan. This whole process led to the realization that there was a great deal of interest in RI watersheds from the public. The result of this was the creation of task force focused on Rhode Island's rivers which would eventually become the Rhode Island Rivers Council.
- RIRC was set up as state agency with same status as CRMC and the Water Resources Board. It is an agency of state government, but not a department of state government. It is enumerated with a set of purposes. Agencies of state government can be moved from one state agency to another by legislation or by order of the governor.
- In 1992, RIRC Act was amended – alignment with state wide planning.
- In 2004 – watershed based planning was being pushed – amendments to DEM's statute (omnibus bill) to focus on watershed based planning.
- Water Resources Board – in 2004 – not marginalized state agency at the time. RIRC put under WRB at this time because the two agencies were complementary.
  - 2006 – Amendments to WRB – compliance to separations of powers amendment of the constitution. Re-enforced executive branch state agency status of RIRC.
- Watershed Councils – part of the body corporate & politic – aka public body.
  - Originally intended for these bodies to be public for funding purposes – so they could qualify for funding that individuals or private landowners cannot qualify for.
  - Watershed Councils do not fit the definition of quasi-public entity. Not given these powers.
  - Watershed councils are public bodies to an extent for federal purposes. Watershed Councils are a flexible tool.
  - Watershed Councils have "ownership" of watershed to take care of it, in circumstances where private property owners are no longer present and towns don't want the responsibility. Ex. Defunct mills where streets/water supply need repairs but no known owners. → tool to be useful at points in time.
- General observations
  - There is a failure in RI to keep underlying environmental statutes up to date.
    - 2002 – Department of Environment Act repealed and nothing has

- replaced it. DEM is still ruled by legislation from the 1970s. A lot of anti-DEM sentiment nearly killed it and leaves it antiquated.
    - 42-17.1-2.3 -- watershed based management legislation
    - People don't appreciate what is possible within the statutory structure that exists surrounding watershed management legislation.
  - One of the things that need to be done is to make sure that we have an environmental history of RI's rivers. Without this people won't realize the magnitude of the issues going forward.
    - EC4 – strategy is an energy not an environmental strategy. Nothing is included to mitigate climate change, but watershed environmental strategies can be used to mitigate climate change.
    - RIRC is not a stopping point, what is being done by RIRC is not enough.
  - Council of State Governments – structural deficits in state government across the board. State revenues are not meeting state obligations. How do we go about engendering different ways people think about the importance of resources so that we can change the willingness to protect and act in a stewardship manner in regards to those resources? This is where watershed councils become invaluable. Get people out and using them and falling in love with them – then they will fight to protect it. How do you radicalize local constituencies? Watershed councils need to be stewards of people's love of the resource. (public programs/guides/etc)
- How can RIRC help?
  - Extra effort to bring what is important to the floor – network with others that share your mission – increase the value of the proposition.
  - Define the issue in a way that people can respond to it.
  - Stimulate the base.
  - Connections with you legislator is key.

4:40 Reports by RIRC Representatives on State Committees:

**-Narragansett Bay Estuary Program** - Walter Galloway

**-State Guide Plan Advisory Committee** (Outdoor Recreation) – Paul Gonsalves – The plan process is underway. The Working group meets every two weeks and the 2<sup>nd</sup> scheduled Advisory Committee Group meeting is scheduled for Sept. 14<sup>th</sup>. Public outreach will begin in October.

**-Water Resources Board** - Eugenia Marks

**-Bays, Rivers, & Watersheds Coordination Team Funds** – Veronica Berounsky

4:55 Officer Reports, Financial Report

5:00 Reports of activities in Designated Local Watershed Councils:

**-Blackstone River Watershed Council / Friends of the Blackstone** – No report - [www.blackstoneriver.org/blackstone/](http://www.blackstoneriver.org/blackstone/)

**-Buckeye Brook Coalition** – No report - <http://www.buckeyebrook.org/>

**-Kickemuit River Council** – No report - <http://www.kickemuitriver.org/>

**-Moshassuck, Friends of** – No report - [www.themoshassuck.org](http://www.themoshassuck.org)

**-Narrow River Preservation Association**

*Casey Farm Coastal Grower's Market*

One Saturday morning in August, a local farmer's market in the watershed allowed NRPA to have an informational table and display and to sell tickets for our annual kayak raffle.

Casey Farm is a large parcel of land owned by Historic New England. Half of the property is in the Narrow River Watershed.

Even better than selling \$165 in raffle tickets, we connected with market goers, many of whom asked questions about the watershed and took information about NRPA.

### *Art on the River*

Despite being postponed for 3 weeks due to bad weather, Art on the River was well attended. Plein air artists painted river scenes while children made fish prints and seaweed art. People especially enjoyed using watercolors and colored pencils on river themed coloring pages designed by local artist Pati Sylvia specifically for NRPA. Photos of the event were featured in both local newspapers.

### *UPCOMING NRPA EVENTS:*

September 15, Saturday – What Lives in the River (9-11am) and Guided Marsh Walk (10am-noon), 'Gansett Days @ Middlebridge Marina, Narragansett

September 30, Sunday – Narrow River Cleanup, noon – 2pm

October 2, Tuesday – Narrow River Preservation's 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

October 20, Saturday – Kayak Fishing Challenge on Narrow River

<http://narrowriver.org/>

### **-Pawtuxet River Authority and Watershed Council**

We will soon be focusing on fall cleanups at several of our properties. For some of these, and for future projects, we will be working with a business that received a penalty from DEM that was negotiated to allow the business owner to provide funds or "in-kind" work in the amount of \$20,000 over the next 5 years for projects in the Pawtuxet River Watershed. He has equipment and capabilities we do not have, so this could be of tremendous help at several of our properties.

We will also begin discussions with the City of Cranston and other landowners to clean up and improve property adjacent to land we own on Randall Pond at the southern end of Libera Street, near Randall Drive. This area has been subject to dumping, and we hope that with some clean-up efforts, beautification and reconfiguring access that we can reduce this problem.

We are also in the process of exploring some tree trimming and invasive plant removal at Pawtuxet Falls, as well as removal of one mid-river tree that could affect the fish passage project if it gets knocked down by flood flows, as happened some years ago with another tree.

Work is expected to start in the next two weeks at our Pontiac Rd canoe access to rehabilitate it.

We are getting ever closer to having the contractor ready to start repairs to our Pontiac Canoe Launch. Once started, there will be an announcement temporarily closing the access.

We have significantly underestimated the difficulties in finishing the memorial at Veteran's Square for Guy Lefebvre. This saga is ongoing. I will be trying to insert myself back into that to get it back on track.

Most recently, we have reviewed and may be commenting on an oil spill emergency response plan that is being developed by DEM and EPA for the Blackstone and Pawtuxet Rivers.

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

### **-Salt Ponds Coalition**

SPC continues its work with the Town of Charlestown under the EPA grant. For our annual meeting we featured Prof. Jose Amador from URI as our speaker. He spoke about what factors they are looking at under the grant when inspecting advanced waste water systems, and what some of their preliminary results are showing. We have also continued to do filming for more outreach videos, and they will be edited and released over the fall/winter.

Water quality monitoring is continuing to go well; SPC's 2017 data is not available on the google map on our website.

SPC has sent out its first e-version of the Tidal Page newsletter. We had some good response to it. It was a condensed version of our print newsletter which just highlighted our summer happenings. We plan to release an e-version in tandem with future print newsletters.

SPC's summer programming season is complete. This summer we planned 17 safaris, but had to cancel two; this included our public programming as well as camps and Boy Scout troops. We planned three paddles this year, but had to cancel one: Point Judith with 25 paddlers in attendance, Quonnie was cancelled, and Winnapaug with 33 paddlers. We have also done water quality education at the URI Sailing Center, and were at Narragansett Environmental Awareness Day.

SPC is working with a URI Watershed Watch student to help update our status and trends report, and to see how our AHI Index might be adapted to compare the ponds to other salt water bodies in the state.

[www.saltpondscoalition.org](http://www.saltpondscoalition.org)

**-Ten Mile River Watershed Council-** No report- <http://www.tenmileriver.net/>

**-Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association –** No report - <http://www.wpwa.org/>

### **-Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council**

#### *Greenway Maintenance & River Rangers*

The Greenway team have been in full swing caring for the on and off road portions of the bike path in preparation for this Saturday's big fund raiser, the Woony River Ride, Bike-a-Thon. Currently the team consists of 3 Senior Rangers and 1 Junior Ranger. The summer team included youth with school commitments. We are looking to expand the fall team with an additional Senior and 2 additional Juniors.

#### *Clean Days on the Greenway Series*

The WRWC has hosted or participated in 23 events so far. We have engaged 759 individuals, approximately 242 from Olneyville.

Volunteers gave 4471 hours so far this year at a value of \$107,942.

*Water Quality Monitoring:* Water quality monitoring for the season is coming to a close. Doug Stephens is still coordinating this project. Thank you, Doug!

*Electrofishing Monitoring:* The second site on the Ten Mile River will be monitored on Saturday, September 22nd at 9:30am.

#### *Green Infrastructure:*

We are pleased to have signed an agreement with RIDOT to develop green infrastructure projects over the next 5 years in the Woonasquatucket Watershed! There are many green infrastructure projects underway, including Citizen's Bank at Olneyville Square, Greystone Mill Social Club, King Street and Sheridan Street and Pleasant Valley Stream multiple homeowner retrofits.

#### *Education Programs:*

Education Director, Kassi, is running and preparing for school programming, including high school Environmental Leaders course. This program will even hire to seniors, who have graduated from the course, to mentor sophomores taking the course!

#### *Red Shed:*

Is open until Saturday, September 29th. Hours are: Wed 3:30 - 8PM, Friday 3:30 - 8PM, and Sat 9AM - 5PM. The shop may close due to rain.

#### *Recreation Program:*

The last paddle of the season is on Sunday, September 30th at 11:30 am. This is a downtown Providence paddle, and a must join! Seeing the city from the water, which is also a wildlife corridor, is a completely different perspective.

Check out the paddle trip on events pages on WRWC.org and on our Facebook page.

*EVENTS LISTED at <http://wrwc.org/events.php>*

*Upcoming:*

*a. Woony River Ride – Saturday, September 15th*

*b. Downtown Paddle Trip – See above.*

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

5:40 Committee Reports, Legislation Report

5:45 Other Business

5:50 Chair's Report

- RIRC was awarded a \$2000 grant to create a booklet (annual report like) to give to legislators, etc. Include maps/details about the watersheds with beautiful pictures, etc.

6:00 Adjournment

Adjourned @ 6:16PM.

The Rhode Island Rivers Council is an associated function of the Rhode Island Water Resources Board  
Public Contact Information: Veronica Berounsky, Chair; Alicia Eichinger, Vice Chair