

**Summary of the Watershed Counts Meeting  
Monday, October 6, 2014**

1:00 PM - 3:00 PM at Save The Bay

**Attendees:**

Veronica Berounsky, Graduate School of Oceanography  
Walter Berry, EPA-Atlantic Ecology Division  
Tom Borden, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program  
Rachel Calabro, Save The Bay  
Alicia Clemente, Friends of the Blackstone  
Ames Colt, RI Bays, Rivers, Watershed Coordination Team  
Katie DeGoosh, RI Department of Environmental Management  
Paul Gonsalves, RI Division of Planning  
Linda Green, URI Watershed Watch  
Sue Kiernan, RI Department of Environmental Management  
Tom Kutcher, Save the Bay  
Alicia Lehrer, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council  
David McLaughlin, Clean Ocean Access, Newport  
David Murray, Brown University  
Denise Poyer, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association  
Pam Reitsma, Narragansett Bay Commission  
Nicole Rohr, URI Coastal Institute  
Courtney Schmidt, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program  
Tom Uva, Narragansett Bay Commission  
Richard Verdi, U.S. Geological Survey



**Welcome and Introductions**

Nicole Rohr and Tom Borden welcomed all to the meeting and provided an overview of the purpose of the meeting. They thanked everyone for their work on the 2014 Watershed Counts report.

**Presentation: EPA Urban Waters Grant**

Denise Poyer of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association and Alicia Lehrer of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council presented their work on fish assemblages in urban rivers, which was funded by an EPA Urban Waters Grant. The original goal of the project was to identify target fish communities for water quality assessments; however, that ended up being beyond the scope of what was feasible.

Water temperature, dissolved oxygen, and fish were sampled at two sites on each of three urban rivers during the summer months: Moshassuck, Ten Mile, and Woonasquatucket Rivers. Volunteers were trained in electrofishing techniques and identification cards were developed to aid in the accurate identification of the fishes. The volunteers identified and measured each fish that was collected, and one fish of each species was photographed.

There were no clear patterns in water temperature and dissolved oxygen among the sites, but dissolved oxygen was consistently in a range tolerated by most fish. The abundance and diversity of fish present in each river was surprising given the degraded water quality typical

of urban waters.

The EPA Urban Waters Grant is complete, but the watershed groups will continue to administer the program as well as maintain equipment and database and make data available. They welcome the participation of other watershed organizations and individual volunteers. In fact, they have equipment that can be borrowed by watershed groups. They plan to develop a baseline of fish assemblages at each location and compare annually to observe for changes in the fish communities.

### **Feedback on the 2014 Watershed Counts Report**

The overall feedback on the 2014 Watershed Counts Report was positive, but several helpful suggestions were discussed. The group positively highlighted the use of a spotlight indicator to dive more deeply into the issue of beach health, the increased use of pictures and other visual aides, and employ of case studies to provide concrete examples and to tie in specific communities.

Specific critiques of the 2014 report include:

- The Wood-Pawcatuck and Southwest Coastal Ponds subwatersheds were included in the overview map, but there was no further discussion of issues in those regions throughout the text; we could have done a better job of making this connection.
- Additional details on the location of the beaches and the number of closures at each one—even if it were categories on a map depicted by green, yellow, and red dots—would have been helpful.
- Figure captions should have been used on all pictures, graphs, and maps.
- Some of the map scales were hard to read.
- There is still some confusion on the target audience.
- Increase outreach by relaunching the report in the fall with community meetings.
- Provide a Google Analytics report.

General feedback on the report that can be incorporated in the 2015 report included:

- Increase the resolution on the low resolution PDF.
- Use an online digital marketing tool for online viewing that will be more similar to paging through the report in addition to providing a PDF.
- Produce a two-page fact sheet in addition to the executive summary; make the case studies into one-pagers.
- Upload the different components of the report to the Watershed Counts website to allow for download of specific sections of interest.

### **Discussion of 2015 Watershed Counts Report**

The 2015 Watershed Counts report will once again focus on a spotlight indicator. Tom Borden and Nicole Rohr started the discussion by suggesting a focus on urban water quality. This spotlight would be very different from last years and draw the focus to different geographic regions. It would accommodate Rhode Island and Massachusetts data and case studies and allow incorporation of issues in environmental justice and social equity.

The spotlight of urban water quality was well received as an overall topic and suggestions were made for issues to include under that umbrella:

- Water quantity—the 2014 report focused on water quality for the environment but another pressing issue with climate change is the availability of freshwater for environmental and human uses.
- Economic development—what projects are urban areas implementing to promote local economies while protecting/restoring water quality; water use as an indicator of economics? Thompson and Dalton at URI conducted a study several years ago that may be included. Access issues were discussed such as the new Gano Park boat ramp and Sabin Point beach.
- Invasive species—is there information on invasive species that could be included? This has been an indicator we have struggled with but we may have an opportunity to touch on it in the 2015 report.
- Fish contamination—there was concern that there is not much data on mercury in fish or other contamination but RIDOH may have the data if someone can analyze it; RIDOH does issue fish advisories and it would be worthwhile to explain what the fish advisories mean, what they are based on, and how people can find more information; include background information on mercury as well including the health risks, etc.
- Dissolved oxygen—focus on projects to reduce nitrogen input to waters including green infrastructure (Green Infrastructure Coalition), Bay water restoration funds and 319 funds, rain gardens, nonpoint source pollution, etc.; some of these may also be tied to flood-reduction measures.
- Stormwater—tie-in the impact of stormwater; stormwater utility districts; and how utilities can impact water quality, flooding, silting in of waters, what towns are required to do now, etc.; could include an overview of the minimum requirements for stormwater utility districts and which towns are successful at this; concern was raised that there is a lot of information out there about stormwater so we need to be sure we are not redundant.
- Additional issues: subsistence fishing, marine debris removal projects, historical evolution of how our decisions for urban water management have led to the situations we are trying to remediate today, highlight what land-trusts are doing to improve urban water quality,
- Case studies—suggestion to base them on the watershed planning areas, there was a recent RIDEM report on Providence-Seekonk and Fall River; we could also tie in the urban areas for the headwaters in MA; Worcester is a great case study because they had to cut down most of its trees because of the Asian Longhorn Beetle infestation and are now redesigning the trees in its town.
- Other general concerns—we should lead the resource we care about, such as renewing the urban stream; is there an event we can dovetail the release with? The Urban Ponds Procession?; need to make a connection with nonurban areas as well to make sure the maximum number of stakeholders are engaged.

Other potential spotlight issues were discussed including an explanation of the new EPA standards through the BEACH Act and how that impacts how many beach closures are reported, and an update on eutrophic ponds and total maximum daily loads. Those issues were generally discussed to be too detailed for Watershed Counts, or not timely.

## **Narragansett Bay Estuary Program State of the Watershed Report**

Tom Borden provided an overview of the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program's initiative to develop a 2015 State of the Watershed report. The Estuary Program is in the beginning stages in the development of a report that will provide details on the status and trends of the environmental health of the greater Narragansett Bay watershed. This document will serve as the update to the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program's 2009 status and trends report and the extensive work on indicator development through Watershed Counts.

The Estuary Program recently formed a Science Advisory Committee which will focus on this project. The first element of this project will be to refine the scope of the report to choose representative indicators and to add missing indicators. Watershed Counts spent years developing indicators for Narragansett Bay and the State of the Watershed will use the history and hard work of the Watershed Counts program as a springboard to develop representative indicators for the entire watershed. Tom offered to meet with groups to discuss the draft indicators and handed out a list of suggested indicators from the scoping document.

### **Next Steps**

The meeting ended with a request for volunteers to assist with the committee to oversee the development of the 2015 Watershed Counts report.