

**Summary of the Watershed Counts Meeting
Monday, December 9, 2013**

9:00 AM - 1:00 PM at Save the Bay in Providence

Attendees:

Molly Allard, Northern RI Conservation District
Veronica Berounsky, Rhode Island Rivers Council
Walter Berry, USEPA Atlantic Ecology Division
Tom Borden, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
Justin Bousquin, USEPA Atlantic Ecology Division
Jim Boyd, RI Coastal Resources Management Council
Mike Cassidy, Blackstone National Heritage Corridor
Peter Coffin, Blackstone River Coalition
Ames Colt, Rhode Island Bays, Rivers, and Watersheds Coordination Team
Kathy Crawley, RI Water Resources Board
Julia Crowley-Parmentier, Bryant University
Walt Galloway, Rhode Island Rivers Council
Greg Gerritt, Environmental Council of Rhode Island
Linda Green, URI Watershed Watch
David, Gregg, Rhode Island Natural History Survey
Paul Gonsalves, Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program
Susan, Gorelick, URI ENRE Graduate Program
Bruce Hooke, B.G. Hooke Consulting
Meg Kerr, Environment Council of Rhode Island Education Fund
Sue Kiernan, RI Department of Environmental Management
Tom Kutcher, Save the Bay
Alicia Lehrer, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Marisa Mazzotta, USEPA Atlantic Ecology Division
Bryan Milstead, USEPA Atlantic Ecology Division
David Murray, Brown University
Mark Nimiroski, RI Department of Environmental Management
Claudette Ojo, USEPA Atlantic Ecology Division
Amie Parris, RI Department of Health
Michelle Peach, Rhode Island Natural History Survey
Peg Pelletier, USEPA Atlantic Ecology Division
Denise Poyer, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association
Nicole Rohr, URI Coastal Institute
Heather Stoffel, URI Graduate School of Oceanography
Judith Swift, URI Coastal Institute
John Torgan, The Nature Conservancy
Tom Uva, Narragansett Bay Commission
Hal Walker, USEPA Atlantic Ecology Division
Jennifer West – Narragansett Bay Research Reserve
Caitlyn Whittle, USEPA Region 1



Welcome and Introductions

Judith Swift welcomed all to the meeting and provided an overview of the recent changes to the coordination team for Watershed Counts. She expressed her appreciation of the extraordinary efforts of Meg Kerr and Q Kellogg for their many years in co-coordinating the program. She then introduced the two new co-coordinators, Nicole Rohr from URI's Coastal Institute and Tom Borden from the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program. The participants (listed above) then introduced themselves and provided a sentence or two on the issues that are important for Watershed Counts (urban fishing, nutrients, stormwater, management strategies, monitoring, need for new format, public involvement, freshwater fishing, wetlands data, lake water quality, public education, cost estimates to remedy pollution sources, climate change, economic indicators, legislative outreach, and volunteers)

Discussion of the tone and target audience for the 2014 Watershed Counts report

The group discussed the various audiences that the report reaches and strategies to reach various audiences. One potential audience is the elected officials; however, the 2013 report did not include a clear set of items for legislative action. The group discussed whether the report should be a report card and should include a tone of advocacy or should be vehicle to educate the general public and provide a summary of the best available information. The Watershed Counts partners include a broad array of groups and many of the members may not be able to participate in a process which is seen as lobbying for specific legislative action. The information gathered through the Watershed Counts report may certainly be used by advocacy organizations and various other groups that actively made recommendations to legislative bodies.

There was a consensus that the strength of the Watershed Counts report and the focus for the 2014 report should be to take the most up to date information and data and distill the available science into a report that clearly presents the facts to the general public. The 2014 report should strive to engage the public in issues relating to the health of Narragansett Bay and its watershed. There is a need for an Executive Summary to provide a concise summary of the findings. There is a need to keep the emphasis on visual communication aides such as posters and maps. There is a need to focus on specific stories using photos to show successful projects.

Discussion of the indicators for the 2014 Watershed Counts report

The groups discussed the fact that certain indicators in the report do not change year to year. Some indicators such as land use, open space, and impervious cover (as examples) do not change until updated land use coverage is developed. Certain other indicators do change year to year, such as beach closures. As another example, it was discussed that there are minimal changes between the 2010 and 2012 versions of the integrated water quality reports but that the 2014 integrated report would likely include numerous updates. The following provides a brief summary of the issues identified for specific indicators:

Open Space – need to reach out to Rupert Friday of the Rhode Island Land Trust Council and others to see if there are updated data.

Land Use and Impervious Cover – unlikely to have any updated information but need to confirm. Need to coordinate between Massachusetts and Rhode Island data sets on impervious cover.

Marine Water Quality – there is updated information on dissolved oxygen levels and nitrogen loading that can be reported.

Invasive Species – while there is ongoing work to update data on invasive species issues, there will not be data to report for 2014. There was a discussion of the need to separate freshwater issues and marine issues to provide a clear framework for the report.

Fresh Water Quality – While there are limited changes between the 2010 integrated report and the 2012 integrated report, the maps can be easily updated to show the 2012 data. There is additional data compiled through watershed watch efforts that could be highlighted in media stories.

Fresh Water Flow – There really is no available metric that presently exists. While there are numerous approaches there is a need to develop a metric to measure flow conditions. It was agreed that this would have to be deferred to 2015.

Natural Resource Economics – This indicator is also under development. While there are various issues that could be reported – economic data on shellfishing, beach closures, fishing licenses, property values, etc. – there is a need for additional work on this topic before it can be included in the report.

Climate Change – This issue has implications for many indicators and, rather than be listed as a specific indicator, the issue should be incorporated into specific issues. For example, the issue of salt marsh migration should specifically address sea level rise implications.

Bay and Ocean Beaches – There is updated information on this topic and there are many specific stories that can be told (Middletown and Warwick as examples). There is a need to report information from Massachusetts and Rhode Island for both saltwater and freshwater bathing areas. Similar suggestions were made to keep distinct the freshwater issues.

Discussion of a “spotlight issue” for the 2014 Watershed Counts report

A proposal was made to alter the focus of the 2014 report. While the report can provide a broad overview of Narragansett Bay and its watershed using the various indicators developed to date, the 2014 report should shine a “spotlight” on a particular indicator. This will allow the report to both give an overview of the various watershed indicators and give adequate space for a focused and in depth analysis of the “spotlight” indicator. Because the data for each indicator does not always change from year to year, the report can focus on particular indicators. The *Status and Trends Report* from the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program is anticipated to be initiated in 2014 and completed every five years to track specific indicators. The Watershed Counts report can continue to be issued each year with a spotlight on relevant and timely indicators where there is updated information.

There was consensus to focus a “spotlight” on the Bay and Ocean Beaches. A focus on beach water quality will provide room for an analysis of beach closures, progress made to date with various capital improvement projects, ongoing problem areas, importance of stormwater and green infrastructure improvements, and beach monitoring needs, as well as the interwoven aspect of climate change as appropriate. The focus on a “spotlight” issue for the 2014 report will provide adequate time to coordinate the 2015 report and expand it to include additional data from Massachusetts to gain a full picture of the Narragansett Bay watershed. There was a discussion of the need to include freshwater beaches in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, to use photos to tell specific stories where municipal action and other capital improvements improved beach water quality and to tell other stories and case studies where action is needed. A workgroup will be formed to initiate the spotlight focus on beach water quality.