



Watershed Counts

A program co-coordinated by the Coastal Institute at the University of Rhode Island and the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
<http://www.watershedcounts.org/>

MEDIA RELEASE

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Contact: Tom Borden 609-955-0395 / tom.borden@nbep.org

Nicole Rohr 401-225-4909 / nrohr@uri.edu

Protecting the Headwaters of Narragansett Bay

Focus of the 2016 *Watershed Counts* Report

*A Clean Narragansett Bay Requires Headwater Protection to Succeed,
Coordination by Both States is Essential as Headwaters Flow from Stream to Bay*

The health of Narragansett Bay is influenced by the freshwater rivers that flow into it, and depends on the protection of headwater streams in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. These small streams combine to form rivers, which then feed the bay with essential freshwater flow and they also serve as the freeways for fish to spawn upstream. These important connections between freshwater streams, the brackish bay, and the salty ocean, along with the people who take action to protect the connections, are the main messages from the 6th annual *Watershed Counts* report, which each year evaluates the land and water resources of the Narragansett Bay region, and highlights the work being done to protect and restore the bi-state Narragansett Bay watershed.

"Protection of our waters does not occur spontaneously, it takes clear vision, hard work, and long-term dedication by individuals, communities, organizations, and agencies to initiate change to improve environmental health," said Nicole Rohr, assistant director of the Coastal Institute at the University of Rhode Island. "But when these changes are effective, as shown in our case study on Providence's Olneyville neighborhood, the results improve the environment and strengthen communities."

The 2016 *Watershed Counts Report* cites how dedicated efforts at four specific locations achieved benefits for people and the environment from land to sea: 1) individuals who take action make small but important differences; 2) communities that work together across municipal boundaries protect their drinking water and send clean water down to the bay; 3) organizations that work at a watershed scale help to protect the connections between the headwaters and the bay; and 4) state and federal agencies make commitments and establish programs dedicated to the ongoing protection and preservation of vital and valued lands and water.

"Narragansett Bay and our local waterways are the heartbeat of Rhode Island," said Janet Coit, director of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. "Having clean bays and rivers is vital to our state, our traditions, our environment, and our families. And I am proud of the sustained effort our team and many partners have put in to ensure the vibrancy of our waters. Kudos to all involved in the compilation of this report and the important work to preserve Rhode Island's most precious natural resources."

Two-thirds of the Narragansett Bay watershed lies in Massachusetts, and what takes place there inevitably has an impact on Narragansett Bay as its rivers and streams eventually flow into the Bay. As one example of people and actions that protect streams, the 2016 *Watershed Counts Report* highlights five Canoe River municipalities in Massachusetts that are coordinating to protect shared drinking water supplies.

“In the Taunton River and upper Blackstone River watersheds in Massachusetts, our environmental agencies and partners are protecting headwater streams through dam removals and stream flow protection to provide for healthier aquatic habitats,” said Doug Fine, assistant commissioner for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection’s Bureau of Water Resources.

“In the Riverside Park area in Providence’s Olneyville neighborhood, we formed a partnership to improve the areas along the Woonasquatucket River to benefit both the environment and the community,” said Dean Isabella, captain in the Providence Police Department. “Cleaning up the environment and creating enjoyable, safe recreation areas resulted in a sense of accomplishment and pride that has reverberated throughout the community.”

The *Watershed Counts Report* points out that individual headwater streams are small, but they collectively make up over 80 percent of the stream length in the Narragansett Bay watershed. They also tend to be sensitive environments that can be susceptible to land-use impacts, such as development and agriculture. Development along a headwater stream results in runoff directly into the waterbody, while agriculture along a waterway can increase the amount of fertilizer and nutrients that enters the stream. When rainwater and runoff are allowed to soak into natural areas, the soil and plant root systems provide two major benefits: 1) many contaminants such as excess nitrogen, phosphorous, and sediments are filtered out, and 2) the water flow slows down before it enters the stream.

“Collaboration between hands-on partners at the local level and programs at the state and federal levels results in a system of integrated watershed management that benefits everyone,” said Tom Borden, program director of the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program. “This collaboration between grassroots groups, towns, and governmental agencies is evident in the Taunton River, which obtained the highly sought federal designation of the national Wild and Scenic River program.”

“Along the Blackstone River, there’s an incredibly strong web of partnerships, over 60 partners, which are engaged and connected because the heritage corridor had already been here for 30 years,” said Meghan Kish, superintendent of the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park. “It is exciting, there is a new sense of pride in Blackstone River Valley with the designation of a new national park.”

Watershed Counts is a coalition of over 60 non-profit entities, government agencies, academic institutions, and other organizations who work together to report regularly on the land and water resources of the Narragansett Bay region. The annual *Watershed Counts Report* highlights the important work that many partners do every day to protect and restore the Narragansett Bay watershed. It is co-coordinated by the Coastal Institute at URI and the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program.

For downloadable copies of the *Narragansett Bay Watershed Counts 2016 Report*, past reports, and further information, go to www.watershedcounts.org.

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