

Neponset River Watershed Association

Strategic Plan

2006 – 2011

*organize ... inform ... advocate ... collaborate ... raise ... facilitate ... support ... assist ... gather
analyze ... publish ... maintain ... print ... present ... meet ... conduct ... protect ... restore
identify ... engage ... ensure ... harness ... partner ... serve ... document ... prioritize ... assess
develop ... coordinate ... build ... improve ... involve ... market ... establish ... invest ... foster*

Table of Contents

I. Mission.....	1
II. History and Profile.....	3
A. Water Quality and, Water Quantity	3
B. Land Use and Habitat.....	3
C. Access and Recreation	4
D. Public Education and Outreach.....	4
III. Programs and Activities.....	5
A. Water Quality and Water Quantity	5
B. Land Use, Habitat and Watershed Health.....	6
C. Access and Recreation	7
D. Public Education and Outreach.....	8
IV. Operations and Management	9
A. Management.....	9
B. Staffing.....	9
C. Facilities.....	10
D. Development: Membership.....	10
E. Development: Fundraising.....	11
F. Development: Grants and Contracts	11
G. Volunteers.....	12
V. Neponset River Land Holding Association	13
A. Mission.....	13
B. Background	13
C. Willett Pond	14

I. Mission

The Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA) works to protect and restore the Neponset River, its tributaries and surrounding watershed lands for the benefit of present and future generations.

NepRWA accomplishes this mission through:

- Environmental monitoring, science, research and planning;
- Outreach and education to the general public and targeted audiences;
- Demonstration projects that highlight new and existing best practices;
- Political action at the local, state and federal levels;
- On the ground cleanup, restoration, and preservation projects; and
- Advocacy and, when necessary, litigation.

NepRWA always strives to use a collaborative approach to carry out its mission but will employ legal action or other non-collaborative methods when necessary.

II. History and Profile

The Neponset River Watershed Association, Inc. (NepRWA) was organized in 1967 under the name “Neponset Conservation Association” by a group of citizens who were concerned about the impact of the Southwest Corridor project, which would have continued Route 95 northward from Route 128 into Boston. When Governor Sargent agreed to cancel the Southwest Corridor project in the early 1970’s, the Neponset Conservation Association turned its attention to a broad array of wastewater, water, open space and transportation issues facing the watershed. In 1985, the Association’s name was changed to the Neponset River Watershed Association to better reflect the breadth of its new mission and the organization’s commitment to an integrated, watershed-based approach to resource management.

Today, NepRWA seeks to fulfill its mission through a variety of programs and activities. The following four sections provide a brief summary of NepRWA’s past successes, current activities, and future programs.

A. *Water Quality and Water Quantity*

NepRWA’s long-standing water quality and water quantity programs focus on protecting and restoring the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of the Neponset River and its tributaries. Over the years, these programs have included organizing volunteers to collect water quality samples, informing the public and government officials about the condition of the Neponset River, recommending policies and implementation measures needed to restore waterways, working with government agencies and private parties to remediate sources of water pollution, advocating for the maintenance and/or restoration of adequate in-stream water levels, and raising awareness about the need and opportunity to conserve water.

B. *Habitat and Watershed Health*

NepRWA offers activities to help support sound land use and protect or restore natural areas and habitats in the watershed. These activities have included working to facilitate the acquisition of Forbes Woods by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the donation of an adjoining conservation restriction to the Milton Land Trust, advocating for the removal of dams and restoration of anadromous fisheries on the Neponset River, advocating for the daylighting of nearly ½ mile of culverted river at the former Foxboro Stadium, and the ongoing management of Willett Pond in Walpole via the Neponset River Landholding Association. NepRWA’s future strategic direction will include a dam inventory project, a focus on non-point sources of pollution, and a more active program of wetland restoration.

C. Access and Recreation

To increase people's appreciation of this valuable resource, NepRWA must improve public access to waterways and open up watershed lands for appropriate public recreational use. Past activities have included working with landowners and government agencies to create continuous recreational pathways along the shoreline in Quincy and Dorchester, facilitating the acquisition of key passive recreation parcels such as the Canton Airport and Signal Hill, and advocacy for expanded recreational access as a benefit of development and redevelopment projects.

D. Public Education and Outreach

No natural resource can be meaningfully protected unless it has a knowledgeable and actively engaged constituency working on its behalf. NepRWA's long-standing commitment to gathering and analyzing water quality and water quantity data provides the communities it serves with a critical resource: a sound and unbiased clearinghouse of scientific information capable of raising people's awareness and understanding of the watershed, its value, and its needs. NepRWA engages in a variety of activities that promote this understanding, including publishing the NepRWA newsletter, maintaining the NepRWA website (www.neponset.org), publishing informational brochures about river topics, making presentations to civic groups and students, working with the media to publicize watershed issues, and conducting educational programs for young people, the general public and municipal staff.

III. Programs and Activities

NepRWA undertakes a number of programs and activities to foster and support its mission. These programs and activities are organized into four broad program areas, including (A) water quality and water quantity, (B) land use and habitat, (C) access and recreation, and (D) public education and outreach. Each program area has its own specific goals, strategies and tasks.

A. *Water Quality and Water Quantity*

Goal

Protect and restore the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of the Neponset River and its tributaries by ensuring:

- Clean water for people and wildlife, and
- Adequate flow for aquatic habitat and human recreation.

Strategies

- Use science to develop a clear understanding of watershed health and the causes of impairment.
- Identify problems and prioritize solutions at a sub-watershed level in recognition of the fact that each tributary is unique.
- Ensure that proposals impacting the watershed will result in a net improvement of water quality and water quantity.
- Facilitate development and implementation of remediation and conservation projects in conjunction with strategic partners.
- Advocate for the adoption of stronger water quality and water conservation rules at all levels of government.
- Harness the redevelopment process as an important mechanism to correct existing water quality and hydrologic problems.
- Partner with municipalities to encourage positive changes to water resource protection policies and practices.
- Implement and publicize demonstration projects that showcase structural and non-structural best management practices.
- See the Neponset River Watershed 2004 – 2009 Action Plan for a complete list of tasks that help direct NepRWA’s water quality and water quantity efforts.

B. Habitat and Watershed Health

Goal

Protect and restore aquatic, wetland and upland habitats to sustain healthy wildlife populations and ensure a high quality of life for area residents.

Strategies

- Support and/or lead design and implementation efforts to restore stream segments and wetlands degraded by dredging, filling, channeling, damming, invasive species and contaminated sediments.
- Proactively identify and advocate for the permanent protection of healthy ecosystems through various means including regulation and direct conservation ownership.
- Serve as a conduit to maximize the investment of public and private grant funds into the restoration of the Neponset Watershed.

Tasks

1. Riverine Habitat

a. Cold Water Fisheries

- Document existing cold water fisheries and obtain regulatory recognition for these important resources.
- Prioritize these “healthiest streams for water quality, water conservation, habitat protection and habitat restoration efforts.

b. Sediment Assessment and Remediation

- Assess the extent and severity of contaminated sediments in the watershed and develop an Action Plan for dealing with them.
- Remediate contaminated sediments and abate eutrophication in the Neponset Reservoir.
- Remediate severe PCB contaminated sediments in the lower Neponset River.

c. Shoreline Restoration

- Inventory the riparian shoreline buffers, stream channels, and culverts for restoration opportunities.
- Develop programs to educate stream and wetland abutters about appropriate land maintenance near resource areas.

2. Wetlands Restoration

- Implement to the maximum extent feasible Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA's) Neponset Wetlands Restoration Plan using available grant funds.
- Implement Neponset Salt Marsh Restoration Project immediately to avoid loss of federal funding.
- Assess extent of invasive terrestrial and aquatic species and develop an Action Strategy.
- Coordinate volunteers to annually pull up water chestnuts in Ellis Pond (Norwood) and Clarks Pond (Walpole) and other affected areas.

3. Dam Assessment, Remediation and/or Removal

- Support the development and implementation of a plan to remove the Tileston & Hollingsworth (T&H) and Baker Dams from the lower Neponset River and remediate contaminated sediments.
- Conduct ecological risk assessments of removing the other one hundred or so dams in the watershed and/or creating fish passages.

4. Open Space Acquisition

- Inventory intact habitats for regulatory protection or acquisition.

C. Access and Recreation

Goal

Encourage the responsible public use and enjoyment of the Neponset River and its tributaries by promoting access to and events about this valuable resource.

Strategies

- Work with the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), local citizens groups, and river enthusiasts to develop access points and trail systems.
- Develop a new open space needs and opportunities plan for the watershed as a whole.

Tasks

1. Boat and Canoe Ramps

- Create a public boat ramp in the Neponset Estuary.
- Improve canoe launch at Neponset St. in Canton.

2. Trails and Walkways

- Develop a conceptual plan for a riparian trail system along the Neponset River above Paul's Bridge.
- Complete Phase II for the Neponset River Reservation Master Plan [Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)].
- Implement NepRWA's conceptual plan for Quincy's RiverWalk and DCR's Master Plan for Squantum Point.

D. *Public Education and Outreach*

Goal

Build an active and informed constituency that will ensure the continued protection and restoration of the watershed for years to come.

Strategies and Tasks

- **Public Events:** Organize a series of events throughout the watershed in order to have a visible presence in the watershed communities.
- **Media Cultivation:** Use the various media outlets as a low cost method to educate and activate a large population of watershed citizens.
- **Membership Cultivation:** Increase NepRWA's outreach efforts on maintaining its current membership base.
- **Public Education:** Market NepRWA's public education services to watershed municipalities who are required under Phase II Stormwater regulations to implement public education campaigns.
- **K-12 Education:** Develop a K-12 Watershed Literacy program to deliver existing curricula materials, and train volunteers and local teachers to promote throughout our schools and communities.
- **Legislative Advocacy:** Involve NepRWA's members and watershed citizens in advocating for positive environmental legislation and adequate environmental budgets.
- **Other Strategies:** Develop and evaluate other strategies for educating the public about watershed issues.

IV. Operations and Management

NepRWA's operations and management are the Association's infrastructure for carrying out its mission. Specifically, Section IV addresses four broad categories, including (A) Management, (B) Staffing, (C) Facilities, (D) Development and (E) Volunteers. Each category has specific goals and tasks designed to support NepRWA's mission.

A. Management

Goal

Establish effective structures and systems for developing a shared vision for the organization, providing program oversight, internal communication, decision making, priority setting, and program evaluation.

Strategies and Tasks

- Establish a program committee comprised of staff and board to oversee the development and monitoring of annual work plans needed to implement the strategic plan.
- Foster strong relationships between board and staff by having staff participate in Board Meetings and Committees and other events designed to encourage the exchange of thoughts and ideas.
- Invest in appropriate software and other tools to streamline the project management, budgeting, and accounting processes at the staff supervisor and Board levels while enhancing donor accountability.

B. Staffing

Goal

Attract and retain energetic, creative, and experienced professionals to assure programmatic continuity and organizational technical expertise.

Strategies and Tasks

- Hire an experienced Development Director to increase individual and corporate support.
- Subject to successful program funding, recruit staff in the areas of natural resource management and environmental education.

- Foster a flexible and rewarding work environment, and provide a level of compensation comparable to other regional watershed associations.
- Ensure appropriate internal management and communication amongst staff, through regular staff meetings, one-on-one meetings and annual performance evaluations consistent with best business practices.
- Assign staff to projects and programs that are personally challenging but achievable to encourage strong performance and help build new skills.
- Provide staff training and support in the area of project budgeting and management.
- Subject to available funding, provide opportunities for staff to pursue ongoing education opportunities in technical and managerial subjects through workshops, conferences, and classes.

C. *Facilities*

Goal

Provide a welcoming, efficient, and professional office environment with appropriate technology and furnishings to support high staff productivity.

Strategies and Tasks

- Establish a modest capital budgeting process to support the acquisition of equipment and technology improvements that will maintain and enhance productivity.
- Include technology upgrades and office overhead expenses in budgets for grants and donations.
- Annual budget to include line item for facility improvements to address list of desired office technology and supplies.

D. *Development: Membership*

Goal

Increase individual and corporate membership by 15% annually over the next five years.

Strategies and Tasks

- Establish a standing membership/fundraising committee, including the Development Director and 3-4 Board members. Subdivide this group

into multiple standing committees and/or work groups as increased workload demands.

- Develop strategies to increase member engagement, volunteerism and program/event participation.

E. Development: Fundraising

Goal

Expand unrestricted revenue sources so that NepRWA's "core functions" of outreach, advocacy, monitoring and administration would continue even if all restricted grants were eliminated. This translates into at least 2.5 full time equivalents or approximately \$188,000.

Strategies and Tasks

- Develop fundraising program that is implemented by the Board and other volunteers with staff support and that provides reliable unrestricted funding through donations, and gifts to support NepRWA's core operations.
- Establish a standing membership/fundraising committee, including the Development Director and 3-4 board members. Subdivide this group into multiple standing committees and/or work groups as increased workload demands.
- Prioritize and staff fundraising activities that support and sustain NepRWA's core programs and activities irrespective of securing grants and awards for particular projects.
- Create a new fundraising event or events to replace Fall Fest with an improved cost-revenue relationship.

F. Development: Grants and Contracts

Goal

Obtain and use restricted foundation, corporate, and government funding to expand the reach and impact of NepRWA's project work beyond its core programs and activities.

Strategies and Tasks

- Focus a significant portion of the Executive Director's time and a more modest portion of program staff time on grant writing activities.

- Seek grant opportunities that conform to NepRWA’s strategic vision and program priorities.
- Ensure that grant proposal budgets reflect the true cost of the program including staff time and overhead.
- Establish strong project management systems to support accurate project budgeting and timely completion of projects within budget parameters.

G. Volunteers

Goal

Recruit a broad base of volunteers to apply their skills and energies to the realization of NepRWA’s mission by serving as board members, committee members, community liaisons and a workforce for the Association.

Strategies and Tasks

- Maintain a Board of 12-15 that is broadly representative of the entire watershed and where every member is fully engaged.
- Review the 1994 Statement of Board Member and staff responsibilities and update as needed.
- Recruit motivated Board members with skills in areas such as non-profit finance, land-use planning, and marketing.
- Recruit Board members capable of bringing financial resources to the organization.
- Recruit Board Members capable of bringing strong interpersonal networks to the organization.
- Discontinue the current Honorary Board and establish in its place an Advisory Board to broaden community support.
- Develop strategies to increase general membership and volunteer participation.

V. Neponset River Land Holding Assn.

Section V explains the Neponset River Land Holding Association and its relationship to NepRWA and NepRWA's overall mission.

A. *Mission*

The mission of the Neponset River Land Holding Association (NRLHA) is to own and manage land on behalf of the Neponset River Watershed Association, thereby furthering the Watershed Association's mission of environmental protection and restoration.

More specifically, the NRLHA will work to protect and enhance the ecological, recreational, and aesthetic value of Willett and Pettee's ponds, while helping to buffer the impacts of seasonal low stream flows on the Neponset River.

B. *Background*

Willett Pond and Pettee's Pond (referred to hereafter as "Willett Pond" or "the Ponds") are owned by the Neponset River Land Holding Association or "NRLHA," a nonprofit subsidiary of the Neponset River Watershed Association or "NepRWA."

The property owned by NRLHA includes an area of approximately 240 acres located in the towns of Walpole Westwood and Norwood. The property includes the land beneath the water of the two Ponds, as well as a strip of dry land around the shoreline. The Ponds are entirely artificial, having been created in 1913 primarily as an industrial water source to support the Winslow Brothers and Smith tannery, now known as the Norwood Commerce Center. The Ponds were established by the construction of a 900-foot long dam and 1900-foot long dike, both largely owned by the NRLHA.

The Ponds are fed by a 5.5 square mile watershed, which is relatively lightly developed and surrounded by approximately 100 single-family homes, the owners of which have significantly altered NRLHA property along the shore over the years.

The Ponds have good water quality and are representative of a healthy warm-water aquatic community—all industrial activity having been located downstream of the Ponds. The Ponds are significant recreational amenities, though their use is currently limited to immediate abutters. Because of the substantial storage volume of the Ponds, NRLHA has the ability to significantly influence downstream water levels.

The NRLHA issues licenses to abutters allowing them to utilize the Ponds and the NRLHA owned shoreline for recreational purposes. In exchange for pond use privileges the licensees pay annual license fees (\$290 base fee and optional \$145 boat fee as of 2005), which fund the activities of the NRLHA. The NRLHA has no employees and instead, hires NepRWA to operate the Ponds. Operations have included monitoring the shoreline for unauthorized alterations and taking enforcement actions as needed, maintaining/implementing a modest water quality monitoring program, implementing maintenance activities on the dam and dike, and more recently, an running educational program designed to encourage abutters to re-naturalize sections of the shoreline.

C. Willett Pond

Goals

1. Maximize long-term water quality and the health of the aquatic community.
2. Maximize habitat and aesthetic values along the shoreline
3. Minimize long-term capital costs of dam repair
4. Partially mitigate the impact of low flows on the Neponset River
5. Maximize recreational benefits of the Ponds without compromising their ecology

Strategies and Tasks

1. If NRLHA is to continue owning the Ponds, it must proactively manage them as environmental resources. This in turn requires establishing an adequate level of staffing and project activity, which will, in turn, require significant increases in licensing fees. If it is not possible to raise sufficient fees to manage the Ponds properly, NRLHA should not own the Ponds.
2. In order to support Goal 1, the NRLHA should establish an active program of in-lake and watershed monitoring, as needed to support the identification and remediation of all water quality threats through implementation of appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs). Threats of particular concern include nutrient loading, bacterial pollution, invasive aquatic species and to a lesser degree sedimentation. Funds for the monitoring program must by in large be derived from license fees, however some grant funds may be available to implement BMPs.
3. To support Goal 2, the NRLHA must conduct a program of permitting for shoreline alterations, combined with regular shoreline inspections and enforcement actions as needed.
4. To fully realize Goal 2, the NRLHA must develop a series of shoreline maintenance and restoration design guidelines, and establish incentives for compliance with those guidelines. Initially this shall take the form or

educational outreach activities, financial incentives and permitting incentives, with compliance becoming mandatory over time.

5. In order to realize Goal 3, the NRLHA shall take a proactive stance toward incremental and preventive maintenance at the dam and dike, and establish a program of regular engineering inspections as required by state law.
6. To achieve Goal 4, the NRLHA must develop a comprehensive water level management protocol for Willett Pond that appropriately balances in-lake and downstream water needs during various seasons. This protocol should be based on a water balance for the pond, and on coordination with other impoundment managers.