



2001

Annual Report

R h o d e I s l a n d R i v e r s C o u n c i l

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Special Thanks to the Rhode Island Legislature for Supporting our Watershed Councils



THE RHODE ISLAND RIVERS COUNCIL

Department of Administration

One Capitol Hill

Providence, Rhode Island 02908

T: 401-222-2093

F: 401-222-2083

watershed 2001

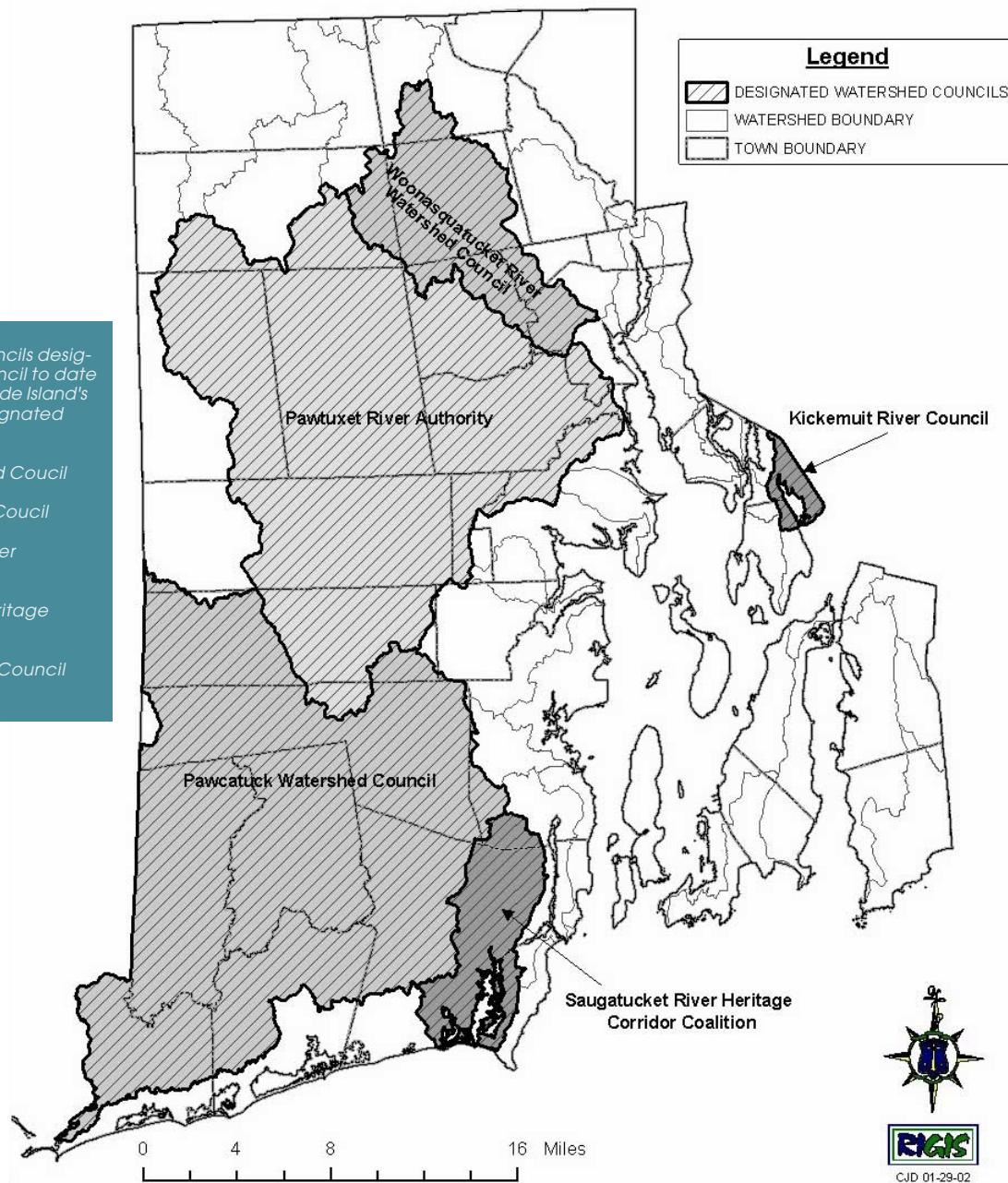


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RHODE ISLAND WATERSHEDS AND DESIGNATED WATERSHED COUNCILS

The five Watershed Councils designated by the Rivers Council to date encompass much of Rhode Island's total land area. The designated watershed councils are:

- Pawcatuck Watershed Council
- Pawtuxet Watershed Council
- Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
- Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition
- Kickemuit Watershed Council



2001 who we are



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The Rhode Island Rivers Council was established by the state legislature in 1991. It is part of the Statewide Planning Program within the Department of Administration. The Council consists of 15 members who serve three-year terms and are appointed by the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Senate Majority Leader. Members represent such state agencies as the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), as well as the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns.

PURPOSE

The state has established the goals of preserving its natural, cultural, and historic resources and features; protecting opportunities for the recreational use of rivers; encouraging the creation of greenways; and strengthening comprehensive and regional planning for rivers, water quality, and land use. To further these goals, the Rivers Council is charged with coordinating, overseeing, and reviewing efforts to improve and preserve the quality of rivers and to develop plans to increase the use of river areas throughout the state.

The state legislature created the Rivers Council to consolidate the state's approach to implementing river policies and plans that impact the environmental, cultural and economic qualities of river areas; to recognize and empower local watershed councils; and to foster public involvement in river planning and decision-making processes.

The state legislature also declared that many of Rhode Island's rivers "possess outstanding aesthetic and recreational value" and that "the preservation of these rivers and their immediate environment together with their significant recre-



Photo by Sue Baker

Pawtuxet River Authority Chairman George de Tarnowsky, right, accepts watershed council designation from former Rivers Council Chair Mike Cassidy. Standing at left are Rivers Council Chair Meg Kerr and Pawtuxet River Authority Executive Director, Guy Lefebvre.

ational, natural and cultural value is hereby declared to be a public policy. It shall be the policy of the State of Rhode Island to protect these values and to practice sound conservation policies and practices relative thereto."

POWERS, DUTIES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Rivers Council is not a regulatory body, but a planning and coordination board charged with developing a Rhode Island State Rivers Policy and Classification Plan, and advising decision makers on river improvement and protection measures. The Rivers Council promotes appropriate river use, fosters public involvement in river planning and decision-making and designates watershed councils as local stewards of the state's rivers and advocates of the Rhode Island Rivers Policy and Classification Plan.

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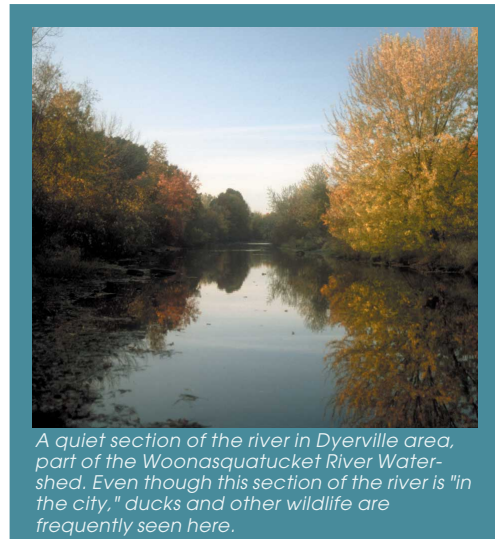
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After five years of effort and extensive public involvement, including public workshops and meetings with watershed representatives, the Rhode Island Rivers Council created the Rhode Island Rivers Policy and Classification Plan. The Rivers' Plan was adopted in 1998 by the State Planning Council as an element of the State Guide Plan.

The Rivers Plan is a guide for action to protect and enhance the quality and the use of Rhode Island's fresh water bodies. It integrates water quality and land use planning with activities such as recreation and habitat preservation. The Plan's goals are to protect drinking water and pristine rivers, encourage recreational uses of rivers, foster the creation of greenways, and provide for river clean-ups.

In 1998, the Rivers Council began the process of recognizing watershed councils, thereby creating a new management structure for ensuring the implementation of state rivers policies. By organizing local river protection groups into a network of watershed councils, the state gains an effective implementation method, and communities achieve new access to government resources.

The Rhode Island Rivers Council will recognize one local watershed council for each Rhode Island watershed. Funding



to support designated councils was included in the state's FY 2002 budget. The watershed councils recognized to date are:

- Pawtuxet River Watershed Council
- Kickemuit River Council
- Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
- Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition
- Pawcatuck Watershed Council.

highlights



2001 council members Annual Report

ACCORDING TO RIGL 46-28-5, THE COUNCIL SHALL CONSIST OF 15 MEMBERS

MEMBER	APOINTED BY	TERM EXPIRES
Elizabeth Gowell	Governor	July 1, 2002
Steven Kearns	Governor	July 1, 2003
Jane Sherman	Governor	July 1, 2004
Tricia Jedele	Lieutenant Governor	July 1, 2002
Dale Grogan	Lieutenant Governor	July 1, 2003
Meg Kerr (Chair)	Lieutenant Governor	July 1, 2004
Rep. Eileen Naughton	Speaker of the House	July 1, 2003
Rep. Scott Rabideau	Speaker of the House	July 1, 2003
Vacant	Speaker of the House	July 1, 2003
Daniel Varin	Majority Leader of the Senate	July 1, 2003
Senator Elizabeth Roberts	Majority Leader of the Senate	July 1, 2003
Scott Millar (Vice Chair)	Department of Environmental Management	no term
Kevin Cute	Coastal Resources Management Council	no term
Kevin Nelson	Department of Administration	no term
Michael Cassidy (Former Chair)	League of Cities and Towns	no term

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accomplishments Annual Report



COMPLETE REPORTS FROM EACH COUNCIL ARE AVAILABLE,
CONTACT MEG KERR AT 874-6522 OR MKERR@GSO.URI.EDU.

EMPOWERING LOCAL WATERSHED COUNCILS

- A \$52,500 legislative grant resulted in \$10,000 grants to each of the five watershed councils and \$2,500 to support workshops for local watershed councils. Councils have until September 30, 2002 to use the funds.

- Designation of new watershed councils. In June 2001, the Rivers Council formally designated the Pawtuxet, Kickemuit and Woonasquatucket River Watershed Councils. This brought the number of designated councils to five, including the previously designated Saugatucket and Wood-Pawcatuck Councils.

- The Rivers Council participated in the state Watershed Partnership. The Rhode Island Watershed Partnership consists of federal, state, local, and nonprofit organizations cooperating to protect, preserve, and restore the state's environment on a watershed basis.

STRENGTHENING THE RIVERS COUNCIL

- Two new Council appointments leave only one vacant council position to be appointed by Representative John Harwood, Speaker of the House.

- The Rivers Council received an advisory opinion from Attorney General Sheldon Whitehouse (5-8-01) clarifying the authority of designated watershed councils and the capacity building role of the Rivers Council. The Attorney General found that watershed councils have standing to give testimony in administrative proceedings "impacting on rivers and water quality." However, the determination as to whether a proceeding has an "impact

on rivers and water quality" belongs to the body conducting the proceeding. DEM's decision to provide notice to watershed councils was spurred in part by this decision.

The Attorney General found that the Rivers Council's powers are primarily as advisor and educator. As advisor, the Council has power to "make findings and recommendations to state agencies and political subdivisions by participating in administrative proceedings and by reporting to the governor regarding disputes and conflicts on river issues." The letter states that this wording implies at a minimum, an obligation on the part of the state agencies and political subdivisions to consider those findings and recommendations when making final decisions about rivers or river planning. The council also has capacity building powers in designating local watershed councils and providing grants to the councils.

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S AUGATUCKET RIVER HERITAGE CORRIDOR COALITION

<http://www.saugatucket.org>

The Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition (SRHCC) is a volunteer 501(c)(3) organization that was established in 1994 to protect and promote the Saugatucket River and its watershed. SRHCC became a designated watershed council in 2000. Activities for 2001 included:

- **Education.** SRHCC hosted a community meeting to discuss the findings of DEM's water quality study (TMDL). June 2001 Rivers Day events included river cleanups and a downtown block party with fires in the river. These successful "Saugatucket River Lights" were continued through the summer, bringing more residents and tourists to the river.
- **Environmental Protection.** SRHCC sponsored five river and greenway cleanups, supported the progressive wastewater ordinance recently passed in South Kingstown, and worked with local land trusts to prioritize lands in the watershed for protection.
- **Recreation.** SRHCC continued to focus on construction of the Saugatucket River Pedestrian Walkway, scheduled to begin construction in 2002.
- **Historic Preservation.** Efforts to preserve the late 1700s farmhouse "Stepping Stones" were unsuccessful, and the house was demolished in December 2001.
- **Economic Development.** SRHCC continued to pursue its vision of promoting the environment and heritage of the river for economic revitalization with funding from the Rhode Island Foundation targeted at designing "Main Street East" along Tower Hill Road.

KICKEMUIT RIVER COUNCIL

The Kickemuit River Council is a

501(c)(3) organization that incorporated in 1973 to protect the Kickemuit River. The Kickemuit River Council was designated by the Rivers Council in 2001. Activities for 2001 included:

- **Education.** Supports the Town of Bristol in the acquisition of a pump-out boat for use in the Kickemuit River and encourages boaters to use the facility. Submitted letters to the editor (*Warren Times, Bristol Phoenix, Providence Journal*) about issues related to the River. Wrote to Warren about zoning violations on land abutting the Kickemuit.
- **Environmental Protection.** Attended supportive sewer commission meetings in Warren to encourage and thank the town for addressing storm drain sources of fecal coliform. Helped the Town of Warren obtain grants to address storm drain pollution and obtained letters of support for the grants. Approached Warren to improve the Harris Avenue right-of-way to the river.
- **Recreation.** Advocated to the Coastal Resources Management Council for continued shoreline access and walkability as docks proliferate along the river.

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WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

<http://www.woonasquatucket.org>

The Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council (WRWC) was established in 1999. The WRWC was incorporated and became a 501(c)(3) organization in 2001. Also during 2000 - 2001, the Council hired a full-time executive director and moved to a new office in a historic mill building along the Woonasquatucket River. The WRWC was designated a watershed council by the Rivers Council in 2001. Activities for 2001 included:

- **Education.** Completed a "watershed asset map" that highlights sites of historic, cultural, and natural significance as identified by local residents. Developed watershed road signs for posting at watershed boundaries in the six communities. Created a web site for the organization.
- **Environmental Protection.** Worked with local, state, and federal Rhode Island Watershed Partnership members to develop a Watershed Action Plan for the Woonasquatucket. Worked with state agencies to develop inventories of shoreline buffer and wetland restoration opportunities and projects. Secured funding for two riparian buffer restoration projects.
- **Recreation.** Conducted watershed community activities including cleanups, canoe rides, and planting projects with children.
- **Economic Development.** Conducted a "River Revue" to celebrate the artistic, economic, and cultural vitality of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed.
- **Quarterly Meetings.** Established quarterly meetings with town planners in the watershed.



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Canoeing on the River at Donigian Park, part of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed

PAWCATUCK WATERSHED COUNCIL

<http://www.wpwa.org>

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) is a 501(c)(3) conservation organization that formed in 1983. WPWA is governed by a board of trustees, and employs a full-time executive director and a full-time program director as well as one or two part-time summer interns. The Rivers Council designated the WPWA as the Pawcatuck Watershed Council (PWC) in 1999. PWC's activities for 2001 include:

- **Education.** PWC created a website, which contains the full version of the Pawcatuck Watershed Action Plan developed with the Rhode Island Watershed partnership. PWC conducted presentations to municipal officials on behalf of the Water Use Stakeholder Group and its work on water availability and water use management. PWC's program director presented an *Awesome!* eight-week course to teachers in the Coven-

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try School Department who earned graduate credits and can now serve as a new corps of watershed educators.

- **Environmental Protection.** PWC monitored stream water quality and flow with results summarized in *Stream Monitoring in the Pawcatuck Watershed*. A Brown University student intern conducted an inventory of the navigable river banks, identifying and mapping points where erosion control and access improvement are required.

- **Recreation.** PWC created an inventory of river access points along the Wood and Pawcatuck Rivers, and made recommendations for acquisition and improvement. These recommendations were presented to RIDEM officials. In June 2001, Rivers Month, PWC conducted a source-to-sea canoe trip, a five-part canoe ride through the Pawcatuck River to Little Narragansett Bay.

PAWTUXET RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

<http://www.pawtuxet.org>

The Pawtuxet River Authority (PRA) is a nonprofit corporation that was chartered by the state legislature in 1972. The PRA holds 501(c)(3) status and was designated by the Rivers Council in 2001 as the Pawtuxet River Watershed Council (PRWC). PRWC accomplishments for 2001 included:

- **Education.** PRWC created a website, with more than 75 pages of content. On June 16, 2001, PRA held the second annual *Pawtuxet Riverfest* with exhibits, arts and crafts, and canoe rides. In August, three one-day high school educator workshops were held at the three wastewater treatment facilities along the river. PRWC has also worked in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation to create watershed signs that will be posted throughout the watershed.



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- **Environmental Protection.** In July, PRWC adopted a monitoring system that operates at three levels – river/stream, lake/pond and wetlands/land use. PRWC partnered with the Town of Coventry and the Rhode Island Association of Wetland Scientists to make the Sandy Bottom area along the South Branch of the Pawtuxet River a center for restoration, enhancement and environmental education.

- **Recreation.** PRWC facilitated discussions among three towns and two major land owners to reach consensus on Alternative 2 described in an engineering feasibility study that was completed for the Hope Spur section of the river trail system. PRWC also worked with author and naturalist Ken Weber to include the main stem of the Pawtuxet River in the second edition of his popular book, *Paddling Southern New England*.

- **Economic Development.** PRWC provided letters of support to the Town of West Warwick for Veterans Square open space (which was subsequently funded), to the City of Cranston for a \$50,000 greenspace enhancement for the Parkview South section on the Pawtuxet River, and to the Town of Coventry for a US EPA grant to further wetlands restoration and education at the Sandy Bottom site.

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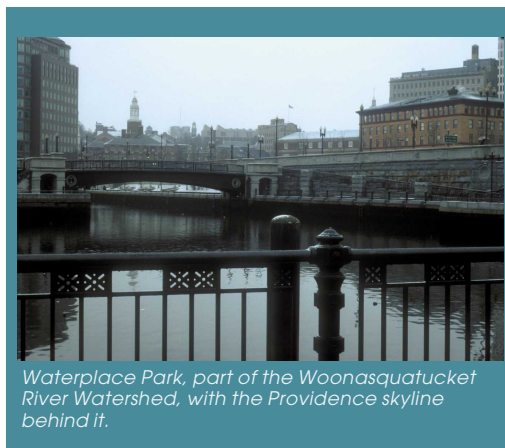
PRIORITIES FOR 2002

EMPOWER LOCAL WATERSHED COUNCILS

- At its November 2001 meeting, the Council voted unanimously to request funding from the state legislature for FY 2003.
- The Rivers Council will host workshops for watershed councils to improve their ability to monitor conditions and trends of their watersheds. Training on fiscal management will also be provided.
- During 2002, the Rivers Council will seek applications for new watershed councils.

STRENGTHEN THE RIVERS COUNCIL

- The Council is developing rules of procedure to be adopted in 2002.
- The Council will make revisions to the Rhode Island Rivers Policy and Classification Plan. The Statewide Planning Program Technical Committee has been advised of this effort. Priorities identified to date are:
 - **Policies.** Develop river goals as well as policies, and link the river policies more closely with community comprehensive plans so they can be more easily adopted by municipalities. Create policies that address the unique needs of urban rivers. When appropriate, develop policies that are specific to the river classifications (pristine, water supplies, recreational open space, recreational multiple use, and working rivers).



Waterplace Park, part of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed, with the Providence skyline behind it.

- **Watershed delineation.** Create a watershed delineation scheme that is consistent with those of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Rhode Island Water Resources Board, United States Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Services, and others managing and protecting river resources. Consider policies that allow watershed councils to be formed on sub-watersheds or on watershed groups.
- **Classifications.** The Rivers Council will be moving forward with classification of the tidal portions of rivers.

looking ahead

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THE RHODE ISLAND RIVERS COUNCIL

Department of Administration

One Capitol Hill

Providence, Rhode Island 02908

T: 401-222-2093

F: 401-222-2083

Designed by Environmental Science Services, Inc. as a contribution to the Rhode Island Rivers Council