



**Strategic Plan 2016 — 2021**



## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2021**

**APPROVED MAY 16, 2016**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

For 35 years, GSWA has served as “Guardian of the Great Swamp Watershed,” pursuing programming that has protected and improved water resources in the 55-square mile region that forms the headwaters of the Passaic River. We have accomplished our mission by monitoring local streams, advocating for intelligent land use, and educating our communities about the quality and quantity of water and its effect on public health and the health of the environment.

The organization was formed to encourage maintenance of the nationally-recognized natural entity known as the Great Swamp and of the watershed in which it lies. The corporation specifically intends to promote the conservation and restoration of all regional natural resources and to encourage local land-use decisions compatible with those conservation and restoration purposes. Achievement of these purposes will be furthered by conducting scientific investigation and research; publishing educational and scientific material; holding public meetings and workshops; acting as informal advisor on environmental problems to watershed residents and governments; and, doing all things suitable and appropriate to protect and improve the communities of and area within the watershed.

In early 2016, GSWA trustees and key staff convened to determine how the organization might build upon this long legacy of success to broaden the future impact of the organization. GSWA will maintain its successful local efforts while concurrently capitalizing on its deep organizational strength to expand its work to new communities along the Passaic to both demonstrate, and promote, a “follow the water” understanding of the river system, from headwaters to tidewaters.

As part of these deliberations, GSWA convened a large gathering of Passaic River stakeholders to discuss threats, needs and opportunities in the Passaic region and to help identify how and where GSWA might best contribute “downstream.” The first goal of this 5-year Strategic Plan, *Mission Expansion*, reflects the organization’s starting down this path.

Broadening its efforts in a second area, GSWA also prioritized growing the organization’s work as a land trust to respond to opportunities to protect open space and habitat that supports the organization’s water-protection focus.

Lastly, in support of all future work, the GSWA planning team has developed priority goals for a renewed communications and outreach strategy, and for sustaining its organizational excellence and vitality.

Overall, this Strategic Plan is intended to help focus GSWA’s planning and efforts over the next five years. In accordance with its broadening scope, GSWA has also updated the organization’s mission statement and developed a new vision statement, both presented below.

### **OUR MISSION**

The Great Swamp Watershed Association is dedicated to protecting and improving the water resources of the Passaic River region, from the Great Swamp headwaters to Newark Bay, for present and future generations. Through education, advocacy, science, land preservation and stewardship, in collaboration with partners, we work to instill our communities with an awareness of water’s effect on health and the beauty of the environment, from source to sea.

### **OUR VISION**

We support a “One River, One Community” vision for the many rural, suburban, and urban communities along the Passaic River, for a future in which all of the region’s citizens understand that the health of the watershed is integrally connected to the quality of their daily lives. We imagine a time in which residents, businesses, and

governments along the Passaic work actively and cooperatively to protect and promote clean, safe water, and in turn are rewarded with a bountiful environment that supplies healthy water for drinking and recreation, provides controls for flooding and erosion, supports abundant vegetation and wildlife, and forever inspires with its natural beauty.

## HOW WE WORK

Over the course of the plan period, GSWA will continue all of its core programming in the Great Swamp Watershed and will seek to strengthen and expand it, and to launch new local initiatives, where opportunities or needs emerge. Highlights of these current programs include:

### **Water Quality Monitoring and Improvement**

GSWA's director of water-quality programs works with a team of 30+ trained volunteers to monitor water quality in the watershed's five main streams by conducting chemical, biological and visual assessments as well as bacteria testing. Key sites are visited at regular intervals each year, building a large body of data that forms the basis for much of GSWA's programming. The findings are compiled into our Great Swamp Watershed Report Card, which was publically disseminated for the first time in September 2015.

In early 2016, GSWA offered our third year of well-water testing for area residents and, for the first time, water testing for residents using public water supplies, in response to heightened concerns regarding municipal water sources in the aftermath of the lead contamination crisis in Flint, Michigan.

### **Education and Outreach**

GSWA's in-school presentations reach more than 1,300 young children annually. These hands-on lessons use a 3D topographical watershed model to demonstrate the movement of pollution downhill and downstream, from source to sea, along the Passaic.

SWaMP (*School Water Monitoring on the Passaic*) is offered annually to more than 400 students at over a dozen high schools and colleges, including two high schools in Paterson. SWaMP provides students with hands-on water quality monitoring experience and gives them an opportunity to compile and compare water quality data, and draw conclusions about how content of the water changes depending on location, raising awareness regarding local issues.

For both adults and children, we offer more than 30 educational events each year that reach close to 1,000 people. These activities range from "breakfast briefings" delivered by experts in various fields such as climate change and open-space management, to workshops and educational hikes. The appeal and reach of our events extends well beyond the borders of our watershed, with participants last year coming from almost 100 different locations.

### **Advocacy for Responsible Development, Intelligent Land Use and Important Legislation**

GSWA responds when proposed land-use changes or new development threatens our lands and waters, or when natural habitats may be degraded or reduced in size. We comment favorably on proposed development that utilizes best management practices to safeguard and improve our environment.

GSWA officially launched the Great Swamp Passaic Municipal Alliance in April 2014. Through the Alliance, we educate key local and regional policymakers on environmental issues and other related concerns. A formal group of officials and concerned stakeholders such as town council members, planning board officials, environmental commissioners, developers and others meet on a regular basis to collaborate on issues and major concerns. Meetings feature guest speakers who are well-respected leaders in fields such as climate change, open space preservation, and flooding and stormwater management.

### **Land Acquisition and Stewardship**

GSWA acquires and preserves open space in the watershed and employs stewardship practices that promote healthy water and natural habitat. At GSWA's Conservation Management Area, a 53-acre parcel of wetlands and deciduous upland forest in Harding Township, we are actively restoring the property to its native state and have established the preserve as a "living laboratory" and classroom for our environmental education activities, as well as a favorite destination for passive recreation such as hiking and birding.

## 5-YEAR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

To bolster ongoing programs, while concurrently broadening the organization's reach and impact into new communities along the Passaic, GSWA will prioritize the following goals, each with an associated set of strategies, over the next five years.

### **GOAL: MISSION EXPANSION**

*BUILDING ON THE BREADTH AND SUCCESS OF ITS WORK IN THE GREAT SWAMP WATERSHED, GSWA PROVIDES ITS CORE SERVICES — EDUCATION, ADVOCACY, AND SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE — THROUGHOUT THE PASSAIC RIVER REGION.*

STRATEGY: Become the *Passaic Riverkeeper Affiliate* of the international Waterkeeper Alliance. In this role, establish GSWA's credibility as a leading "voice for the Passaic" and position the organization to assume the role of a hub for regional stakeholders.

STRATEGY: Focusing on mid-Passaic communities, explore expanding key GSWA programs to downstream audiences, including *School Water Monitoring Along the Passaic (SWaMP)*, *Breakfast Briefings* educational series, and chemical water-monitoring programs.

STRATEGY: Grow relationships among Passaic River stakeholders and respond to opportunities for collaboration on new projects and initiatives.

### **GOAL: INCREASED FOCUS ON LAND PROTECTION AND STEWARDSHIP**

*GSWA IS AN EFFECTIVE, RECOGNIZED LAND TRUST WHICH, INDEPENDENTLY AND IN PARTNERSHIP, ACQUIRES AND STEWARDS LANDS WHOSE CONSERVATION VALUES SUPPORT THE HEALTH OF THE REGION.*

STRATEGY: Earn national accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in order to raise GSWA's visibility as a working land trust and to bolster its credibility with potential landowners and acquisition partners.

STRATEGY: Respond to land acquisition opportunities (through donations or purchase of conservation easements and fee lands) in which properties meet GSWA's project selection criteria and support its focus on water-quality protection.

STRATEGY: Proactively communicate to local and regional stakeholders GSWA's increased focus on land acquisition, and its willingness to partner on projects that support shared values related to water protection.

STRATEGY: Apply the successful stewardship model of GSWA's Conservation Management Area to newly preserved lands.

### **GOAL: RENEWED COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH**

*GSWA'S UNIQUE ROLE AND PROGRAMS ARE HIGHLY VALUED BY THE COMMUNITIES OF THE GREAT SWAMP WATERSHED AND BY NEW AUDIENCES THROUGHOUT THE PASSAIC RIVER REGION.*

STRATEGY: Develop and implement a new communications plan that addresses the following priorities:

- effectively presents GSWA's past accomplishments, current programs, and its vision for the future
- clearly articulates GSWA's new role as *Passaic Riverkeeper Affiliate* and its downstream expansion
- engages a wide audience that reflects the diversity of Passaic River communities
- provides timely, ongoing education about environmental issues throughout the Passaic region

- clarifies GSWA’s local role from that of other Great Swamp organizations

STRATEGY: Roll out social media tools, beginning with a new organizational website in 2016, that capture the energy and focus of the new communications plan.

**GOAL: ONGOING ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

*GSWA IS A STRONG, ADAPTIVE, AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION, WITH THE CAPACITY AND RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE ITS MISSION WITH CONTINUED FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY.*

STRATEGY: Increase and develop internal staffing, as needed, in response to organizational needs and evolving mission activities.

STRATEGY: Toward maintaining a highly active, effective and engaged Board of Directors, provide ongoing educational opportunities for board members that include topics such as fundraising, recruiting, and communications.

STRATEGY: Pursue board recruitment, including for the Advisory Council, that focuses on filling gaps in educational and professional skills among board members.

STRATEGY: Pursue board recruitment, including for GSWA’s Advisory Council, that targets individuals who are able and willing to give generously and consistently.

STRATEGY: Pursue grant funding and development opportunities “downstream” once GSWA has established successful positioning and programming in new communities along the Passaic.