



Protecting our Waters and our Land for More Than 40 Years

Plastic Pollution and Microplastics in Our Waters – A Continuing Story

By Sandra LaVigne, Director of Water Quality Programs

In 2018, GSWA began its journey into researching how plastics were impacting our local waterways. We conducted our first microplastic sampling study by collecting samples from 10 sites, including all our headwater tributaries in the Great Swamp sub-watershed and sites along the Passaic River



downstream as far as Livingston. This data showed that microplastics, defined as plastic pieces smaller than 5mm in size, were ubiquitous throughout the watershed, from the headwaters of Primrose Brook through the length of the Passaic River. The data showed that in 2018 as many as 690 million par-



ticles of tiny plastic could be carried in the waters of the Passaic River in a single day. GSWA used this data to help communities including Madison, the Chathams, and Berkeley Heights, understand the need for single-use plastic ordinances to help protect our waters. This was before the New Jersey state plastics law was passed.

In 2019, GSWA teamed with New Jersey City University to conduct further microplastics research. We expanded the number of sampling sites to 15 throughout the region and had the samples processed in the state-of-the-art lab at the university. This helped us gain better knowledge of the types of micro-



plastics we were finding and what the source plastics were. The plastics we identified were broken down into three categories: chips, film and fiber. These microplastics most often originate from larger sources such as single use plastic bags, plastic bottles, and straws. Our largest data points

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My New Role as GSWA's Executive Director

By Bill Kibler, Executive Director

Hello. My name's Bill. I'm new around here.

You can tell because I don't know how to pronounce "Loantaka," as in Loantaka Brook or Loantaka Park. Spelling it should be easier, but if you can't pronounce it, you can't spell it, right?

I didn't grow up locally. I'm here because water is my passion. My family is from the Adirondacks in New York. As a youngster, I saw my favorite places destroyed by acid rain: lakes, ponds, and streams sterilized of all life one by one.

That experience ignited my passion for protecting water. Watching my favorite places needlessly die infuriated me. It made me want to fight to defend our planet and protect the water that all life depends on.

Although I'm new to the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA), I'm not new to watersheds. I've worked for the past 20 years in the Raritan Basin, right next door. I love my new job and I'm embracing the chance to explore a new watershed. The Great Swamp is one of New Jersey's gems. I hope you'll join me on one of our future hikes or paddling trips.

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the Board of Trustees for giving me this opportunity and entrusting me with this responsibility. GSWA has an incredibly talented and dedicated group of people on staff. If you've interacted with them, you already know this. It's an honor and my distinct pleasure to learn from and work with them.

I want to thank Sally Rubin for 17 years of dedicated service to the Great Swamp. I'm lucky to have known Sally for years, and grateful to her for handing over an organization that has a superb staff, a focused strategic plan, and sound finances.

Most importantly, I want to thank all the people and organizations that support our work. Our mission is vitally important, but we can't accomplish our mission without your generous support.

This is a great organization with a storied history, talented staff, and dedicated members. I deeply appreciate your support of the Great Swamp Watershed Association. I look forward to meeting each of you. Perhaps you can help me with my pronunciation. 🌲

GSWA Experts Available to Speak to Area Groups

Do you wonder, "What is in my water?" or "What can I do to keep water clean for my children?" These and other questions about water quality, land preservation, and local efforts to protect the environment can be answered by the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA). GSWA speakers give interesting, hands-on presentations that will educate and inspire members of your local club or group. Please call (973) 538-3500 or email info@greatswamp.org.

Across the Watershed

is a publication of the **Great Swamp Watershed Association**, a collaborative effort of the GSWA staff.

GSWA is a member-supported non-profit organization that protects the waters and the land of the Great Swamp Watershed and Passaic River region.

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GIVE WITH CONFIDENCE

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Upcoming Programs and Events

Registration: Unless otherwise noted, registration is required. Visit GreatSwamp.org/events, scan the QR code, or call 973-538-3500.



Scan to Register

5th Annual Plant for Pollinators Program

April 1 - 18 - Opens Online @ 12 pm

(Plant purchase pickup on May 3)

GSWA and our 28 Community Partners will host our 5th annual Plant for Pollinators program online sale with convenient order pickup at multiple local sites. Order online April 1-18 and pick up your plants May 3. Whether you are looking to expand your garden or you're ready to start one, we've got the native plants you need. And we've taken the guesswork out of it with a variety of pre-packaged plant plugs (young plants) that when placed together, create a beautiful, functioning pollinator garden. Plants can also be purchased in units of plugs. Mark your calendar for April 1 and email PlantSale@GreatSwamp.org for more information. Be sure to order early to ensure you get your choices as plants sell out quickly!

Volunteer Opportunity: Community Workday at the CMA

Saturday, April 12, 9 am - 1 pm

*GSWA's CMA, 1 Tiger Lily Lane,
Harding Township, NJ*

Join us on Saturday at the GSWA Conservation Management Area (CMA) to help us steward the land. We will work from 9 am to 1 pm and enjoy some well-earned snacks. We

could really use your help getting our CMA tidied up! Be sure to wear long pants, long sleeves, and hiking boots or old shoes you don't mind getting muddy. Bring a hat and a reusable water bottle. We will provide bug spray, sun block, gloves, snacks, and all tools you will need. What better way to spend a Saturday morning?

Breakfast Briefing: A Watery History of Jockey Hollow

Wednesday, April 16, 8 - 9:30 am

*GSWA's HQ, 568 Tempe Wick Road,
Morristown, NJ*

Join us for a special Breakfast Briefing as we explore how water has shaped Jockey Hollow's history—from the resourceful Lenape people and Revolutionary War soldiers to early industries and modern conservation efforts. Space is limited! GSWA members: free, non-members: (adult) \$10, (child) \$5.

Stream Assessment Training - FREE!

Saturday, April 19, 9 am - 12 pm

*Essex Environmental Center, Garibaldi Hall
621 Eagle Rock Ave., Roseland, NJ*

As our planet faces the challenges of climate change, it's more important than ever to connect with our environment. Join us for this free training workshop and discover how

Find Your Perfect Volunteer Opportunity with GSWA!

Come help protect our beautiful watershed have some fun! We offer a variety of indoor/administrative and outdoor/field volunteer opportunities for everyone ages 16 and up. Explore the possibilities at GreatSwamp.org/volunteer and raise your hand by emailing info@GreatSwamp.org!

to become a stream health advocate. We'll start indoors with an instructional session which covers the basics of stream monitoring. Then, we'll head outdoors to apply what you've learned. By the end of the day, you'll be fully trained and equipped to assess the health of local streams and contribute to environmental conservation! Check back on our website for the time and location for this free training session.

Evening Briefing: GSWA 2024 Water Quality Report Card – FREE!

Wednesday, April 23, 7 - 8:30 pm

GSWA's HQ, 568 Tempe Wick Road, Morristown, NJ and via Zoom

GSWA presents our 2024 Water Quality Report Card. Come learn about the condition of the water throughout the Great Swamp watershed and the upper Passaic River. Sandra LaVigne, Director of Water Quality Programs, and our dedicated Stream Team of Citizen Scientists collect water quality data throughout the year to determine the health of our riverine ecosystems and the state of the water. This data forms the core of our water quality report and guides GSWA as we work together with state, county, and municipal agencies as well as our local community members to protect and improve our streams. Light snacks will be served at this free presentation.

Treasures of the Swamp Scavenger Hunt – FREE!

Saturday, April 26, 10 am - 4 pm & Sunday, April 27, 10:30 am - 3:30 pm

Visit 1 to 6 different sites located within the Great Swamp watershed

Adventure awaits! Join us for a fun, free community event, brought to you by the Great Swamp Partners. Play solo or team up with friends and family. The Treasures of the Swamp Scavenger Hunt launches April 26,

and the Great Swamp is your playground! Unleash your inner explorer for an afternoon or weekend (it's up to you) of riddle-solving and treasure-seeking across six beautiful locations. Your clue booklet holds the secrets, and each site unlocks the answers. Expect forest trails, wildlife sightings, code-cracking, and celebratory high-fives as you solve each clue. It's a great opportunity to experience the incredible natural beauty right here in our backyards! Visit 1 or all 6 sites in any order at your pace. Every site you visit earns you a free ticket for the drawing of 6 prizes from each Partner (valued at \$50-\$75) and the grand prize (valued at ~\$300). The more places you visit, the better your chance to win swag, private hikes, and the grand prize. Registration is not required but appreciated for this free event.

The Chathams & Madison Town-Wide Yard Sale

**Saturday, May 3, 9 am - 2 pm
(Rain Date Sunday, May 4)**

The Chathams & Madison, NJ

Madison and Chatham residents, when you host a yard sale at this community event, your address and sale items appear on a digital, printable map. The map will be linked to GSWA's website and publicized far and wide to potential shoppers. Your tax-deductible \$10 registration fee benefits GSWA! Everyone else, mark your calendar to get out and shop sustainably. Happy sales to you!

Beginner Paddle on the Passaic River Friday, May 9, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

Livingston Canoe Launch, 12 S Orange Avenue, Livingston, NJ

Celebrate spring with a paddle on the Passaic River designed for beginners! We will focus on how to paddle in a kayak and learn paddle strokes, getting in and out of the boat, and how to maneuver. Children 8 and up are

welcome. All participants 15 and under must be accompanied by a parent. There are only 7 spots available – 2 spots/registration max. All participants must be able to swim, be comfortable on the water, and wear clothes and footwear that can (and will) get wet and muddy. Life vests will be provided. GSWA members: \$30, non-members: \$40.

Breakfast Briefing: Honey Bee Health

Tuesday, May 20, 8 - 9:30 am

*GSWA's HQ, 568 Tempe Wick Rd.,
Morristown, NJ*

Join us for for a Breakfast Briefing featuring Dr. James Muchmore, a Honey Bee Ambassador and beekeeper. As the steward of Muchy's Bee Farm and an active member of the Morris and Somerset County Beekeepers Association (mscbees.org), Dr. Muchmore is committed to protecting and promoting healthy honey bee populations. He'll take us behind the scenes to explore the role beekeepers play in maintaining thriving colonies—and their impact on our ecosystems. Enjoy a light breakfast prior to the start of the presentation. GSWQA members: Free, Non-members (Adult) \$10, (Child) \$5.

Breakfast Briefing: A Deep Dive into Microplastics in Our Water

Tuesday, June 3, 8 - 9:30 am

*GSWA's HQ, 568 Tempe Wick Rd.,
Morristown, NJ*

It's been 7 years since GSWA conducted our first microplastics sampling study and 5 years since New Jersey passed the "Get Past Plastics" legislation aimed at reducing our reliance on single-use plastics. Are you curious if it's made an impact? We certainly were, so we gathered our team and re-sampled the same 10 sites from our 2018 study. Join Sandra LaVigne, GSWA Director of Water Quality Programs, as she reveals the findings of our 2025 microplastics sampling study, shedding

light on what effects, if any, these plastic reduction laws have made in our local water. Sandra will also offer practical solutions for all of us to consider adopting to help keep our waterways clean. Enjoy a light breakfast prior to the start of the presentation. GSWA members: Free, non-members: (Adult) \$10, (Child): \$5. Registration is required.

Great Swamp Great Music: After Dark

Sunday, June 22, 6 - 10 pm

*Homestead Bar & Kitchen, 10 Dehart Street,
Morristown, NJ*

Extend the weekend vibes! From festival to an exceptional evening of music – GSWA's Great Swamp Great Music returns for its 8th year reimagined, now at Morristown's trendy Homestead Bar and Kitchen. Enjoy dinner, reduced-price drinks, and a musical smorgasbord. We're serving up a mix of country vibes, classic rock hits you know and love, and fresh original music that'll leave you wanting more. Admission price includes a delicious dinner buffet, discounted drink pricing, preferred seating, and of course, excellent live music! Located in the heart of Morristown, Homestead's unique open-air design, featuring an inviting patio, blends indoor comfort with outdoor ambiance, creating a refreshing atmosphere. Ample parking available. It's a fun evening out for music lovers and a great way to support the environment through this lively environmental fundraiser! 🌲

For more information on upcoming events and to register, visit GreatSwamp.org or call 973-538-3500.

Most events are free or a reduced rate for GSWA members.

Unless otherwise noted, registration is required.

Building Community as a Means of Sustainability

By Alex Sloane, Water Quality and Education Associate

Sustainable decision-making has become both more important and complex in today's world. Despite local plastic bag bans and the popularity of reusable water bottles and shopping totes, single-use items still dominate our daily routines. All you have to do is look around your bathroom or kitchen to see how many single use items still make up your regular routine. The rise of greenwashing, increasing costs, deceptive marketing, and relaxed regulations makes it even more challenging to make sustainable and ethical choices. Despite our efforts, it can feel like the impact is minimal—plastics continue to pollute our oceans and rivers, and donated items often end up in landfills instead of helping those in need.



Hazel England/Photo: Trash floating in the Passaic at Riverfront Park, Newark

The **United Nations Environment Programme** reports that in 2024 we generated approximately 400 million metric tons of plastic waste globally, of which only 9% was recycled, and 60% ended up in our natural environment or landfills. According to **Business Insider**, fashion production accounts for 10% of total global carbon emissions and 20% of total water waste, yet 85% of all textiles end up in landfills each year. The **World**

Health Organization reports that in 2022, an estimated 62 million tons of e-waste (including computers, mobile phones, large appliances, and medical equipment) were produced globally with only 22.3% documented as collected and recycled. Clearly there is room for improvement!

Better sustainable design and materials, stronger economic and legislative incentives, and more efficient recapture and reuse programs would go a long way to reducing these numbers, but as individuals, those improvements are a bit out of our control.

One thing that has helped me make more sustainable choices on an individual level is focusing on building community. Just as an ecosystem relies on interconnected relationships, we can reduce waste by redistributing items within our local networks. Instead of sending things “away,” we can extend their lifespan by passing them to someone who can use them, saving both resources and energy.

This approach saves water and energy that recycling would use. It saves fossil fuel and wear on transport infrastructure. It also keeps the item out of landfills, roadsides, and ocean garbage patches. It saves raw natural resources, packaging, and fuel that would go into manufacturing, packaging, and shipping a new item to an individual.

Building community doesn't require starting from scratch—local services, mutual aid organizations, and community groups are key to sustainable living. Engaging with your local environment—from recycling programs to community gardens, libraries, local non-profits, and food distribution centers—helps you identify opportunities for sharing resources. *(continued on page 8)*

Building Community as a Means of Sustainability

(continued from page 7)

Community groups, religious organizations, and mutual aid groups are, by nature, tapped into the needs of their communities. They often accept donations of specific items based on the specific needs of the community, such as winter coats, non-perishable food, books, and even reusable bags. These items are redistributed through their networks, rather than going to large donation centers. Mutual aid groups are particularly interested in building community self-sufficiency and are an amazing way to learn new skills and make new friends. Libraries often provide access to not just books but also items like sewing machines, power washers and even native seeds, while community groups regularly host rummage sales or repair workshops.

Equally important is the concept of “gift economies,” where people exchange items or services without money. *Buy Nothing* groups and *swap meets* allow you to both offload items you no longer need and find things you do, all while keeping them out of the waste stream. This system strengthens local ties and encourages more mindful consumption by fostering shared ownership of resources.

Communities organized around sustainability can also play a crucial role in driving broader sustainability initiatives. Local sustainability goals, whether political or simply collective decisions like reducing consumption, can create larger-scale change. By participating in such groups, we can influence the way our neighborhoods interact with the environment.

Think Beyond the Purchase

Adopting this mindset involves thinking beyond the purchase. Do I need this new item, or can I find it used? What happens to it when it's no longer useful? Can it be repurposed? Recently, GSWA hosted a workshop

where we discussed some of the impacts our consumption habits have on the environment, what alternatives exist already in our communities, and some creative methods that our participants were already using to reduce their waste. Then we repurposed old jeans (donated by GSWA staff members) into new items that could be used in daily life such as glasses cases and organizer pouches.



Glasses case made by a workshop participant from recycled jeans

Not only did it reduce waste, it brought people together to explore creative ways to live more sustainably.

Ultimately, making sustainable choices requires effort, but it's also an opportunity to reimagine a world where resources, skills, and items circulate within our communities rather than being discarded. If you're interested in getting involved, here are a few of my favorite local resources listed below:

- **Mutual Morris:** a non-hierarchical network of directly impacted community members that are working to build mutual aid relationships and community resilience in Morris County. They support community members with emergency relief while also building long term self-sufficiency through education and community initiatives. They

offer skill sharing and crafting opportunities, community gardening, food distribution, swap meets and much more. If there is something you're interested in, or you have a skill you want to share – you can reach out on their website!

- **Visiting Nurses Association Rumage Sale:** A twice-yearly event where you can donate or shop for a wide variety of used goods, from outdoor gear to books to jewelry, while supporting a good cause. The items are in good shape and reasonably priced.
- **Libraries:** Many libraries offer more than books—they lend tools, offer classes and services, and organize donation drives for winter coats and other goods.
- **Buy Nothing Groups:** Community-based exchange groups focused on

the gift economy, where you can find and share goods for free. The Buy Nothing group has an app you can download, a website you can use to find your local group, and often Facebook groups for your specific town's Buy Nothing group. There are also many 'gift economy' groups not affiliated with Buy Nothing but that operate the same way on social media.

- **Pinterest:** Not a local one, but a great online resource for DIY projects that help you creatively reuse items you might otherwise throw away. It is a wonderful and free resource for getting those creative juices flowing.

By actively participating in these initiatives, you can make a significant contribution to a more sustainable and connected world. 🌱

8th Annual
GREAT SWAMP *after dark...*
GREAT MUSIC!

Sunday
JUNE 22
6-10 PM
The Homestead Bar & Kitchen
Morristown, NJ

tickets include:
live music | buffet dinner | discounted drinks | more live music

The poster features a whimsical illustration of three green frogs in a pond at night. One frog is playing a red guitar, another is playing a violin, and a third is playing a drum. A large, full moon hangs in the background, and reeds are visible in the water.

Impacts of Shifting Land Cover on the Passaic River

By Ginger VanRyzin, Manager of Stewardship and GIS Specialist

It is no secret that New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the United States, and the population is ever-growing. According to the US Census Bureau, the population of NJ grew nearly a half a million people, from 8.88 million to 9.29 million from 2020-2023. Unfortunately, as the population grows, the amount of land in the state does not. Instead, the way we use parcels and properties shift to make room for the growing infrastructure needed.

The terms land use and land cover are used to analyze what is happening on any given property or parcel in terms of the land. Land use is how the property is used by people, such as for commercial or residential purposes, while land cover uses satellite data to determine what type of surface covers the land, like forest, farms, open water, or developed lands. After determining the type of surface, estimates are made on the amount of impervious surface (or surfaces that cannot absorb water) present at each parcel.

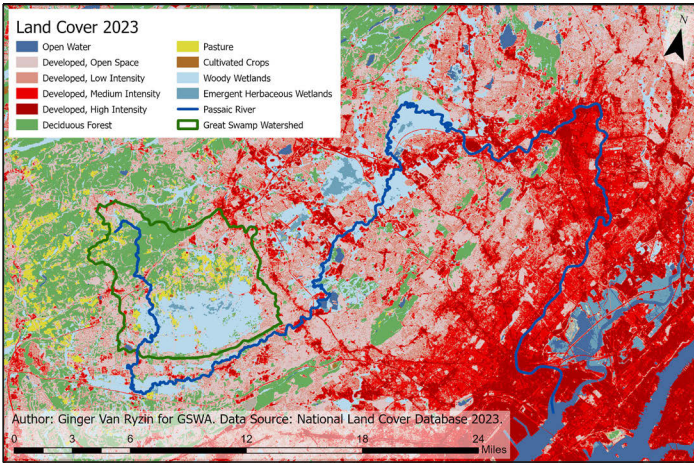
Along the length of the Passaic River, the amount of impervious cover generally increases as it moves downstream. Historically, before major highways and trainlines crisscrossed the state, rivers were the main source of transportation and many towns settled along riverbanks because of this. Fast forward to the most recent land cover dataset from 2023, and we see that trend continue. Essex County, for example, is primarily covered by developed areas while the headwaters of the Passaic in Morris County deciduous forest is the most common land cover. This means that when it rains in the upstream portions of the Passaic, much of the water is absorbed by soil and plants while downstream much of

the water runs off directly into the river, causing flooding.

From 2020-2023, when the state population increased nearly a half a million, much of the towns and boroughs along the Passaic did not appear to change drastically; however, little by little new buildings and developments are forming. This slow creep of development is the sort of “death by a thousand cuts” that changes our landscape and rivers over time. In total, over the past three years, Morris, Passaic and Essex counties have lost roughly 750 acres of undeveloped lands like forests and wetlands and the developed lands have increased 880 acres (NLCD).

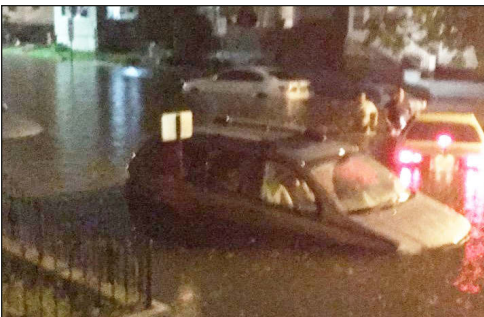
The term “developed lands” has the connotation of totally impervious, paved over lots, buildings and roadways. While in some cases this is correct, development is broken into four categories depending on the amount of impervious cover present. High intensity developed lands are just what we think, buildings, roads and lots that cover 80-100% of the property with impervious surfaces. Next is medium intensity, 50-79% of the parcel is impervious cover, and low intensity is 20-49%, which are often single-family homes, with a house and driveway as well as a wooded or other natural, permeable area. Lastly, we have developed open space, that has less than 20% impervious surfaces, such as parks and golf courses. So, when 880 acres of land has been developed from 2020-2023, it includes high, medium and low intensity development, as well as developed open space.

The land cover data from 2023 around the Passaic River is shown on the map, with shades of red representing development



Land Cover along the Passaic River, 2023

(darker the red, the higher intensity) and the greens, blues and yellows representing forests, waters and pastures, respectively. In the headwaters of the Passaic, the Great Swamp watershed, the land cover is primarily permeable, surfaces like forest, hayfields and wetlands while downstream in urban cities like Paterson and Newark the land cover is almost entirely some form of developed land. So, while some rainwater is retained in the Great Swamp during rain events, much of the stormwater downstream flows right into the Passaic River, causing flooding in roadways, houses or even schools. Unfortunately, rain events and other storms are projected to intensify with climate change, creating dangerous conditions for those who live and work in



Flooding in Paterson during Hurricane Isaias 2019

these downstream areas.

Although at times it may feel hopeless to make positive changes, it is important to remember there are many ways to help. Local government, specifically your local planning board or board of adjustments, is tasked with approving or denying development applications or changes to the land use of parcels in your town. Attending these meetings,

being aware of what developments are on the table, and speaking out against unnecessary or poorly designed developments is the first step to getting your voice heard. For property owners, whether you live on low, medium or high intensity developed lands, flood water management improvements can start in your own backyard. Rain barrels and rain gardens, or any other green infrastructure that captures rainwater runoff, can help minimize downstream flooding while adding habitat to your property.

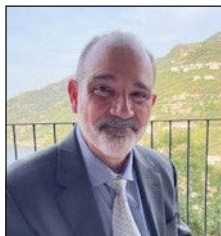
Doing what you can, whether it be attending town meetings or making rain gardens, can spark change in our communities to look at our land use differently. Shifting our view of land use and land cover to have an environmental approach, focusing on the ecosystem services natural areas provide like stormwater retention, will help us make smarter, more logical developments for the future communities here in New Jersey.

For more information on the National Land Cover Database, visit usgs.gov/centers/eros/science/national-land-cover-database. To explore land cover maps throughout the US, visit mrlc.gov/viewer. 🌲

Spotlight: Russell Furnari, GSWA Advisory Council Member

By Wade Kirby, Director of Development

Russ Furnari has been a valued and active supporter of GSWA's mission for many years. Originally from Newark, New Jersey, Russ has never lived more than four miles from the Passaic River and currently lives on the fringe of Hatfield Swamp.



Russ Furnari

In 1979 he received a Bachelor of Science degree in industrial administration from the New Jersey Institute of Technology. His area of study was a combination of management and industrial engineering. Russ soon landed a position at PSE&G in which he learned many different phases of construction oversight.

Following his first ten years with PSE&G, as environmental regulations were expanding, the company decided it needed additional environmental coordinators. Russ knew about the generating stations, and he was able to move into this role to evaluate and implement environmental compliance issues that could impact operations. An example was the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 which required expanded spill planning, including modification to all the large fuel oil tanks. Russ was directly involved in many of the physical upgrades and negotiations that occurred with federal and state regulators.

Russ had a link to the corporate environmental group which compared issues with other companies and environmental groups across the state. He was invited to certain fundraisers, and GSWA's was one! At the

time, Russ was working on water related concerns, one of which was the Clean Water Act of 1972. Organizations such as GSWA were the ones he was attracted to the most. He enjoyed the people, one of whom was Julia Somers, a former GSWA Executive Director. Russ served on the board of the Passaic River Coalition and was the *new guy* on the speakers' bureau where he educated customers about PSE&G operations. He was also a frequent attendee at GSWA events and *claims to have missed only one Fall Gala in 21 years!*

Russ was engaged in discussing water issues as a member of GSWA's Advisory Council and took over environmental outreach for PSE&G. He soon became their point person for funding requests. Regarding land use and water impacts, he represented PSE&G with the stakeholder groups for the watershed management areas that the Department of Environmental Protection created in his geographic location. They were the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers which included GSWA. Russ also assisted with the development of water monitoring protocols established by the DEP. His technical analysis of clean water was a good link to the monitoring that GSWA's Director of Water Quality Programming, Sandra LaVigne, oversees.

GSWA advocated for protection of the waterbodies around the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and the ten towns that border the Great Swamp which is part of their headwaters. Russ served as PSE&G's point of contact for environmental issues in the area. Through these efforts he met Dot Stillinger, a devoted and invaluable board member who was a leader of the ten towns group that fo-

cused on stormwater impacts. Over the years Russ also joined staff members for their education initiatives, which were in part funded by PSE&G. This included field trips with student groups. This morphed into involvement with stewardship, and Russ' hands-on help with the maintenance of our Conservation Management Area *which he loves!*

Russ retired from PSE&G in 2021, but he is just as interested in the work and success of GSWA as he ever was. He has become a full-time stewardship volunteer who takes care of the physical access of our facility for the public. Many, many thanks to you Russ. We are so lucky! 🌲

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Reflecting on my (almost) Five Years at GSWA

By Lynne Applebaum, Director of Institutional Relations

It's hard to believe that I am a few months shy of my fifth anniversary as Director of Institutional Relations at GSWA. But here we are...

My interview for this job in 2020 was virtual, as we were in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual meetings are ubiquitous now, but not nearly as commonplace back then. Prior to that interview, I attended GSWA's virtual gala. I thought it was beautifully done, informative, and engaging. And it definitely helped me gain a better understanding of the organization and the important work being done. In 2025, virtual meetings and events are ubiquitous. Hard to imagine work life without this option!

Before joining the GSWA team, I was a front-line program professional for many years. A big part of that job actively involved leading teams to meet fundraising goals during annual support campaigns. I received very good training for this and was certainly comfortable asking people for support, which was (and is) a huge help to this day. Still, there was definitely a learning curve to becoming a full-time development professional. When I first started working at GSWA, the toughest challenge was resisting the urge to jump out in front, which I was very used to doing in my former career. Moving to the background in a support role was certainly an adjustment.

Being part of the internal engine that allows the GSWA machine to run has turned out to be very gratifying work. The transition from the human wellness field to watershed protection has required a lot of reading, watching, and learning, and listening to the experts who deliver our programming and represent this organization so impressively. It's a privilege to learn more about the envi-

ronmental challenges that the Passaic River region faces and observe students learning in nature at our 73-acre Conservation Management Area (CMA) in Harding Township. Our public education programs reach people via speaker programs, kayak tours, workshops, and hikes designed to promote watershed friendly living with an appreciation for the beauty and fragility of our area.

Believing in our mission makes it easy to tell our story to potential funders—but securing funding is a different challenge.

There are lessons I have learned over the five years that I've been here, which have helped me to *keep calm and carry on*:

- Make your narrative compelling but succinct. No need to go overboard with embellishments. Explain the need well and thoroughly. Realize that funders are reading through hundreds of these applications and proposals, their time is valuable.
- Don't take a rejection personally. There are many reasons why a funder may not support your request, and they have nothing to do with you. Quite often, a grant maker may shift focus on what they are supporting from year to year, depending on where they feel the need is greatest, and how it aligns with their organizational goals that particular year.
- Do the research! Valuable information and insight can be found out if you do some digging and read between the lines. That means studying 990s, reading annual reports, and really interpreting and understanding their mission pillars.
- Don't assume that a foundation or company that has

(continued on page 18)

Full Circle – How GSWA Programming and Staff have Evolved and Learned from the Pandemic

By Hazel England, Director of Education, Outreach, and Land Stewardship

In February 2020, GSWA staff were excitedly looking forward to our busiest spring from a programming and advocacy perspective. In that winter's newsletter, we proudly shared information on new, local, municipal-led single use plastic bans that were just being enacted, and in which we had often been involved with the municipality to help pass. These ranged from banning 'high volume retail businesses' from handing out single-use plastic bags to outright banning most single-use plastics (including bags, straws, and Styrofoam containers). We used supporting data from a 2017 study published in Nature Communications estimating that annually, 1.15 - 2.41 million tons of plastic enter oceans via rivers ([nature.com/articles/ncomms15611](https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms15611)) to tie it all into our water protection mission.

Our spring events were focused on education around reusing, reducing and recycling. We offered 'building sustainable clothing wardrobe' workshops, carbon cycling programs, and in-person maker workshops building natural material, habitat friendly bird houses. These programs all aligned with our Watershed Friendly Living focus. We were also incorporating this focus into our busy, upcoming water quality education classroom programs, tasking students to come up with single use alternatives and conducting trash analyses in rain gardens we had previously installed. We were preparing for our busiest school field trip season ever, building on the 3,000-plus students we had taught the year before. We were figuring out how to cram in the 36 different spring in-school and field trip programs booked. Then in early March came COVID-19, and the world paused.

As an organization focused on high quality, in-person, and most especially hands-on science, the closure of schools meant a radical shift in how we conducted our programming. For the first few critical lockdown months, our staff worked harder than ever, creating Zoom educational programs, weekly nature scavenger hunts to engage bored, homebound families, and planning new ways to use existing, and new technology in creative ways. We were all figuring out how to teach from our back patios, local woods, and living rooms. We developed 'streaming from the stream' programs where *we* were in the woods, and via iPad and phone hotspot, our homebound students could see us and the creatures we were showcasing over Zoom. But it was a pale pastiche of a hands-on program.



Streaming from the stream - remote teaching from the woods

We created short videos, telling the story of "What's a watershed" and highlighting our Passaic River watershed model. We shared them with schools asynchronously, having students watch the videos prior to class, then engage in discussion during their live lessons. Although dealing (continued on page 16)

Full Circle – How GSWA Programming and Staff have Evolved and Learned from the Pandemic

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with developing brand-new teaching methods and content which we had always taught in person was exhausting during the pandemic, one positive was programming the staff's enhanced ability to be creative, flexible- REALLY flexible, and able to change and develop new teaching plans on a dime.

We put this flexible mindset to good use in the winter of 2021, when we were approached by a coalition of environmental commissions and area groups working as Pollinator Partners. This group was intent on encouraging their communities to plant 'Home-grown National Parks' by developing pollinator habitat throughout their communities. This affiliation needed a nonprofit partner to purchase plant materials, host the sale, and coordinate a physical processing location to get plants into homeowners' hands via an efficient distribution mechanism. Since the program fit well within our existing 'Watershed Friendly Living' program, we quickly said *yes!* We built the first 'Plant for Pollinators' program as we went, determining which plants to offer by what was available at such short notice from a range of nurseries. We created COVID safe ways for volunteers to engage and process the plants and built the ordering website and process one step ahead of the sale opening. The first Native Plant sale was a grand success, and although there were some teething troubles- crashing GSWA's website due to the volume of purchasers the moment the sale opened being one- over 13,600 plant plugs were snapped up by 330 local residents in the first year! We've continued to refine our approach each year, leading to incremental growth and program success. Last year, our numbers increased to 25,700 plants acquired by 515 residents.

We initially offered 17 species of native wildflowers, available in two basic kits. That has blossomed considerably, literally and figuratively! In 2024, we offered 37 species and 6 kits- with new plants brought in, and old favorites cycled out. Indeed, by any metric, the Plant for Pollinators program has grown year by year, from 75 home communities our first year to 126 last year. In our first year, 70 masked and gloved volunteers, happy to be in proximity to other humans after months of social distancing, increased to 147 by 2024.

Our comfort with virtual presenting gleaned during COVID helped us gain confidence in hosting future webinars. This allowed us to obtain expert speakers from anywhere, based on their expertise, not just relying on local presenters as we would have



Running a socially distanced plant sale during COVID

done in pre-COVID times. From a single kick-off webinar, the first year attended by a thrilling 130 people, we offered 4 webinars with national pollinator experts last year, attended by over 540, and are on track to surpass even that number with this year's webinars (visit greatswamp.org/events to view and register.) We have focused the Pollinator program on growing people's knowledge of native plants and the pollinators that visit them, building an understanding of benefits to the watershed and beyond, and scaffolding knowledge gaps with increasingly de-

tailed and easy-to-follow information and resources on our website. From not being a blip on our radar five years ago, the program has become a core fixture of our educational outreach year.

Speaking of programs ‘not being a blip on our radar’ when GSWA’s five-year strategic plan for educational programming was being formed at the start of the pandemic, next month marks the close of GSWA’s first year participating in the NJ Department of Education Climate Change Learning Collaborative (CCLC). The formal title is ‘Climate Awareness Education: Implementing the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Climate Change.’ This innovative program creates educational hubs regionally around the state at area universities, with environmental organizations as ‘spokes’ offering place-based, science-focused climate change professional development (PD) and programming to public school teachers. The goal is to bolster teacher understanding and utilization of the K-12 standards which New Jersey was the first in the nation to implement. Unfortunately, the standards rolled out back in 2020... right as the COVID pandemic hit, just as the world was shutting down.

As Ramapo College rushed to complete the grant application by the deadline, a partner environmental education organization followed up wondering, “where does Hazel work?” with a call to GSWA. They outlined the program, partnering Ramapo and two other North Jersey environmental nonprofits as the Northern NJ hub to offer cross-curriculum, K-12 PD workshops throughout the upcoming year to half the teaching population in the state! With only a



Teaching how a watershed works from the back patio during lockdown

week to turn around the grant, come up with the teacher workshop write-ups, and write the \$50,000 budget for staff time, supplies and field programming expenses, it would have been easy to say NO. It was a huge ask. However, in saying no, GSWA would have missed out on the opportunity to offer meaningful professional development to almost 260 teachers over the last year, making great new connections in urban, underserved districts.

The CCLC has provided a chance to reframe our educational programming more precisely through the lens of how a changing climate impacts water quality and quantity, quality of life, and the biodiversity of our Passaic Watershed. While pulling all-day teacher workshops together on top of a busy, existing schedule was tough, many of the resiliency lessons we learned pivoting during COVID times helped us to make it



CCLC grant teachers sharing their climate resiliency projects during workshops

work. Our final workshop of the year will be attended by 49 teachers, and we are assured we will receive \$62,000 of funding for the second year of the grant. This will allow us to offer 10 more PD days for teachers, along with PD at schools, in-class climate education for students, (continued on page 18)

Full Circle – How GSWA Programming and Staff have Evolved and Learned from the Pandemic

(continued from page 15)

and multiple field trips focused on how climate change can be studied hands-on at our Conservation Management Area in Harding Twp.

Five years on from the COVID pandemic, much has changed

on GSWA's educational calendar, and we are only just regaining the numbers we had pre-COVID. But the resiliency gained in dealing with the pandemic has allowed us to embrace a sometimes rapidly changing focus of pro-



Climate change PD in person

gramming. We have become pivoting experts, and this has only strengthened the mission-based content we offer. In a full circle moment, last month we offered a program on the environmental perils of fast fashion, and how buying sustainably can reduce carbon emission impacts, which was the first program we canceled 5 years ago as the pandemic began! 🌲

Reflecting on my (almost) Five Years at GSWA

(continued from page 14)

- supported you year after year is going to fund you as a matter of course. Many times, it is due to the reasons listed above. At other times, they simply lack the funds to support the volume of requests that year.
- Maintain consistent, appropriate relations with your grant makers. There is something of a “veil” between me, the grant writer, and the funding organization. It’s not the same as the one-to-one experience when asking specific individuals for support. Some funders are very hands-on and want to be updated regularly about what we are doing, how their support has helped us move forward in our mission. Others want an annual report and that’s it. And still others are happy to provide support and don’t necessarily want to hear about everything we do, they trust us to use

their funding wisely. All of them want to be partners with us. It’s just a matter of how much they want to know and how often they want to know it!

- Most importantly – be a responsible steward of these funds. We at GSWA take this responsibility very seriously. We do not take this support for granted (no pun intended.) This is how trust-based philanthropy works. We are entrusted with the responsibility of managing granted funds wisely, and we trust our funders to support our discretion in utilizing them effectively.

There is so much more to this. I learn something new every day. I am honored to represent GSWA in this capacity. The work we do today has a lasting impact—not just for us, but for future generations. I look forward to continuing this journey and seeing how we can deliver on our mission even further. 🌲

A Plastic Challenge – Look to the Bathroom!

By Sandra LaVigne, Director of Water Quality Programs

Over the years I have worked hard to reduce the amount of plastic that enters and leaves my home. Spurred on by the research and scientific data about the detrimental effects of plastics in our water, I have worked to switch out many items. Research published by Columbia University in 2024 showed that globally, we produced 430 million tons of plastic in 2023. Of that amount, less than 9% was recycled leaving over 391 million tons of plastics as waste. In the US alone, 73% of post-consumer plastic ends in landfills. This plastic production is directly related to issues of climate change as it produces over 1.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide annually. While the data shows that the best way to reduce plastic pollution, and thereby reduce the plastics in our waterways, is to limit the amount of plastic being produced, we can push that change by altering our consumer practices.

In our home shopping bags, single-use water bottles and straws were some of the first things to go. Then I attacked my kitchen replacing single-use storage bags and plastic wrap with reusable items like waxed cloth covers and reusable storage options made from glass. In general, I felt like I had made good strides toward reducing my personal contribution to the growing plastic problem.

However, more and more I realized just how much single-use plastic is in the bathroom. In 2015, due to an outcry from environmentalists and the public, the U.S. put a ban on the use of microbeads in beauty products including toothpaste and cleansers, which was a step in the right direction. Moving forward to the present however, a study conducted by Fordham University in 2022 showed that approximately 120 billion units

of plastic are being produced annually by the beauty and cosmetics industry. A unit is considered any bottle, container, or packaging used in the production of a product. Bath and beauty products are almost all sold in single-use plastic containers, and many are in types of plastic that are not easily recyclable, from shampoo and conditioner, toothpaste and toothbrushes, to make-up and skin care products all of it in a variety of different plastics.

So, I set myself a challenge: reduce plastic waste in the bathroom to zero by the end of the year. But where to start? A little online research and I found many options for items that I could switch out.

The shower:

This was the easiest place to start and one of the biggest plastic contributors in my house.

- Shampoo, conditioner, body wash, shaving cream
 - All available in bar form
 - Refillable metal containers (usually have a plastic pump)
- Washcloth/shower pouf
 - Cotton washcloth
 - Crochet/knit natural fiber pouf
 - Natural fiber soap bag
- Razor
 - Reusable metal options
 - Electric razor

Skincare and deodorant:

This gets a bit trickier but is manageable. Deodorant is much easier than skincare

- Deodorant
 - Refillable metal deodorants
 - Deodorants in cardboard pushup containers *(continued on page 20)*

A Plastic Challenge – Look to the Bathroom!

(continued from page 19)

- Face washes and creams
 - Refillable options
 - Cardboard containers
 - Glass containers (often have plastic lids)
- Make-up removal (single-use wipes are not a good option)
 - Reusable cotton rounds
 - Regular washcloth
 - Ecologically sourced bamboo disposable wipes

Oral care:

Here again, not as many options as I would like but doable

- Toothpaste
 - Tablets
 - Pastes in glass containers (usually with plastic lids)
- Toothbrush
 - Wood and bamboo options (often have plastic bristles, but I have found some that have natural fiber)
 - Reusable, battery operated
 - Some in metal with plastic refillable head = less overall plastic
 - Some with refillable bamboo head

Make-up:

I will be honest here and admit that I use (and have) very little makeup. But I have found some options.

- Glass containers (often have plastic lids or wands)
- Refillable
- Cardboard containers
- Bamboo containers

Throughout 2025, my plan is to work through the list, trying different products, and reducing the plastic in my bathroom to

net zero. There are many things to consider: cost, where things ship from, and how I like the product. We will keep you posted on our social media platforms. Please join me! I encourage everyone to do what they can to reduce plastics in their house. At your own speed and within your own budget, make the choices that are right for you and work with us to keep plastics out of our waterways. Below please see the short (not comprehensive) list of suppliers and products I have begun to assemble. I have included some notes based on what I found, however, GSWA is not specifically endorsing any specific products.

Skincare:

- Bambu earth: bambuearth.com
 - Expensive for skincare and many products have a strong, herbally scent
 - Mostly glass bottles, but plastic lids
- Upcircle: us.upcirclebeauty.com
 - Good price for product
 - UK company
 - Plastic negative company
 - Glass and metal containers with minimal plastic

Shaving:

- Viking blade razors: vikingsblade.com
 - Metal safety razors with metal blade refills
 - No plastic packaging
- Kitsch shaving bar: mykitsch.com/collections/shave-bar
 - Plastic free shaving lather bar

Deodorant:

- Dove refillable deodorant
 - Metal case
 - Plastic refills
 - Not the best ingredients
- Wild: wearewild.com/us

- A variety of scents and cases
- Cases are primarily metal and there is no plastic packaging for the refills
- They come out with lots of limited edition and new cases which does not help with overconsumption
- Not my personal favorite but still a great, eco-friendly brand that also offers body and handwash
- **Fussy:** *getfussy.com*
 - Plastic case but the cases are simple and well-made with no incentives to buy new ones
 - Unique scents and a great formula (in my opinion)
 - UK company
 - Refills last a long time
- **AKT:** *us.aktlondon.com/?country=US*
 - UK company
 - No case refills and no plastic at all
 - Each tube of deodorant is in an aluminum tube and cap that can be recycled
 - Only a few scents
 - Long-lasting but expensive
 - My personal favorite but it is pricey compared to Fussy, so I tend to alternate (plus it's good to switch up your deodorant every now and then)
- Many different types of shampoo and conditioner bars for different hair types
- Face wash and scrub bars
- Moisturizer bars, but too oily for me (see skincare section)
- No plastic
- Some products have bright dyes in them, which might not be for everyone
- **Kitsch:** *mykitsch.com*
 - A few shampoo and conditioner bars
 - Plastic-free packaging
 - Great hair protection products
 - Available at Target
- **Dip:** *dipalready.com*
 - Shampoo and conditioner bars
 - Hair oils and sprays
 - Plastic-free
 - More expensive than others and does not have different bars for different hair types
 - A good range of scents
 - Available at Simple Bare Necessities in Sparta (they also deliver)
- **Papatui:** *papatui.com*
 - Good body wash bars that are plastic-free and palm oil-free (which is a hard one to find!)
 - Some of the other products are in plastic bottles
 - Good ingredients all-around
 - Available at Target

Hair and body:

- **Parrotfish:** *shopparrotfish.com*
 - Shampoo and conditioner bars with different scents
 - Not too many options
 - Not my favorite as it made my hair more tangled
 - No plastic
- **Ethique:** *ethique.com*
 - NZ company
- **Bath and Body Works:** *bathandbodyworks.com/t/aromatherapy-fragrance/bar-soap*
 - The aroma therapy line has bar soap
 - Downside - everything else is in plastic 🚮

GSWA Staff and Board of Trustees Announcements

Welcome Bill Kibler, Executive Director

Bill joined GSWA in January, bringing a wealth of experience as a long-time environmental advocate. Previously, he served as executive director of the South Branch Watershed Association and policy director of the Raritan Headwaters Association, demonstrating his deep commitment to water and the environment. His foundation in environmental science, earned through a BS



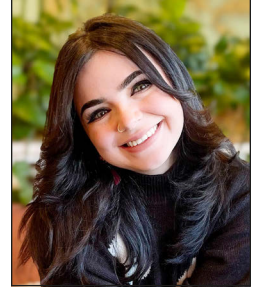
William "Bill" Kibler

from the United States Military Academy at West Point, was further solidified by his service as a Corps of Engineers Officer in Alaska during the Exxon Valdez cleanup and in the Persian Gulf War. Following his legal training at Syracuse University College of Law, Bill specialized in environmental, land use, and international law. Beyond his professional achievements, Bill is a dedicated community servant, volunteering as a firefighter and EMT, and currently serving as chief of the Califon Fire Company. He also enjoys fly fishing, kayaking, and hiking.

Welcome Izzy Filippini, Office Manager & Event Coordinator

Izzy made an immediate impact upon joining GSWA in May 2024, seamlessly integrating into the Great Swamp Great Music Festival on her very first day. Her proven ability to create and manage successful events, exemplified by the *Flower Power Flea Market & Festival*, a North Jersey showcase of local

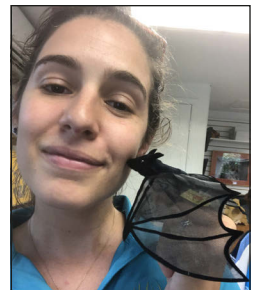
businesses and artisans, made her an instant asset. Izzy's passion for supporting local communities shines through her work. At GSWA, she expertly manages daily office operations, spearheads the annual gala fundraiser, and orchestrates a variety of fundraising, social, and program events. Driven by a desire to create positive change, Izzy is also deeply involved in animal welfare and rescue programs and supports other small businesses.



Izzy Filippini

Welcome Alex Sloane, Water Quality and Education Associate

GSWA welcomed Alex in June 2024, a New Jersey native with a strong background in watershed conservation and education. Her nine years in south Florida provided her with hands-on experience working with diverse species and ecosystems, including sea turtles, alligators, owls, and mangrove shorelines. She also brings to us her expertise in water quality and bacterial sampling. Alex is dedicated to supporting the health of the Great Swamp ecosystem and its surrounding communities, and is currently pursuing of her master's degree in wildlife conservation and management at Unity Environmental University.



Alex Sloane

Welcome Eric Fenchel, Director of Finance

Eric joined GSWA on February 27th. He is a graduate of Rutgers University and has an M.B.A. from Baruch College. Eric has run finance departments for various companies for over 30 years. Recently, he has worked for NJ non-profits and has his own “Best Practices” consulting business. He lives in Harding, NJ and is very excited to join the GSWA team!



Eric Fenchel

Happy 20-year Anniversary to Hazel England, Director of Education, Outreach, and Land Stewardship

Since 2004, Hazel has been the heart of GSWA, our longest-serving staff member. Her dedication weaves through every facet of our work, from inspiring students of all ages with engaging environmental education programs to meticulously managing the restoration of our Conservation Management Area (CMA) in Harding Township. Hazel’s passion is palpable, and her impact immeasurable. With a



Hazel England

rich background that includes a decade as a Naturalist in the Great Swamp and executive leadership at the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, she brings a wealth of experience. Her degrees in Zoology, Botany, and Ecology & Environmental Management, coupled with her Scottish roots, create a unique and invaluable perspective. We are incredibly fortunate to have Hazel’s expertise and unwavering commitment shaping our community.

Welcome Kristina McRae to the Board of Trustees

Driven by a lifelong commitment to environmental stewardship, Kristina joins GSWA’s Board with a clear vision for preserving the purity of Earth’s natural resources. Her experiences across diverse landscapes in Europe, Canada, and the United States have solidified her belief in the importance of conservation. Kristina’s professional background encompasses executive leadership in Sales, Category Management, and Human Resources, providing her with a comprehensive skillset. She is poised to apply her strategic expertise to help expand GSWA’s reach and impact. Kristina lives in Chatham with her husband and two college-aged children. 🌲



Kristina McRae

What I've Learned About GSWA Membership—and What's Next

By Nancy Rago, Membership and Social Media Manager

Reflecting on the past five years at the Great Swamp Watershed Association, I'm inspired by the incredible growth of our community. As Membership and Social Media Manager for the past four years, I've had the privilege of seeing firsthand the passion and dedication of our supporters—people like you who believe in protecting our water and land.

And the numbers tell a powerful story. GSWA's reach has expanded downstream, welcoming supporters from new towns. Over the past five years, our total membership has surged by an impressive 47%, with the biggest jump occurring between 2020 and 2021. Since then, we've maintained strong, steady support. Even more exciting, our Sustaining Membership program has grown by 35%—and I'm eager to see it expand even further this year.

Why Sustaining Membership Matters

GSWA thrives because of committed members who contribute in countless ways, whether through donations, volunteering, or funding. Every effort strengthens our mission to protect the Great Swamp watershed and Passaic River waterways.

Our Sustaining Membership program, in particular, has grown for good reason. By



setting up automatic, scheduled donations, these members provide GSWA with a predictable and reliable income stream. This financial stability allows us to plan ahead and ensure the

success of critical initiatives like water quality monitoring, habitat restoration, and environmental education.

Here's why becoming a Sustaining Member makes an impact:

- **Consistent Support for Our Mission:** Your ongoing contributions create a stable foundation for our work.
- **Less Paper, More Action:** Fewer renewal notices mean lower administrative costs, allowing more resources to go directly toward environmental programs.
- **Hassle-Free Giving:** Your membership renews automatically, and tax receipts are emailed to you for convenience.

Ready to make the switch? If you're already a GSWA member—or if you're joining for the first time, becoming a Sustaining Member is easy. Just visit GreatSwamp.org/donate, enter your donation amount, and select “Make this donation every” to choose your preferred frequency (monthly, quarterly, or annually). Your support makes a real difference, and I'd love to see this program grow even more in the coming year!

Looking Ahead: A New Spotted Turtle Survey

Beyond our membership growth, we want to hear from you. How do you connect with nature? What environmental issues matter most to you? Your input will help shape GSWA's future programs and events.

Do you remember the Spotted Turtle Survey of 2020? Launched by Kristina Necovska, our former Membership & Social



Jim Gilbert/Photo:
Great Swamp NWR - a spotted turtle

Media Associate, this survey helped us better understand the values of our members. We named it after the resilient spotted turtle—an adaptable, problem-solving species native to the Great Swamp.

Now, I'm revisiting and refining the survey to ensure it reflects the needs of our evolving community. As GSWA continues to expand its reach beyond the Great Swamp and along the Passaic River, it's more important than ever to understand what resonates with our members.

The updated survey takes just a minute or two to complete and remains anonymous.

A few required questions help us understand which part of the watershed you're from. Individual responses are confidential, but your honest feedback will guide our programs and events efforts. You'll find the survey at GreatSwamp.org/sts, and we'll also feature it in upcoming eNewsletters. The survey will be open until **Sunday, May 11, 2025**, and responses will be analyzed for a final report. If you'd like to receive a copy of the results, simply provide your email address in the final question of the survey.

Let's Stay Connected



Have questions? Want to chat about membership? I'd love to hear from you! Feel free to reach out at nrago@greatswamp.org.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we're making a lasting impact—protecting and preserving our waterways for generations to come. 🌲

Multiply Your Impact: Share This Newsletter!

This *Across the Watershed* newsletter is a treasure trove of information, with articles contributed by the entire GSWA staff. Don't let it go to waste! Share the importance of watershed protection with a friend or neighbor. Your simple act of sharing can inspire new members and strengthen our collective effort to safeguard our natural resources.

Covid, Cookies, Flower Power, and the Great Swamp: How the Last Five Years Connected Me and the Environment

By Izzy Filippini, Office Manager and Event Coordinator

In February 2020, I was a fresh college grad with a bachelor's degree in communications and digital media. I had a full-time position at a New York/Los Angeles based creative agency and had just moved into a great apartment; I was on the fast track to success. My life, along with the rest of the world, would be flipped on its head only a few short weeks later. March 12 was the last day I ever commuted to New York, and I worked from home for a few months before I was laid off. During that time, I almost lost my mom, a paramedic, to COVID-19. The near loss of my mother, my seemingly derailed career, and my suddenly confined living situation made me question the value of my work.

The summer of 2020 was a time of huge change for everyone, and I was no exception. I moved from downtown Montclair to a quiet apartment with a private patio surrounded by lush trees and gardens, and I spent a lot of time outside, something I never really did before. Finding work as a new grad during a global pandemic was no easy feat, so my lack of job paired with my culinary background turned into a cottage food vegan cookie business called Lazy Iris Cookie Co.

Over the next year and a half, Lazy Iris would sell at craft shows and vendor markets, and I began connecting with other vegans and small business owners around New Jersey with my younger sister. Diving into my new community and learning about veganism was world-altering for me, and, for the first time, I really became cognizant of my eco-footprint. Though I previously practiced

some eco-conscious habits, I hadn't fully considered my impact. More than anything, I was consumed by the idea that I alone would not make a difference. Very suddenly, however, I went from hyper consumption to buying only what I needed, shopping small/second-hand, and reducing waste whenever I could.

On a rainy afternoon in October 2021, my sister and I were having a slow day at a vendor market and were talking about all of this. We came up with the idea of a vegan event with the mission of promoting responsible consumerism and highlighting nonprofits that were doing exceptional work. Flash forward to May 2022, when the first Flower Power Flea Market & Festival took place at a beautiful lakeside meadow in Pompton Lakes. We had a whopping 65 handmade and vintage vendors, vegan food, local animal welfare and environmental nonprofits, and even adoptable dogs and cats. Our planning of Flower Power was meticulous; we selected vendors who sold nothing that was mass produced, greenwashed, or felt like it would just end up in a landfill. Over the next few years, my sister and I organized six Flower Power events, growing to nearly 100 vendors and 1,500 attendees.

Flower Power showed me my passion for event planning, particularly events with a positive mission. Unfortunately, such roles are rare. Most event coordinator positions work in corporate or private events, and I dreaded going back to a job that would feel wasteful to me. Then, in March 2024, almost 4 years to the day that I began working from

home, I found a job ad for the office manager and event coordinator position at Great Swamp Watershed Association, and I had my first day at GSWA on May 15. For the first time, my job felt truly meaningful.

Looking back, losing my cushy agency job was the best thing that could have happened to me. At the start of 2020, I was a hyper consumer who had no interest in the outdoors and gave little to no thought about the environment. I now love spending time with nature, practicing ways to lower my eco-footprint, and making a difference through my job. As office manager, I support a staff that is doing incredible stewardship, education,

and environmental activism work, and as event coordinator, I get to connect with our community and get people excited about the incredible work GSWA does.

Somewhere along the way, I heard the quote, “I cannot do all the good that the world needs, but the world needs all the good that I can do.” We all have a little good to give. For me, that comes, in part, from being involved with GSWA. For others, that may be rescuing a pet, cutting back on single-use plastic, shopping locally, or even getting involved with local nonprofits. Whatever your little bit of good looks like, every little bit helps. 🌲

Bank of America Supports GSWA and Thriving Communities

By Lynne Applebaum, Director of Institutional Relations

This past year, GSWA was fortunate to receive general operating support from a new funder for us – Bank of America. We are thrilled to have them as new partners who support our mission to protect and improve the Passaic River.

Bank of America is committed to investing in communities. In New Jersey and across the country, they support local organizations like GSWA, which are on the forefront of creating thriving communities.

Water is life, and clean water means health. The path to long-term success or thriving

communities cannot be paved without access to clean, healthy water and protected natural resources. Bank of America has made a commitment and the connection between environmental protection and the ability of people to thrive in communities across the Passaic River region. We are fortunate and grateful that Bank of America chooses to support organizations like GSWA who work every day to protect and improve the water and land resources of this region, enabling those who live here to truly thrive. 🌲

GSWA's 2024 Gala Celebration, A Green Gathering

By Izzy Filippini, Office Manager and Event Coordinator

Excitement was in the air as close to 250 Great Swamp Watershed Association supporters came together to celebrate the environment at our 2024 Gala Celebration in Florham Park on October 24. Themed *A Green Gathering*, our largest annual fundraiser, emphasized environmental education through intimate table conversations rather than highlighting one keynote speaker. Over 30 esteemed environmental experts – artists, local politicians, consultants, foragers, business owners, and sustainable farmers to name a few – acted as *Green Gathering* discussion leaders and conducted informative conversations at each table. I wish there was room to list them all.

The evening began with a cocktail reception where VIPs and *Green Gathering* discussion leaders mingled, enjoyed some fabulous hors d'oeuvres, and perused our 2024 silent auction. With a whopping 216 auction items including art pieces, fine wine, spa and gym memberships, theme park tickets, guided boat and helicopter tours, dining experiences, travel getaways, sports and theater tickets, and more, this was by far GSWA's largest silent auction.

As the cocktail reception concluded, attendees made their way to their tables and began their *Green Gathering* discussions. Engaging and insightful conversations spanned topics such as environmental art, ESG investing, local history, and government policies. At one table, Carol English, owner of the certified organic and preserved English Farm, and Aly Stoffo, forager, educator, and owner of Glam Gardener NYC, discussed the benefits of native spicebush and the importance of organic and sustainable farming. At another, Jean Epiphan, M.S., Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent and assistant professor for Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Morris County, shared ideas with guests for making their own yards more pollinator-friendly by gardening with native plants. Overall, it was a lively evening of connection over a shared love of the environment.



The 2024 GSWA Silent Auction.
Photo courtesy of Kathy Harris Photography.



Green Gathering speakers Aly Stoffo and Carol English pose with guests.
Photo courtesy of Kathy Harris Photography.

The Gala would not have been possible without the hard work and support of so many. We deeply appreciate the generosity of our 2024 Gala donors, advertisers, supporters, and underwriters: Adrienne & Reed Auerbach, Atlantic Health System, Avelino Law,

BASF Corporation, Delta Dental, Eagle Cliff Real Estate Partners, Agi & Matt Krauser, PSEG, Valley Bank, Lisa & David Welsh, and The William L. Gibson Foundation. GSWA thanks the incredible *Green Gathering* discussion leaders, donors, advertisers, supporters, volunteers, and guests.

Special thanks to Back to Nature Home & Garden for donating the beautiful florals and centerpieces and to Kathy Harris Photography for the incredible photos of the celebration.

I would personally like to thank the GSWA Staff, Board of Trustees, and Advisory

Council members who worked tirelessly to plan, promote, and execute the Gala, secure donations for the silent auction, and connect GSWA with fantastic *Green Gathering* speakers. I learned so much from you all during the process of putting together my first Gala at GSWA, and I'm excited to work with you in preparation for the 2025 Gala!

Want to be the first to hear about the 2025 GSWA Gala Celebration? Visit GreatSwamp.org to sign up for our mailing list! 🌲



GSWA Staff pose ahead of the 2024 GSWA Gala Celebration.
Front row: Sandra LaVigne, Val Thorpe, Sally Rubin, Sue Levine, Wade Kirby;
Back row: Ginger Van Ryzin, Alex Sloane, Hazel England, Nancy Rago,
Izzy Filippini, Lynne Applebaum

Have You Considered Including GSWA in Your Estate Plans?

Designating the Great Swamp Watershed Association as a beneficiary in your will is a sure way to continue your support for our work and sustain it long into the future.

Specific language in your will should be reviewed with your attorney. For more information on GSWA's Planned Giving program, please contact Wade Kirby, Director of Development at (973) 538-3500 or wkirby@greatswamp.org.

Where Are They Now? Catching up with GSWA Interns Five-Plus Years Later...

Compiled by Sandra LaVigne, Director of Water Quality Programs

Chris Coultas – 2020 Intern

“It’s hard to believe it’s been five years! My internship with the GSWA significantly increased my passion for environmental education and it hasn’t slowed since. Since

then, I graduated from Drew University with a bachelor’s degree in environmental studies and Sustainability Research while serving as the student director of the Forest Restoration Project. After Drew, I continued

on to Colorado State University where I completed my Masters in Natural Resource Stewardship with a focus in Ecological Restoration. During my time at Colorado State, I spent two summers as a Teaching Assistant and Assistant Professor at CSU’s Mountain Campus, an immersive field research facility where undergraduate students live and learn forestry, rangeland, watershed, wildlife, and human dimension sciences. Most recently, I’ve been working at Rocky Mountain National Park with the Continental Divide Research Learning Center as the Community Science Field lead. In this position I have six different projects which heavily involve community partners and volunteers to collect field data. These projects range from



Chris Coultas

macroinvertebrate sampling to forestry composition measurements, to recurring Glacier Photo Monitoring. Thank you to all of those at the Great Swamp Watershed Association that encouraged me to take this journey!”

Rachael Freundlich – 2019-2020 Intern

“I interned at GSWA for two summers. It was hot, sweaty, and labor-intensive work. I built boardwalks, removed invasive species, mulched paths, and collected water quality samples. Even though the work was difficult, it was also incredibly rewarding. It was during those months that I learned plant and invertebrate identification, riparian restoration, and NJ history. The lessons I learned at the GSWA stayed with me throughout my college career and beyond. In 2021, I graduated from St. Lawrence University with a bachelor’s

degree in environmental studies and French and started my career in public service. First as an AmeriCorps member building trails and educating hikers in upstate NY, then as a Park Ranger for the National Park Service (NPS). I’ve worked seasonally for the NPS for three years now and greatly enjoy sharing my love of environmental education, history,



Rachael Freundlich

and stewardship with visitors. In my work, I look to connect people from around the country (and world!) to the stories of America's National Parks, so that they might take lessons of sustainability, progress, and community back with them to their own homes. Now, I, like so many others on my career path, am hoping for a permanent position. In the meantime, I am waiting to hear back from graduate schools as I look to continue my education in public lands management. Fingers crossed!"

Chris Gocklin – 2019 Intern

"I am currently living in Sussex County with my wife, 2 children (4 and 1), dog pepper and cat rue. This year is my 6th year of teaching high



Chris Gocklin

school environmental science and special Ed science at High Point Regional High School. On the weekends and summers, I do photography both professionally and as a hobby. In the spring and fall I enjoy taking my family on hikes on the local trails and conservation areas and camping trips to the Adirondacks and Catskills. The skills and friendships I acquired at the GSWA have been things I have treasured and often reference my experience there to my students!"

Mason Scher – 2017-2018 Intern

"After a wonderful year of interning at

GSWA, I spent a summer interning at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C. where I developed an interest in using the chemistry of fossils to interpret past envi-



Mason Scher

ronments and climate change. After finishing my undergraduate degree in Chemistry from Drew University in 2020, I started my PhD at Princeton University in the Department of Geosciences. My research uses stable isotopes (different masses of the same element) to reconstruct the diets of ancient animals (including dinosaurs), figure out how rainfall has changed during periods of extremely high CO₂ in the past (e.g. 56 million years ago), and study how modern plants take up nutrients from soil. My love for being outside is strong, and fieldwork in Wyoming is one of my favorite parts of research. Often, I use skills developed during my time at GSWA teaching demos to explain scientific concepts to undergraduate mentees. I plan to finish my PhD in the Spring of 2026, and we'll see where I go from there!"

GSWA still takes on post-High School and College interns. Although these internships are currently unpaid, interns gain valuable and relatable experience with us. If you are interested, please email your cover letter and resume to SandraL@greatswamp.org. 🌲

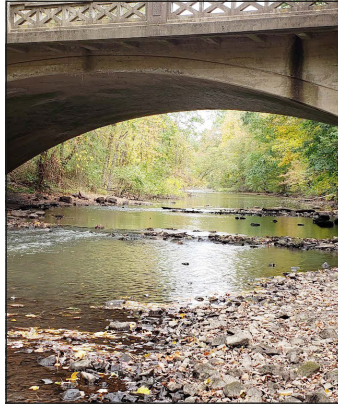
Plastic Pollution and Microplastics in Our Waters – A Continuing Story

(continued from page 1)

were microfibers and film plastics. Microfibers enter the water mostly through laundry effluent after washing synthetic clothing. Film plastics are pieces of plastics broken down from things including single-use bags, candy wrappers, and film-wrap packaging.

Five years ago, just 14 municipalities within the Passaic River watershed had passed and implemented single-use plastic bans. However, it was in 2020 that New Jersey passed the (at the time) most progressive single-use plastics reduction law in the country. The law, Plastic Pollution Reduction Act of 2020, or the “Get Past Plastic” law as it is called, banned single-use plastic bags from stores and most businesses, banned poly-styrene food take-out containers, and limited the distribution of plastic straws.

The implementation of the law began with the plastic straw restriction in 2021. It was fully implemented in 2022 with the bans on single-use plastic bags and takeout containers. This law aimed to reduce the overall quantity of plastic that ends up in our waterways which, in 2020, was estimated at



*Millington Gorge,
Basking Ridge, New Jersey*



*Primrose Brook,
Morristown, New Jersey*



*Microplastics sample
under microscope*

approximately eight million tons per year.

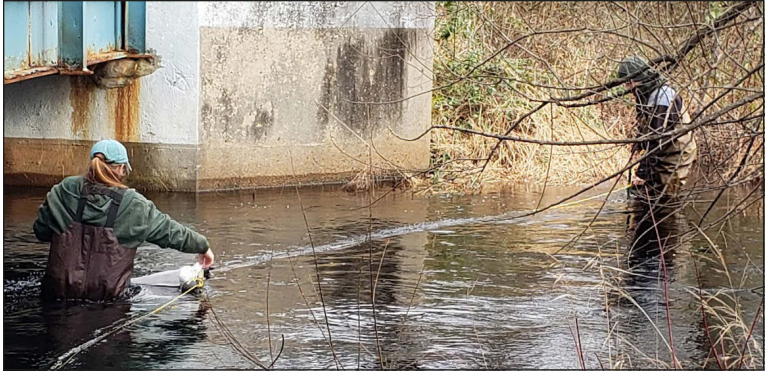
Today, five years since the passing of the Get Past Plastic law, and six years since our last microplastics study, GSWA will conduct a new microplastics study in the Passaic River region. We will conduct research that both mirrors and expands on the sites we sampled in our 2018 and 2019 studies to determine what impact these plastic reduction laws have made in our waterways.

Reviewing data released by the New Jersey Plastics Advisory Council in their 2023 and 2024 reports, in the first year alone, 16.5 **billion** single-use plastic bags were eliminated from circulation. Clean Ocean Action (COA) is a New Jersey non-profit that conducts bi-annual beach clean-ups and collects data on the types and quantities of the items collected. In 2019, COA reported 9,724 single-use plastic bags were collected in their cleanup. In 2023, just 2,300 bags were collected – nearly a difference of 7,425 bags. GSWA Stream Team members have also reported seeing far fewer bags along our local rivers when conducting stream

assessments in the spring and fall. GSWA hopes this reduction in plastics is also seen in our microplastics data set this spring.

New Jersey has been a leader in working to reduce the impacts of plastics in our environment and our waters. GSWA will continue to advocate for practices that will further reduce our dependence on single-use plastics, helping to keep our waters safe for generations to come. Below, see a list of things you can do to help keep plastics out of our waters.

- Use re-usable bags – not just at the supermarket but wherever you shop.
- Bring your reusable coffee or tea mug to the coffee shop and ask them to fill it instead of a disposable cup with a plastic lid.



- Put a reusable bag with a few reusable storage containers in your car and bring them into a restaurant for leftovers.
- At restaurants, ask for a drink with no stirrer or straw. If you like to use a straw, bring a reusable one.
- Carry your own travel cutlery in your car for takeout or on-the-go eating.
- And support local business that are making changes to reduce their plastic use.

References and citations for this article are available upon request. Email sandral@greatswamp.org. 🌿



Double Your Impact This Earth Day!

Celebrate Earth Day (April 22nd) with GSWA and make your contribution go twice as far! A generous supporter has pledged to match every dollar you donate between now and May 31, 2025, up to \$10,000. Donate today and help us reach our goal!



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How to Create an Environmentalist in Ten “Easy” Steps

By: Val Thorpe, Director of Communications and Membership

My entire childhood, all I knew about vacation accommodations was the walls leaked when it rained, the mattress was inevitably flat by morning, and the bathroom was always less than desirable. One might ask, why didn't we choose better hotels? The better question at the time was, why didn't we choose any hotel... ever?!

No, we were not a “hotel” family. We were a “canvas tent at a KOA campground” family. My mom was our Girl Scout leader and my dad, an engineer at Bell Labs, embraced nature getaways to find his center. My sisters and I followed their lead.

Vacations were camping. That's all we knew. Once we arrived at the campsite in our

soda/beer cans (I'm dating myself), cigarette butts, and broken glass.

Next, we'd drag the what-felt-like-100-pound canvas tent from the car to the flattest spot (which was typically also the rockiest), try to remember how to assemble the 57 bent poles, and somehow turn this behemoth into our shelter. Then we'd take turns using the one foot-pump to inflate our turn-of-the-century air mattresses and unroll our sleeping bags.

My mom fashioned a hand-washing station from an upside-down (cleaned) bleach bottle suspended from a tree. A strategically placed nail served as the faucet and stocking holding a bar of soap hung from the handle. Genius!

One of us would find the water pump (it was never close to our campsite), fill the 5-gallon Jerry Jug and drag it back. This was our drinking and utility water

Once we were set up, my sisters and I would go exploring, catching bullfrogs and salamanders by the lake and collecting firewood. Dinner was prepared on a grate over an open fire, but we eventually graduated to a propane stove – progress! After dinner, we heated water and dumped it into bins to wash the dishes. Paper plates and plasticware? Not on their watch! Then we'd roast marshmallows around the crackling campfire, rearranging our chairs when the wind changed direction and blew smoke in someone's face. It was all part of the experience!

Before bed, we filled our collapsible drinking cups with water to brush out teeth. Then we took the one flashlight, seemingly always with a breath of battery life left in it,



Me (in the middle) and my sisters ready for some canoeing.

highlighter yellow station wagon (true story), we'd snap into action. First things first, the kids would grab a brown lunch bag (most likely, one that had been used several times before) and patrol the site for trash left behind by previous campers – the three things I remember finding most were tabs from

to find our way to the outhouses... That's all I will say about that.

As we dozed off to the soft hiss of our air mattresses deflating, crickets, owls, and other night sounds, I would think about what adventures the next day might bring. We hiked, fished, swam, canoed, made forts, and simply immersed ourselves in nature. We camped everywhere, including many national parks, so there was always something amazing on the horizon.

But did it always rain on every single camping trip? Yes... yes it did. "Don't touch the tent!" was our parents' mantra. But the temptation was just too much. A raindrop traveling down the outside of a canvas tent was just begging a 6-year-old-me to follow its trail with my finger. This, of course, led to leaks (something to do with disrupting the surface tension) and a wet sleeping bag.

At the end of each trip, we would drag our rain-soaked, now 200-pound tent back to the car and pack up our belongings. The very last task was to grab another used lunch bag and search for more trash as my dad repeated every... single... time... "Always leave it cleaner than when you arrived." This included any outdoor space we ever visited. At the time, it drove me crazy. Now, I'm forever grateful for those lessons.

As the directions on the shampoo bottle say, lather, rinse, repeat. These wonderful,

outdoor, family experiences continued into adulthood. My sisters and I carried on these traditions with our kids, and now, they're doing the same.



My daughter in her early camping days.

My parents led by example, connecting us to the power of nature, conservation, and open space. They are the reason I am a proud environmentalist working to protect these important resources which benefit us all.

That was about 10 steps, right? If not, pretty close. You don't have to sleep in a wet sleeping bag to care about the environment. This was just my journey. What's yours? If you have a story to share, please email me at vthorpe@greatswamp.org and perhaps we will publish it in an upcoming eNewsletter. In the meantime, please keep caring. 🌲

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Please let us know! Send your name, address, and old email to info@GreatSwamp.org to ensure you continue receiving our informative eNewsletters.



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