

*Wild & Scenic*  
**WESTFIELD RIVER**  
*Committee*

2017 ANNUAL  
REPORT



*Celebrating 25 Years Keeping it Wild & Scenic*

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### Town of Becket

Mercedes Gallagher, Treasurer  
Karen Karlberg, alt.

### Town of Chester

Robert Thompson, Chair; Dave Pierce, alt.

### Town of Chesterfield

Nancy Rich; Denise Cormier, alt.

### Town of Cummington

Amy Pulley

### Town of Huntington

Jeff Penn, Vice-Chair

### Town of Middlefield

Carol Waag; Terry Crean, alt.

### Town of Savoy

John Tynan

### Town of Washington

Roy Bryan; Ed Neumuth, alt.

### Town of Windsor

Jim Caffrey, Secretary; David Zink, alt.

### Town of Worthington

Virginia Martell; Susan Warner, alt.

### Additional Members:

Westfield River Watershed Association

The Trustees of Reservations

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

National Park Service

### Associate Member:

Westfield River Environmental Center

Westfield State University

## Letter from the Chair

As we near a quarter century of protecting the Westfield River and half century of protecting some of the greatest rivers in the United States, the Committee is reflecting back on our work over the last 25 years and looking ahead to the next 25 years.

Change was a familiar theme in 2017. We welcomed several new Committee Members, while a few of our devoted Members departed for exciting adventures. Unexpected critical program needs shifted some of our capacity and encouraged us to find ways to make the Committee and the work we do more resilient to changes in the future.

Often with change, we experience a sense of loss. Our greatest loss this past year came with the passing of our dear friend, Mercedes Gallagher. For almost 20 years, Mercedes was our Town of Becket Representative and Treasurer on the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee. She was devoted and passionate about working for the preservation of water. Before her work on the Westfield, she was Executive Director of Del-AWARE Unlimited in Buck County, PA working to protect sections of the now designated Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic River. In recent years, she led pioneering efforts overseeing the removal of milfoil as part of the Center

Pond Weed Project in Becket and previously served as a member of the town's Conservation Commission. We will surely miss her presence on the Committee and we hope to inspire her enduring spirit and determination in others.

Like rivers which are constantly changing with the passage of flow and time, the Committee will find a new course as we move ahead. Although we may be uncertain of what the future holds, we hope you join us in celebrating the progress and accomplishments we have made over the last 25 years along the Westfield River. We encourage you to Discover, Enjoy and Volunteer!

**Robert Thompson, Chair**



*Cover: First Beecology outing with Robert Gegear. Interested in bees? Join us for events in 2018.*

*Left: Emily Landon, enthusiastic intern.*

## OUR MISSION

*To preserve, protect and enhance the special qualities and outstanding resources of the Westfield River Watershed in concert with local communities.*

# FINANCIAL REPORT

Project funding provided through the National Park Service's Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers Program (except as noted \*).

## General Expenses

General Operations \$7,525\*

## Outreach & Education

Outreach & Education \$4,005  
Watershed Blitz \$2,273\*

## Stewardship

Stream Teams \$21,733  
River Internships \$6,672  
Monitoring \$4,632

## Riparian Conservation

TNC Riparian Conservation Grant \$20,000

## Community Grants

Chesterfield LCC – Reading the Landscape \$150  
Gateway Outdoor Club \$1,200  
Friends of the Keystone Arches - Film \$6,750  
Friends of Windsor – OUR Town Project \$900  
Worthington Library Stream Explorers Pack \$764  
WSU EnvScience Hydrolab \$4,000

## Partnership Rivers

Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers Gathering \$6,247

**Total Expenses: \$86,892**

Additional Project Funds Under Contract \$61,206

Program and technical assistance provided by staff at the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, Department of Fish & Game and the National Park Service.

\*A total of \$427 of these funds came from other donations.



Fairy shrimp found in an East Branch tributary, during our vernal pool plunge.  
Photo: Jason Crockwell

# A YEAR BY THE NUMBERS

**14** National Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers hosted at Westfield State University for the bi-annual gathering

People attended the “Reading the Forested Landscape” talk by Tom Wessels co-sponsored with the Chesterfield Local Cultural Council.

**110**

**198**

Stream Team Volunteers contributed over 847 hours to monitor the watershed, improve trail and recreational features, and certify vernal pools.

**Nearly 2000**

Acres and more than **27,000** ft (5 miles) of stream frontage protected with support of a Riparian Conservation Grant

**\$516,614+**

in grants, donations, in-kind and volunteer services leveraged



## Another Dynamic Blitz

Each year from May to July I walk 10 to 15 Wild & Scenic river miles with landowners, volunteers and interns: conducting visual surveys, noting resources, beauty, historic elements, and issues to be addressed. At the end of this exploration I select river segments that offer the greatest opportunity for our specialists to take a group exploring. We call this annual event our **Watershed Blitz**. In 2017 the East Branch offered up its treasures as over 65 participants waded into riffles, braved cobble and trundled through brush. They traversed steep banks in search of tracks and paddled into wetlands. Watching the community expand and share knowledge and love of the Westfield is a delight.

Save the date **Sept 22** for the **2018 Watershed Blitz!!**

**Meredyth Babcock**, Volunteer Coordinator

---

## Railroad to the Moon

A documentary on Whistler's father building the western railroad over the Berkshire Hills has entered the editing phase after a long hiatus. **Railroad to the Moon**, a collaboration between **Alson Video Productions**, **Friends of the Keystone Arches** and the **Chester Foundation** began 15 years ago when a project to repair segments of two Keystone Arches belonging to **Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife** seemed likely to proceed. Planning to film the restoration process, the group began to shoot historic reenactments to use as background footage for the restoration storyline, but the project ground to a halt and eventual abandonment.



Geoff Alson moved to Arizona and the film was put aside. A decade later the project has been renewed with a generous grant from the **Wild & Scenic Committee**.

As the Arches are one of the top historic resources in the watershed they are of special concern to the Committee. New footage and finish editing will result in an hour-long documentary on building the first mountain railroad, including the imposing **Keystone Arch Bridges**.

**David Pearce**, Chester Rep. and founder, The Friends of the Keystone Arches



---

## Underwater Realms

When my son and I signed up for **Snorkeling the Wild & Scenic Way**, we didn't know quite what to expect. On a brilliant summer day we hiked 3 miles upriver to reach it, the inner gorge. From steep slopes dominated by massive trees the bedrock plunged into the languid river. We donned our wetsuits and plunged in too.

No, we weren't in some tropical jungle, we were in our own Westfield River paradise. Twelve intrepid swimmers braved 42 degree temperatures last July to explore the rarely seen underwater realm of macro-invertebrates, crawdads and fish—thanks to the expert instruction and toasty warm wetsuits provided by **Action Sports and Travel** of Pittsfield. We drifted lazily down with the current, our masks trained down, intent on spying the hidden life within the undulating folds of the bedrock below, in the magical liquid silence of the river. **Carol Waag**, Middlefield Rep.

## 470 Acres Conserved on Coles Brook in Middlefield

In May of 2017, after more than a decade of communications with the landowners, **The Nature Conservancy (TNC)** purchased 470 acres of land owned by the Kushi family in Middlefield. Michio and Aveline Kushi founded the Kushi Institute in Becket in 1978. The Kushi land had been on the Conservancy's radar since the inception of our Westfield River program in 2004, as the largest unprotected land parcel in single ownership in TNC's Middlefield Peru forest core. This 28,600 acre forested area was identified by TNC in a rigorous ecoregional planning process, spanning an area from Maine to Virginia, as a premier opportunity for large-scale forest conservation.

As is often the case with land conservation projects, the success of the Kushi project was due to critical roles played by many partners, especially the **Wild and Scenic Westfield River Committee (WSWRC)**. Back in 2009, Becket Representative Mercedes Gallagher helped connect me with the executive director of the Kushi Institute as at the time I wasn't getting much traction with the landowners. It was through this connection and a lunch meeting at the Institute that we began a conversation that ultimately resulted in protection of the majority of the land owned



*Sean Provencher (MA DCR) standing in Coles Brook, Kushi tract, ©Markelle Smith, TNC, 2017*

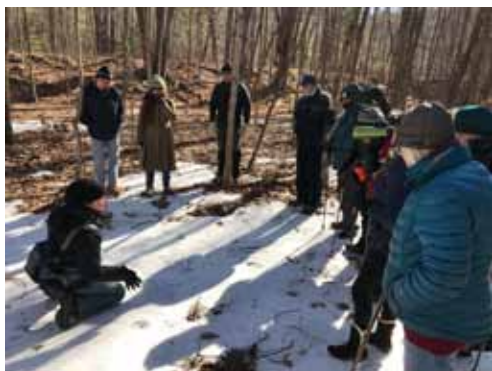
Institute. The relationships and trust shared by neighbors and friends in the small communities in which we work are critical to accomplishing our conservation goals. The **WSWRC** is an invaluable partner who has been so generous in sharing their local knowledge. Also thanks to a generous riparian conservation grant from the Committee, the Conservancy was able to fund half of the survey costs for the Kushi land.

**Markelle Smith, The Nature Conservancy**



## Tracking Landowners

As landowners in West Chesterfield for 18 Years on the banks of the Wild & Scenic East Branch of the Westfield River my husband and I offered our 9 acreages as a training site for the **Westfield River Wild & Scenic Saturday** events. It was truly a pleasure being surrounded by hardcore nature enthusiasts last March during the **Animal Tracking and Wildlife Camera Workshop** in West Chesterfield. With temperatures in the single digits, it was not easy navigating the wildlife cameras. But we persevered and had a great time tracking otter, rabbits, fox, porcupines, coyotes, deer, fishers, raccoons, (and more), in the beautiful East Branch of the Westfield River. A special thanks to Meredyth and Jess for leading the way. **Lynn Hicks**





## Gateway Gets Out

The **Gateway Outdoor Club** had a great 2017! Our group of 8 students has been outside enjoying the beauty of the Westfield watershed area. We went snowshoeing multiple times over the winter, including a hike at Chesterfield Gorge led by Meredyth Babcock. We visited Sanderson Brook Falls and Tekoa Mountain, and had weekly exploitative hikes all around the **Gateway High School** property. A highlight of our year was the kayaking trip led by Jeff Penn on Littleville Lake. We learned about the geology and history of the area and had a great time paddling around. This event as well as some of our transportation and equipment costs were helped by a generous grant from the **Wild and Scenic Westfield River Committee**. Everyone is looking forward to a fun 2018 and getting outside even more!

**Nicole Daviau**, Gateway teacher



*Members of the Gateway Regional High School's Outdoor Club enjoying a winter hike and frozen boulders along the East Branch Trail of the Westfield River, connecting Huntington to Chesterfield.*

## A May Afternoon

When I arrived at the Becket Elementary School, I found six young **Stream Explorers** circled around **Meredyth Babcock** and assistant **Kester Warlow-Harlow**, soaking up sunshine and talking about nature. Final exams at Westfield State had just wrapped up, so getting a chance to drive up into the hilltowns for a little storm drain labeling was sounding pretty good.

I've been organizing storm drain labeling sessions for the **Westfield River Watershed Association** for 5 or 6 years, and with the help of lots of volunteers we've probably labeled at least 5000 drains over that time – in Westfield, Southwick, Agawam, Russell, Huntington, Worthington and Chester. The colorful labels are intended to alert people to the fact that storm drains generally lead directly to local streams and rivers, not to a processing facility that might remove potentially harmful materials. The hope is they're getting people to think before throwing trash or dog waste or spent vehicle oil into the storm drain system.

After some initial discussion and a couple of practice labels applied on the school grounds, the youngsters joined in enthusiastically as we spread out to label the drains in the central portion of Becket. There aren't that many drains in Becket, and some of them probably drain to sumps rather than directly to the Westfield River, but that water ultimately drains to river via the groundwater system, so the "No Dumping" rule still applies! It took us only 45 minutes or so to find and label the couple of dozen drains in "downtown" North Becket village, but everyone had a good time – especially the boy who took on the job of directing traffic around our crew! And it was a fitting way to draw this multi-year project to a close – with the youngsters who participated taking on an expanded sense of ownership and responsibility for their local stream. After all, they're the ones we hope will be enjoying the cleaner local environment that the project was intended to foster.

**Mike Young**, Geology Professor, Westfield University

# The Westfield River as Our Guide

Having just finished my junior year at UMass-Amherst in the **Wildlife Ecology and Conservation** program, I was looking for work that would allow me to explore the outdoors while making meaningful connections in my personal and professional life. I found the **Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee (WSWRC)** had a summer internship. I had only lived in Worthington for 9 months and I felt that working with the committee for the summer would be perfect. I began working with **WSWRC** and joined the Conservation Commission hoping that I would get a well-rounded experience protecting the river through grass roots community campaigns & implementing state regulations regarding wetland protection.

As an intern for **WSWRC**, not only did I walk the entire Middle Branch, I was able to help organize, participate, and implement some of the key community projects. The experiences I had as an intern strengthened my interest in freshwater resources and helped me develop professional relationships. When the committee had an opening for Worthington, where I lived, I decided to pick up where I left off, this time as a representative. After graduating, I was accepted into the **UMass Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation Biology** Masters program focusing on restoration of endangered freshwater mussels. I am excited to work with the **WSWRC** and for the river that has taught me so much about who I am.

**Virginia Martell**



A couple of years ago, I was asked to do a spring rivers studies activity with a group of homeschoolers in Cummington. Since my knowledge of the natural history of the river was a bit sketchy and it had been years since I had spent time with macro invertebrates, I started to look around for resources. I quickly bumped into the Wild and Scenic web site and Meredyth let me borrow a box of books and keys related to the river. Armed with these resources, we discovered lots of fascinating creatures such as caddis fly and dragonfly larvae. We enjoyed the changes over the course of the spring; some of the children would specialize in stalking crayfish while others were more interested in exploring a full emersion experience in the river. This spring, Meredyth joined our group with an activity about watersheds. The books and keys helped encourage some children to spend most afternoons in a Worthington summer camp knee deep in a stream with a net looking for water creatures.

Working with the Worthington library, we applied to the **Wild and Scenic Committee** for a community grant for water studies equipment and books for community members to borrow. We now have a backpack full of water exploration materials, a wildlife camera, and a variety of books and puppets available to borrow.

The classes, materials, and support provided by the committee have enabled many children to explore the local rivers and streams. This year I joined the committee as Worthington's Alternate representative. I look forward to inspiring children and community members to explore & protect their rivers and streams for many more years.

**Susan Warner**

# In Appreciation

Our supporters and contributors are too numerous to list here. Know that your help is invaluable to the health and well-being of our watershed.

*Action Sports and Travel*

*Army Corps of Engineers*

*Four Seasons Club*

*Friends of the Keystone Arches*

*Lynn and Kent Hicks*

*Highlands Footpath Collaborative*

*Hilltown Collaborative*

*Hilltowns Land Trust*

*Nature Conservancy*

*New England Forestry*

*Starving Artist Café*

*Trustees of Reservations*

*Umass Dept. of Geosciences*

*Westfield River Watershed Association*

*Judy and Dudley Williams*

*All our extraordinary Specialists*



**Kester Warlow-Harry**  
*Volunteer of the Year, Chesterfield*



*Carrie Banks admires a job well done on the Frost Road culvert replacement in Washington, funded by a MEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant.*



**WILD & SCENIC  
WESTFIELD RIVER  
COMMITTEE**

PO Box 393, Huntington, MA 01050

**We are in the River and on the Web!**  
*Learn more about your watershed, places to go, and things to do.*

Visit our website at  
**[www.wildscenicwestfieldriver.org](http://www.wildscenicwestfieldriver.org)**