

# Strategic Plan: 2021 and beyond

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## Blackstone River Watershed Association

The mission of the BRWA is to engage, educate, and advocate for improved water quality in the Blackstone River watershed.

*Our Vision: Vibrant, Healthy, Free-Flowing  
Waterways in the Blackstone Valley, Treasured by All*

This strategic planning document was conceived by the 2021 Board of Directors (BOD) following a loss of three board members in 2020 due to illness and moves. This loss of experienced and devoted volunteers combined with COVID-19 and previous decreases in volunteers and membership caused a severe reduction in BRWA's capacity to respond to funding, project opportunities, and organization of events.

The goals of the strategic planning process and the plan itself are to:

- Categorize the BRWA's current and planned actions
- Document the BRWA's current actions and those that the organization has the capacity to carry out with its current members and volunteers (Current Work)
- Catalog goals and activities that the 2021 BOD wishes to work toward, but will require additional resources (Expansion)

This plan will be circulated to prospective board members and others interested in involvement with the BRWA. It is designed to be a guide for the coming year and inspiration for the future.

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# Development

## Current

- Membership
  - Eliminate Class B membership
  - Add “Become a Member” button to our home page so it is very visible
  - Record names of all members (family)
  - Gather complete contact information
  - Recruit volunteers/members who do projects
  - Suggest corporate matching to donors
- Board of Directors
  - Create a list of desired skills, diversity, and interests for prospective board members
  - Invite prospective board members to attend a prospective board member ‘mixer’
- Partnerships
  - Reaffirm partnerships post-COVID-19
  - Rejuvenate/establish partnerships with BRC, BRWC, BHC, BVNHC, DCR
  - Coordinate activities with the new Blackstone Watershed Coordinator

## Expansion

- Membership
  - Add members with a goal of 1,000 members by 2030
  - Be able to articulate benefits of membership
  - Communicate with membership (newsletter, bulletin etc.)
- Consider a new structure for membership; members, volunteers, and donors.
- Grow corporate sponsorship program with a goal of 5 corporate sponsors by the end of 2023
- Board of Directors
  - Expand the Board to 10 members with a range of skills, diversity, and interests
  - Define duties – see ‘back office’ category
- Consider adding what is needed for volunteers/board members on the website
- Partnerships
  - Establish partnerships with groups like Manchaug Pond Association, land trusts, Trout Unlimited, etc.

## Infrastructure

### Current work

- Begin overall website update and improvement
- Switch bank account to Savers
- Create an annual budget
- Determine status of DCR office space and investigate other options
- Explore the option of a post office box (in Grafton)

### Expansion

- Funding
  - Procure funding through grants, donations, and membership
  - Create a list of funding resources
  - Create templates for information commonly required for grants
- Contact/membership database
  - Set up a process for collecting membership information
  - Set up auto donation thank you emails and auto renewal reminders
  - Look into resources capacity building, technology or infrastructure
  - Include provision for School-Institution-Group/Grades/Classes/Course to track programs such as Watershed and Us, contacts made, and numbers of people served
- Website
  - Continue review of the web site and determine what can stay, what needs to be updated, and what needs to go
- Insurance
  - Board and liability to cover events, grant requirements etc.
- Document duties of different BRWA positions – volunteers, members, board members, officers

## Education

### Current work

- Watershed and Us
  - Coldwater Fisheries
- Website
  - Kids section
  - Teacher section
  - Mapping
- Continue and grow the watershed education program currently in place
  - Maintain current list of schools
  - Train new presenters to replace current presenters
  - Work on a process for communicating with and registering schools.

### Expansion

- Watershed and Us
  - Expand Watershed and Us to other ages/groups (homeschoolers, seniors, 'outdoor' preschools?)
  - Engage and train new Watershed & Us presenters
  - Increase the number of schools over time to include all schools in the watershed.
  - Coordinate with other groups using the watershed model for training to secure BRWA's niche
- Schools/school-age children
  - Create an outdoor program for school vacation weeks; perhaps partnering with DCR
  - Sponsor an Envirothon Team from a school in the watershed
  - Design student projects such as stream adoption, monitoring, or restoration
  - Develop curriculum materials that support watershed education using the STREAM educational model which incorporates Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Art, and Math activities.
- Adults
  - Create a program tailored more for an adult audience (corporations, senior centers, Lions Club, Garden Club etc.)
  - Connect public with information on environmental regulations – what to do/who to contact if environmental regulations are violated (website)
- Conduct a Bioblitz in/along the river or set up a program through iNaturalist
- Create/expand on current outreach materials for community events

## Restoration

### Current work

- Clean ups
  - Consider switching to fall cleanup?
  - Develop online reporting apps for trashed areas and cleanup events
- Invasive species monitoring and hand-harvesting as necessary (eg Rice City Pond)

### Expansion

- Restore flow
  - Dam the canal downstream of Plummers Landing (investigate DER priority projects and habitat improvement grants from MassWildlife, RICKA or other paddle groups, and the canal conservancy)
  - Culvert replacement - working with DER
- Restore buffer zones
  - Conduct shoreline plantings
- Invasive species
  - Education, mapping and control efforts
  - Connect with Conservation Commissions in the watershed to facilitate volunteer hand-pulling efforts to address pioneer infestations.
  - Develop a guide for individuals to ID and undertake control efforts under the above program
- Coldwater Fishery Resources (CFRs)
  - Identify and prioritize cold water streams for protective measures to reduce impact of climate change
  - Reach out to watershed Conservation Commissions to educate
  - Post CFR info including maps on our website
  - Conduct monitoring to determine capacity for restoration
- Have a list of possible projects for enhancing the environment, habitat or water quality that can be accomplished with local partners and funding agencies. Shovel-ready projects.
- Pieter de Jong stormwater management project at Riverbend Farm.
- Look into the canoe launch/Tri-River Health runoff problem.

# Monitoring

## Current work

- Water quality monitoring<sup>1</sup>
  - Update information on our web page – report cards
  - Add data viewer to our website (with permission from BRC)
  - Identify amount needed and funding source for 2021 program
- Aquatic connectivity (North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative)
- Long-term Stream Temperature Monitoring (Collaboration with MassWildlife for Northeast Climate Science Center project)

## Expansion

- Assist state agencies with projects
- Make data available for interested parties, perhaps on the web site starting in 2021.
- Water quality monitoring<sup>1</sup>
  - Working with BRC and other partners, expand monitoring to more sites and more parameters to meet the needs of towns, state agencies, and partner organizations
  - Explore expansion of parameters and/or targeted sites. Consider adding bacteria or other biological indicators such as macroinvertebrate monitoring
  - Investigate remote sensing options such as Mayfly loggers (see student project/adopt a stream idea under Education)
  - Consider assessment of specific streams/sub-watersheds
  - Post data to a website with tools for searching and doing basic analysis and comparisons

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<sup>1</sup> Partnership with Blackstone River Coalition

# Promoting best practices that protect water quality

## Current Work

- White papers (i.e. solar, snow/ice management)

## Expansion

- Conservation Commission outreach (mapping – tools on website?)
- Education for recreational users and anglers including fishing line disposal and invasive species transport.
- Homeowner toolkits for protecting water quality and reducing water use. Start with targeting homeowners near lakes/streams.
- Participate in MS4 permit processes and projects such as the Millbury downtown redevelopment, to promote water quality best practices
- Stormwater BMPs
  - Promote use
  - Identify areas in need, especially those where limited engineering would be required and reach out to towns/landowners to support projects
  - Establish funding for small grants to landowners wishing to install rain gardens, drainage swales, etc. especially those in proximity to priority streams, rivers.
- Support maintenance of BMPs
  - Consider establishing partnerships with garden clubs, scouting organizations, garden centers, landscapers etc. to conduct simple maintenance for areas like swales and rain gardens when towns have limited resources

## Supporting environmental initiatives

### Current Work

- Municipal Vulnerability Planning (MVP) – possible follow-up projects

### Expansion

- Participate in permitting processes at a local level (NOI, Planning Board, etc.)
  - Have position letters prepared ahead of time which would need only limited edits for specific projects but could be sent to Conservation Commissions or other decision makers in response to NOI notifications etc.
  - Develop a program where volunteers monitor projects in their town
- Millbury Nature Trail



## Government: Legislators – Local and State and Federal

### Current work

- Connect with local, state, and federal legislators
  - Update list of legislators contact info
  - Consider becoming an organization member of the [MA Rivers Alliance](#)

### Expansion

- Connect with MassRivers
- Set up annual communication with state legislators
  - Letter summarizing the work we have accomplished in the previous year
- Work with local Towns, particularly Conservation and Planning and Open Space, to emphasize water quality protection and enhancement, open space conservation, invasive species control and management, fish and wildlife habitat improvement including coldwater fisheries habitat protection, and public outdoor recreation opportunities focused on the Blackstone's water resources.

## Events

### Current

- Continue some subset of the events/activities that engage the public but only those which can be done without straining the board.
  - Fall cleanup
  - Family Fun Fishing Day in partnership with OpenSky

### Expansion

- Create a list of volunteers/members who can assist with running events
- Be the leader and organizer for cleanup activities in the watershed that focus on water bodies and shorelines.
- Paddles – partner with a paddle organization to lead with focus on education, or as a GO! event
- Educational walks

