



ACTION THROUGH CONNECTION

Hudson River
Watershed Alliance



EMILY VAIL

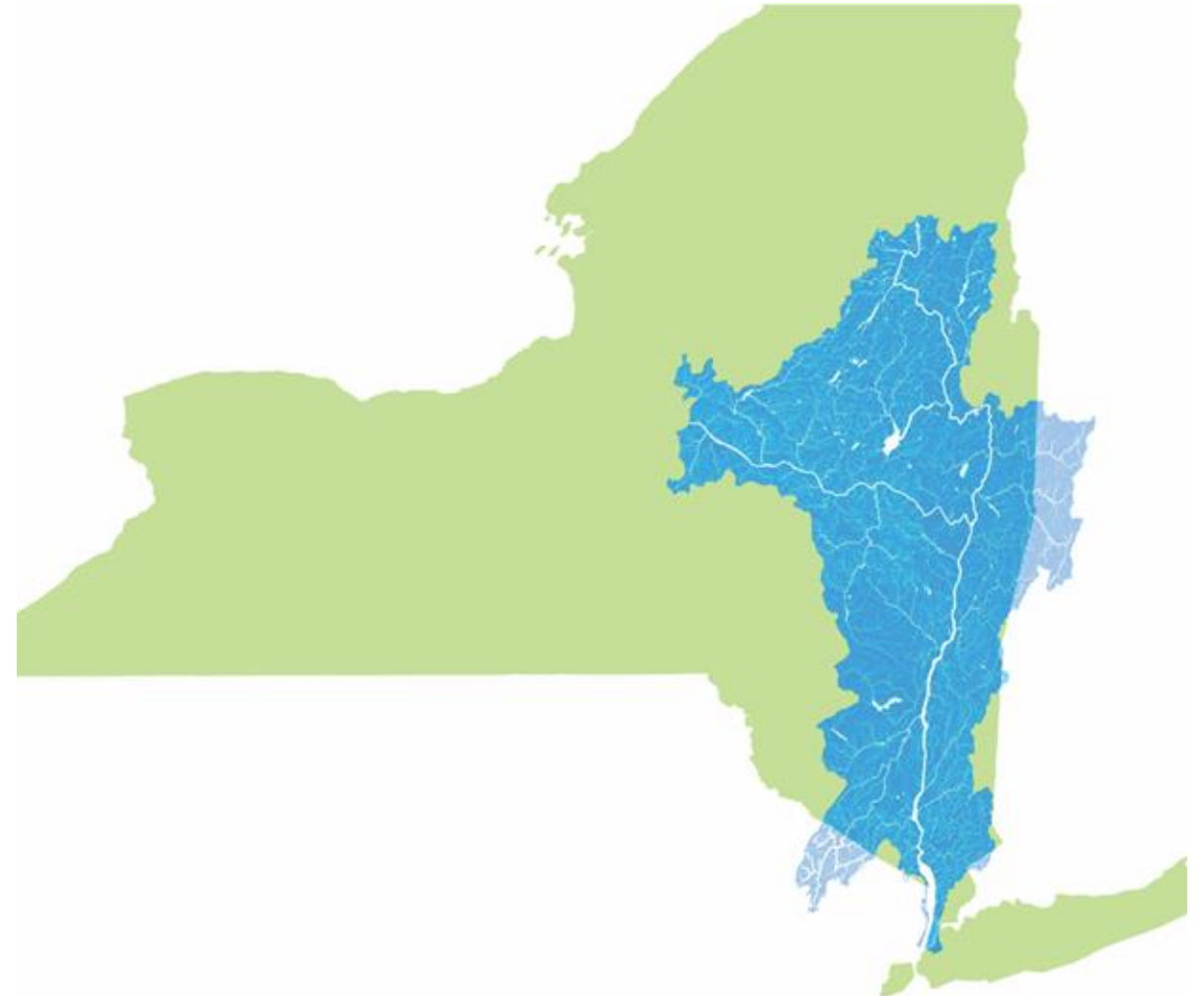
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HUDSON RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE

Lower Hudson Lakes NYS Federation of Lake Associations Regional Conference | 6/5/26

OUTLINE

- Hudson River Watershed Alliance
- Planning processes: moving from data to action
- Capacity is key to implementation
 - HRWA programs, resources
 - Case Study: Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance
- Planning/capacity self-assessment worksheets
- Next steps



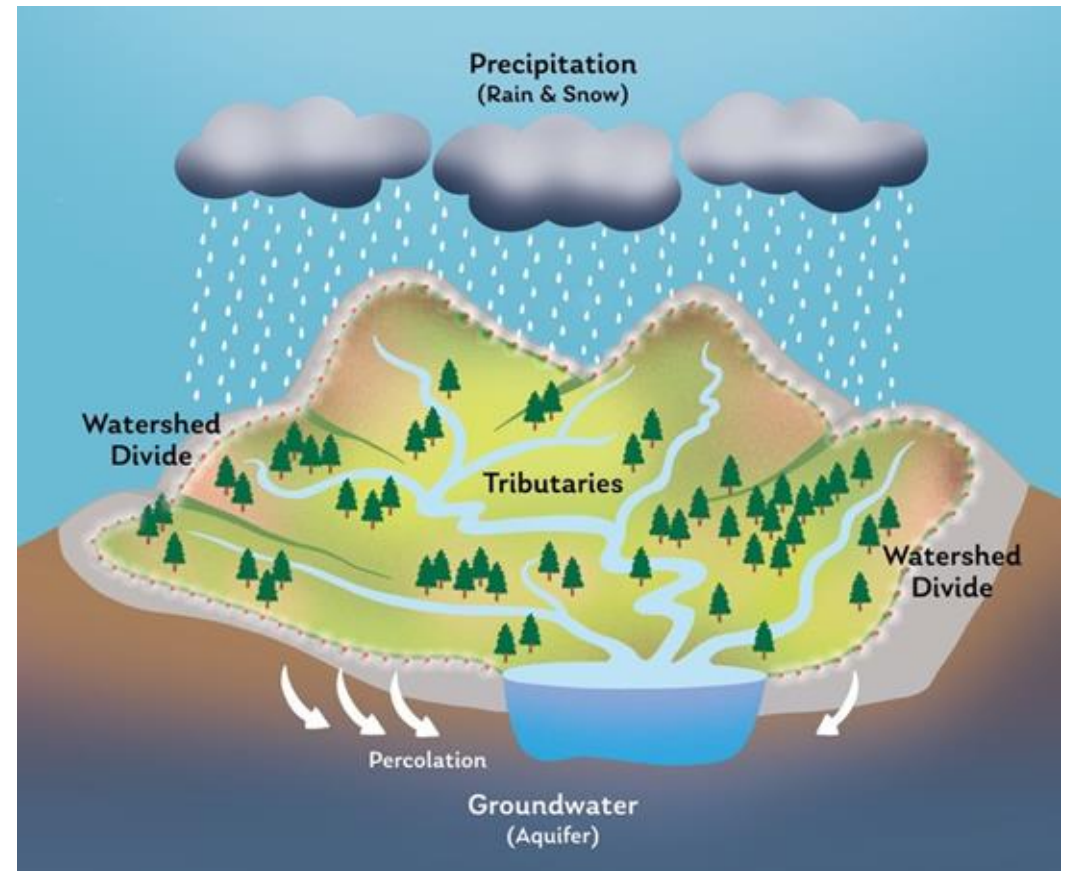
HUDSON RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE

- Unite and empower communities to protect our shared waters
- Support watershed groups
- Help municipalities work together
- Communicate as a collective voice



WHY WATERSHEDS?

- Land area where water flows to a specific waterbody
- Hydrologic connections linking lands, waters, people upstream & downstream
- Geographic unit best-suited to understanding conditions and managing our waters
- Cross political jurisdictions, require a thoughtful process / broader approach to understand and protect our waters



HRWA PROGRAMS

- Watershed groups:
 - Watershed planning
 - Capacity-building
- Municipal governments:
 - HV Flood Resilience Network
- Convening the watershed community:
 - WaveMaker Awards Benefit
 - Annual Watershed Conference
 - Webinar series



HRWA Annual Watershed Conference

WHAT IS A WATERSHED GROUP?

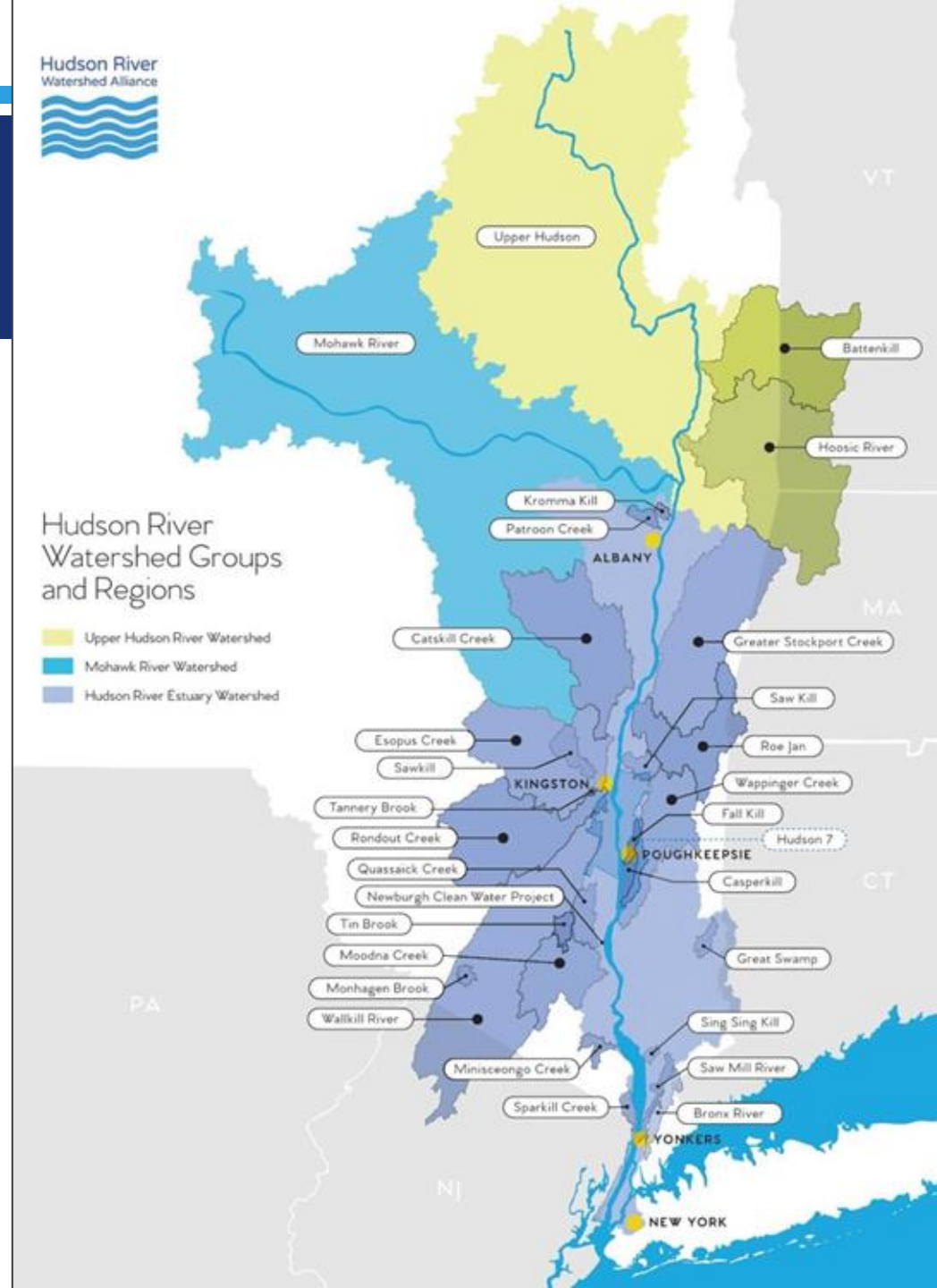
- Collective of people working together locally to protect a specific watershed (tributary connection to the Hudson River)
- Groups can take a variety of forms: unincorporated community groups, 501(c)(3)s, intermunicipal councils, fiscal sponsor, led by agencies or non-profits
- All- or mostly- volunteer groups (some have part-time paid coordination)
- Watershed work is complex, collaboration is key



Fall Kill Watershed Coalition

TRIBUTARIES + LAKES

- Rivers + streams:
 - Often larger sized watersheds
 - Partnerships with municipalities, regional nonprofits, land trusts, etc.
 - Issues: water quality, flooding, public access, recreation, etc.
 - Watershed plans
- Lakes:
 - Smaller sized watersheds?
 - Partnerships with homeowners
 - Issues: water quality, invasive species, access, recreation, etc.
 - Lake management plans



THE PLANNING PROCESS

Understand
current
conditions



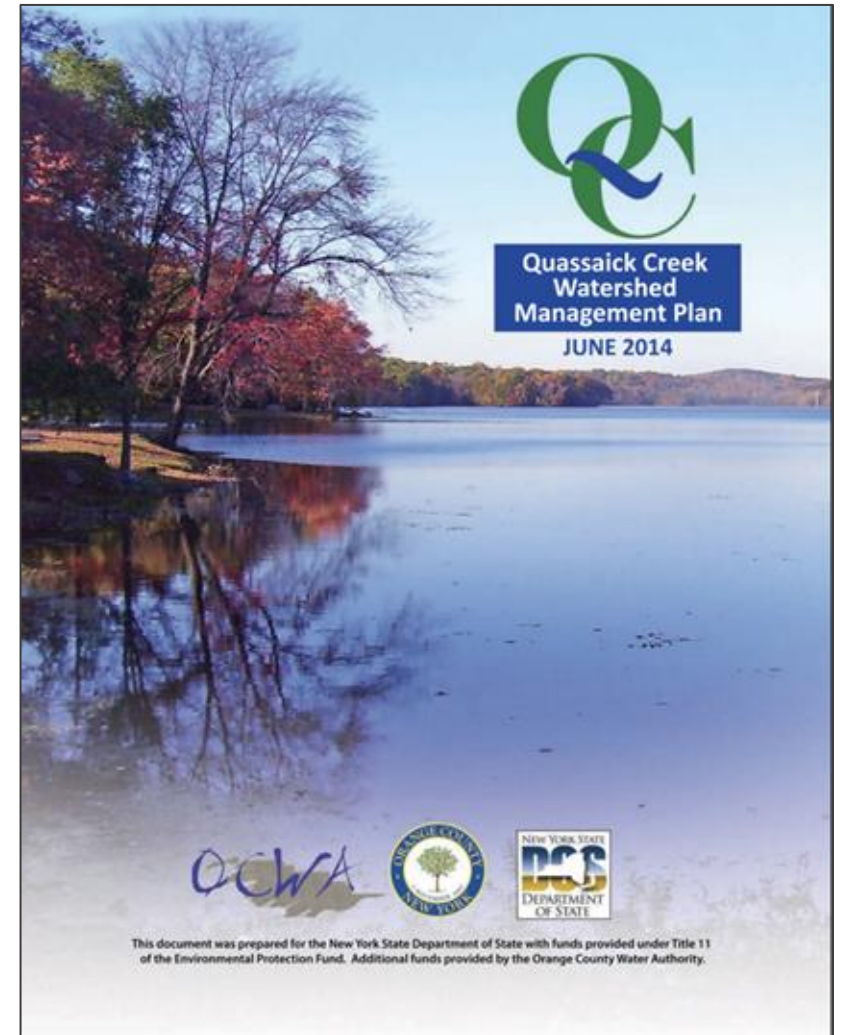
Set goals for
future
conditions



Identify strategic
actions to get
from present to
future

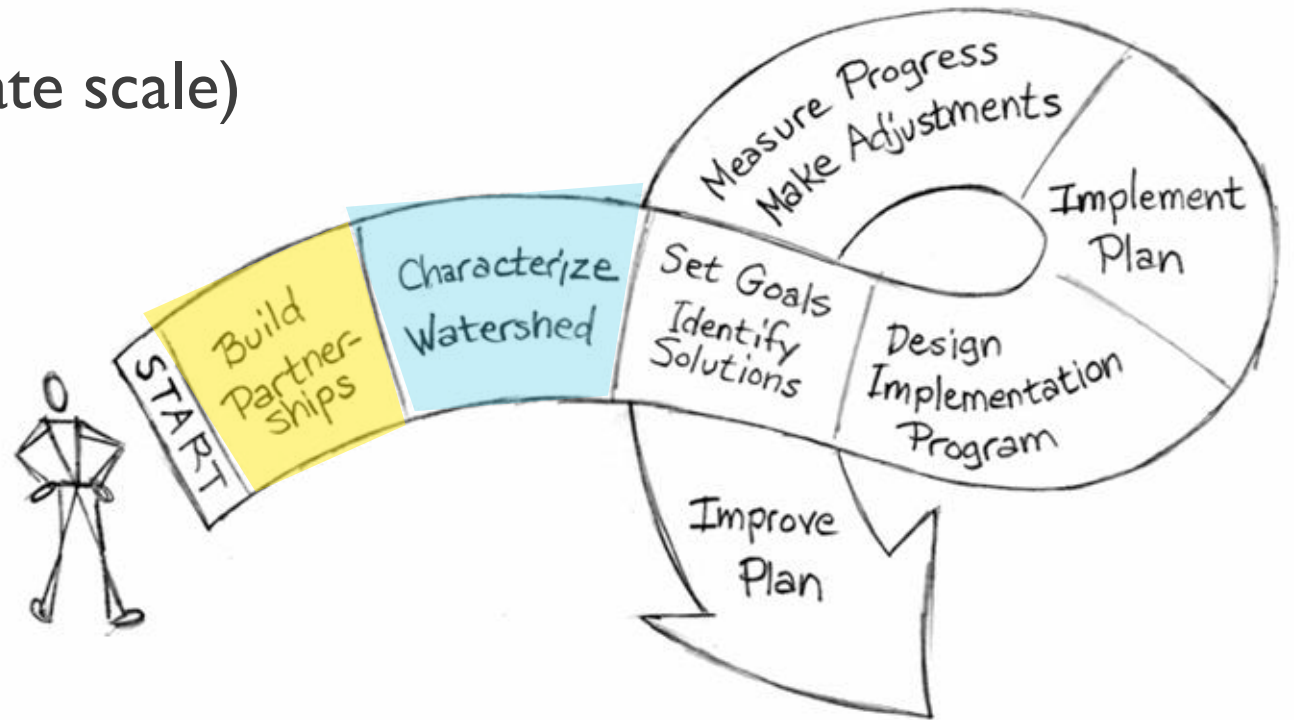
WHAT IS A WATERSHED PLAN?

- Planning for future conditions, using a watershed framework and scale
- Traditionally have focused on water quality, can include other issues (flooding, habitat, ecology, and others)
- Planning provides a process and product to bring people together, build consensus, and develop strategies
- Includes 1) compilation of existing information and 2) specific actions to meet goals



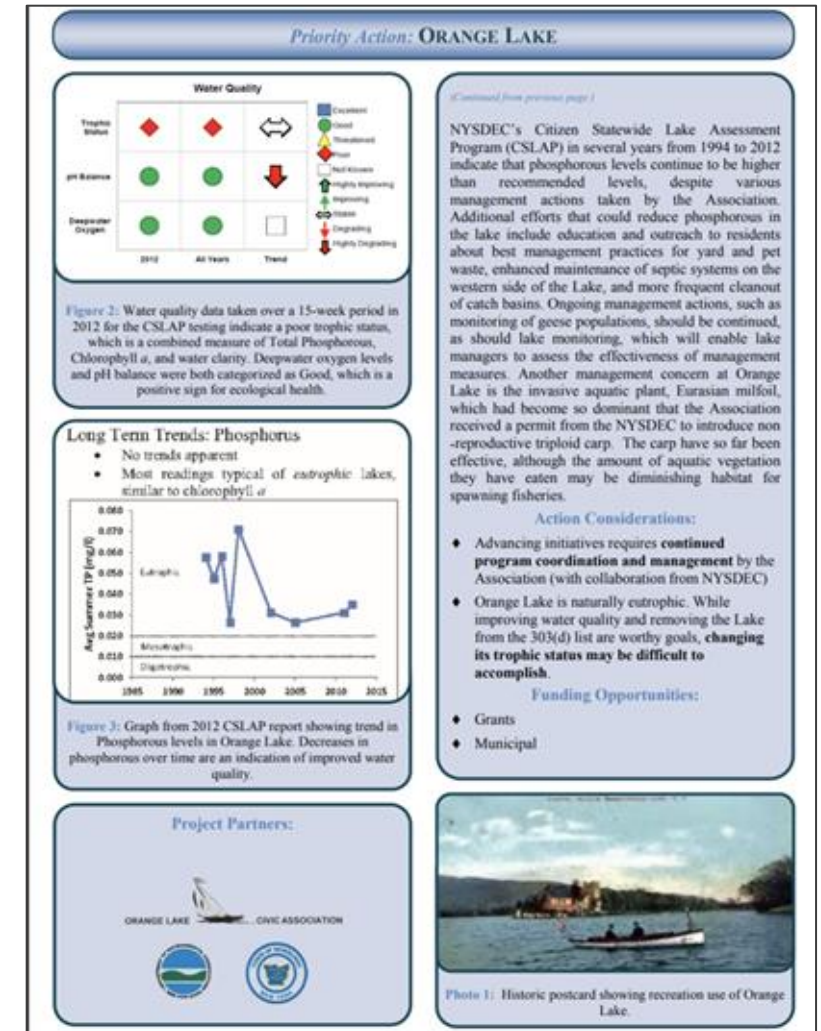
WATERSHED PLANNING PROCESS

- Define goals
- Delineate a watershed (appropriate scale)
- Convene partners
- Compile existing data
- Identify gaps
- Prioritize issues, create targets
- Specify actions
- Implement the plan!
- Measure progress and adapt if necessary



DATA TO ACTION THROUGH PLANNING

- Collect data/information (water quality)
- What does it mean? Interpretation is key
 - Scientifically? Against baselines/standards? Within the watershed/community context?
- Describe in watershed characterization
 - Maps, charts, narrative to illustrate/interpret
 - If 9 Element plan - informs pollutant modeling
- Watershed plan process: defines actions
 - Use the science to inform strategies
 - Prioritize, build consensus, buy-in
 - Implementation plan
- Priority actions get done!



PLANNING PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS

- Motivations
 - Reactionary? Anticipatory? Exploratory?
- Geographic extent
- Content focus (based on understanding of watershed conditions or issues)
 - e.g., water quality, flooding, aquatic habitat, environmental justice, climate change
- Who should be involved? Roles?
- Helps you determine
 - Timeline/budget/funding
 - Expertise and experience needed



*Punch Brook-Roeliff Jansen Kill Watershed
Characterization Advisory Committee*

WATERSHED PLAN OUTCOMES

- Sharing the watershed's story to build support
- Clear understanding of current conditions, vision for future conditions, strategic projects
- Consensus on priority issues, projects
- Buy-in from partners to support next steps and implement projects
- Citable resource, including funding next steps

Active decision-making before, during, and after a planning process sets up projects for success.



UPPER HUDSON RIVER WATERSHED REVITALIZATION PLAN

MARCH 2020



Preparation of the Upper Hudson River Watershed Management Plan was funded through a New York State Department of State Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) grant to the Town of Horicon

WATERSHED GROUPS NEED CAPACITY

- 2022 Watershed Needs Assessment: capacity needed most
- What is capacity?
 - Defined as **the ability of an organization to get work done, be effective, and fulfill their mission**
- How can we help groups get their work done?
 - What is the work?
 - What are the barriers?



Wallkill River Watershed Alliance tree planting

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES WE HEARD

- Need more specific, clearer mission
- One person does all the work, need to share the load
- Leadership transitions
- Recruit more members, engaging more communities
- Strengthen internal systems to process funding
- Manage available opportunities, especially as partner on projects



September 2025 Watershed Roundtable

SYMPTOM → PROBLEM



What we hear...

What we see...



FUNDING & FINANCIAL MGMT

"If we only had more money..."

Poor management of existing funds and funders

"We just need a grant writer"

Poor document management and underutilization of skills

"We don't have capacity to fundraise"

Lack of shared fund development strategy

"There isn't enough money to..."

Failure to account for direct & indirect costs in budgets

"I don't know what's in the budget, or if we have one"

One person managing finances and low/no interest from others

"Budgets are scary and I don't know what I'm doing"

Over complication of financial systems/failure to hire support

LEADERSHIP

"I'm too busy/overallocated"

No/minimal workplanning

"I'm not getting enough support"

Misalignment of resources with needs

"I can't tell if what we're doing is impactful"

Lack of evaluation and feedback systems

ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY-BUILDING

Can be considered for ongoing internal work/lake associations, planning processes, implementation projects, partnerships/collaborations, etc.

- Defining specific mission(s)
 - What is our shared purpose?
- Leadership
 - Who sets the course?
- Membership / leadership team
 - Who is at the table, or should be?



ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY-BUILDING

- Governance structures and roles
 - Who makes decisions? Who advises? Who is informed?
 - How can the workload be shared?
 - Who is responsible for what?
- Funding/budgets
 - Do we have the resources we need?
 - How are funds processed?
- Workplans
 - How do we prioritize work?
 - Do we have the people, resources, time, expertise?



ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY-BUILDING

- Relationship-building
 - How to engage partners and/or the broader community?
 - Do we have access to people with the information, expertise, experience, and/or insights we need?
- Communications
 - Is information from past work, studies, institutional knowledge, etc. accessible? Where is it stored?
 - How are project updates or successes shared? (to engage more members, connect with partners, update the community, build trust/legitimacy)



GOOD SYSTEMS CAN GROW CAPACITY

Ways to build capacity:

- Refining group structures
- Defining roles to work more efficiently
- Building/sharing leadership
- Involving more people and partners
- Documenting systems and processes



Increases ability to get work done:

- Clarity of roles, purpose (more time/confidence)
- More efficient decision-making (more time)
- New leadership, partnerships (more people, more expertise)
- Replicable work, information (more time, people, legitimacy)

Capacity is often reduced to funding, but these strategies can provide more time, people, expertise even without increasing funds, and may help bring more funding/resources in.

HRWA CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMS

- HRWA offered two different capacity-building programs in 2025:
 - 4 watershed groups: **direct technical assistance** with facilitators to create a strategic workplan, implement an org development priority
 - 8 watershed groups: **self-guided learning**, monthly cohort meetings to work through modules on organizational development



Wallkill River Watershed Alliance visioning session

SELF-GUIDED RESOURCES AVAILABLE

- Organizational development + growth checklists
- Short videos, worksheets, templates
- Posted on HRWA website for all to use
- Useful for getting on the same page for groups, orgs, projects, partnerships, etc. of all sizes
- Helps make the implicit explicit
- Simple, but not easy



Episode 1: Org Health Checklist & Mission Statements

The first episode in this series reviews the checklist topics, and dives into building and assessing a mission statement.

- [Mission Statement Worksheet](#)
- [Values Worksheet](#)
- [Vision Statement Worksheet](#)
- [PDF of episode slides](#)

The image shows a YouTube video player thumbnail. At the top left is the 'Fashion River' logo. The video title is 'Organizational Health - Episode 1: Org Health Checklist & Mission Statements'. The main title of the video is 'MISSION? VALUES? VISION?'. Below this are three columns defining each concept: MISSION (Answers WHAT), VALUES (Answers HOW), and VISION (Answers WHY). A red play button is centered over the 'VALUES' column. At the bottom left is a 'Watch on YouTube' button.

Organizational Health - Episode 1: Org Health Checklist & Mission Statements

MISSION? VALUES? VISION?

MISSION
Answers **WHAT**
(& WHO, WHERE)
What actions does the organization primarily take to achieve its goal?
What do you do?

VALUES
Answers **HOW**
What **me** or themes will unite the ways you approach your work?
How will you accomplish your work?

VISION
Answers **WHY**
What long term goal will be realized if the work is successful? Why do you do the work you do?

Watch on YouTube

CASE STUDY: QUASSAICK CREEK WATERSHED ALLIANCE

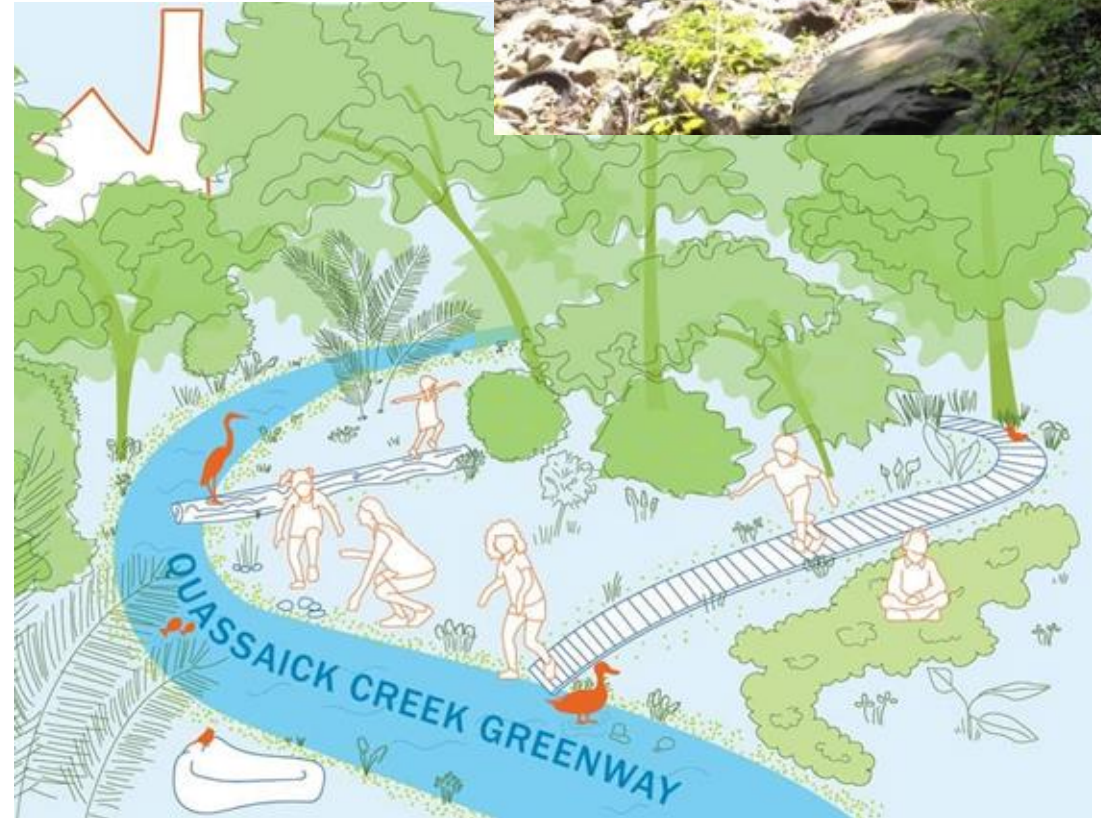
- Quassaick Creek watershed
 - 56 square miles, Newburgh, NY
- 2009: Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance started
- 2014: Watershed Management Plan
 - 54 management recommendations
 - 10 priority projects
- 2025: Quassaick Creek Greenway Plan, led by Scenic Hudson
 - Goal to create urban trail and new access



Quassaick Creek Watershed Alliance

QUASSAICK CREEK CASE STUDY

- 2025 capacity-building work with HRWA:
 - Strategic workplan to re-evaluate priorities
 - Retirement of long-time leader, leadership transitions
 - Re-defined roles/workload
 - Improved communications
 - Clearer role on Quassaick Creek Greenway Leadership Council, to implement Quassaick Creek Greenway Trail plan, with partners



ACTION THROUGH CONNECTION

- **What does successful work together look like for you?**
- **What does “increased capacity” look like, for your group or the group(s) you support? (How do you know capacity has been increased?)**
 - Goals: Increased confidence, ease, consensus, cohesion, shared sense of direction
 - Vision: groups confidently take on defined roles, manage projects, share successes
 - We know through: assessment, tracking outcomes, ongoing conversations



Fishkill Creek Watershed Alliance

THREE SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKSHEETS

1. Supporters of locally-led watershed efforts

2. For locally-led groups who are planning or starting


3. For locally-led groups who are in process or finished

Not part of local group and not working on a specific watershed

Part of a local group OR working on a specific watershed

STEP I: WORK ON YOUR OWN

- Each worksheet has similar structure
- Set of statements related to watershed characterization and planning - adapt to whatever plan you're working on
- Decide how much you agree with each statement
- Write down potential next steps

 **Watershed Characterization & Planning Workshop: Worksheet 1**
This worksheet will help individuals or organizations who are interested in supporting a locally led watershed characterization or plan to identify the different types of contributions that can support this work.

Please review each statement and circle the number that best reflects your opinion for each:
5-strongly agree 4-agree 3-neutral 2-disagree 1-strongly disagree ?-don't know
As you finish each section, reflect on some next steps you might take based on your responses.

Motivation and Focus					
I am clear on why I want to support a locally led watershed characterization or plan.	1	2	3	4	5 ?
I understand how my watershed or organization can benefit from strong, locally led watershed characterizations and plans.	1	2	3	4	5 ?
I am focused on supporting a specific watershed.	1	2	3	4	5 ?
I am able to support watershed work at a broader regional scale (e.g., county, region-wide).	1	2	3	4	5 ?
I am clear on how much time I can commit to supporting locally led watershed efforts.	1	2	3	4	5 ?
I am clear whether I will volunteer my time, participate as part of my job, or need to be paid for my time.					
<i>What do the answers to these questions tell us about my next steps?</i>					

STEP 2: TALK TOGETHER

- With someone sitting near you, discuss:
 - What stood out to you as you worked through the worksheet?
 - Was anything surprising or validating?
 - Why did you choose these next steps?
 - Is there anything you would change, after talking it through?



STEP 3: REPORT OUT

- Let's hear from a few people around the room:
 - What is something you learned?
 - What is one action you will take as a next step?



TAKEAWAYS

- Planning is valuable through both the process and product, to understand current conditions, build consensus, and set priorities
 - Active decision-making, clear goals before, during, and after a planning process supports better outcomes
- Capacity is the ability to get work done
 - Across different contexts: within groups, implementing projects, through collaborations with partners
- Taking time to develop good working systems creates more ease, confidence, opens capacity (even without more money or people)
- Hudson River Watershed Alliance has tools and resources that may be useful for lake associations to improve action through connection.

NEXT STEPS

- Get specific about the barriers to action, in planning or implementation
 - Funding/resources is often a component, but there might be others
- Worksheets - what did you learn? Bring ideas, copies back to your groups
- Self-guided resources available, new set of resources will be coming out soon
- Join our email list to stay in touch!
 - Annual Watershed Conference: Tuesday, October 27 in Hyde Park



THANK YOU!

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[@HudsonRiverWatershedAlliance](https://www.instagram.com/HudsonRiverWatershedAlliance)

Hudson River
Watershed Alliance



*Uniting & empowering communities to
protect our shared waters*