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Watershed Past, Present & Future – 2009 Annual Meeting

Jim Waltman – Executive Director

Welcome to the Annual Meeting of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association and thank you for helping make possible another highly successful year.

I am honored to be with you this steamy evening as your Executive Director to share with you some thoughts on our history, our present, and our future.

This is a big year for the Watershed—our 60th Anniversary. For six decades, the Watershed has worked to protect your water and your environment through conservation, advocacy, science, and education.

A Tradition of Successful Conservation

Our story begins in the 1940s, when a handful of area residents began raising concerns about erosion of farmland and sedimentation of our streams. In 1949, David H. McAlipin and Kathleen A. Peyton, a leader with the Garden Club, and several other local residents founded the Watershed Association based on the model of the Brandywine Association.

A man named Fairfield Osborne is credited by many for the profoundly simple idea behind the watershed movement: that conservation is best done on the scale of a local water catchment basin and done most effectively by local people, working at the community level.

That first year of our founding, the all-volunteer organization signed up 14 large landowners to prepare farm conservation plans to reduce erosion—not a bad start.

Several of our founders would dedicate a decade or more of their lives to this organization. People like Ted Reed, Paul VanWegan, Jack Faussett, Sally Hart, Wheeler McMillan, Charles Oldis, George Drummond, Fred Peterson, and Sol Posner.

We were incorporated in 1951, established a more formal Board of Trustees and began holding annual meetings of our membership like this one tonight.

In 1953, with \$3,857 in the bank, we hired James Lawrence, our first Executive Director. Mr. Lawrence started the Watershed newsletter now in

its 57th year of publication. “The road ahead is an uphill climb, and there is no resting,” he wrote that first year, “But we are making progress, and gradually the land will begin to show it. Still, it all takes time. It takes patience. It takes courage.”

Malcolm Crooks was hired in 1955 and led us for an active eight years. I am so pleased that Malcolm is here with us this evening. With Malcolm’s leadership, the Watershed contracted with local universities and other institutions to complete eight critical research projects that became the foundation upon which our early work was based.

We were involved in watershed restoration and water supply issues and engaged municipalities in an effort to keep developments out of floodplains. Malcolm reports of attending “smoke-filled municipal meetings where the cigar and cigarette smoke was just terrible.”

Others would join the movement and emerge as volunteer leaders of the Watershed. People like Irving Kingsford, Carl Yates, Bill Flemmer, Tom Southerland, Fred Rasweiler, John Kuser, and Jim Sayen. And another David McAlpin would come to lead the organization.

Their generosity of time and resources sustained the organization, allowing us to succeed and grow.

Our greatest patron, of course, was Muriel Buttinger. Almost exactly 45 years ago, Muriel gave the first of a series of generous gifts of her beloved Brookdale Farm. Muriel would eventually give 535 acres of what has grown to become the 860-acre Watershed Reserve.

The strength of the Watershed Association, from our earliest days on, has always been the combination of dedicated and passionate volunteer leadership and a highly skilled professional staff.

Literally hundreds of individuals have served this organization as Trustees. We have captured the names of those individuals on the chart over by the rock wall and I hope you take the time to look and remember with us their tremendous service.

Some of them are here tonight— Ted Bromley, Anna Drago, Philo Elmer, Joan Emerick, Alix Gerry, Tom Harvey, Betsy Hoover, Sarah Hollister, Ingrid Reed, Nancy Ross, Ted Thomas, Dan VanAbs.

Scores of highly skilled conservation professionals have worked as staff for the organization, including the Directors who followed Malcom Crooks and preceded me: Dick Thorsell, Ian Walker, Adelle Mitchelle, Jim Gaffney, Todd Bryant, Pat Begel, Jamie Sapoch, and George Hawkins.

I'm so pleased that Jim Gaffney was able to join us here tonight. Executive Director between 1980 and 1985, Jim was a strong environmental advocate, helped engineer a management plan for the Watershed Reserve, initiated the Watershed Organic Farm, and ushered in a new era of environmental education by hiring Jeff Hoagland as education director in 1984.

The good works of the Watershed over the decades to protect and restore our environment is a constant source of inspiration to me.

- The discharge of sewage into the D&R Canal and other waterbodies ended long-ago because of this organization.
- Major proposed highways though some of our most sensitive habitats were beaten back by this organization.
- Open space is preserved where once thousands of homes were proposed because of this organization.
- Scores of local and state laws have been passed to protect water and landscapes because of this organization.
- We've restored stream banks, planted hundreds of thousands of trees, and removed tons and tons of garbage from our waterways.
- We've inspired generations of residents to love and care for the earth through our education programs, and taught homeowners, businesses, farmers, schools and anyone else who would talk to us how they can reduce their environmental impact.

We've been the eyes and ears and voice of the environment in our region, monitoring water quality in our streams and watching out for violations of environmental regulations.

We've also been an incubator of other vital organizations. In the mid-1980s we initiated the Greenway Project, raising seed money and hiring a coordinator for the program. And 20 years ago we gave birth to the D & R Greenway, which has grown to become one of the most successful land trusts in the state. We congratulate them on their Anniversary this year.

Organic farming in the state has grown from its infancy here at the Watershed, where we housed the Northeast Organic Farming Association in the 1980s. And that little Watershed Organic farm has grown to become the nation's largest community supported organic farm.

Since the very early years, we've helped expand the watershed movement. Malcom Crooks helped fledgling groups in the 1950s and 1960s and today our Watershed Institute continues that tradition.

The Tradition Continues

This organization is rich with history and tradition. But our present and our future are even brighter.

Today, our talented team of two dozen staff is busy:

- inspiring future generations of conservationists,
- monitoring the health of our streams,
- healing degraded landscapes,
- speaking out for environmental protection,
- and managing our magnificent 860-acre Watershed Reserve.

Let me just take a moment to ask the staff to stand up.

Three of our staff are celebrating special anniversaries with us this year: Jennifer Coffey, our policy director, is celebrating her 5th anniversary. Peggy Savage, our Science Director has also worked here 5 years.

And Jeff Hoagland, our education director has a little anniversary too this year. Jeff is celebrating 25 years with the Watershed this year—an event that we will celebrate more thoroughly at a later occasion.

Recent Successes

Over the last year, we've continued our long track record of success:

We've secured additional state protections for the Stony Brook that adds a layer of protection against development for more than 4,000 acres; and new wastewater planning regulations that will protect clean water and habitat for imperiled species threatened by sprawl.

We helped defeat an enormous proposed housing development near the Millstone River in Hillsborough, pass an increase in Hopewell Township's Open Space Fund, and secure a mechanism to protect more than 100 acres along the Millstone River as part of the Redevelopment Plan for the Princeton Junction Train Station.

We've taught more than 10,000 children and adults about the wonders of nature and how they can become involved in its protection and stewardship. In 2008, we served 46 different schools, expanded our camp, and added two new program series to help connect people to the environment in their own back yards.

This past weekend and next, our staff have organized stream clean-ups in 11 of the 26 municipalities in our region. The past two days, 197 volunteers joined us to pull nearly 5,000 pounds of garbage out of local streams.

And next weekend we'll do it again in Hopewell, Lawrence, Monroe, and East Windsor—if you are looking for a way to get up close and personal with our streams, please join us!

We've improved the methodologies by which we collect stream-monitoring data at 40 stations in our region and initiated testing for bacteria—a new chapter in our StreamWatch program.

We've also just recently secured two grants to expand our watershed science program.

The first is a grant from the national group American Rivers and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to study the feasibility of removing

two dams on the Millstone River in hopes of restoring American Shad and other migratory fish. Lambertville can have its ShadFest but we want SHAD IN OUR SHED!

The second grant, from the Dorris Duke Charitable Foundation will allow us to develop a plan for conserving and restoring high priority stream and wetland habitats in central New Jersey.

A Bright Future

The work of the Watershed staff to protect and restore our environment is a constant source of inspiration to me

Most inspirational of all is the work we have done over the last eighteen months to prepare for our future. Over this period, a dedicated committee of Trustees and staff has assessed our facilities and their capacity to support our mission.

The Buttinger Nature Center was opened 20 years ago and at the time was heralded in the Trenton Times and other publications as a beacon for environmental educational.

The center and other buildings here have served us well over the past several decades. As much as we love our home, however, the reality is that we've outgrown our facilities, the nature center included.

This organization has always supplied the model for others to emulate. And so we have adopted a new Master Plan for our campus that incorporates the absolute greenest energy and water technologies.

Our plan is to transform our campus to make it a platform for teaching and modeling the technologies and behaviors that society absolutely must adopt if we are going to address our enormous environmental challenges.

That lawn mower over there is a symbol of our future. Funny looking isn't it. Did you know that 10% of the particulate matter and other air pollution problems come from lawn care machinery? This propane mower pollutes 80% less than new conventional mowers of its size.

Six Decades of Determination

I am extremely proud to be a part of the Watershed's six decades of determination.

James Lawrence knew that this work was not easy and not without frustration. While our waterways are healthier than many other regions of the state, too many of them don't support the full diversity of life that they once did and too many lakes and streams are not swimmable or fishable.

But we know we have the tools to restore our waterways and we are inspired to move forward by the very generous support of so many of you.

From all of us on the staff at the Watershed Association, thank you for your support that makes our work possible protecting your water, your environment, and your voice.

Thank you.