



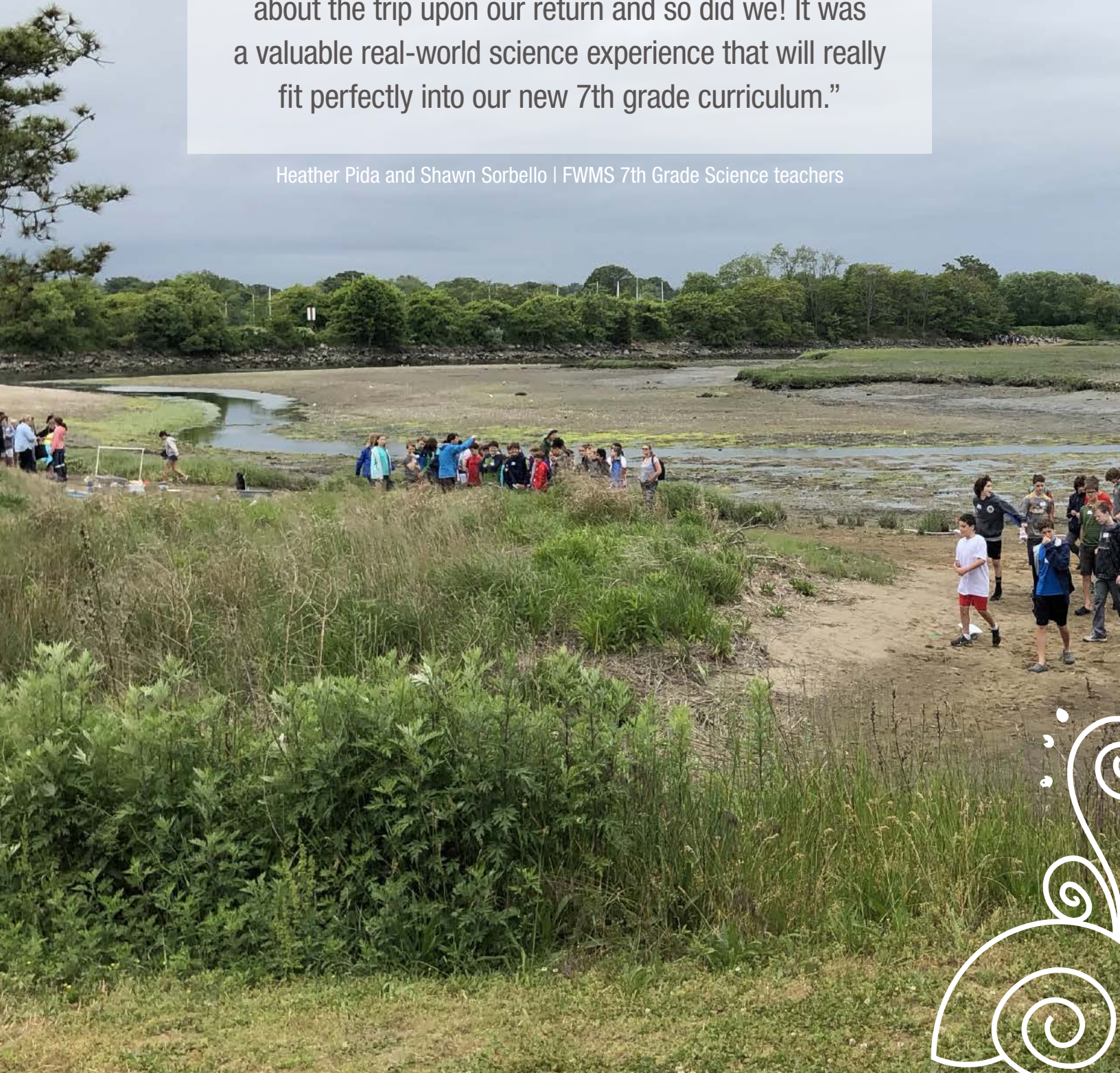
2019 ANNUAL REPORT

mrwc-fairfield.org



“Thank you for making our first River-Lab experience a great one. The students had so many great things to say about the trip upon our return and so did we! It was a valuable real-world science experience that will really fit perfectly into our new 7th grade curriculum.”

Heather Pida and Shawn Sorbello | FWMS 7th Grade Science teachers



PRESIDENT'S

REPORT



Fittingly, on the edge of a new decade, the theme that reappeared throughout Mill River Wetland Committee this past year was transition. In my house, we call it “pre-trip stress.” It is the seemingly unending list of tasks pulling your attention in different directions as you try to get everyone out the door at the same time to embark on what will eventually be a great vacation. MRWC is entering 2020 with all the correct items packed and everyone beginning that journey together.

In 2019, we added new voices to our Board of Directors. Those different perspectives helped the Board develop a five year plan to focus on realistic goals for our organization and evaluate our long term commitments. Out of this work, we identified a recurring need to invest more in technology to keep our curriculum, outreach, and operations current and accessible.

MRWC continues to join with others working toward our common goals. Co-sponsoring the Wyland National Mayor’s Challenge for Water Conservation with the Town provided an opportunity for MRWC to highlight national issues with local solutions in conjunction with Aquarion Water Company. Uniting with others, we have advocated for the local environment on the skip the straw campaign, the reusable bag ordinance, and the Long Island Sound Study. Our presentation at the CT Volunteer Water Monitoring Conference showcased our curriculum with other organizations who engage their local communities in water education. Finally, our participation in the Pollinator Pathway project for 2020 will allow us to interact with many of the area’s environmental groups across Fairfield, Westchester, Dutchess and Rockland Counties.

Our River-Lab curriculum continues to transition to the Next Generation Science Standards. Pilot programs have been accepted, curriculum is realigned and implementation is being planned. We have also evaluated the requirements to reproduce the program in other venues and are piloting the approach with a private school in Bridgeport.

On a personal note, as I transition out of the role of President, I would like to thank every member of MRWC. Each of you make this organization a Fairfield treasure. Every member has directly contributed to our financial stability, program excellence and our community impact. I have been honored to be a part of it. My bags are packed but I am on board for the rest of this great journey. Please join me!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Shavinsky". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lynn Shavinsky
PRESIDENT

HIGHLIGHTS



MRWC successfully expanded our community advocacy and engagement in 2019, while continuing our educational River-Lab Program with schools.

Mayor's Challenge for Water Conservation

Co-sponsored with the Town of Fairfield, we held a series of events to raise local awareness about simple ways to use water more efficiently, thereby reducing pollution and saving energy. By participating in Wyland Foundation's National Mayor's Challenge for Water Conservation, we encouraged residents to use online tools to calculate their water footprint and commit to specific steps to use less water. To support our efforts, Aquarion Water Company generously donated 1,000 shower timers which we distributed at events throughout the year. Aquarion also provided a grant that funded the creation of educational materials about water conservation. Members of the MRWC Board of Directors provided these materials to children through presentations at preschools, scout troops and elementary classrooms. Although Fairfield did not win this friendly competition between towns, our residents pledged to save over seven million gallons of water!

Presentation at Statewide Volunteer Water Monitoring Conference

River-Lab Program Advisor, Nicole Nuttall, and Sara Jannott, Director of Grade 5, shared the Grade 5 classroom laboratory experience with representatives from more than 20 organizations across Connecticut who provide environmental education programs in their communities. During the program, participants used microscopes to examine slow moving water collected from Mill River. Like our students, the participants identified many types of zoo- and phyto-plankton in the water samples and expressed great enthusiasm for this chance to see the incredible life within a single drop of 'murky' water.

UConn CAP Research Project

This year, we were designated a Conservation Ambassador Program (CAP) Community Partner. CAP is part of the Natural Resources Conservation Academy (NRCA) through the UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources. The program engages high school students in a one week field experience at UConn followed by an individual conservation project, designed in their own community under the guidance of a local community partner like MRWC. For our project, Daniel Pollack, a junior at Ludlowe High School, chose to survey Fairfield coastline locations at Penfield Beach and Ash Creek Estuary to document concentrations of microplastics within the sand/soil. Carrie Rullo from MRWC and Bridget Cervero from The Maritime Aquarium served as his community partners. Daniel's research contributed to The Big Microplastic Survey project, a global citizen science effort to obtain microplastic concentration data in order to further scientific research about the impact on shore birds, fish, and plankton as they ingest these plastics.

IMAGES FROM LEFT: Water Monitoring Conference, Water Conservation Challenge, 2019 Green Awards Honorable Mention, Microplastics Survey

KUDOS

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

The following individuals were honored for their service to the River-Lab Program at our Annual Picnic at the Mill, home of Jocelyn T. (Joy) Shaw. We sincerely appreciate their commitment and dedication to environmental science and the community.

Kingfisher Badge

Guided at least 1 study-trip per grade level and at least 10 study-trips total

Suzanne Graceffa
Bob Weber
Carmen Weber

5 Year Award

Guided at least 5 years and received Kingfisher Badge

Steve Baker
Heidi Gassel
Juli Karacsonyi
Malini Vyas

10 Year Award

Guided at least 10 years and received Kingfisher Badge

Lynn Shavinsky

30 Year Award

Guided at least 30 years and received Kingfisher Badge

Charlene Brauns-Schindler

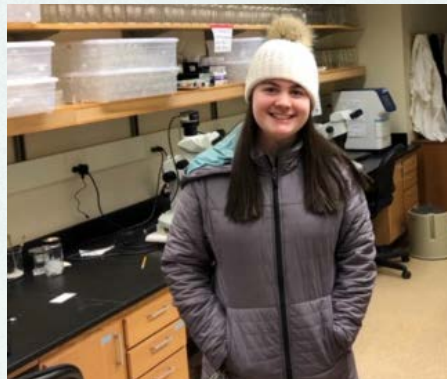
MRWC Scholarship for Sustainability

Each year, MRWC recognizes a senior from Fairfield Ludlowe and Warde High Schools for their study of and commitment to science and the environment. For generations, River-Lab Program volunteers have provided over 120,000 Fairfield students with unique opportunities to explore environmental science in a local watershed. We hope this scholarship encourages students to become leaders in environmental stewardship.



Fairfield Ludlowe High School Recipient

Nicholis Imbrogno is now a freshman studying Environmental Science at the University of New Haven. He credits his study-trips to Mill River as one of the catalysts for his passion for the environment.



Fairfield Warde High School Recipient

Allison Milicia is now a freshman at Purdue University working in a lab to identify the effects of environmental stressors, such as road salts, on Daphnia, zooplankton. She vividly recalls her study-trips to Mill River, especially her first observation of plankton under the microscope.

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



Alison Genovese

MRWC has been the grateful beneficiary of Alison's time and many talents since 2012. In that time, she has served as a guide, school captain, Grade 5 Co-Director, grant writer and Director of Curriculum for the River-Lab Program. Alison's leadership of the multi-year project to realign the River-Lab Units with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) has been her most significant contribution to our organization to date. The new Ecosystem Unit for Grade 5, scheduled for Spring 2020 implementation, represents a huge milestone in the project. NGSS fundamentally changes the way students learn science. Read more about that in our Curriculum Spotlight on page 9.

In 2015, Alison became the Director of Curriculum. She brought to the role her certification in elementary education, more than 15 years teaching experience in private and public schools across three states, and a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Combined with her collaborative style, Alison's background set the stage for a very successful partnership with Walter Wakeman, Fairfield Public Schools Program Director of Elementary Mathematics, Science and Enrichment.

In addition to her accomplishments in curriculum, Alison had great success with grants. Most importantly, thanks to her application for a 2016 grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation, MRWC was awarded \$5,000 to update our website.



“In the end, we will conserve only what we love.
We will love only what we understand.
We will understand only what we are taught.”

Sengalese - Baba Dioum

Photo by Tara Benyei

RIVER-LAB

PROGRAM

16 SCHOOLS

14 PUBLIC, 2 PRIVATE
11 elementary & 3 middle schools



MEASURING
OUR IMPACT



3,222
STUDENTS



122 RIVER-LAB
STUDY TRIPS



531
GUIDES

20
COMMUNITY
OUTREACH
EVENTS



7 MILLION
GALLONS WATER
SAVED

47 RIVER-LAB TRAINING TRIPS

CURRICULUM

SPOTLIGHT

River-Lab Ecosystem

This new Grade 5 Unit was developed, piloted and revised by the Curriculum Committee over the last three years. Alison Genovese directed the initiative, with leadership assistance from Nikki Vinoski beginning in 2019. Other committee members include: Steve Baker, Carol Barrios, Amy Broderick, Sara Jannott, David McKinnis, Nicole Nuttall, Kate Plager, Christina Rescsanski, Carrie Rullo, Joy Shaw and Anne Weinrod.

In alignment with the Next Generation Science Standards, the Ecosystem Unit emphasizes student-driven inquiry rather than guide-delivered content. While on the study-trip, students actively observe natural phenomena in our local river basin system, focusing on interdependent relationships. Observations of organisms, and the ways in which they interact with each other and the environment, provide evidence students will employ as they assess this ecosystem's health.

Another significant change involves modeling the movement of energy. Using yarn, students form a web of connections between organisms in our river basin system. Then, dropping yarn bonds dramatically present the consequences of a disruption in the ecosystem's balance (e.g., fertilizer runoff from neighboring properties).

As before, the study-trip concludes with a classroom lab. Students use their own prism microscopes to look for plankton and insect larvae in the slow- and fast-moving water samples taken on the outdoor portion of the study-trip. They record observations by water sample location (slow or fast), water temperature, time and date of sample. Students analyze this data in order to understand the relationships between these factors and the quantity and types of plankton/larvae observed.

This lab activity remains one of the most important lessons of the unit, as well as the one of the most memorable. Since plankton form the base of the aquatic food web and phytoplankton produce about half of earth's oxygen through photosynthesis, it is essential for students to recognize the optimal conditions for plankton (slow-moving water). Through this unit, students truly gain a new perspective on the interdependencies of all life on Earth!



LUMINARY



Charlene Brauns-Schindler

At the Annual Awards Picnic, Charlene Brauns-Schindler was recognized for 30 years of dedicated volunteer work for MRWC and the River-Lab Program. In appreciation of her service to the community, Former First Selectman, Mike Tetreau, proclaimed May 30, 2019 Charlene Brauns-Schindler Day.

Charlene joined MRWC in the Fall of 1989 as a River-Lab Volunteer Guide for Jennings School. She proceeded to volunteer for all the remaining River-Lab study-trips for her four younger sons as they progressed through the Fairfield Public School System. Charlene continued to support the River-Lab Program long enough to enjoy guiding her two grandchildren through each of their four study-trips!

30 years, 578.5 study-trips, 11,000+ students

Charlene has volunteered in every position within the River-Lab Program including: guide, model leader, Jennings School Captain, lab leader, scheduler at every grade level, grade-level director, and Program Advisor. As of December 2019, Charlene had participated in an astounding 578.5 study-trips! We estimate that she has guided over 11,000 students on study-trips during her 30-year tenure.

Charlene has also provided leadership within MRWC, serving on the Board of Directors since 1991. During her terms on the Board, including 11 years as President, Charlene was deeply involved in the Garden Expo, the 50th Anniversary Planning Committee, and countless other events and programs sponsored by MRWC.

This year, Charlene will be leaving the Board to spend more time with her family. We admire her spirit and are grateful for her many contributions to our organization and the community.

COMMUNITY

A SAMPLING OF ACTIVITIES



TOP: Founders Walk, Riverfield Girl Scouts

MIDDLE L to R: 2019 Aquarion Environmental Champion Awards, National Trails Day at Ash Creek Estuary

BOTTOM L to R: Coastal Cleanup, RL 4 guides, Clam Clinic

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Photo by Tara Benyei

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Lincoln W. Craighead, **Engineering**

Brian Fagan, **Education**

**MRWC and River-Lab Program
Founder/Author/Illustrator**

Jocelyn T. (Joy) Shaw

Director of Curriculum

Alison Genovese

Co-Director of Curriculum

Nikki Vinoski

Roberta Clark, **Office Manager**

PROGRAM OFFICERS AND STAFF

RIVER-LAB OFFICERS

Advisors

Nicole Nuttall

Directors

Dabney Bowen: RL Estuary Co-Director
Nancy Fuller: RL3
Sara Jannott: RL5
Sarah Neafsey: RL4
Nicole Nuttall: RL Estuary Co-Director

Gear Manager

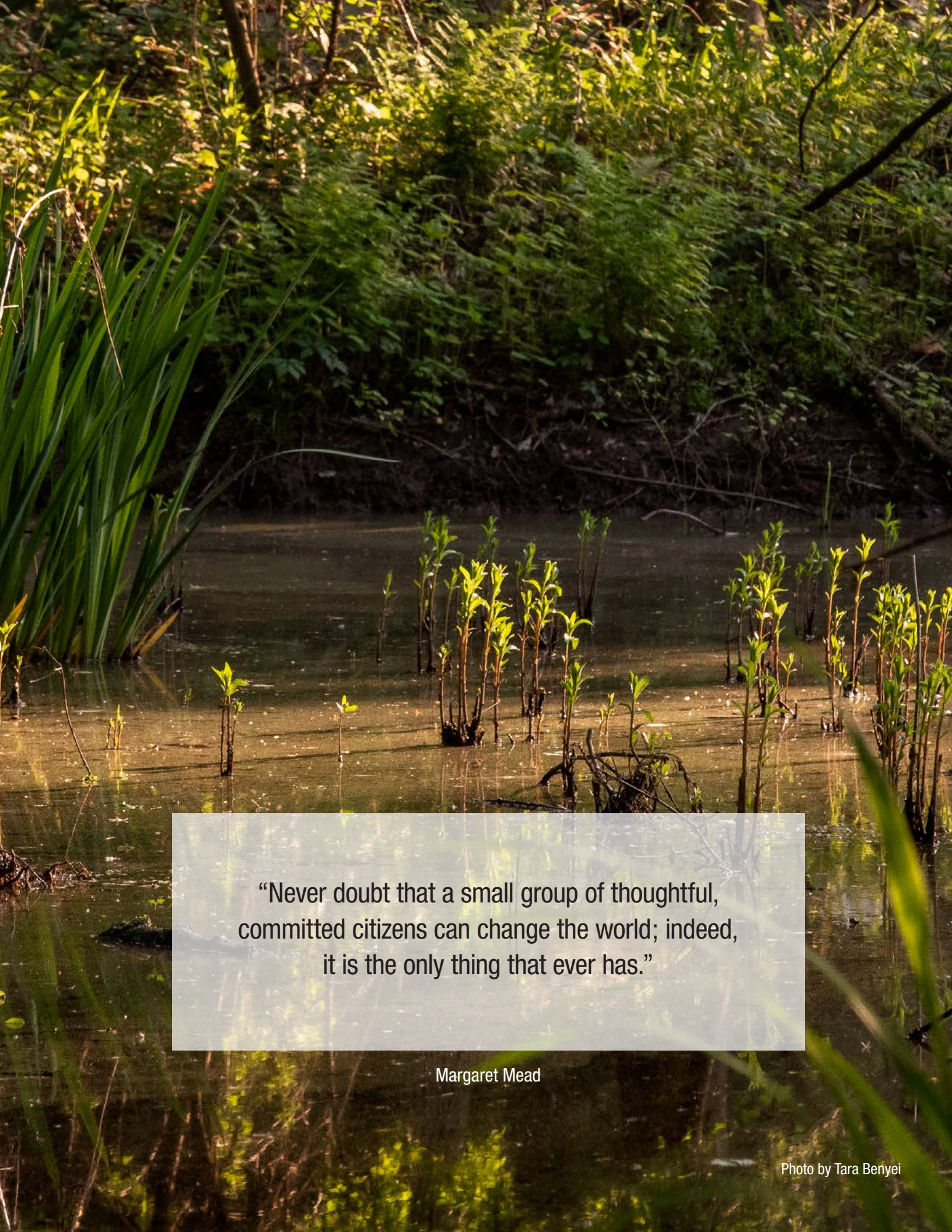
Heidi Gassel

Assistant Gear Manager

Samantha Anderson

GUIDE AND CLASSROOM TRAINERS

Samantha Anderson
Steve Baker
Carol Barrios
Dabney Bowen
Charlene Brauns-Schindler
Sara Jannott
Juli Karacsonyi
David McKinnis
Sarah Neafsey
Nicole Nuttall
Kate O'Mahony
Christina Rescsanski
Subha Sunder
Nikki Vinoski

A photograph of a mangrove swamp. In the foreground, several young mangrove saplings with bright green leaves and thin brown stems are planted in shallow, murky water. To the left, a cluster of taller, green reeds or grasses grows. The background is filled with dense, lush green foliage and trees, creating a thick canopy. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day, with some reflections on the water's surface.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Photo by Tara Benyei

2019 FINANCIAL REPORT

Mill River Wetland Committee, Inc
January 1, 2019 - December 31, 2019



INCOME	12/31/2019	12/31/2018
Donations		
General/Memorial	16,383.00	15,248.10
Annual appeal	6,825.00	2,040.00
Company Match	650.00	1,362.50
PTA donations	7,000.00	6,000.00
Subtotal Donations	\$30,858.00	24,650.60
River-Lab Program Income	12,460.00	12,615.00
Fundraising Income		
Special Events	0.00	5,127.01
Amazon Smile	129.73	95.29
Merchandise/Other	100.00	1,403.51
Social Media	600.00	0.00
Subtotal Fundraising	829.73	6,625.81
Grants	500.00	2,400.00
Dividend/Interest Income	2,174.20	2,014.11
TOTAL INCOME	46,821.93	48,305.52
EXPENSES		
MRWC Expenses		
Operating Expenses	4,301.93	4,222.69
Insurance	2,686.80	13,144.20
Storage	3,023.00	2,974.50
Scholarship Fund	500.00	500.00
Community Outreach	477.23	0.00
Subtotal MRWC Expenses	10,988.96	20,841.39
River-Lab Program Expenses	6,792.23	5,225.50
Payroll Expenses	23,177.55	22,118.25
Fundraising Expenses	116.89	120.11
Total Expenses	41,075.63	48,305.25
NET CASH FLOW	5,746.30	0.27
INVESTMENTS		
Vanguard Inter-Term Treasury Funds	42,358.77	39,852.86
Vanguard Inter-Term Treasury Funds*	27,467.28	26,783.18
Vanguard Short-Term Treasury Funds*	23,832.90	23,006.46
TOTAL INVESTMENTS	93,658.95	89,642.50

*These restricted investments are funds from HUD for the dam restoration.



“If the path be beautiful, let us not ask where it leads.”

Anatole France





Mill River Wetland Committee, Inc. is a locally founded non-profit organization. We believe the most powerful protection for our environment comes through education. The River-Lab Environmental Science Program is our signature curriculum, through which school children visit a local river to learn about the importance of watersheds and how to protect them. In addition, MRWC is proud to engage our community in environmental issues and advocate for continued watershed protection.

Mill River Wetland Committee, Inc.
203.259.1847
P.O. Box 38
Fairfield, CT 06824

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