

Grantee: Great Swamp Watershed Association

Program Area: Environment/Animals

Most recent grant: \$20,000 in 2017

Total funding: \$277,000 since 1998

Given our upcoming focus on land stewardship and preservation throughout the next year, we felt a spotlight on our local Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA) would be fitting, especially given the organization's most recent and rather significant property acquisition referenced below. While \$20,000 is a relatively small investment, our support here has been lengthy and consistent and has certainly helped GSWA to make a strong impact throughout its local community. To provide a brief overview, the GSWA was founded 35 years ago to protect the streams that feed the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (located in Basking Ridge, NJ). Today, the organization is dedicated to protecting and improving the water resources of the Passaic River region through education, advocacy, science, land preservation, and stewardship. Of special note, Wade Kirby accepted the position of Director of Development this past January after having served on GSWA's Advisory Council and subsequently the Board of Trustees for several years. (Please note that all development efforts between the FMKF and GSWA are transacted through Sally Rubin (Executive Director), as opposed to Wade, to avoid any perceived conflicts of interest.)

In late November 2017, I attended a GSWA ribbon cutting event celebrating a newly-acquired and preserved 20-acre property. This property now brings the organization's Conservation Management Area (CMA) to a contiguous 73-acre parcel of wetlands and deciduous upland forest that the organization owns in Harding Township, NJ. The CMA was previously split in half by this "missing piece," and there was a pronounced sense of achievement and relief at the event as GSWA had been in negotiations regarding this formerly privately-owned property for nearly two years. While there was not necessarily a great deal of private foundation representation at the event, the enthusiasm of individual donors, Board members, staff, and volunteers for the opportunities this land parcel brings was certainly contagious. This connection of contiguous open space is a significant benchmark for GSWA as it allows for undisrupted and more controlled research of streams throughout the property, continuous hiking trails, and more impactful fostering of native plants and wildlife.

Prior to this acquisition, in mid-2016, GSWA committed to a strategy that has scaled its reach and impact exponentially. Expanding its mission from local stream and land protection to the protection and improvement of the water resources of the greater Passaic River region has increased the number of municipalities from ten to more than 25 with a combined population of over 1,000,000 people. These are rather dramatic changes as GSWA has absorbed the remnants of the Passaic River Coalition, thus assuming responsibility for the ecological wellbeing and protection of the river from source to sea.

It is apparent that such a bold, yet very logical expansion is costly. To accomplish the initial stages of the expansion, the FY16 operating budget included a 60% increase in program

staff time, which increased by *another* 50% in this year's budget. Planning for such growth sparked some internal controversy among the Board and members given the degree to which the GWSA would expand its mission and geographic reach. But even if others appeared displeased with this change or perhaps with Sally Rubin herself, one must admit that she and her organization have seen success on many fronts. In April 2017, Rubin was selected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to receive an Environmental Champion Award, the highest recognition presented to the public by the U.S. EPA Region 2. Additionally, after a long and intensive, two-year application process, GSWA achieved national recognition in August 2017 as an Accredited Land Trust from the Land Trust Alliance, another grantee of the FMKF. Of the more than 1,300 land trusts in the country, only 389 currently hold this status, and GSWA is one of only eight accredited in New Jersey. Accreditation recognizes that the organization has demonstrated sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship.

With an ever-growing education program, its new advocacy role as the Passaic River Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate, and exciting upcoming stewardship projects, the Great Swamp Watershed Association remains dedicated to "being the watch dogs over our waters and lands, preventing environmental problems rather than just solving them, and educating the environmental stewards of the future."

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Prepared by Erin Clifford