



Raritan Headwaters Association

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



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The scientific community is telling us that clean, safe freshwater supplies are declining nationwide.

Right here in the Raritan River Basin, there are too many places where plastics and debris litter streambanks, stormwaters carry chemicals into waterways, high temperatures trigger harmful algae blooms, and major storm events cause devastating flooding. These water quality issues are becoming painfully familiar and sounding the alarm to better assess the presence of emerging contaminants like microplastics and “forever chemicals” and their enormous implications for the future.

Raritan Headwaters Association remains vigilant and committed to keeping our rivers and drinking water resources clean and safe. Every day, RHA's professional staff is monitoring the watershed and working to raise awareness and find solutions to real and potential threats to water quality based on the best available science. We are an influential and respected leader in safeguarding New Jersey's natural environment and the demand for our expertise and services is testament to the success of our conservation programs.

The Upper Raritan River region is home to precious water supplies, diverse wildlife and residents who value their quality of life. With the help of our partners, volunteers, and passionate supporters, we are making a real and lasting impact on the health of the watershed. This is good news, not just for those of us who live in this special place, but for communities downstream in New Jersey's more urban areas that rely on the drinking water that comes from our streams and reservoirs.

Many thanks for your dedication to Raritan Headwaters Association's mission and generous support that enables us to do our job - keeping water clean and healthy.



Cindy Ehrenclou, Executive Director



Since 1959, Raritan Headwaters Association has focused on one thing — clean water. We engage citizens and decision makers in the protection of our watershed and beyond through science, education, land preservation and advocacy.



A New Strategic Plan for 2022-2024

Acutely aware of the fact that the world was changing and the stresses on our ecosystems were changing with it, the board and staff launched an effort to establish a new Strategic Plan. Priorities and goals have been developed to ensure that RHA delivers effective programs that will reach the broader community and make a significant impact on the health of precious natural resources.

A theme throughout the process of developing this plan was a heightened awareness around being more inclusive in the way we provide access to nature and support for broader, more diverse communities in safeguarding clean water. We also recognized a pressing need for sustainable funding, to ensure high quality data on land and water resources and our capacity to address threats to these resources.

The urgency to protect the health of the watershed, paired with the demand for RHA's services affirmed that this was the right time to establish a clear path for the next three years and beyond. Our fresh Strategic Plan includes well-defined, attainable goals and strategies to improve water quality, expand education programs, increase access to nature and clean drinking water, promote planning for climate resilience, and improve the ecological integrity of habitat in the Raritan headwaters.

RHA's 2022-2024 Strategic Plan can be found at www.RaritanHeadwaters.org.



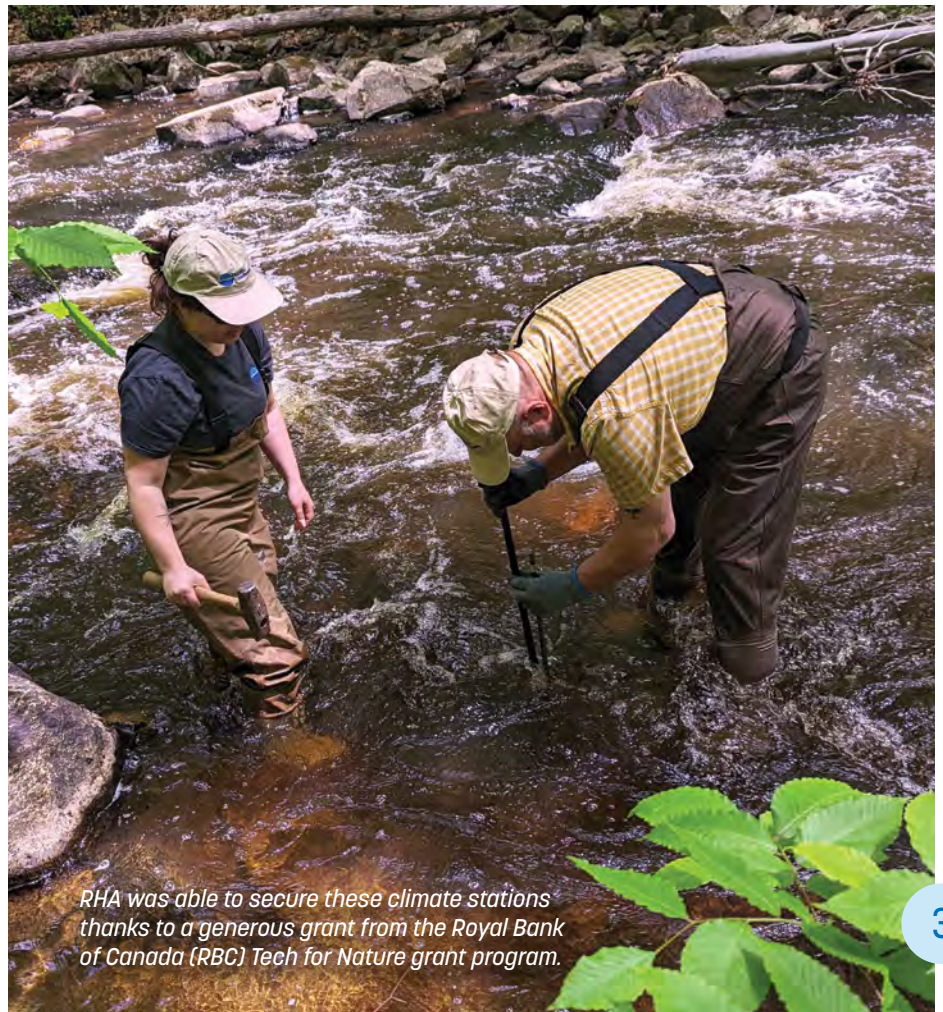
New Climate Stations monitor water quality in real time

New Jersey is predicted to get warmer and wetter in the coming decades, and we see the changes firsthand with blistering heatwaves and big storms like Hurricane Ida.

How is this impacting the health of our watershed? RHA is getting closer to answering that question with the installation of Sentinel Climate Stations at four key locations along rivers in the Upper Raritan Watershed. These climate stations are collecting and transmitting to our website continuous data on stream temperature, conductivity, and water depth, which can be viewed and downloaded by the public, and is especially valuable to municipal decision-makers, scientists, educators and students, fishing clubs, and state environmental agencies.

In partnership with Duke Farms, RHA installed a fifth station on their property in Hillsborough to monitor water as it leaves the Upper Raritan and enters the Lower Raritan region, which encompasses more urban communities that depend on our reservoirs and streams for their drinking water.

This new technology will help inform decisions on short- and long-term vulnerability to climate change and the steps necessary for effective climate resilience and adaptation planning in our communities.



RHA was able to secure these climate stations thanks to a generous grant from the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) Tech for Nature grant program.

Watershed University prepares the next generation for conservation work

This summer 29 high schoolers participated in RHA's Watershed University program. In June and August, students entering grades 9-12 from Bridgewater, Hillsborough, Basking Ridge, Whitehouse Station, Flemington – even as far as Blairstown, New York City, Bound Brook, and Hackensack – spent a week learning about environmental issues and conservation careers from a cast of experts.

RHA staff led hands-on experiences ranging from a biodiversity study with Dr. Kristi MacDonald, to a stream assessment with Watershed Scientist Emily Mayer. Students learned about current events and environmental justice issues with Bill Kibler, and Melissa Mitchell introduced GIS technology via an exploration of Fairview Farm's trail systems. Other subject areas included land stewardship, groundwater quality, native wildlife, foraging, birding and more with Zak Kircher, Mara Tippet, Robert Lucas, and Lauren Theis. Local artist Julie Goetz and community partners from Hunterdon County Parks also visited the students. Each week culminated with a kayak trip on the South Branch.

Watershed University, now in its fifth season, was established to provide high school students with opportunities to gain a knowledge base and explore future fields of study in college and beyond – perhaps preparing for a career in environmental science, policy, or conservation. And, of course, we are striving to develop a community of young conservationists who are equipped to make impactful change!



Good Infrastructure = Clean Water

In many places across our state, failing and outdated water infrastructure threatens public health. Most New Jerseyans are aware of the dangers posed by lead pipes and urban sewer systems that overflow during heavy storms. But few realize that there are serious problems with water infrastructure in many rural areas.

Four out of five residents of our watershed get their drinking water from privately-owned wells, and most dispose of household wastewater through septic systems. This generally works well on large lots, but not so adequately on small properties – of which there are many. Other local towns are using antiquated, inadequate wastewater treatment systems.

Last spring, Bill Kibler, RHA's director of policy testified before the New Jersey Senate Environment Committee to tell them that all communities – urban, suburban, and rural – deserve clean water and the infrastructure necessary to provide it.

Any contamination in the headwaters of the Raritan River is felt far downstream. That's why it's critical for public health to address infrastructure problems at the source.

Our hope is to attract a portion of the new Federal and State infrastructure funds for testing and rehabilitating contaminated drinking water wells, and for inspecting, testing, and replacing faulty septic systems. Ideally, many malfunctioning septic systems would be replaced with small community wastewater treatment plants.



Happenings in our watershed!



This year RHA partnered with 24 schools! Our education team welcomed hundreds of students to Fairview Farm, led in-school programs, river explorations, and more opportunities for fun in nature!



Over 1,000 volunteers, in one morning removed 11 tons of trash from 50 miles of stream at **RHA's 2022 Annual Stream Cleanup**.



RHA's **Kestrel Nest Box** project is a partnership that employs the American Kestrel as a flagship species for conservation of other wildlife associated with open habitats, including grassland birds, and for the preservation and management of lands that support watershed health.



Shedfest is RHA's newest community event that you don't want to miss! It's a music festival with food trucks and family fun. Join us for **Fall Shedfest on October 2, 2022** – Register at <https://www.raritanheadwaters.org/event/shedfest/>

We can't do it alone!

We rely on thousands of dedicated volunteers each year to remove invasive species, plant trees, clear trails, set-up events, monitor streams, organize nature classrooms, enter data, and more. There are volunteer opportunities for a wide array of activities - indoors and out.

Interested in joining us? Reach out to **Debbie Newcomb**, Volunteer Coordinator, at dnewcomb@raritanheadwaters.org.



RHA's Well Test Program to the rescue!

Heavy rain and flooding brought by Ida and other intense storm events in 2021 increased the risk of contaminated drinking water throughout New Jersey. Those relying on private wells are particularly vulnerable.

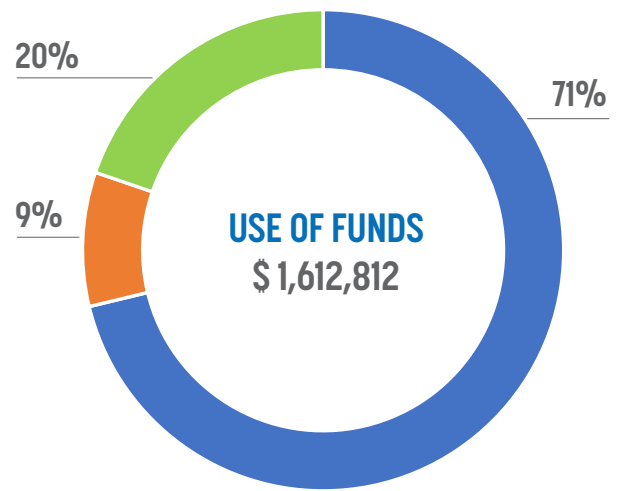
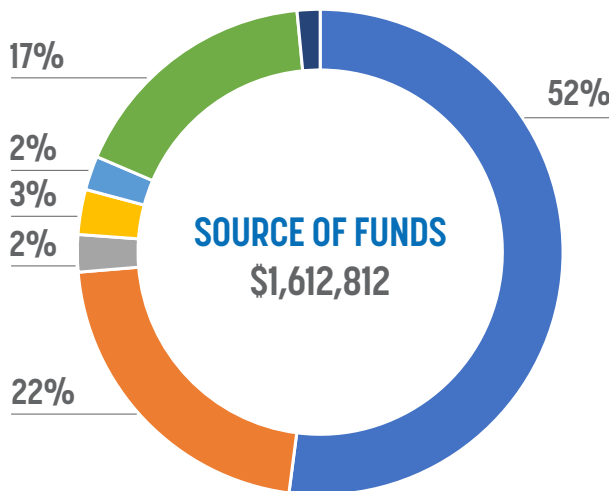
RHA's well test program is always here to meet the needs of residents who are looking to test their wells for bacteria and other pollutants. However, following Ida, our team sprang into action when first, Branchburg's Health Department called for help and other municipal partners followed to address an urgent public health concern. In response to local flooding, RHA distributed hundreds of test kits to at-risk homeowners. Community Well Testing events held in September and October served many of the hardest hit communities. Families needed to know their drinking water was safe to drink. For more information about our well test program and upcoming Community Well Testing events visit: www.raritanheadwaters.org/get-involved-2/groundwater-well-testing/.



Samantha LaRocca, Well Testing Program Manager, and Mara Tippet, Watershed Scientist.

Fiscal Year October 1, 2020 - September 30, 2021

Raritan Headwaters Association is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) conservation organization that operates on a fiscal year, beginning October 1st and ending September 30th. Our accounts are audited on an annual basis by the accounting firm of James M. Wood, CPA. Presented are two graphs depicting the Functional Expenses and Support Revenue of the Association for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2021.



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