

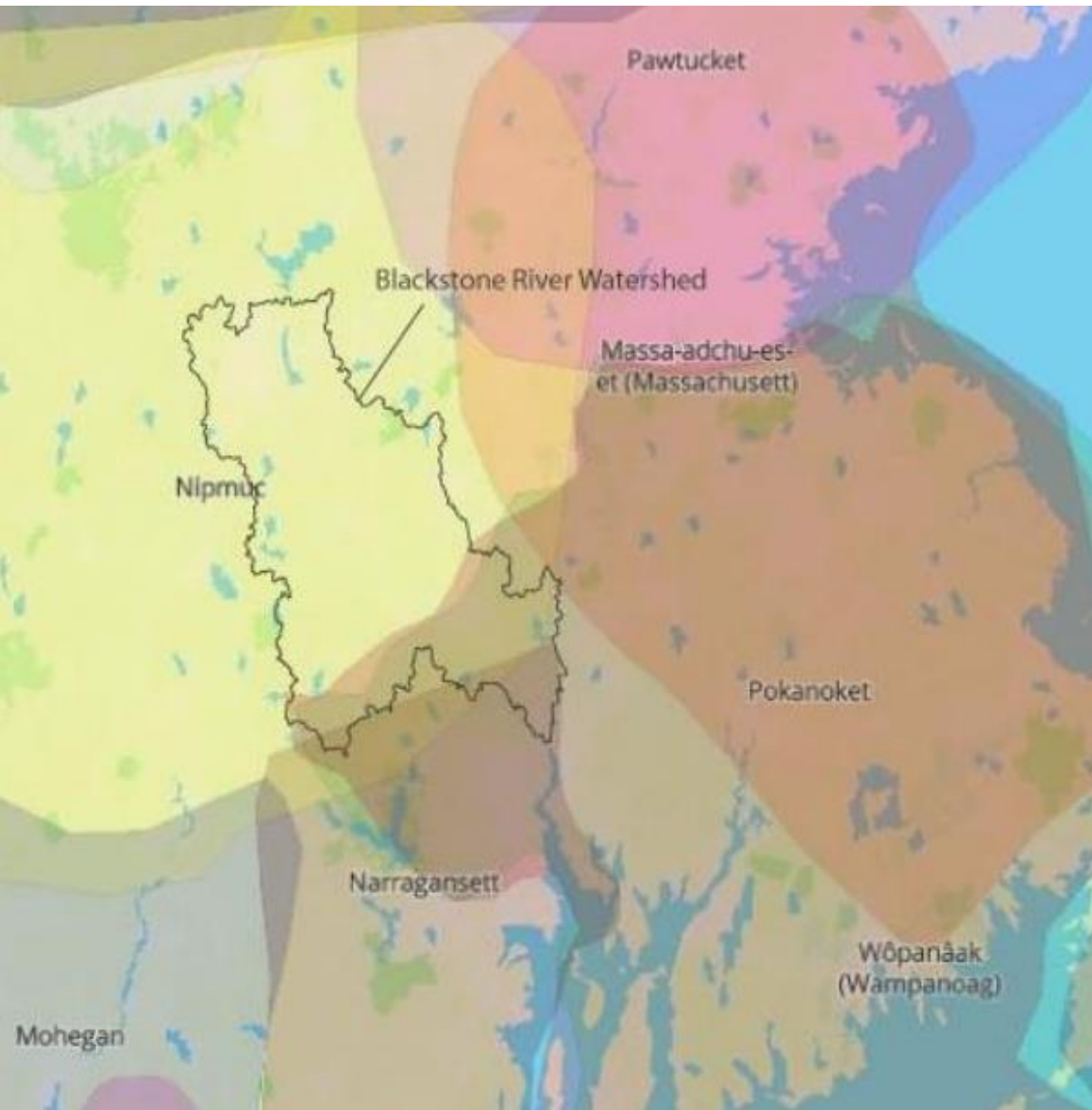
# Supporting GI & Collaborative Projects in the Blackstone Watershed



Stefanie Covino, [scovino@clarku.edu](mailto:scovino@clarku.edu)  
January 31, 2024

**NARRAGANSETT BAY  
ESTUARY PROGRAM**





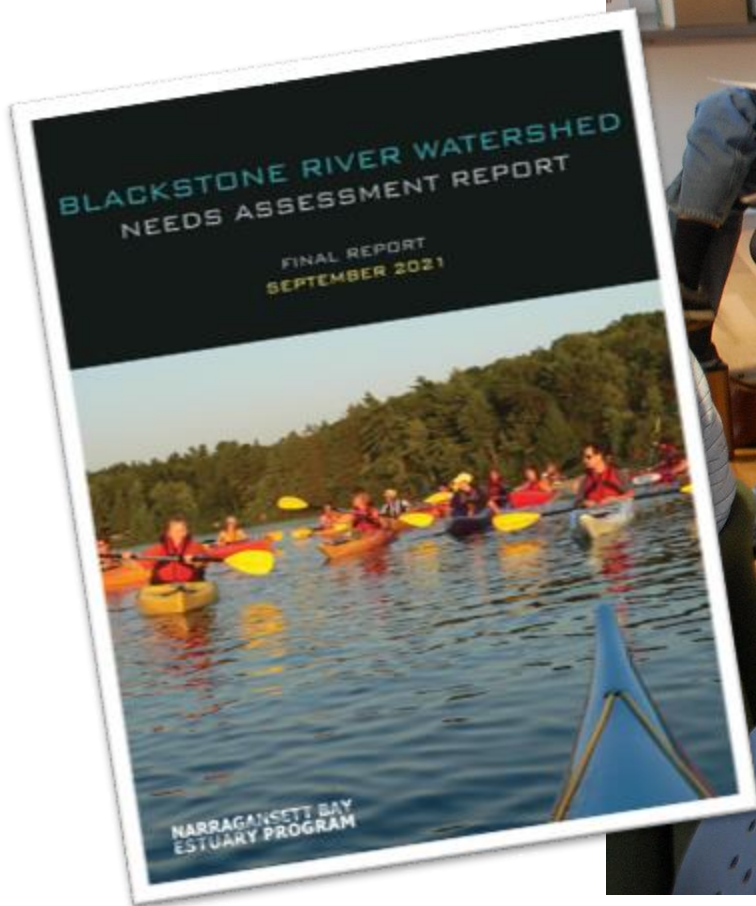
# Indigenous Land

- [Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe](#)
- [Narragansett Indian Tribe](#)
- [Nipmuc Nation](#)
- [Pokanoket Nation](#)

Centuries of careful land stewardship with close ties to the river

Needs Assessment Report Figure 6: Regional Indigenous Lands (Native Land Digital 2021)

“How can we help?”



## NARRAGANSETT BAY ESTUARY PROGRAM

- 2 years & 8 meetings
- 140 ppl, 40 orgs
- 11 govt agencies

20  
priorities



# A Shared Watershed with Shared Goals

Enhance WQ monitoring



Enhance aquatic connectivity



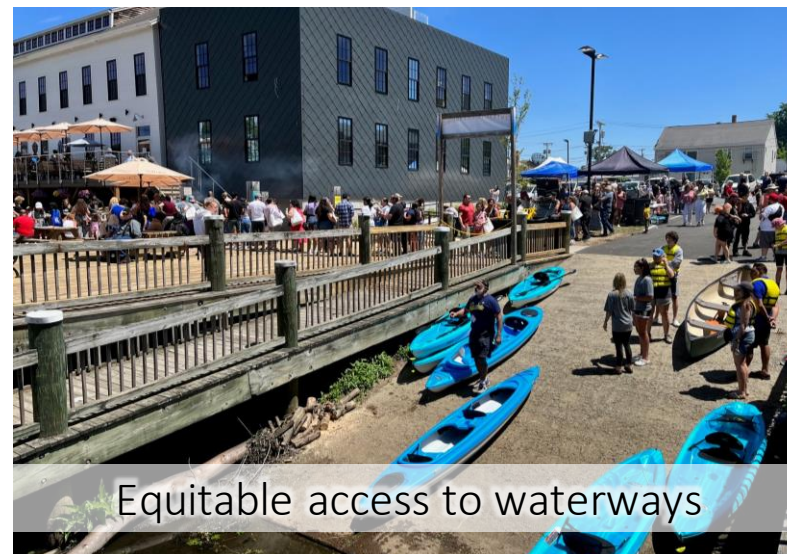
Manage water chestnut



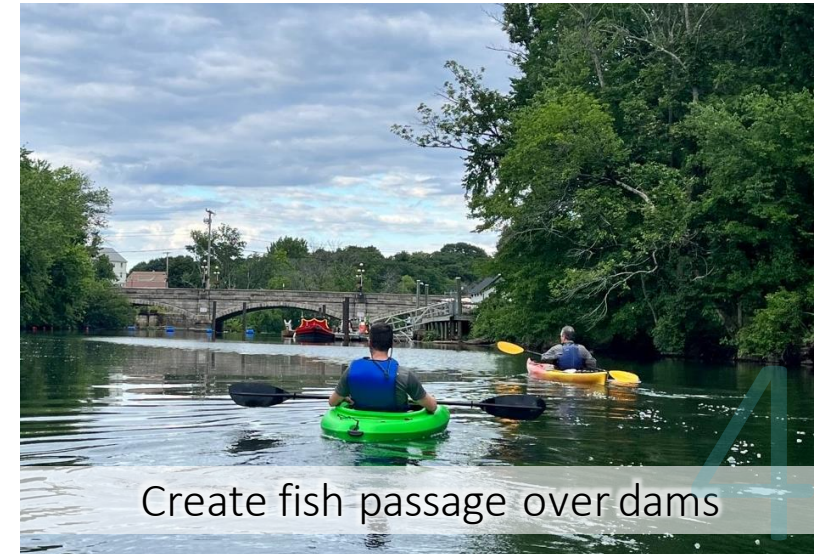
Enhance use of GI



Equitable access to waterways



Create fish passage over dams





# [blackstonecollaborative.org](http://blackstonecollaborative.org)



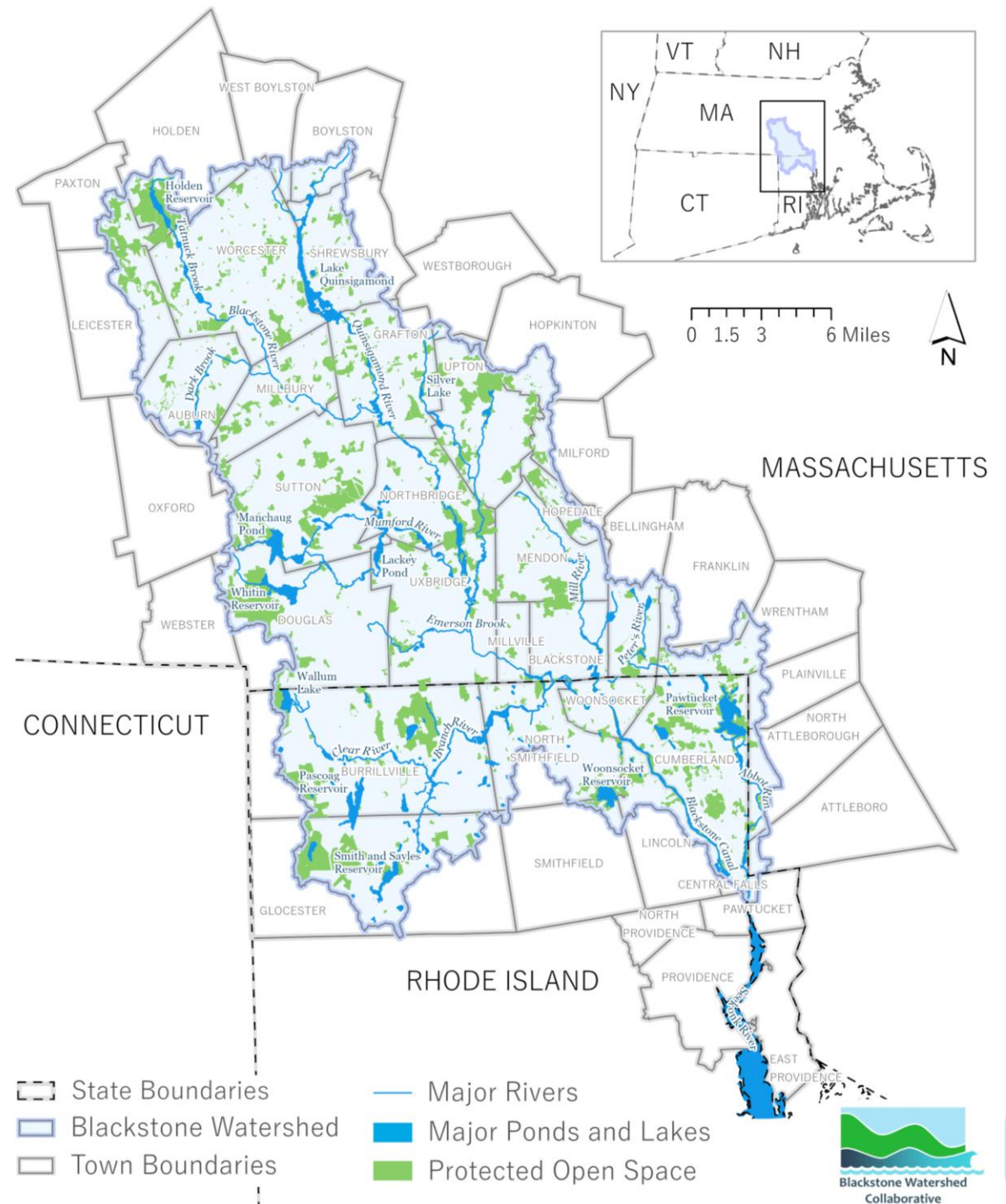
Over 120 organizations working together to ensure a **healthier and more resilient** Blackstone River Watershed by addressing our *industrial past*, ongoing *urbanization*, and the impacts of *climate change*.

Meet monthly; all are welcome!



# Blackstone Watershed

- 48 miles long
- Drops 438'
- 475 square miles
- 39 communities
- 2 states
- Many tribes





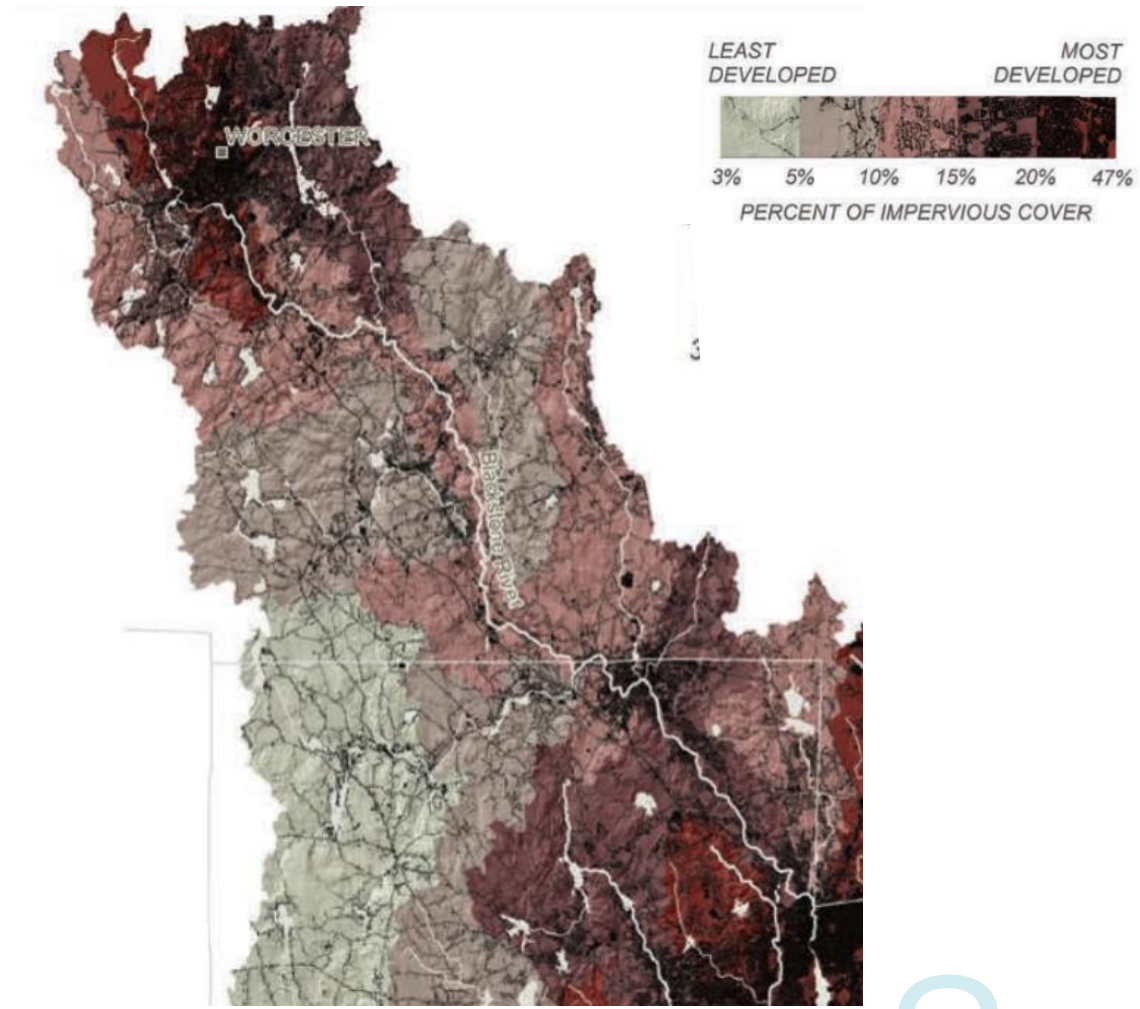
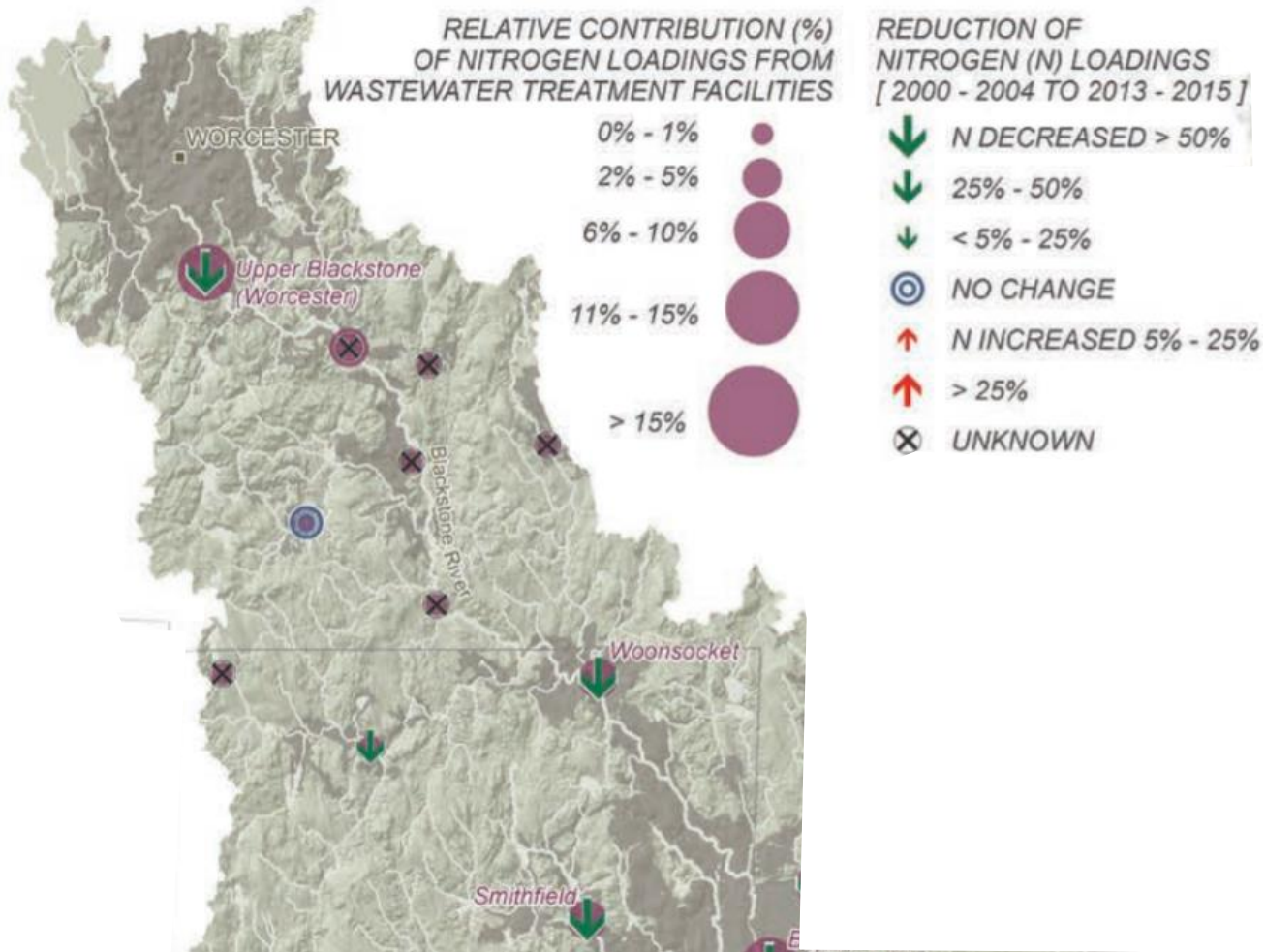
# America's Hardest Working River



*Slater Mill, America's first water-powered cotton-spinning mill in Pawtucket, RI (c.1790)*



# While Water Quality Has Improved, Challenges Are Expanding...

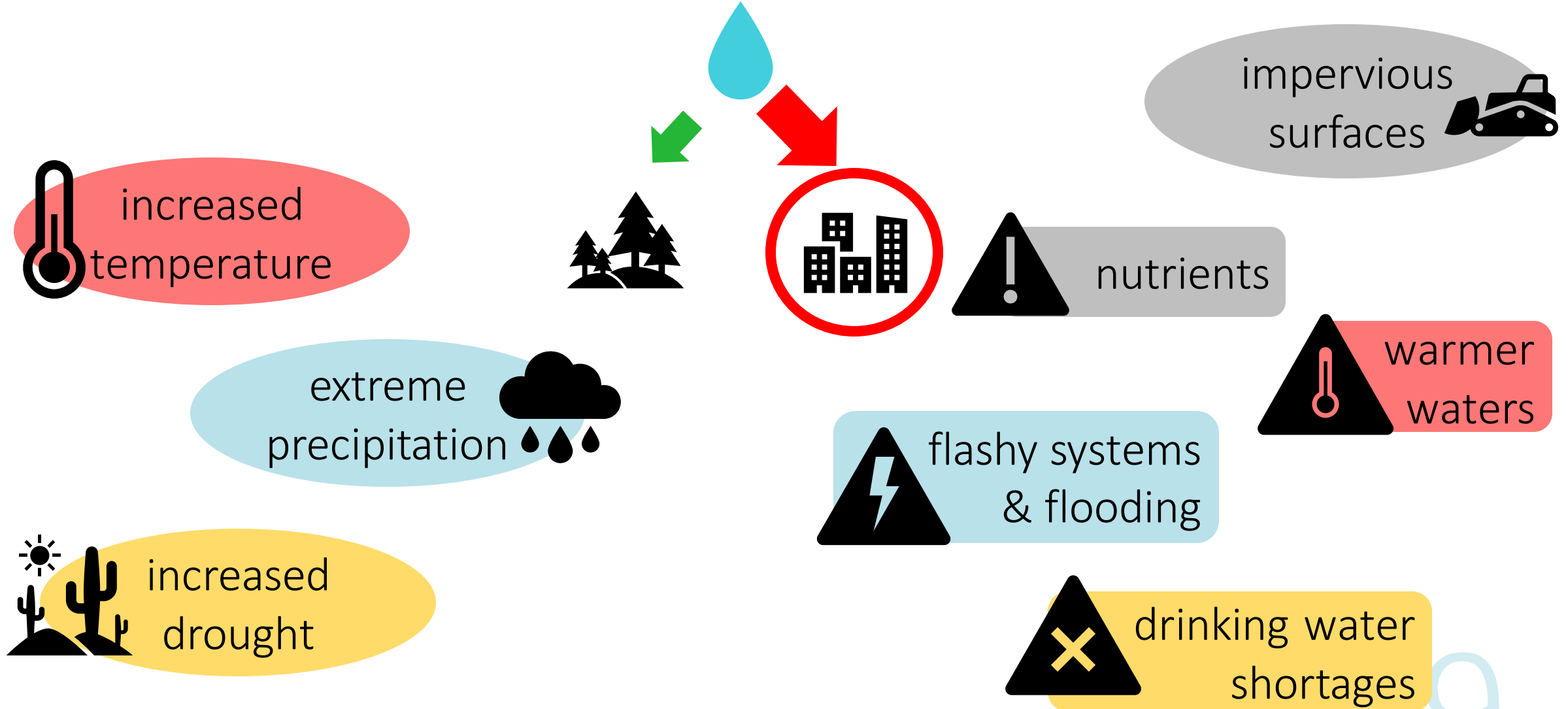


**Reductions in Nitrogen Loading**





# ...& Climate Change Exacerbates Impacts & Is Central to Our Mission





# Impacts Are Compounded & Not Felt Equitably

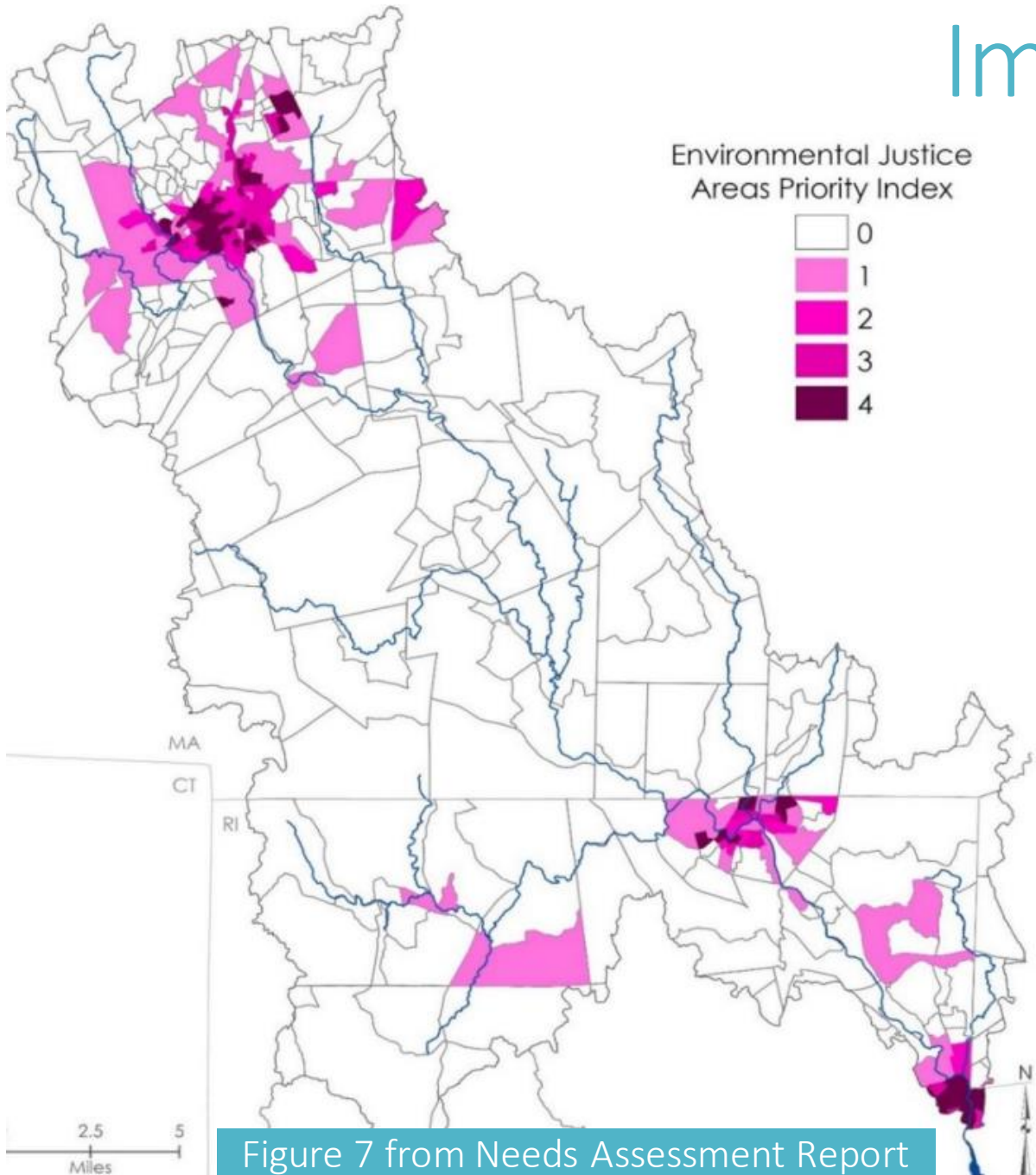


Figure 7 from Needs Assessment Report

- Heat islands
- Tree cover
- Asthma rates
- Flooding impacts
- Water quality



# Supporting Local Planning





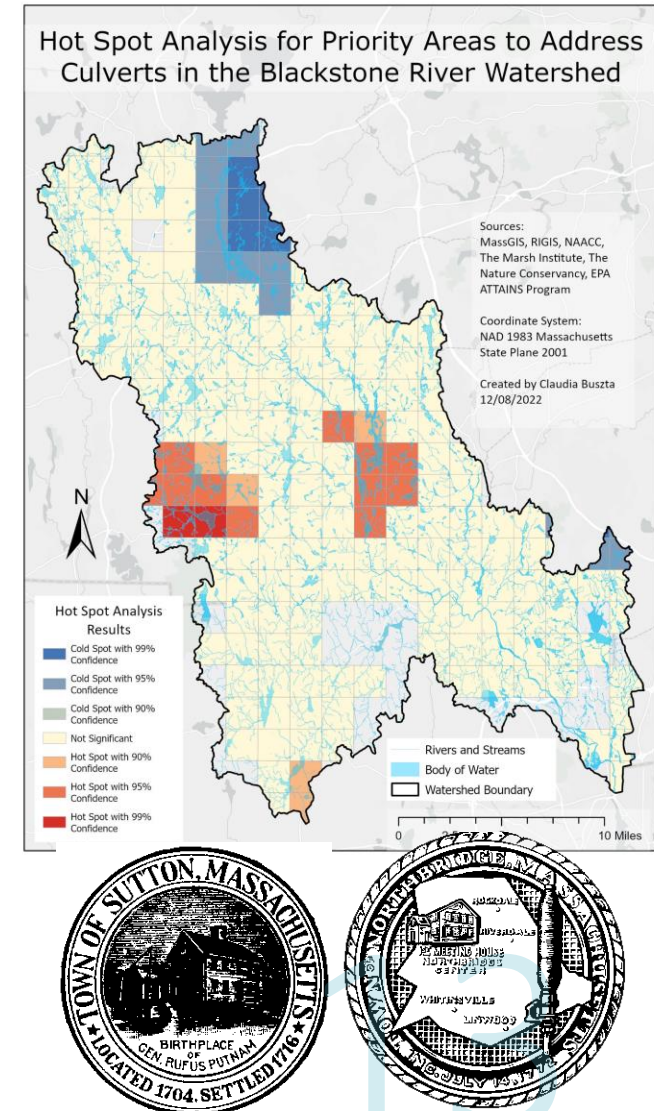
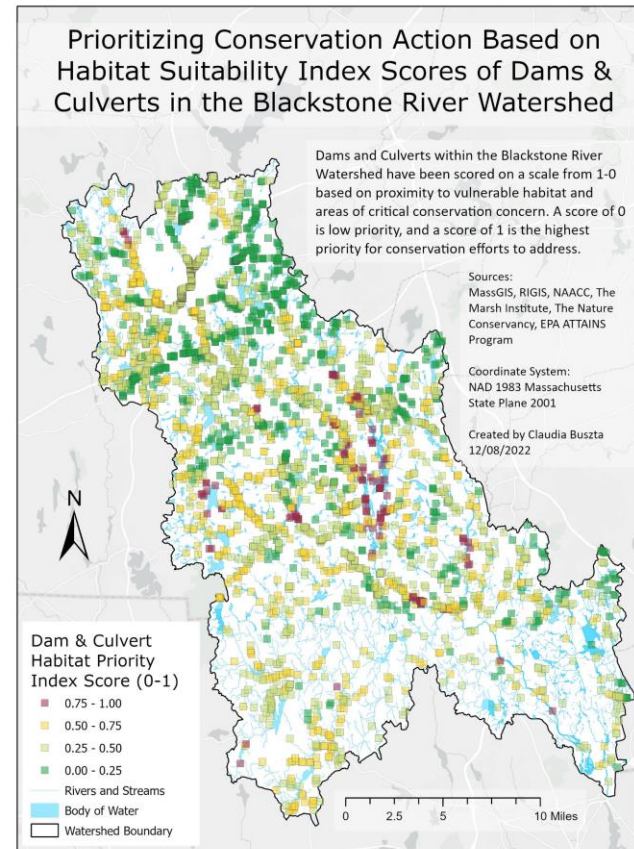
# Public Education on Stormwater & CSO

Catch Basin Mural Project  
Worcester, Ma



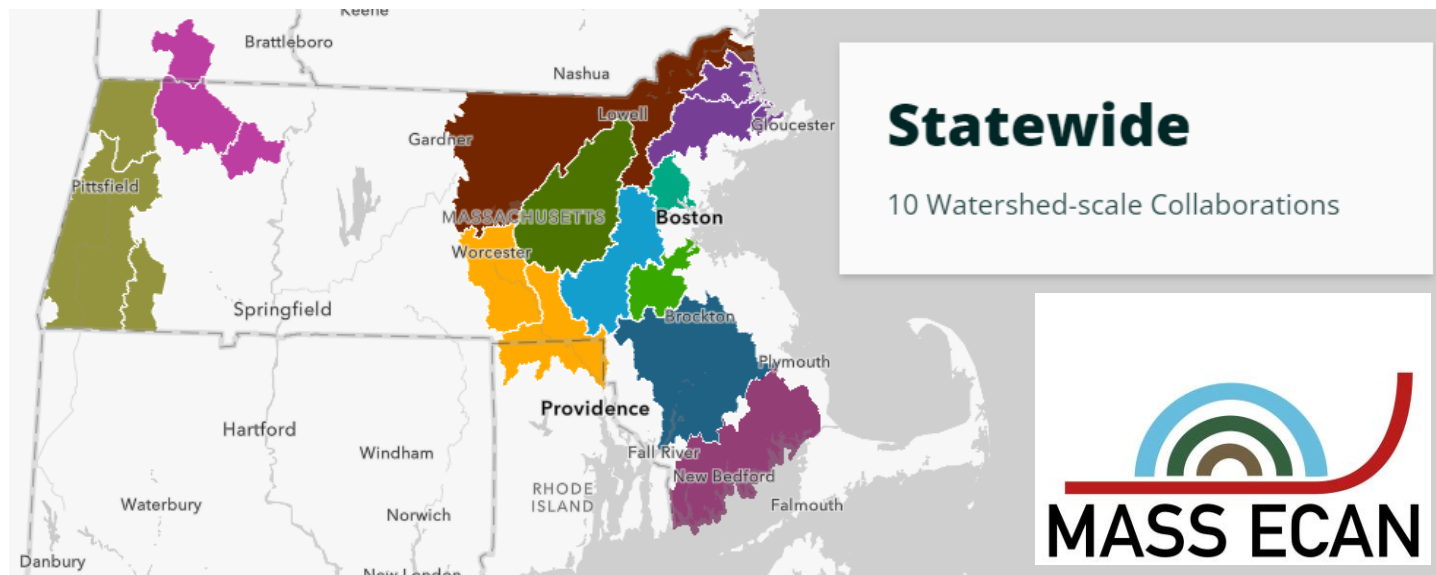
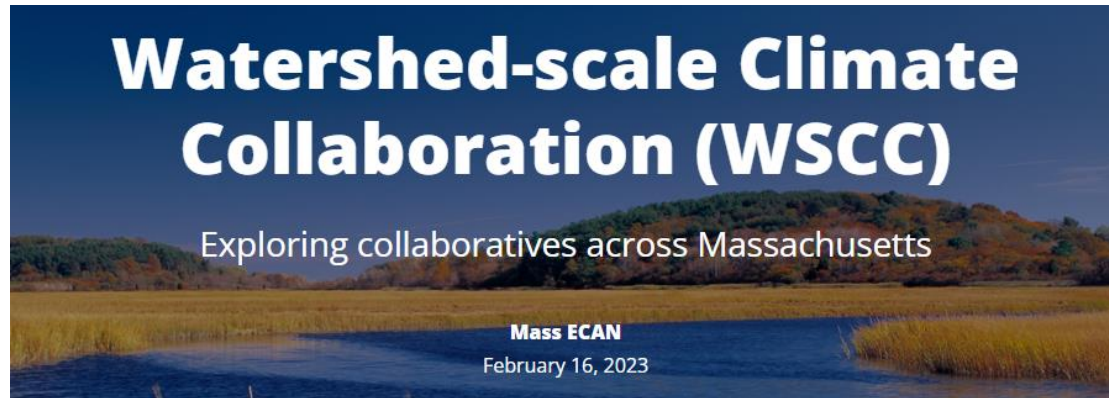


# Connecting Students with Priority Local Organizations & Issues





# Supporting NBS Statewide & Sharing Best Practices





# Coordinating in Real Time... Woonsocket Wastewater Overflows

## The Providence Journal

ENVIRONMENT

### Sewage discharged from treatment plant into Blackstone River — again. Why it happened.



Alex Kuffner  
The Providence Journal

Published 5:10 a.m. ET March 3, 2023 | Updated 10:29 a.m. ET March 6, 2023



#### Key Points

- This is not the first time sewage has leaked into the Blackstone river
- RI DEM issued a no-contact advisory for the river
- DEM was preparing to issue the plant a notice of violation before the incident

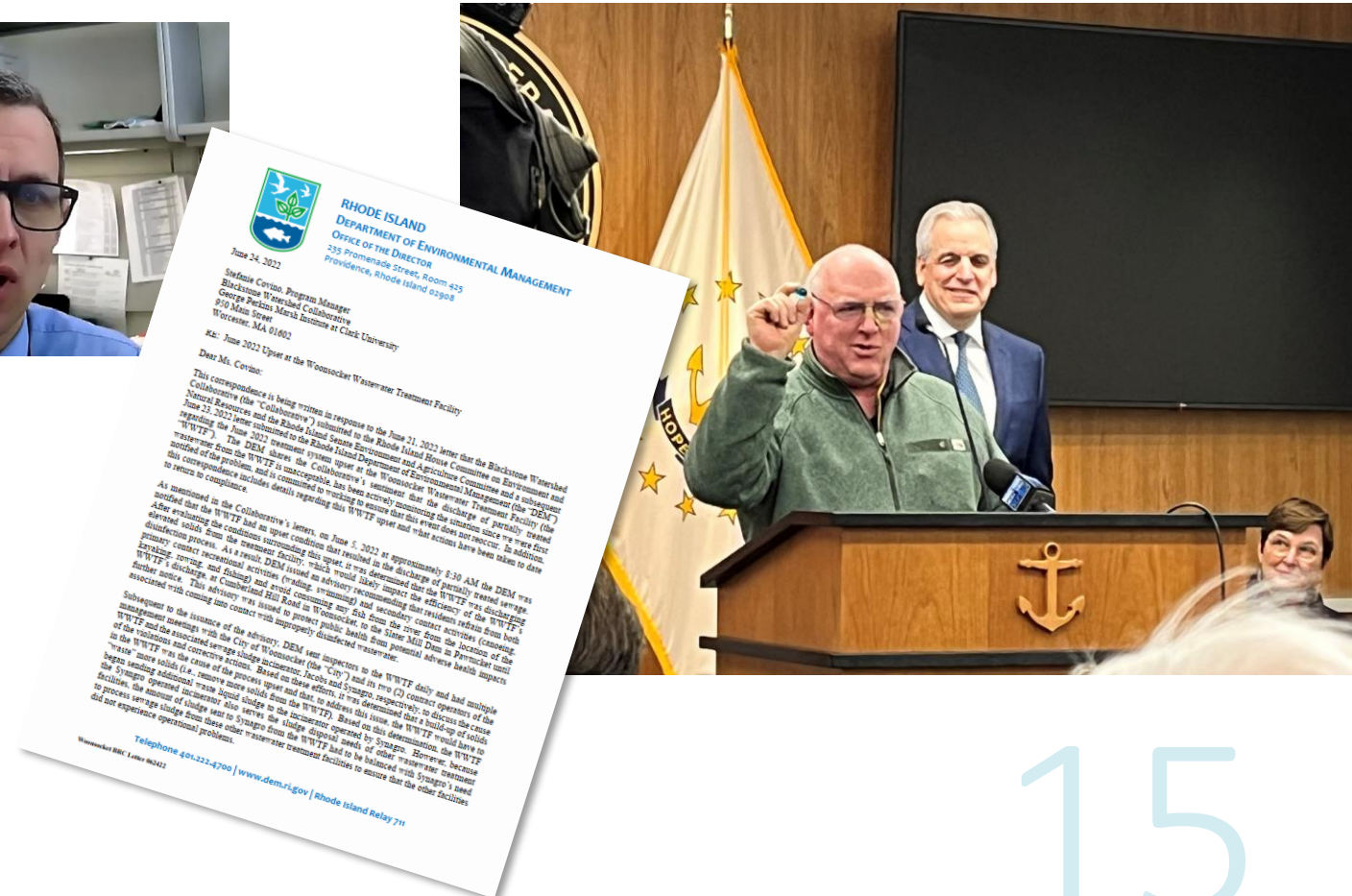
WOONSOCKET — Johnathan Berard was out for his morning run Wednesday when he turned onto the [Blackstone River Bikeway](#) and was overcome by a strong odor. |

“Something didn’t smell right,” he said. “It was definitely raw sewage.”

The smell was coming from the opposite bank of the river, where an outfall from the [problem-plagued Woonsocket wastewater treatment plant](#) is located.



Joseph Haberek (RIDEM)



**RHODE ISLAND  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**  
Office of the Director  
235 Promenade Street, Room 425  
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

June 24, 2022

Stefanie Corvino, Program Manager  
Blackstone Watershed Collaborative  
George Peckham Marsh Institute  
910 Main Street  
Worcester, MA 01602

Re: June 2022 Upset at the Woonsocket Wastewater Treatment Facility

Dear Ms. Corvino:

This correspondence is being written in response to the June 21, 2022 letter that the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative (the "Collaborative") submitted to the Rhode Island House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and the Rhode Island Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee on June 23, 2022 regarding the June 2022 treatment system upset at the Woonsocket Wastewater Treatment Facility (the "WWTF"). The DEM shares the Collaborative's sentiment that the discharge of partially treated wastewater from the WWTF is unacceptable. As mentioned in the Collaborative's letter, the location of the WWTF is not the cause of the problem, and is committed to working to ensure that this event does not occur. In addition, this correspondence includes details regarding this WWTF upset and what actions have been taken to date to return to compliance.

As mentioned in the Collaborative's letter, on June 5, 2022 at approximately 8:30 AM the DEM was notified that the WWTF had an upset condition that resulted in the discharge of partially treated sewage. After evaluating the conditions surrounding this upset, it was determined that the WWTF was discharging disinfected solids from the treatment facility, which would likely impact the efficiency of the WWTF's primary treatment process. As a result, DEM issued an advisory recommending that residents refrain from both contact recreational activities (swimming, wading, and secondary contact activities (swimming, fishing, and boating) and avoid consuming any fish from the river from the location of the WWTF discharge at Cumberland Hill Road in Woonsocket, to the Slater Mill Dam in Pawtucket until further notice. This advisory was issued to protect public health from potential adverse health impacts associated with contact with improperly disinfected wastewater.

Subsequent to the issuance of the advisory, DEM sent inspectors to the WWTF daily and had multiple management meetings with the City of Woonsocket (the "City") and its two (2) contract operators of the WWTF and the associated sewerage sludge incinerator, Accis and Syngro, respectively, to discuss the cause of the violations and corrective actions. Based on these efforts, it was determined that a build-up of solids in the WWTF was the cause of the process upset and that, to address this issue, the WWTF would have to begin sending additional waste liquid solids from the WWTF. Based on this determination, the WWTF operators agreed to increase the amount of sludge sent to the incinerator operated by Syngro. However, because the Syngro operated waste liquid solids from the sludge disposal sheds of their wastewater treatment facilities, the amount of sludge sent to Syngro from the WWTF had to be balanced with Syngro's need to process sewage sludge from these other wastewater treatment facilities to ensure that the other facilities did not experience operational problems.

Telephone 401.222.4700 | [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov) | Rhode Island Relay 711

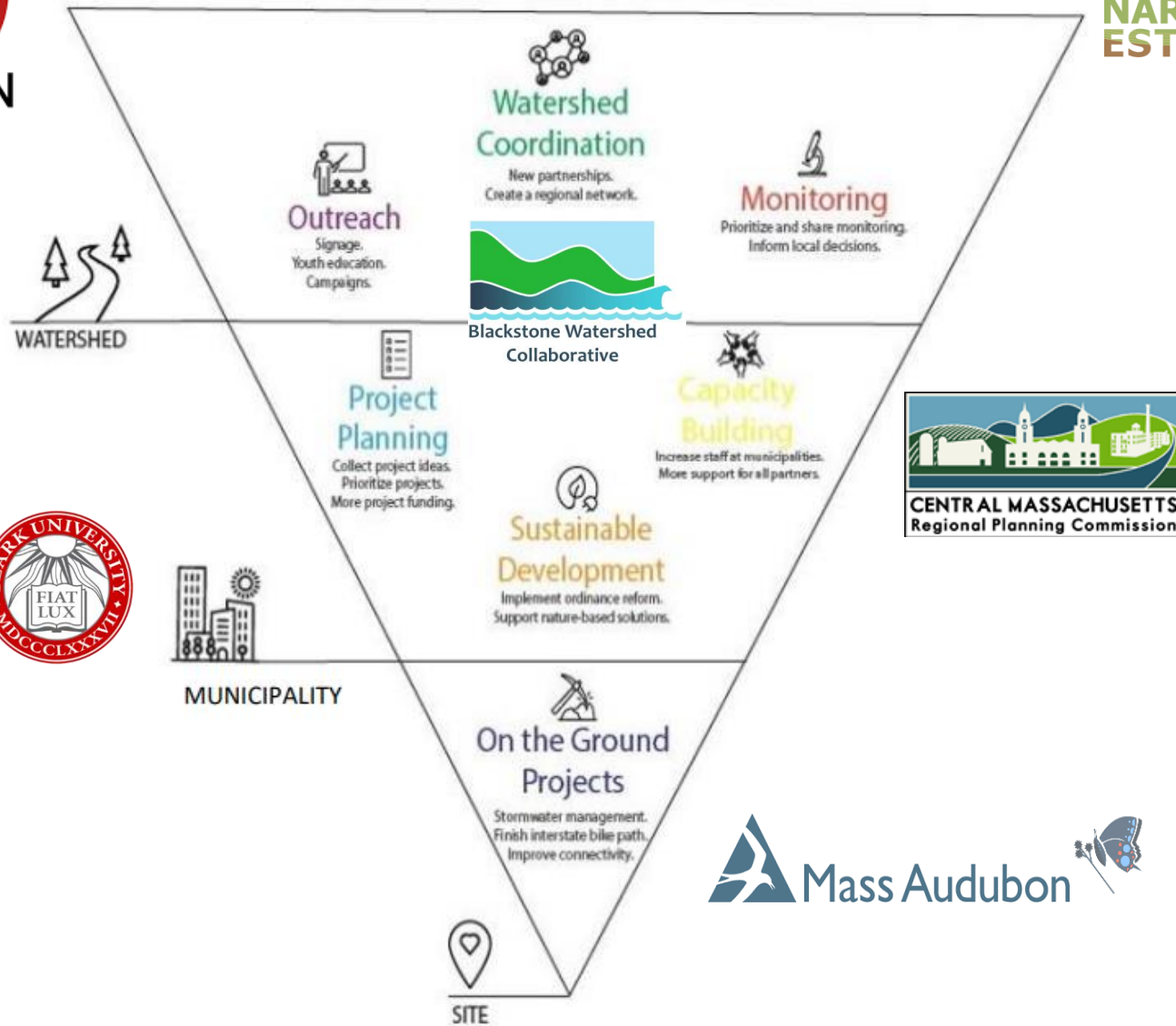
Woonsocket Bldg., 1st Floor, R02121



# Helping Locally, Representing Everywhere



**NARRAGANSETT BAY ESTUARY PROGRAM**





# Thank you!

