

WILD THINGS in the Narragansett Bay Region

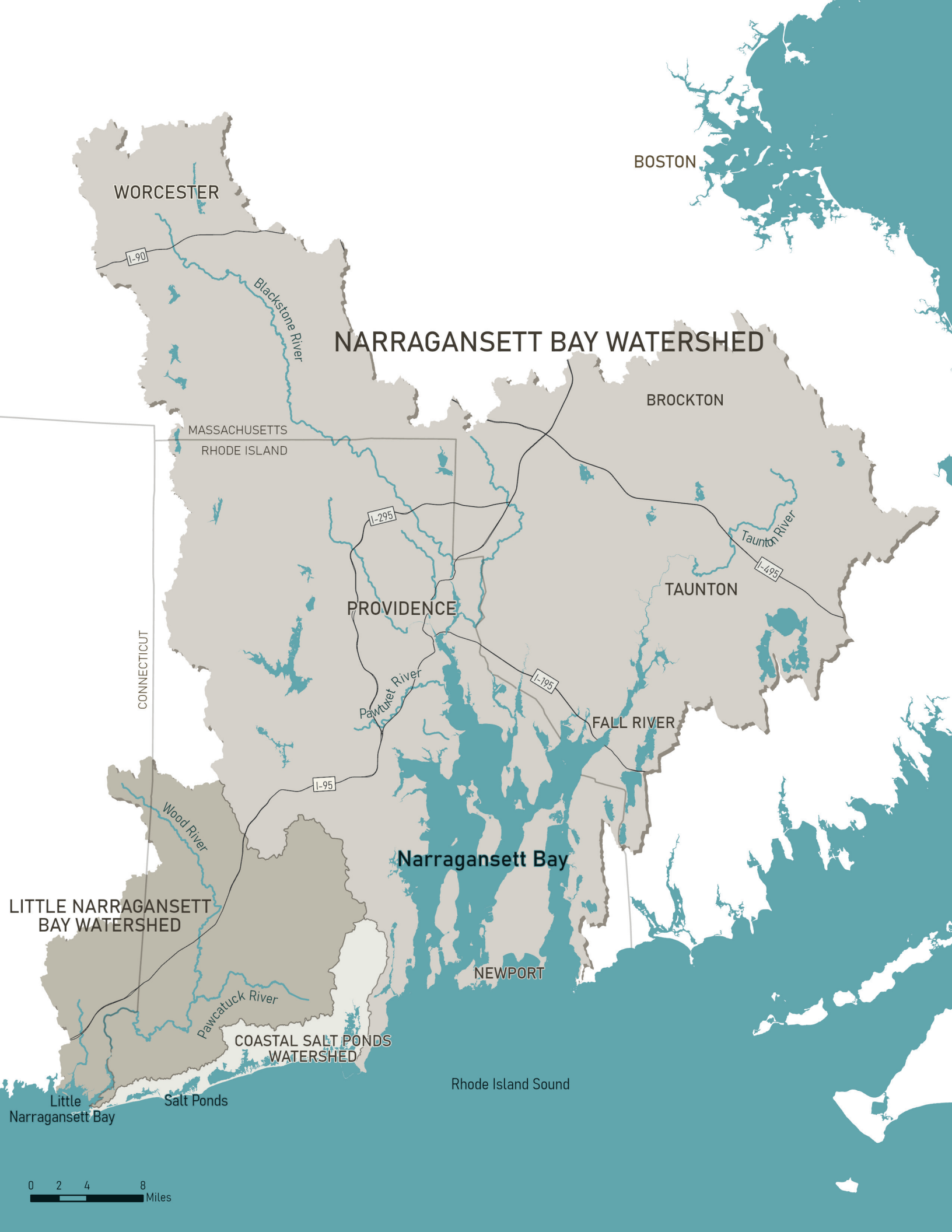
A photograph of a purple mushroom with a white stem growing on a weathered log. The background is a soft-focus forest floor with green leaves and brown twigs.

EVENT SUMMARY

**NARRAGANSETT BAY
ESTUARY PROGRAM**

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2023

Roger Williams University CAS 157
1 Old Ferry Rd.
Bristol, RI 02809



WORCESTER

BOSTON

NARRAGANSETT BAY WATERSHED

MASSACHUSETTS
RHODE ISLAND

BROCKTON

PROVIDENCE

TAUNTON

CONNECTICUT

Pawtucket River

Taunton River

FALL RIVER

Narragansett Bay

Wood River

LITTLE NARRAGANSETT
BAY WATERSHED

NEWPORT

Pawcatuck River

COASTAL SALT PONDS
WATERSHED

Rhode Island Sound

Little
Narragansett Bay

Salt Ponds



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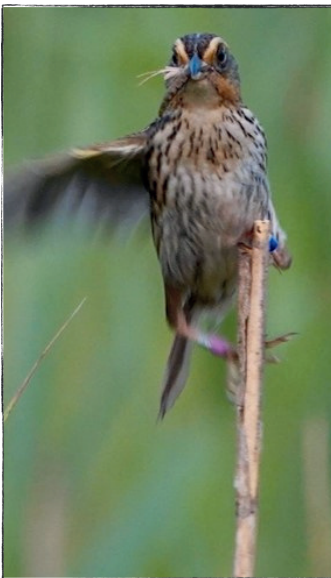


Event Summary

WILD THINGS MATTER

This region spans three of the most densely populated states in the country – Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Yet, in addition to their human inhabitants, our watersheds and estuaries are home to a stunning array of wildlife. Many of these species are commercially and culturally important; some are regionally or federally threatened; **all have ecological and intrinsic value.** Conservation and restoration efforts need to focus on wildlife with strong connections to the environment – set the stage *specifically for* the actors.

FROM FINS TO FEATHERS TO FUNGI TO FUR



Saltmarsh Sparrow
Credit: Jason Jaacks

Climate change and human intervention are changing the natural world. **Baselines are shifting.** Our region has at least two species who are “canaries in the coal mine;” the species that alert us to changes in the ecosystem. **Saltmarsh sparrow** loss indicates loss of habitat to sea level rise and predation pressure from deer. **Native Eastern Brook Trout** loss shows us that freshwaters are warming and will impact the reproduction of **Eastern Pearshell Mussels.**

The interplay between wilds thing and the environment creates “**winners**” and “**losers,**” such as **black sea bass** (winner) and **lobsters** (losers). Black sea bass are better suited for warmer waters and prey on lobster larvae. Lobsters thrive in cooler waters, and their population has migrated towards Maine.

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Yet, these “winners” may introduce new commercial and recreational fishing opportunities. Black sea bass was the second most-caught fish in RI in 2022. **Blue crab** (another species that thrives in warm water) abundance is increasing in the bay. Similar to Chesapeake Bay, this region may one day be able to establish a productive blue crab fishery. The lobster fishery has expanded to include **Jonah crabs**, since they are harvested using the same traps.

The loss of **iconic wild things** ripples throughout the region. **Quahog** harvesting for food is as old as time. The clams are integral to local indigenous tribes as wampum; the beautiful purple interior of the shell hand-crafted into beads and jewelry and shared as tokens of gratitude and respect. Quahog numbers have been declining for decades, worrying lifelong harvesters, and wampum artists alike. The **horseshoe crab** is hailed as the “oldest blue blood” and used in the conch fishery and pharmaceutical research. These crabs are over 300 million years old, providing a deep connection to the past.

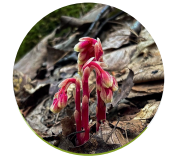


Size of quahogs
by nickname
Credit: Jeff Mercer

The “**unsung**” **heroes** are the wild things often overlooked because they are found on or beneath the forest floor, are “icky,” or considered a nuisance. These organisms are ecosystem constructors – the **beetles** that scavenge dead animals, **plants** that trap carbon and supply oxygen, **mushrooms** that recycle organic matter, the **insects** that pollinate plants, and the **coyotes** that consume indiscriminately.

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Humans have a direct impact on wild things. This point is abundantly clear when describing how coyote numbers have increased due to human influence. When we stop feeding feral cats and reduce food waste, we limit the amount of “easy food” available for coyotes who are then forced to hunt deer and other wildlife. Culling the deer population will bring back the forest understory, providing habitat for ecosystem constructors. Passive actions are also important; removing invasive species and walking away allowed **bloodroot** to thrive in a backyard. Pollinators need three things to thrive: **food, shelter, and safety**. These three key needs set the stage for all wild things and allows the actors to shine.



Wild Bee
Credit: Katie Burns

CONSERVATION REQUIRES EVERYONE

NO MATTER YOUR PROFESSION, AGE, OR PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Conservation efforts require volunteers to make them happen. Restoring fish passage in the region to improve the habitat for **river herring** and **shad** requires cooperation from all who live, work, and play in the region. Efforts along the Blackstone, or Kittacuck, River has united local indigenous tribes, watershed groups, volunteers, and all scales of government. This **cooperation is driving stewardship, scholarship, and uniting visions** of what the river could be when connected to the saltwater.

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Like climate change, conservation actions choose “winners” and “losers”. We learned about **roseate tern** and **common tern** habitat restoration on Bird Island in Buzzards Bay, MA. This island has natural saltmarshes, which were removed and replaced with stabilizing materials, shelters, and vegetation suitable for nesting material. Nesting habitat doubled, and the terns responded accordingly.

For wild populations in decline, the cure must address all the ways in which a species interacts with the world, including people and economy. We treat symptoms; it’s inside those treatments that passion grows, expands, and cures are derived. And passions must be transferred to the next generation. But don’t fear: **entertain yourself and the kids will follow**. The Bristol County Agricultural School’s pioneering program to head-start **turtles**, accelerating their growth rate so they are not easily preyed upon, has inspired legions of students towards conservation.

The “Wild Things in the Narragansett Bay Region” event scratched the surface of biodiversity in the region. All wild things are important. We encourage all to find their favorite wild thing and ways to set their stage.



Eastern Box Turtle
Credit: Brian Bastarache

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Ways to Get Involved

Join a society that specializes in your favorite wild thing

[Barrington Land Trust \(diamondback terrapins\)](#)

[Rhode Island Natural History Survey](#)

[Rhode Island Mycological Society](#)

[Save The Bay](#)

[Saltmarsh Sparrow Research Institute](#)

Search

AND OTHERS!!!

Pollinator Atlas: RIWBO (iNaturalist)

1. See a bee
2. Take a picture of the bee
3. Submit photo to iNaturalist

Benefits of RIWBO

- Opportunity to learn more about the "bees in your backyard"
- VERY low time commitment
- Expert species ID verifications
- Both common and rare bee observations are welcome!

RI Pollinator Atlas - Counting Bees

[Visit RIDEM's Pollinator Atlas to learn more!](#)

RI Critter Kits

[Visit RIDEM's Outreach Program to learn more!](#)

RI Quahog Commission

A special legislative commission to study and provide recommendations on the issues relating to the reduced catch of quahogs in Narragansett Bay. Jody King serves on this committee as a professional shellfish harvester.



Jody King quahogging
Credit: Nick Delgiudice
for So RI Magazine

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Contact Information for Tablers & Speakers

BLACKSTONE WATERSHED COLLABORATIVE

Stefanie Covino / Website: BlackstoneCollaborative.org

CLIMATE CREATIVES

Susan Israel / Website: ClimateCreatives.com

FRIENDS OF THE MOSHASSUCK

Greg Gerritt / Website: TheMoshassuck.org

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Mary Gannon / Website: [RIDEM-Wildlife Outreach Program](http://RIDEM-Wildlife%20Outreach%20Program)

RHODE ISLAND MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Deana Thomas / Website: RhodeIslandMycologicalSociety.org

RHODE ISLAND NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY

David Gregg / Website: RINHS.org

SAVE THE BAY

Kate McPherson / Website: SaveBay.org

SNEP NETWORK/NEW ENGLAND EFC

Phaeng Southisombath / Website: NEEFC.org/SNEP-Network/

SOWAMS HERITAGE AREA PROJECT

David Weed / Website: sowams.org



Tipping Points by Climate Creatives

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Acknowledgements

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Photo credits belong to: Alicia Schickle (@Scientifically_Surreal); Our Speakers; Ayla Fox for NBEP; Creative Commons; and NBEP Staff



Bloodroot from Kate McPherson's Yard
Credit: Kate McPherson

*Thank
you!*

Event Partners

Roger Williams
University

