

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
**PARTNERSHIP  
WILD & SCENIC  
RIVERS**

INTERVIEW SUMMARY REPORT

AUGUST 2024



PHOTO BY JERRY MONKMAN

SUBMITTED BY:  
**Red Bridge Group**



**RED BRIDGE  
GROUP**



## OVERVIEW

The National Park Service's (NPS) Partnership Wild and Scenic River (PWSR) program is a unique model for implementing the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The model relies on sustaining effective partnerships within communities of a Wild and Scenic River (WSR) to cooperatively manage partnership funding, protect river values, and implement local conservation and stewardship programs. As the program has grown, new PWSR Councils have developed their collaborative models drawing on the experiences from earlier functioning PWSR Councils in the program. In some locations, PWSR Councils operate similarly to a nonprofit board of directors with paid staff; in other locations, they are more like volunteer advisory boards managing complex projects. Given the diversity in operational models, the purpose of this project is to analyze existing PWSR Council models and establish organizational development recommendations and best practices that may benefit all (existing and new) PWSR Councils and their effective operation.

The first step in this process was to conduct a series of interviews with select PWSR Council members and NPS staff. NPS staff worked collaboratively with Red Bridge Group (RBG), the consultant team hired to assist with this effort, to develop a consistent set of questions for use during the interviews. The primary question topics included leadership and governance, council/committee structure and composition, fiscal oversight, volunteer recruitment and retention, and challenges and successes, among others. The full set of interview questions is provided in Attachment A.

The NPS chose six PWSRs and members of their respective councils/committees to participate in the project's interview stage. The six participating PWSR groups represent the broader PWSR program and are listed in Table 1.



PHOTO BY ASHLEY KONON

**TABLE 1. PARTICIPATING PARTNERSHIP WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS.**

| PARTNERSHIP WILD AND SCENIC RIVER    | KEY CHARACTERISTICS   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| FARMINGTON RIVER (WEST BRANCH)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecticut</li> <li>• Federally designated in 1994</li> <li>• 14 miles of river</li> <li>• Farmington River Coordinating Committee (FRCC) – 11 members including the Farmington River Watershed Association</li> <li>• 2013 Updated Farmington River Management Plan</li> </ul>   |
| GREAT EGG HARBOR RIVER               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Jersey</li> <li>• Federally designated in 1992</li> <li>• 129 miles of river</li> <li>• Great Egg Harbor River Council – 13 members including the Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association</li> <li>• 2000 Comprehensive Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Great Egg Harbor National Scenic and Recreational River</li> </ul> |
| LAMPREY RIVER                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Hampshire</li> <li>• Federally designated in 1996</li> <li>• 23 miles of river (federal) + entire river and five tributaries also have state designation</li> <li>• Lamprey Rivers Advisory Committee (LRAC) – 16 members including the Lamprey River Watershed Association</li> <li>• 2013 Lamprey Rivers Management Plan</li> </ul>                |
| SUDBURY, ASSABET, AND CONCORD RIVERS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massachusetts</li> <li>• Federally designated in 1999</li> <li>• 29 miles of river</li> <li>• Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council – 13 members</li> <li>• 2019 The Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic River Conservation Plan Update</li> </ul>  |
| TAUNTON RIVER                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massachusetts</li> <li>• Federally designated in 2009</li> <li>• 40 miles of river</li> <li>• Taunton River Stewardship Council – 19 members including the Taunton River Watershed Alliance</li> <li>• 2005 Taunton River Stewardship Plan</li> </ul>  |

| PARTNERSHIP WILD AND SCENIC RIVER | KEY CHARACTERISTICS  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| WEKIVA RIVER                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Florida</li><li>• Federally designated in 2000</li><li>• 41.6 miles of river</li><li>• Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System Management Committee – 16 members including Friends of the Wekiva River, Inc.</li><li>• 2023 Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System Comprehensive River Management Plan (Update)</li></ul> |

The NPS identified three representatives from each PWSR Council (note: the term Council is used to represent both councils and committees throughout the report) to participate in the interviews including a council/committee member, a representative from the river's partner organization, and the NPS staff member responsible for supporting the efforts of the river. RBG interviewed these three representatives from each PSWR. RBG conducted the interviews over a seven-week period between the last week of December 2023 through the second week of February 2024. NPS and RBG members met during this time (and throughout the project) to discuss progress and updates, review the next steps and make any needed adjustments to the project approaches.

RBG used Zoom to facilitate the interviews as well as create recordings and transcripts of the interviews. To help preserve the anonymity of participants in the interviews, both the recordings and transcripts were only used by members of RBG. The transcripts were lightly edited for clarity and reviewed to develop summaries for each interview question (see below). In general, RBG did not include verbatim interview responses and/or any potentially identifying responses in the topic summaries below. RBG plans to use these summaries, specifically the concepts, successes, lessons learned, and other valuable input from the interviews, to inform and derive the corresponding recommendations and best practices document (forthcoming).



PHOTO BY KATHERINE SORROWS

## PRIMARY FINDINGS

The interviews yielded important insights into the organizational model and processes, participation structures, and operations used by participating PWSRs. Upon reviewing the interviews, RBG identified several concepts and themes that threaded throughout the individual responses. These concepts and themes indicate strengths and challenges the PWSR councils and committees have faced in the past, are currently confronting, and/or may influence their future operations. Perceived strengths and challenges of the PWSR program that were shared during interviews are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. PWSR Council/Committee Strengths and Challenges.**

| STRENGTHS – THE STRUCTURE  | CHALLENGES – LESS-THAN-BEST PRACTICES  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarity, cordiality, and variety among constituents</li> <li>• Appointed representatives ensure a variety of perspectives</li> <li>• The structure is well thought-out</li> <li>• Technical strength includes the Council's familiarity with the management plan, particularly those that are faithful to the requirement to update them every five years; commitment to the community; and plentiful personal and professional expertise</li> <li>• One NGO serves as the Council's fiscal sponsor</li> <li>• Practices encourage quorums               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Hybrid meeting options accommodate virtual attendance</li> <li>◦ Engaging alternates who are available to represent a Council position</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarity among constituents</li> <li>• Appointed representatives may be less enthusiastic or invested than volunteers</li> <li>• Large numbers of council/committee members can be a challenge to coordinate</li> <li>• Organizations may not address the need to fill empty Council seats or reboot important committees, improve diversity, or develop best practices for filing and archival storage</li> <li>• There is little or no preparation for inevitable challenges such as Council conflicts, reduced funding, or mass retirement of long-time leaders, including funding leads</li> <li>• Inconsistent internal understanding of management responsibilities</li> </ul> |

Interestingly, some of the strengths of the PWSR councils/committees are also considered challenges. For example, all of the interviewees pointed to a great degree of familiarity and affability amongst the council/committee members. However, this same familiarity was also often cited as a challenge (or potential challenge) with respect to insular thinking and approaches, comfort with the status quo, and lack of turnover in members. These mirrored strengths and challenges, as well as others will be further explored in the next, best practices document.

The interviewees comments also suggest familiar challenges:

### PWSR CONSTRAINTS DUE TO CAPACITY AND/OR EXPERTISE

- **Delegation/sharing of work**
  - Infrequent review of bylaws to confirm roles and responsibilities
  - Inconsistent practice to develop 5-year CRMP updates
  - No 'healthy Council' checklist
- **Lack of turnover (5 – 22 years) and succession**
  - Councils may not have plans to fill empty Council slots
  - There is limited capacity to review or develop term limits, and a conflict of interest policy
  - There is also limited capacity to prepare onboarding, and redeployment of termed-out officers (e.g., term limits that allow them to swap offices or cycle back in after a period)
- **Funding levels**
  - Councils are asked to do the same level of work or more, with fewer resources
  - The NPS has been unclear about its commitment to 1) support new PWSR designations without reducing funding for current PWSRs, and 2) avoid penalizing Council support in order to fund NPS overhead
  - There is no support for training PWSR system leaders
- **Expertise fundamentals**
  - Interest in and skill needed to establish and grow a social media presence is spotty among Council members and staff
  - File sharing and archiving is generally decentralized and potentially vulnerable.

Additionally, the interviewees offered several strategies to improve or enhance their PWSR council/committee's effectiveness and/or efficiency, including:

- Improve council/committee member selection and involvement
- Expand the excitement and engagement among river constituents
- Create and foster better partnerships with other groups and organizations
- Improve communication methods and practices
- Encourage a positive state regulatory environment and independent decision-making
- Increase resources

As noted previously, these primary findings and others will help inform the best practices document.

## SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES

As noted previously, the summarized information for each topic below is based on the responses from the PWSR interviewees. RBG reviewed the interview transcripts to help compile these summaries. Any potentially identifying information from specific interviewees and/or PWSR councils/committees has been removed (or minimized to the extent possible) to help preserve and protect the anonymity of participants.

### INTRODUCTIONS

The six PWSRs involved in this project vary geographically, from New Hampshire to Florida, and include the West Branch of the Farmington River, Lamprey River, Great Egg Harbor River, Lamprey River, Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Rivers, Taunton River, and Wekiva River. The councils established to manage these federally protected rivers use varying organizational models and differ in the jurisdictions they involve; the programs they authorize, design, and champion; and the programs they choose to pursue through their respective missions.

Here is a brief overview of the Councils' composition, including the number of individuals/members and the entities they represent, as legislated and identified in their bylaws and as described by the interviewees:

#### Farmington River Coordinating Committee

The 11 members of the Farmington River Coordinating Committee represent five river towns (Barkhamsted, Canton, Colebrook, Heartland, and New Hartford), the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Farmington River Anglers Association (non-voting), NPS, and Farmington River Watershed Association

#### Great Egg Harbor National Scenic and Recreational River Council

The River Council consists of 13 members, one for each of the 12 towns and one for the Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association. The Towns are Winslow Township, Monroe Township, Hammonton Town, Folsom Boro, Buena Vista Township, Hamilton Township, Egg Harbor Township, City of Somers Point, Weymouth Township, City of Estell Manor, Corbin City, Upper Township.

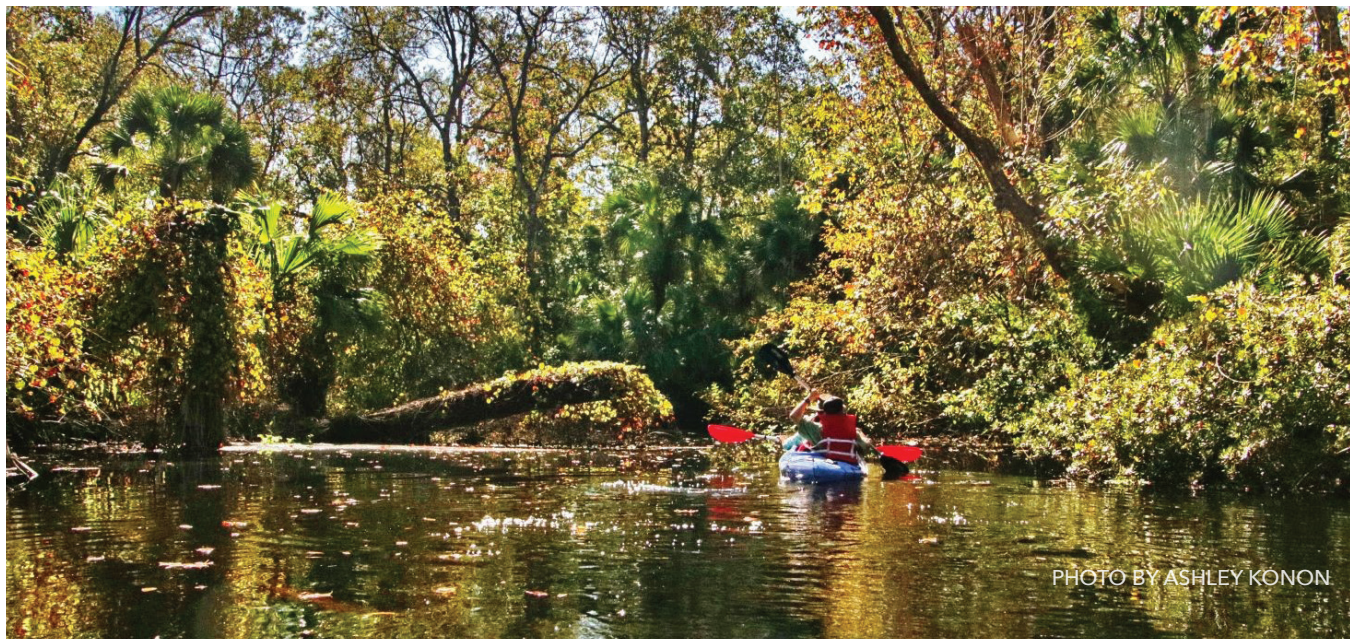


PHOTO BY ASHLEY KONON

### **Lamprey River Advisory Committee**

This committee includes 13 volunteers from eight of the 14 towns in the Lamprey River Watershed, appointed by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. The Committee advises the National Park Service regarding the management of 13 miles designated as Wild and Scenic and 37 miles of the main stem Lamprey River, and five tributaries under the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program.

### **River Stewardship Council**

The Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council includes representatives and alternates from eight municipalities, two non-profit conservation organizations, two federal agencies, and two state agencies. The state positions have been vacant for over four years, as have some alternate positions.

### **Taunton River Stewardship Council**

Nineteen members represent urban and rural communities along the 40 miles of mainstem and tributaries in southeastern Massachusetts, including a nearly 20-mile tidal component of the largest undammed river in New England. Ten municipalities, the State of Massachusetts, the Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District (SRPEDD), and six non-profit organizations, notably the fiscal agent, the Taunton River Watershed Alliance.

### **Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System Management Advisory Committee**

Committee members represent three counties, three cities, and a regional planning council, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection: Wekiwa Springs State Park and Wekiwa River Aquatic Preserve, Seminole State Forest, the St. Johns River Water Management District and two non-profit organizations. Two additional, originally seated organizations have become inactive. One new organization has been added. The Committee was legislated for eighteen members and is served by sixteen.

## **YEARS OF COUNCIL SERVICE AND CAPACITIES SERVED**

Interviewees (18 individuals) reported they have held their positions for as few as two years to a high of 30 years. River-specific averages varied from 5.67 to 22 years and the average for the six groups of three respondents was 14.36 years.

## **PARTNERSHIP WILD AND SCENIC RIVER COUNCIL STRUCTURE**

Interviewees were asked to rate their familiarity with their PWSR Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) using the following rating scale:

- 1 – “I have not read it.”
- 3 – “I think I know what’s in it but I would have to look again to be sure.”
- 5 – “I could cite the main points pretty easily.”

The average rating among all participants was fairly high at 3.95. Council members tended to be more familiar with plan elements than the other interviewees for their respective PWSR.



## COUNCIL ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES

### Council Leadership

According to interview respondents, PWSR leadership responsibilities varied. Representatives of four Councils/Committees stated that the enabling legislation guides their leadership, organization structure, and meeting procedures. Respondents from the remaining two groups varied in their perception of how their processes and procedures relate to bylaws requirements.

- Two groups indicated that a partner fills in with administrative functions and implementation.
- Accepted informality and a mismatch between technical responsibilities and how work is completed in practice (i.e., by whom).
- One group abandoned the use of committees after they seemed to be ineffective.

### Activity Coordination, Reliance on Specific Individuals for Operational Leadership

When asked who is responsible for coordinating or managing the Council's/Committee's activities, interviewee responses varied. Half of the Councils indicated that the primary activity coordinator is the non-profit partner staff. For the remaining councils/committee, their activities are primarily coordinated by NPS staff or by a contractor.

When asked to identify if there is a person who plays a critical role in the organization's functioning, such that the organization would 'fall apart' if they were to step away, perceptions among Council groups varied considerably. A few Councils view one or two people (the Council Chair or partner, a twosome of the Partner and NPS staff, or the Council Chair and watershed staff) as critical to their ability to operate, and one Council's three interviewees offered different assessments about whether or not there is such as key player. One Council felt their leadership and administration were shared equitably, and overreliance on one person was not an issue.

## STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO COUNCIL STRUCTURE

### Strengths

The following describes ways in which the Councils' interviewees believe their designation structure and operating practices support the effective pursuit of their respective missions.

- **Collaboration and Partnerships:**
  - Encourages public-to-public (agencies) and public-private entity collaboration and focus on priorities
  - Encourages partnerships with high-quality professionals and other organizations
  - Ensures representation from all river communities
  - Reinforces the importance of long-term internal relationships and legacy partnerships
- **Innovation is encouraged by**
  - Encouraging creativity in a welcoming environment
  - Increasing project execution efficiency
  - Balancing actions by the Council and those of groups that have received their grants, technical, and administrative expertise
- **Shared risk and cost have been sustained by**
  - Funding the community's projects through small grants
  - Financial support for hiring staff

### Challenges

Based on interviewee responses, the Councils' designation structure and operating practices may also discourage or slow the effective pursuit of their respective missions, as follows,

- Decision-making can be:
  - Lengthy in order to maintain representational balance and priorities
  - Complex due to competing interests or project politicization
    - Conflicts of interest have arisen when organizations receive substantial grants that are or appear to be annually expected or when a Council leader champions a pet project.
- Projects or programs have been politicized when negative outcomes have eroded public trust. Implementation may slow due to:
  - Ineffective delineation of responsibilities
  - Piecemeal financial management
  - Difficulty in translating plans into action
  - Low interest and related capacity for utilizing social media
- Capacity constraints result from:
  - Volunteers' limited time, energy, or commitment

- Management of committee participation, enthusiasm
  - Stagnancy and complacency related to low turnover
  - Diminished personal relationships due to the popularity (i.e., convenience) of virtual meetings
  - Low appeal of the the time-consuming coordination of municipalities' new appointments for each term (e.g., every two years)
- Knowledge gaps due to turnover if succession and training policies are not in place

## COUNCIL FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

Interviewees provided a snapshot of the individuals who are involved in their PWSR Council's financial management.

### PWSR Council Fiduciary Partners

Interviewees were asked if their fiduciary partner, a non-profit organization responsible for managing the PWSR Cooperative Agreement with the NPS, is a member of their Council, or a separate entity. Fiscal administrators for nearly all of the interviewed Councils represent their river organization by being involved in Council activities. One, while supporting the Council with all necessary record-keeping and financial reporting, is neither involved in programming nor non-financial management discussions or decisions.



PHOTO BY ASHLEY KONON

When survey participants were asked, "How involved is the cooperative partner/fiscal agent in Council activities?" respondents rated their involvement using a 5-point scale:

- 1 – Not at all input is through reports or emailed responses.
- 3 – Intermittently, responses to inquiries are good, but there's little personal involvement.
- 5 – They are very involved, an advisor on all matters with a financial nexus.

One-third of the groups rated their fiduciary partner a solid 5 and respondents from another third agreed on ratings of 2-3. Two groups' responses varied among their respective participants and included one person indicating their fiscal agent was "not at all involved."

### **The Role of PWSR Council Treasurers**

Interviewees were asked to describe the responsibilities of the Council Treasurer, besides developing an annual work plan. One third of the groups' interviewees thought that the Council Treasurer is extremely connected and involved in work priorities. One Treasurer fills a perfunctory role only, signing checks and providing reports. One Council Treasurer is not involved due to their age and other priorities, and one group's respondents indicated they were not sure who serves as their Treasurer. Notably, one Council Treasurer also serves as its Vice Chair.

### **Financial Alignment with Council Mission**

Interviewees were asked how well they thought their annual budget aligns with their mission and PWSR River Management Plan. Their rating guide ranged from 1 ("If it ain't broke, don't fix it") to 5 (well-aligned and does a great job balancing management plan-based program objectives, operations, and administrative needs). The average rating among all respondents in each group was 4.3.



PHOTO BY BROOKE HANDLEY

## COUNCIL GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS

### PWSR Council Onboarding, Training, and Succession Planning

Interviewees were asked to describe their onboarding process for new Council members and “refreshers” for current Council participants. Half of the interviewees indicated that no formal or informal process is in place. Others said they rely on an informal approach, were either unsure if such a process existed, or believed an onboarding process was unnecessary.

Nearly all groups indicated they have no program for conducting refreshers for Council members or the public about the Council’s governance. A few Council respondents offered conflicting responses, that they offer a refresher, and that they do not offer such a service. Representatives of two Councils suggested that the Comprehensive River Management Plan revision process they undertake every five years is an excellent way to remind them of their mission and priorities.

Respondents from all groups indicated that their operational plans include no guidance on succession planning and leadership transition.

### Ensuring All Members’ Voices are Heard

When asked for ways to ensure all members’ voices are heard effectively, representatives from over half of the Councils indicated that they allocate time on agendas for each representative to contribute to the meeting on behalf of their constituents. Representatives from other Councils stated that they invite participants to contribute to meeting discussions and may ‘pick on’ the quieter people to speak. One respondent shared that the degree to which all members are invited to speak varies, and of those who may chair the meeting, some are better at this than others.

### Process for Making and Communicating Decisions

Interviewees were asked to describe their Council’s decision-making process, such as whether they vote or rule by consensus and how they communicate the outcome of decisions to their constituents.

Respondents indicated that they adhere reliably to their bylaws requirements. Five Councils require a majority vote from a quorum. One Council requires unanimity on some issues and consensus on others. Meeting minutes and notices of actions or activities are shared with the public by posting them on the Council’s websites and through representatives who must report back to their respective organizations or jurisdictions.

Councils post minutes, annual reports, and other major accomplishments on their respective websites. One Council sends approved meeting minutes to its member towns and submits a required biennial standardized report to the State. At least two mentioned preparing and sharing annual reports with members and via their respective websites. At least one Council also shares decisions through a newsletter and social media.

### Documenting, Hosting, and Archiving Documents and Resources

The sharing, storage, and archiving of documents varies by PWSR Council. The ‘current’ documentation system, such as the use of cloud storage, and posting of meeting minutes and other Council decisions was understood differently among Council representatives. One Council has recently established a ‘central repository’ for important documents.

Note: the wide array of systems that depend on Council members' personal or 'organization-specific' files is significant.

### **Conflict of Interest Policy and Practice**

Interviewees were asked if their bylaws include a policy that addresses a potential conflict of interest in the Council process.

Three Councils responded that there was a conflict of interest policy in their Bylaws, included in their policy regarding procurement. One of these three provides their conflict of interest policy to all new representatives. It specifies actions to identify if a potential conflict exists. Further, their actions require determining if real or potential transactions are less than \$5,000 and if the amount exceeds \$5,000.

Other PWSR Councils that were included in this study do not have a conflict of interest policy and they address potential conflicts on a case-by-case basis. One respondent was not aware that one existed for their Council.

When asked how they address interpersonal conflict among Council members, one group referenced a non-financial type of conflict involving a confrontational council member, which was addressed passively by encouraging new participation when their term ended.

### **Prioritizing Projects for Implementation**

Most Councils establish priorities through their annual work plan. They consider past project accomplishments and then make decisions based on their funding projections. Choices often favor projects that are short-term, whose likelihood of success is greater, or which seem dependent on the Council's funding for success.

Note: One comment indicated that funding decisions often favor 'pet' projects, ostensibly those of a Council member or their constituency.

## **DEFINING SUCCESS WITH METRICS**

### **Metrics and Measurement**

Interviewees were asked to describe how they measure or quantify success, such as establishing quantitative measures of achievement, tracking performance against those metrics (e.g., leveraged funds, acres of invasives treated, number of new river access sites), and suggesting improvements.

The interviewed PWSR Council/Committee representatives generally indicated that they approved projects or grantmaking decisions by evaluating projects against specific criteria with rigorous vetting, and were very frugal in their spending decisions.

Interviewee responses indicated that success metrics vary depending on project type and scope. Some projects have clear quantitative metrics (e.g., culvert installations) and others rely more on qualitative assessments (e.g., invasive species removal).

Examples of specific metrics they mentioned that support program success included:



- Distance, or length of river frontage
- Miles covered - measured, traveled, paddled
- Volunteer hours completed
- Dollars/funds disbursed and leveraged
- Land or acreage protected
- Number of projects implemented
- Number of requests received
- Culvert installation (specific example) completed
- Invasives removal (and the perceived impact) completed
- Visitor metrics (though challenging to measure)

For Councils with community grants, these programs often require a more nuanced evaluation and reporting process.

### **Project Completion and Outcomes**

Defining success, according to interviewees, involves a combination of: objective metrics aligned with goals; subjective assessments of impact and satisfaction weighed against the organization's spending and reporting priorities; and, of course, the protection of targeted natural resources. Specific aspects of project success included:

- Completing projects on time and within budget
- Achieving stated project goals according to project-specific evaluation criteria
- Reporting results effectively, acknowledging achievements and realizing that reporting in and of itself is a component of success
- Sharing successes with stakeholders effectively

## VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

### Council Members' Volunteers: Beyond Leadership Roles, vs. Paid Staff

Interviewees were asked to describe how Council members serve the work of their PWSR beyond their official Council role(s) and to differentiate the roles or tasks of volunteers versus paid staff. Four Councils rely on volunteers to lead meetings and program activities, while two rely on paid staff to hold leadership positions. All PWSR Councils include representatives of towns, counties, and states who contribute as part of their regular work responsibilities, and one Council leadership consists almost exclusively of the latter.

### Volunteer Training, Retention, and Turnover

Interviewees were asked to describe how they manage or address staff and volunteer training, retention, and turnover.



PHOTO BY LIZ LACY

This question elicited two types of responses:

1. Council member training is addressed in “PWSR Council Onboarding, Training, and Succession Planning (above).”

Again, interviewees indicated that new members receive little or no programmed training aside from a (much appreciated) tour of the river. Paradoxically, interviewers heard both that there is little need for a Council training program due to low turnover and that recruiting new members is challenging.

2. Welcoming, initiating, and training public volunteers who offer to help out at or on the river is largely addressed by watershed partner staff and their respective volunteers. See the responses immediately following this section for additional information regarding ‘public’ volunteers.

The following are examples of volunteer training and retention efforts suggested by interviewees that encourage (or would encourage if not in practice today) a culture that evidences and welcomes diversity, particularly in a manner that reflects the profile of their visitors.

- **Community Engagement and Events:**
  - Enlist volunteers and meet and learn from constituents in their communities at events
  - Ensure a welcoming environment for all participants
  - Internship programs engage younger participants
- **Economic Diversity Representation:**
  - Economic diversity is well-represented
  - Consider different economic/income levels in outreach and volunteer efforts
  - Reaching out to Indigenous leaders helps tell stories of a regrettable past.
  - Homogeneity of Councilors breeds helpless inevitability and a lack of responsibility
- **Agency/Organization Representation:**
  - Summer stewardship programs offer opportunities to hire more diverse staff
  - Diversity depends on each agency/organization’s discretion in sending representatives
  - Natural diversity can be increased through a revised committee structure and shifting demographics in the area

In addition to these suggestions, interviewees also mentioned challenges to developing and instituting volunteer training and retention initiatives to encourage diversity. The primary challenge cited by several interviewees centered around the more rural nature of PWSR communities.

## CHALLENGES IN RURAL AREAS AND WITH “OLD BOY NETWORKS”

Interviewees whose rivers are in small, rural, heterogeneously white towns struggle to diversify their Council makeup. They find it difficult to overcome a male-dominated, older, ‘good old boy’ network that has hampered the Council’s outreach and recruitment effort. A common refrain from these interviewees was that “they can’t help not being diverse” because of the demographic makeup of their respective river communities.

## Community Engagement

RBG asked interviewees to rate the degree to which member municipalities, their residents, and the general public know about their PWSR Council successes and challenges on a 5-point scale from 1 ('Terrible') to 5 ('Excellent').

Responses from individuals from three of the groups varied substantially, as much as 3 .5 rating points apart. This disparity aligns with interviewees that indicate that Council leadership and staff interest in, familiarity with, and utilization of non-traditional media varies widely.

## Organizations with Potentially Informative Organizational Models

Council interviewees were asked to suggest "outdoor resource-based organizations or collaboratives" whose organizational structure or best practices might be valuable or helpful to Partnership Wild and Scenic River Councils. Respondents named organizations with whom they have worked or they otherwise know from experience.

- [Southeast Land Trust](#)
- [Appalachian Mountain Club](#)
- [Merrimack Valley Paddlers](#)
- [Northern Forest Canoe Trail](#)
- [Trout Unlimited](#)
- [Vermont River Conservancy](#)
- [Wildlands Trust](#)
- [Audubon](#)
- [Groundwork South Coast](#)
- [Save the Bay](#)
- [Nature Groupie - Outdoor Volunteers](#)
- [National Estuary Program](#)
- [National Heritage Areas](#)
- [1000 Friends of Florida](#)
- [Florida Springs Institute](#)
- [Blackstone Watershed Collaborative](#)

## Wish list for Change or Enhancement

When asked for "changes, enhancements or eliminations" if they were able to "wave a magic wand to make their PWSR role and their river's management perfect," interviewees offered the following suggestions:

- **Committee Member Selection and Involvement:**
  - Improve the process of selecting committee members
    - Fill vacant mandated positions to comply with bylaws and restore perspective
  - Establish clearer roles, term limits, and regular elections.
  - Involve more associate members to broaden engagement
  - Increase diversity
  - Cater committee meetings!
  - Retention programs, succession orientation
- **Positive State Regulatory Environment/Independent Decision-Making:**
  - Enable a a regulatory climate that is favorable to facilitating wise river management
  - Endorse decision-making processes consistent with policies that are relevant to representative agencies

- **Excitement and Engagement:**
  - Generate enthusiasm and active involvement among stakeholders
  - Improve awareness of the rivers' impact on community members' economy
- **Better Partnerships and Communication:**
  - Strengthen existing partnerships
  - Enhance communication channels
  - Share awareness (perhaps through job descriptions) for NPS, paid Council staff, and officers
- **Increase Resources:**
  - Increase support for paid staff and other aspects of capacity
    - Grow awareness of potential staff burden
    - Review for all contracted staff at an agreed-upon interval
  - [Call to NPS] Avoid encouraging new PWSRs and increased staff wages in a flat budget that thereby reduces each rivers' allocation percentage

## ATTACHMENT A - PWSR COUNCIL/ COMMITTEE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Welcome! My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am here on behalf of the Red Bridge Group, working with the National Park Service to speak with you as a Council / Partner Organization / Agency leader for your Partnership Wild and Scenic River. This interview will be recorded for our reviewing purposes, and will not be published. Your responses will be considered in our summary of Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers best practices in an effort to share learning and experiences with colleagues and leverage your many learned lessons to aspiring PWSR leaders.

### INTRODUCTIONS (3-5 MINUTES)

1. What is the name of your Partnership Wild and Scenic River?
2. Can you provide a brief overview of your Council's composition, including the number of individuals/members and the entities they represent?
3. How many years have you served on your Council? In what capacity(ies)?

### PWSR RIVER COUNCIL STRUCTURE

4. How familiar are you with (or how well do you understand) your Management Plan and/or Comprehensive River Management Plan?
  - a. Use a 5-point scale where 1 means "I have not read it;" 3 means "I think I know what's in it but would have to look again to be sure;" and 5 means "I could cite the main points pretty easily."
5. Who is responsible for coordinating or managing the Council's/ Committee activities? Are they: 1) contractual staff, 2) non-profit partner staff, 3) a volunteer, 4) or NPS staff?
6. Based on the \_\_\_\_\_ (documents provided) and a review of your website, it looks like the roles and responsibilities of Council leadership (Chair, Executive Committee, National Park Service staff, NGO staff, volunteers) include: [enter overview of roles and responsibilities]. Is this correct? Can you clarify the roles and responsibilities? Do these roles and responsibilities differ from what is defined by your governance document(s)? If so, could you summarize the differences for me?
7. Are there key individuals whose leadership and administrative efforts are critical to the Council's functioning (i.e., does the Council function fall apart when they step away)?
8. What are the top strengths and challenges of your Council's structure? If possible, provide 2-3 examples of each.

### Financial Oversight

9. Who is the fiduciary partner who manages the Cooperative Agreement, and is this person (or entity) a member of your Committee/Council, or a separate entity?
10. How involved is the cooperative partner/fiscal agent in Council activities?
  - a. Use a 5-point scale where 1 means "Not at all, input is through reports or emailed

responses;" 3 means "Intermittent, responses to inquiries are good, but there's little personal involvement;" and 5 means "They are very involved and an advisor on all matters with a financial nexus."

b. Why did you choose that rating?

11. Besides developing an annual work plan, what are the responsibilities of the Council Treasurer?
12. How well does your annual budget align with your mission and River Management Plan for your PWSR?

a. Use a 5-point scale where 1 means "We may be in a rut by following a model of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" and should revisit it;" 3 means, "It seems to work and we should revisit it when we revise our plan or review our next budget;" and 5 means, "It is well-aligned and does a great job balancing management plan-based program objectives, operations, and administrative needs."

b. Why did you choose that rating?

## COUNCIL GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS

13. Do you have an onboarding process for new Council members? If so, please describe it. Can you describe the outcome of a successful onboarding process?
14. Do you provide a periodic refresher for existing members? If so, please describe.
15. Describe your Council's succession plan. If you don't have one, how do you plan for/address leadership transitions?
16. How does the Council ensure all members' voices are heard effectively?
17. Can you explain the Council's decision-making process, including voting or consensus confirmation and communicating decisions to constituents?
18. How do you (or how does the Council) handle conflict among Council members and with other groups?
19. How does the Council prioritize projects for implementation?
20. How do you define success (what metrics do you track: e.g., leveraged funds, acres of invasives treated, number of new river access sites), and how could this be improved?
21. What is your Council's conflict of interest policy and practice?
22. How and where do you document, host, and archive internal and external documents and resources?
23. How would you rate your communications with your community member municipalities and their residents and the general public regarding your successes and challenges in a spirit of transparency?
  - a. Use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means "Terrible" and 5 is "Excellent."

## VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

24. What roles do Council volunteers play beyond leadership and compared to paid staff?
25. How do you manage or address volunteer training, retention, and turnover?
26. How do your volunteer training and retention efforts encourage a culture that evidences and welcomes diversity, particularly in a way that reflects the profile of your river users?

## OTHER

27. Are you familiar with outdoor resource-based organizations or collaboratives whose organizational structure or best practices might be valuable or helpful to Partnership Wild and Scenic River Councils?
28. If you could wave a magic wand to make your Partnership Wild and Scenic River role and your river's management perfect, what would you change, enhance, and/or eliminate?

Thank you very much for your time today. Again, your answers will provide important insight and help develop models and best practices for current and future Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers. If you think of additional information you'd like to share with our team, please feel free to email us. Thanks again for your time.

---

The topics above may take up our entire time together, and we'll ask the following additional questions, if time permits:

Does your Council run a mini-grants program for community involvement? If not, have you considered this, and why/why not?

Which social media platforms and/or tools do you use regularly?

How does your Council celebrate success?