

DRAFT WRWEO 2025 AGM Chair's Report for calendar year 2023 and 2024

Prepared by Paul Berry Aug 31, 2025

The calendar years 2023 and 2024 were a period of both significant operational achievement and considerable strategic challenge for the Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization (WRWEO). The Bluff Trail Stewardship Program (BTSP) continued to be the cornerstone of WRWEO's activities, with the federal summer student work experience program delivering hundreds of hours of critical work. Key operational successes included routine trail maintenance, addressing flood damage caused by Hurricane Fiona which hit in the fall of 2022, and the successful completion of the replacement of the long boardwalk near the beginning of the trail.

Getting the funding in place for large capital projects such as the boardwalk replacement takes a huge effort for the volunteer board and not all the pieces came together. In this case we tried to get the work done in one year but a large part of the funding did not materialise and we ended up undertaking the project over two years at a higher overall cost of about \$90,000. In terms of capital projects we have other, smaller boardwalks that are further from the trail head that need to be replaced soon. We also need a complete revision and replacement of the signage on the trail. The estimate for the other boardwalk replacement is about \$20,000 - \$30,000 and the replacement of the signs could be as high as \$50,000.

Governance remained stable with some departures. The co-chairs were Paul Berry and Kathleen Hipwell in 2023 and Kathleen resigned in early 2024 leaving Paul Berry as Chair, Paul Berry also continued to take on the role of treasurer, Ben Armstrong remained in the role of secretary and Marine Gameda, Matthew Porter and Omar Al Nasleh were the other board members who started in 2023. Marine Gameda resigned in 2023 due to other commitments.

Mike Lancaster, as the BTSP Coordinator, was central to the execution of all trail maintenance activities and the supervision of student teams for the BTSP. Mike will provide an overview of the BTSP separately and you can review the [2023 BTSP Year in Review](#) and the [2024 BTSP Year in Review](#).

Operational activities encompassed both routine seasonal maintenance and responsive actions to specific challenges. General trail trimming was planned and undertaken for both years.

Following significant flooding events in the fall of 2022 with Hurricane Fiona, summer students were tasked with assessing flood damage and some repairs were undertaken and some funds were obtained through N.S. Trails Federation to address flood damage as well as through our regular maintenance funding from Halifax and Communities, Culture and Heritage at the Province of NS. We indeed to plan for ongoing challenges from climate changes into our long-term trail maintenance and capital planning, which includes not only budgeting for flood repairs but also potentially adapting trail design and materials in vulnerable areas to withstand more frequent and intense weather events.

The replacement of the boardwalk, a project initially linked to 2022 funding, became a central and urgent concern in 2023 and 2024. In July 2023 some anticipated provincial funding of \$30,000 for the boardwalk had failed to materialize, creating a critical funding gap. WRWEO adopted a phased approach to the replacement - focusing on the faceboards in 2023 and the posts and stingers in 2024. Completing the project by November, 2024.

A significant strategic discussion in 2024 revolved around the possible integration or merger of WRWEO with other organizations to ensure long-term stability. Options considered included merging with the St. Margarets Bay Stewardship Association (SMBSA), which was seen as more stable with hired and volunteer resources. Another option was a merger with the Five Bridges Wilderness Heritage Trust (FBWHT), with Mike Lancaster tasked to discuss this with FBWHT. None of these options are viable at this time.

The Board also recommended the approval to NS Environment of a Halifax Search and Rescue (SAR) drone training proposal, with the condition that drone operations rotate between three different locations to avoid repeatedly disturbing wildlife.

WRWEO continued its collaboration with Our HRM Alliance by providing input on the Green Network Plan and advocating for Wildlife Corridors and a municipal Trail coordinator.