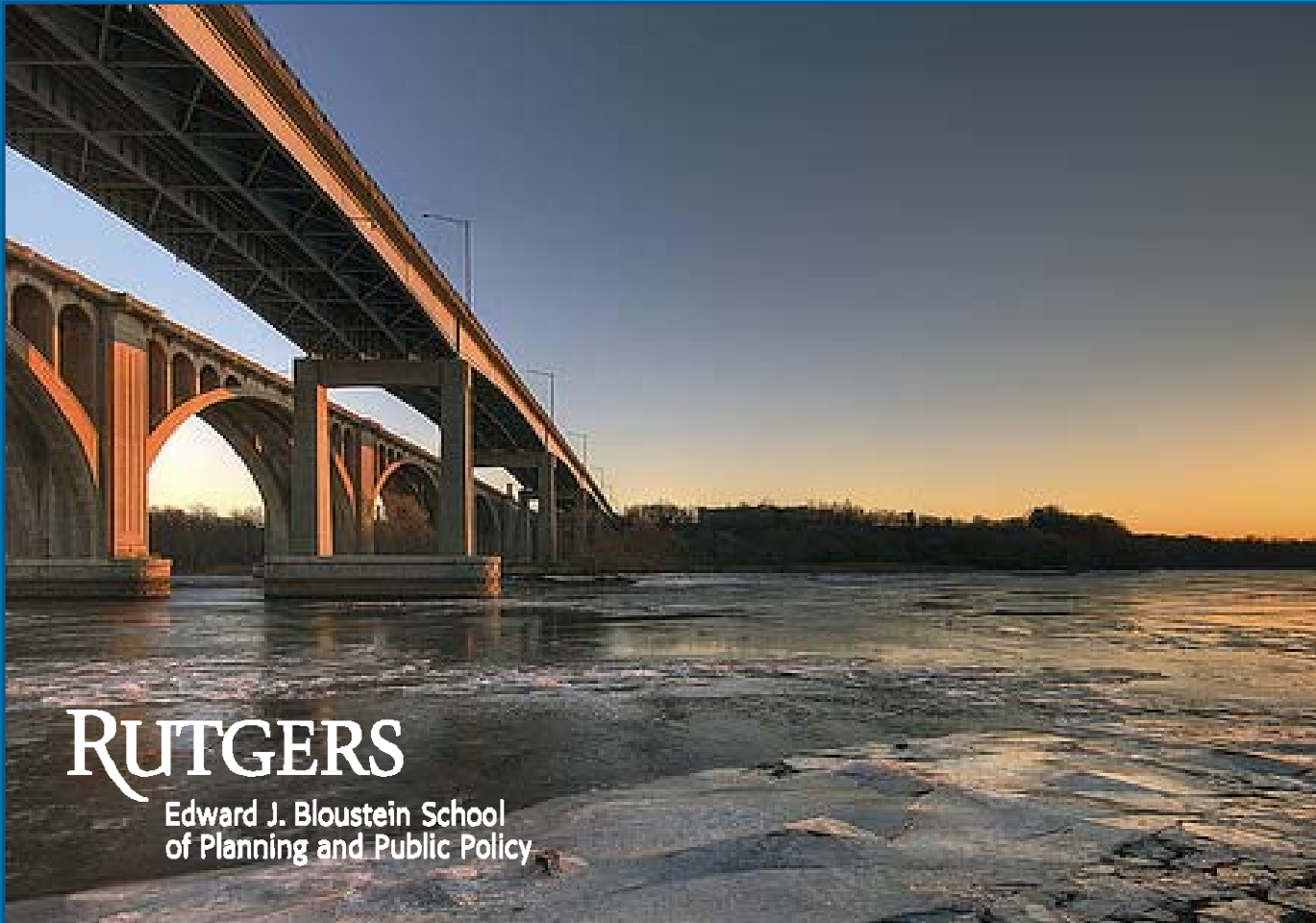


Reclaiming the Raritan: a Restoration and Sustainable Reuse Plan

The Sustainable Raritan River Action Plan



*The Raritan River
Collaborative*

*Rutgers University
E. J. Bloustein School of
Planning and Public Policy*

and

*Rutgers School of
Environmental
and Biological Sciences*

December 2009

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The Raritan River Action Agenda

In early 2009, a group of concerned environmentalists joined staff from Rutgers to form the Raritan River Collaborative to craft an action agenda that meets the goals of the U.S. Clean Water Act, restoring and preserving New Jersey's Raritan River and its tributaries, including the Raritan Bay for a future that sustains its resources, its residents and its economy.

The collaborative continues to attract new partners including organizations and businesses who are concerned about the future of the Raritan River. Over the summer, seventy individual members met to establish the priority action agendas presented here.

Our natural resources face economic and political competition for priority attention and it compels us to work with citizens and leaders alike to implement changes that can have local and regional benefits. Citizens in the region are generally unaware of the value of these resources; their connection with the Raritan River end at the kitchen tap or in their bathrooms. Their connection to the river itself is obscured by the very infrastructure that provides the clean, safe drinking water and the wastewater treatment generated by homes every day.

To create a public expectation for its protection, we need to reconnect people with the river; to get out on the river and celebrate the resource. A public that does not see the river or does not get out on the water has little interest in its protection and oversight.

When people walk its banks, or kayak, canoe, fish or swim in the river, they grow to appreciate its value and develop both a sense of pride and ownership that leads to its protection. This action agenda is dedicated to the over one million residents of the Raritan River Watershed Basin - and their reunion with their river.

*Judy Shaw, Project Director
Michael Greenberg, Karen Lowrie, Henry Mayer, Chris Obropta, Beth Ravit
For The Raritan River Collaborative
December 2009*



*"THE RARITAN,
ONCE THE 'QUEEN OF RIVERS,'
HAS BEEN NEGLECTED TOO LONG.
IT'S TIME TO RECLAIM THE RIVER."*

SENATOR FRANK LAUTENBERG

The following organizations are members of the Raritan River Collaborative and, as signatories to this report, commit to support the goals of the action items presented. Thanks to Jen Zhang (NWSA) and Calvin Tien (The Louis Berger Group) for their tireless help with the maps in these reports.

Environmental Organizations

Stony Brook - Millstone Watershed Association
The Edison Wetlands Association
Trust for Public Land
Lawrence Brook Watershed Partnership
New York/New Jersey Baykeeper
Conserve Wildlife Foundation
Raritan Riverkeeper
The American Littoral Society
The New Jersey Audubon Society
Upper Raritan Watershed Association
South Branch Watershed Association
Regional Planning Association
NJ Association of Environmental Commissions
The Conservation Foundation

Business Partners

Middlesex Water Company
PSEG
PNC Bank
Bayshore Recycling

Academic

The E. J. Bloustein School of Policy & Planning

- The National Center for Neighborhood and Brownfield
- Redevelopment
- The Sustainable State Institute
- The Rutgers Center for Green Building

The School of Environmental and Biological Sciences:

- Rutgers Cooperative Extension
- NJ Water Resources Research Institute
- Rutgers Environmental Research Center
- Rutgers Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences

Government Entities

NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Somerset County
New Jersey Water Supply Authority
Middlesex County
United States Geological Survey
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Union County

Special Thanks to our sponsors at the Mushett Family Foundation

Introduction

Protection of the Raritan River depends on the collective commitment of the state, regional and local government leaders to restore, maintain and enhance this resource for the future. Rutgers University facilitates this effort through the Raritan River Collaborative, engaging environmental and civic organizations with government at all levels, particularly county government, to translate the action items of this report into visible, measurable actions.

These actions will be presented publicly through local websites and in a manner that encourages the public to track our progress and participate in reaching the goals of sustainability for the Raritan River. This effort simultaneously fosters a high quality of life through good jobs, housing and opportunities to enjoy the resource. Five key areas outlined in this report seek to galvanize private and public support and to implement policy and operation changes to address the concerns that prompted this work.

The five areas are: Contamination and Pollution, Public Access, Stewardship, Water Quality and Balanced Redevelopment.

In a watershed area that covers over 1200 square miles and services a population of over 1 million people, the Raritan River provides a common asset – the key to our prosperity and the largest contiguous wildlife corridor in the region.

Eagles soar over kayakers on the river and endangered species thrive on its banks. Restoration requires political will to commit to the kind of stringent local policies, standards and management practices that will demonstrate the restoration. At the same time, major Superfund sites sit unremediated and hundreds of other old industrial sites blight the area, sapping our economic and environmental resources.

As we increase the amount of land in the public domain we must also adjust the management of those lands to ensure their continued variability as areas of recreation and environmental restoration. Stewardship is central to a sustainable future. Maintaining a high water quality affects drinking water and fisheries and ultimately impacts the health of Raritan



"THE UNIVERSITY SEES THE RIVER AS CENTRAL TO ITS MISSION."

**MICHAEL J. GREENBERG,
ASSOCIATE DEAN
E. J. BLOUSTEIN SCHOOL**

Bay. Finally, balanced redevelopment ensures that a thoughtful strategy is in place to promote more people to help minimize the effects of climate change in their daily lives, become advocates for sustainability both in their homes and their places of employment.

In May, 2009, the Raritan River Collaborative sponsored the 1st Annual Sustainable Raritan River Symposium with three goals in mind. First, we wanted to create a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on the critical issues and goals faced in the restoration of the Raritan River. Our second focus was on constraints and third we wanted to identify both the key stakeholders and the strategies that would realize the objectives associated with those goals.

In the months between, over seventy individuals participated in a series of workshops to solidify that exchange into actionable strategies. The University has committed resources from both the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy and the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences to foster the implementation of this plan.

Honoring our commitment to engage the public and get out on the Raritan, the Collaborative, under the leaderships of the Bloustein School and the Raritan Riverkeeper, sponsored the first annual Fall Float down the Raritan. This year, the kayakers and canoers put in from Riverside/Bakelite Park in Piscataway and disembarked at the newly renovated Boyd Park in New Brunswick.

In April of 2010, Rutgers will sponsor a symposium featuring current SEBS and Bloustein research related to the Raritan River. The University program undertaking the greening of the New Brunswick Campus will share their success and students will be able to sign up for opportunities to earn credit by working with the Raritan River Initiative.

This spring, the Counties of Somerset and Middlesex are sponsoring a graduate planning studio to work with the eighteen municipalities from Bridgewater to the Raritan Bay to establish a common vision for the River and to engage municipalities in a way that can enhance the resource and bring more state and federal resources into the region.

On June 4, 2010, the studio planners will present the vision project to their clients and the Collaborative at the second annual Sustainable Raritan River Symposium to be held at the Cook Campus Center. This and other information regarding the ongoing work of the Collaborative and its partner organizations can be found on the Sustainable Raritan River website, www.blueraritan.org.

COMMITMENT ONE:

Increase Awareness and Use of River Access Points and Trails

There are access points and opportunities to get out on the water along the North and South Branches and the 30-mile portion of the Lower Raritan currently offers opportunities for both boating access and for riverfront walking/biking. However, it is widely noted that fewer people are out on this section of the river.

- Coordinate promotion of recreation on the river to people both inside and outside the immediate region
- Expand access points in existing publicly owned lands adjacent to the Raritan River
- Address the obscurity of the river from roadways in future transportation projects

Tasks:

- 1. Produce a Raritan River Trail Guide to the Lower Raritan** with map and information for boaters, hikers and bikers and include historic and other significant sites along river with information about sites. Promote use through an interactive webpage showing access points and trails, with information about canoe and kayak rentals. Arrange tours to familiarize residents and regional leaders with the benefits of the River
- 2. Plan and implement river-oriented events** such as the Raritan River Fall Float, and promote the River via local festivals and contests



Full report: http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Public_Access.pdf

COMMITMENT TWO:

Upgrade Current River Access Points and Develop a Plan for Future Recreational Uses

The River's potential for local recreational potential is largely unrealized. To plan for a strong future, the public access team calls for regional leaders to commit to the following:

- 1. Improve signage to/from access points and trails, and at access points.** Install safety signage on or near water regarding obstructions, fishing, swimming advisories. Identify primary needs and plan for investment in access points.
- 2. Improve/upgrade accessibility to launch sites and walking trails** and add amenities to current access points (parking, restrooms, tables, etc.). Identify logical and needed sites for new boat launches and canoe/kayak access.
- 3. Encourage commercial support and investment.** Local businesses can promote entertainment and enjoyment along River and also invest in businesses that promote the river, such as riverfront restaurants or boat rentals.
- 4. Assess current land uses along the Raritan and determine future development and preservation goals.** Develop a regional coordinated plan for the recreational use of the Raritan River Corridor. Identify logical and needed sites for new boat launches and canoe/kayak access. Identify areas for trail development and investigate acquisition or easement needs and alternatives.
- 5. Assemble local open space plans and proposals for expanded greenways or trails.** Consider improving access from D and R Canal towpath. Investigate acquisition or easement needs and alternatives. Develop educational materials on benefits of greenways and river trails.



A SUSTAINABLE RARITAN IS NOT JUST UNDERSTANDING WHAT DEVELOPMENT LOOKS LIKE BUT ALSO WHAT PRESERVATION, RESTORATION AND INCREASED PUBLIC ACCESS LOOKS LIKE AS WELL.

DEB MANS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NY/NJ BAYKEEPER

Full report: http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Public_Access.pdf

COMMITMENT THREE:

Protect and Preserve Habitat and Biodiversity in Our River Ecosystem

Tasks

- 1. Assemble a team of municipal and county experts to coordinate development of a ‘Regional’ approach to Raritan River Basin Master Planning.** Involve municipal and county governments, Rutgers University, and watershed groups who support stewardship of Raritan River resources, as well as planners, and NGOs who are knowledgeable about the critical habitats in the Basin.
- 2. Raise Public Awareness of the Raritan Basin Natural Resources.** Integrating public access opportunities with stewardship awareness and training benefits both initiatives. A series of public access/stewardship events needs to be developed and implemented on a sustainable basis. Raising awareness of the importance of habitat ecological functions and values is crucial to obtaining support for stewardship, and multiple media that can reach municipal residents should be employed. Newsletters, web sites, and local access cable channels can ‘showcase’ species and habitats and provide residents with information to protect their natural resources.
- 3. Complete Municipal Environmental Resource Inventories.** Identify and ‘ground-truth’ critical habitat based on collected data. Each municipality in the basin needs to complete a thorough ERI. ANJEC is a potential source of partial funding for this task.
- 4. Engage in the Stakeholder Support Process.** Partner with ANJEC to conduct workshops for municipal and county Environmental Commissioners could disseminate habitat information and BMPs to the local communities
- 5. Develop a Land Acquisition Funding Plan.** Identify critical habitat parcels that remain unprotected and develop strategies to fund the permanent protection of these lands. Integrate this activity with existing NGO land preservation and stewardship activities that are currently ongoing in the Raritan River Basin.

Full Report: http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Raritan_Stewardship.pdf

COMMITMENT FOUR:

Adopt the 3Rs: Restore, Rehabilitate & Regenerate

Tasks:

- 1. Securing volunteers to verify the status of critical habitats.** Using the identified parcels in need of remediation/protection, organize volunteers to verify the accuracy of the data/assumptions based on actual site conditions. Coordinate the efforts of the watershed NGOs and house the field data in an online database for use by local managers and planners.
- 2. Assemble a comprehensive habitat Rehabilitation Plan.** Based on actual on-site conditions, develop a basin-wide plan to rehabilitate preserved and/or critical habitat parcels. Identify funds to conduct rehabilitation efforts.
- 3. Rehabilitation Evaluation Criteria.** Develop measurable success criteria and long-term monitoring plans to ensure accurate evaluation of rehabilitation strategies through outreach to local and county governments throughout the watershed. Post outcomes of rehabilitation initiatives (both positive and negative) on the Sustainable Raritan web site and on local web sites.
- 4. Coordinate Stewardship Activities with the Hudson River Estuary Comprehensive Restoration Plan (HRE CRP).** Access this data and information to identify viable restoration sites and potential restoration funding sources for the estuarine portion of the Raritan River watershed.



PRESERVATION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE
BIODIVERSITY OF THE REGION

MARGARET O'GORMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Full Report: http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Raritan_Stewardship.pdf

COMMITMENT FIVE:

Maintain and Manage Preserved Open Spaces

Tasks:

- 1. Require a site management and maintenance funding plan for Green Acres and Open Space funding support.** Amend the state, county, and municipal requirements for obtaining open space funding to include an on-going Site Management and Maintenance Plan (SMMP), including a detailed description of funding sources to support these activities and maintenance of preserved properties.
- 2. Integrate BMPs in the SWAP with both protected and critical wildlife habitats.** Require adoption of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for maintaining the various types of habitat as detailed in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). Complete the system wide maps and link the habitats identified on the maps with the appropriate BMPs in the SWAP. Make the completed maps available to local managers through the Rutgers Sustainable Raritan website.
- 3. Identify opportunities for Public-Private partnerships.** Create partnerships that couple private monies with public maintenance. Secure endowments to maintain preserved land through the land acquisition transaction. NGOs play a key role in securing this long-term funding.
- 4. Develop model management and funding plans.** Providing models of site management plans appropriate for critical habitat types that include estimated costs. Provide these to local managers to aid with acquisition and/or site restoration project. Post model plans on the Sustainable Raritan web site.

Full Report: http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Raritan_Stewardship.pdf

COMMITMENT SIX: ***Remediate Contaminated Sites***

Tasks:

- 1. Provide Meaningful and Useful Data on the Full Extent of Contaminated Sites in the Raritan basin.** Through the Sustainable Raritan River website, provide GIS maps and GIS data layers to regional agencies and develop data layers where needed.
- 2. Foster use of geographic information systems by regional government agencies.** Encourage local links to maps at the Sustainable Raritan River website.
- 3. Encourage and promote the remediation and reuse of contaminated sites.** Work with municipalities and NGOs in the region to expedite remediation and sustainable reuse plans for Superfund sites and other brownfield sites in the region. Encourage enhancements of ongoing regulatory programs.
- 4. Work with EPA and NJDEP to publicize data and to prioritize cleanups closest to the Raritan River and establish protocols for public assessment of agency data.** Specifically assemble a comprehensive report on current sediment data on Raritan area sites.. Identify partners to develop a review protocol for NJDEP groundwater data files to establish where information on contaminants is insufficient and to estimate the potential contribution from unremediated sites, including any information regarding contributions to sediments in the river.
- 5. Promote creation of contaminated site database through municipal websites.** Master lists of contaminated site can foster remediation and reuse both for sustainable economic redevelopment and for open space greenfields.



IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN ON THE RARITAN,
IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT BY LAND,
AND ESPECIALLY IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN
IT BY BOAT, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND
THE BEAUTY AND THE CHALLENGES
THAT ARE OUT THERE FOR US.

ROBERT SPIEGEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
EDISON WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

Full Report: <http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Remediation.pdf>

COMMITMENT SEVEN:

Prevent Future Pollution

Tasks

- 1. Track and address local sources of non-point pollution.** Work with colleagues at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS), Rutgers Cooperative Extension, the NJ Water Supply Authority and other Collaborator organizations to promote stormwater reduction and to promote water stewardship projects. Develop training protocols on how to review agency files and develop reports on contributions of point sources – any permitted industrial and stormwater discharges; existing industries, landfills, sewerage authorities, etc.
- 2. Address on-going discharges from unremediated contaminated sites.** Work with regulatory agencies to ensure any ongoing discharges are addressed and that cleanups are moving forward in a thorough and timely manner.
- 3. Strengthen overall water quality and contamination tracking data through additional sampling and monitoring.** Work with local educational institutions to monitor the River through the science curriculum and post data online.
- 4. Develop Best Remediation and Reuse Planning Practices for Municipalities.** Identify best practices to manage contaminated properties and establish strategies to prioritize reuse as open space or sustainable development.
- 5. Promote Sustainability with regulated Raritan businesses.** Work with NJDEP Compliance and Enforcement on compliance and settlements; encourage pollution prevention practices by regulated industries and zero-discharge stormwater practices. Encourage regional businesses to promote sustainability and work with local NGOs to adopt “River Friendly” practices
- 6. Promote Sustainable State and Green Buildings.** Work with the Rutgers Center for Green Building on promoting zero-net energy infrastructure improvements and water conservation practices. Engage the Rutgers Sustainable State Institute to foster remediation and pollution prevention related practices in their ‘Sustainable Jersey’ initiative.
- 7. Reduce Fertilizers and Pesticides.** Work with municipalities to establish strategies to reduce contributions to the river from applications of fertilizers, local agriculture and general maintenance practices.

Full Report: <http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Remediation.pdf>

COMMITMENT EIGHT:

Significantly Reduce Stormwater Runoff

Educate local, county and State stakeholders on the need for Stormwater Utilities. Assemble a team of experts to deliver educational and outreach programming on stormwater utilities to stakeholders and the public in the pilot area. This will require assistance from individuals in local government, Rutgers University, and watershed groups who support the program and are knowledgeable about the pilot area, stormwater utilities, or both.

Tasks:

1. **Develop a pilot program for the implementation of Stormwater Utilities.** Identify a pilot area in the Raritan River Basin where a stormwater utility program could be formed and assess community stormwater needs. An ideal pilot area would be a municipality in which existing data related to their stormwater needs is easily gathered. Sources of this data include complaint records, stormwater and maintenance staff experience, previous studies, and field measurements. This information allows for the identification of problem areas for priority listing.
2. **Engage in the Stakeholder Support Process.** A stakeholder committee that includes public, commercial, governmental, and environmental groups or individuals affected by the program is vital to the implementation of the program. The stakeholder committee is facilitated to achieve consensus on the goals of the program, as well as each product of the community acceptance process. With the stakeholders, map out the rate structure for the pilot area, billing structures, economic analysis, credit assessments, collection methods, enforcement, and identifying sources of technical assistance.
3. **Develop a Public Awareness and Acceptance Plan.** Develop public educational materials that target specific groups which include elected officials, focus groups, and the news media. Develop a draft marketing plan and education outreach program including editorials for local papers, speaking at public events, and using the connections of University faculty and watershed groups to educate local officials and politicians on the benefits of stormwater utilities.

Full Report: <http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Water.pdf>

COMMITMENT NINE:

Promote restoration and protection plans to address local sub-watersheds (HUC-14)

Tasks

- 1. Compile a list of completed and on-going restoration plans and implementation projects within the Raritan River Basin.** Work with watershed NGOs and the Raritan Basin Alliance on educational and stewardship activities relating to the Raritan River Basin to attract resources and implement programs. A list of plans and projects can be found in the 2009 report “The State of the Raritan River: A Work in Progress.”
- 2. Assemble a list of other identified watershed areas in need of a restoration or protection plan.** The Raritan Basin Watershed Alliance has completed a Geographic Information System analysis and classified each HUC-14 as either healthy, under pressure, or in need of restoration based on a certain set of parameters. NJWSA has also previously identified HUC-14 areas in need of regional stormwater management plans. Compile and prioritize these identified areas.
- 3. Host technical workshops on the development of watershed restoration plans.** Through Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program, provide technical knowledge and skills to those interested in developing watershed restoration plans, through a series of workshops or presentations.
- 4. Identify priority implementation projects from all plans that can be implemented by stakeholder groups. Organize groups of community volunteers and stakeholders to complete necessary plans.**



“WE NEED A MECHANISM TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM. WATER UTILITIES ARE THE ANSWER. IF YOU DON’T AGREE, PUT IN A RAIN GARDEN.”

**DR. CHRIS OBROPTA
RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**

Full Report: <http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Water.pdf>

COMMITMENT TEN: Balance Redevelopment to Sustain Ecological Values in the Raritan River Watershed

The overarching challenge in the Raritan River Basin is redefining economic success in terms that prioritize sustainability and profitability and what Aldo Leopold calls, “an intense consciousness of land.” Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Tasks

1. **Establish an Organizational Structure.** Establish an organizational structure to serve as a clearing house which will disseminate information to a diverse community of stakeholders, to guide and facilitate their collaboration and to coordinate various funding sources that will support the balancing effort.
2. **Conduct Research on Costs and Benefits.** Research costs and benefits of sustainable practices to identify and support successful sustainable practices and the incorporation of environmental amenities/restoration as part of development and business activity on the river.
3. **Develop Successful Balanced/Sustainable Models.** Identify local, state or national examples of projects to serve as models for the basin.
4. **Focus on Education and Outreach.** Throughout this action plan calls on the Collaborative to educate and conduct outreach. Develop a communications strategy to disseminate information on the research and model projects to government, NGO, business community stakeholders and the general public.
5. **Initiate a Regional Approach with Local Project Area.** Develop a regional vision and approach that accounts for differences in the upper and lower river areas, then step down the planning effort to fit with local objectives
6. **Identify Opportunities for Policy and Regulatory Support.** Seek opportunities to propose new or amended policy and regulatory provisions that support balanced redevelopment and restoration.

Full Report: <http://www.blueraritan.org/agenda/Balance.pdf>

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