



The **York River Stewardship Committee** is the local group formed to coordinate implementation of the [York River Watershed Stewardship Plan](#) after the York River and its tributaries were designated into the [National Wild and Scenic Rivers System](#).

Wild and Scenic Rivers



The York River was designated as a Wild and Scenic River in December 2022 for its unique ecological, cultural, and historic resources, as well as its exceptional water quality and ecosystem health throughout the watershed. The Wild and Scenic Rivers program aims to preserve river resources for the benefit of current and future generations. The York River is one of 18 [Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers](#), for which the National Park Service provides financial and technical assistance to support locally-led river protection efforts.

York River Stewardship Committee

The Stewardship Committee is comprised of appointees from the [four watershed towns](#) and representatives from the National Park Service (NPS) and Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve (WNERR). Focusing on administrative and operational functions was a priority for the Committee in its first year. Some highlights and milestones:

- The Committee met monthly beginning in July 2023.
- WNERR, appointed by the Committee as its fiscal agent, began administering the first five-year Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service in July 2023, and recently received the second year of funding.
- Committee officers were elected; an Executive Committee and an Outreach/Communications Subcommittee were formed, and each met monthly; bylaws and a conflict of interest policy were established.
- The Committee hired its Watershed Program Coordinator in October 2023.

Committee Members and Alternates (A)

Eliot: David Marshall, Stefan Claesson (A)

Kittery: Sally Harold (Treasurer), Judy Spiller (Chair), Deane Rykerson (A)

South Berwick: Karl Honkonen, Philip Brekke (A)

York: Karen Arsenault (Secretary), Allan Cawrse, Joan LeBlanc (Vice Chair), Mary Marshall, Susie Rice, Jim Smith, Beth Cromwell (A)

NPS: Emma Lord, Jim MacCartney

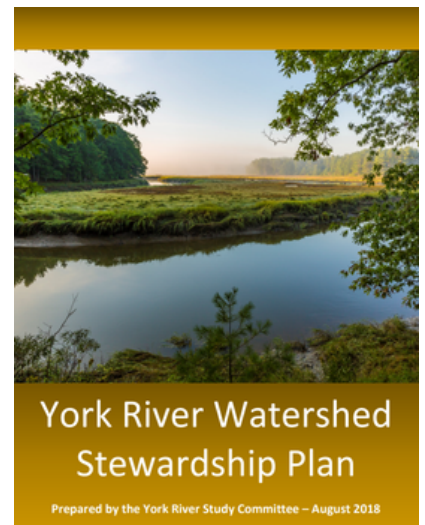
WNERR: Paul Dest

Coordinator: Jennifer Hunter

Outreach and Coordination

During its first year, the Committee’s outreach focused on building awareness of the Wild and Scenic River designation and coordinating with local organizations and committees that have roles in river and watershed resource protection. The Committee also conducted a solicitation process to hire a communications consultant. Outreach activities included:

- [News Center Maine’s “207”](#) feature on York River
- Updated content on [YorkRiverMaine.org](#); issued media releases
- Ongoing participation in the Town of York’s Ad Hoc River Access Committee
- Structured “learning opportunities” for group engagement and discussion on specific topics from the [York River Watershed Stewardship Plan](#)
- Supporting partners’ efforts: participation at events, letters of support, project planning



York River Watershed Grants Program



York River Stewardship Committee members and project partners stand next to kayaks purchased for upcoming programs. Photo: Hannah Volk, NPS

The Stewardship Committee established its first grants program to award funding for local projects that help implement the York River Watershed Stewardship Plan. [The Committee awarded \\$42,000 in grants to five groups.](#) Their projects include land protection, public access, recreation, outreach and education activities with project goals of resource preservation, connecting people to the river, and fostering sustainable approaches.

The 2024 grant recipients are:

- **York Land Trust** for transaction costs related to acquisition of three parcels donated by the Town of York that have significant conservation values and will add 42 acres to its McIntire Highlands Preserve
- **York Conservation Commission** for outreach efforts aimed at reducing use of pesticides and fertilizers
- **York Parks and Recreation** to develop a new kayak tour series on the York River
- **York's River Access Ad Hoc Committee** for consultant assistance to explore options and develop designs for a new public dock for paddle craft at Goodrich Park
- The **Town of Kittery** and **Save Kittery Waters** to implement the CreekSmart program to encourage residents to take actions to protect water resources



Looking Ahead

Building on work initiated earlier in 2024, the Committee looks forward to undertaking projects and initiatives in the next year, including:

- Leading a salt marsh restoration design project, in coordination with the York Land Trust and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, to improve marsh habitat and climate resilience
- Implementation of a communications strategy, branding, and a new look for the website – for improved outreach and communications capabilities
- Conducting the second round of the York River Watershed Grants Program, with a request for proposals issued in mid-winter for projects that will start in July 2025
- Continued project development and partner support to implement priorities from the [York River Watershed Stewardship Plan](#)



Photo: Chuck Maranhas