

York River Stewardship Committee

July 28, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Voting members present: Karen Arsenault, Beth Cromwell, Sally Harold, Joan LeBlanc, Susie Rice, Jim Smith, Judy Spiller

Non-voting members present: Anna DiChiara (alternate), Jenn Hunter (Coordinator), Emma Lord (NPS), Jenn Seavey (Wells Reserve)

Guests: Jane and Robert McIlvane, and Clayton Smith

Welcome: Joan LeBlanc opened the meeting at 5:30 PM, welcomed attendees, and asked members to introduce themselves.

Minutes from May 26, 2026 meeting: Joan asked if there were any corrections to the May minutes. Hearing none, Judy made a motion to accept the minutes, seconded by Sally, all approved.

YRSC Committee Business/Updates

- YRSC members were asked to review and sign the annual Conflict of Interest Policy.
- York, Kittery and South Berwick YRSC members were all appointed/reappointed, with a vacancy for a South Berwick alternate member.
- YRSC member David Marshall has left the committee following term completion, leaving two vacancies for Eliot appointments.
- One-year terms for new YRSC officers began July 1, 2026.

Executive Committee Updates

- Fiscal Agent for next 5-year Cooperative Agreement. YRSC has begun exploring next steps for a new fiscal agent arrangement for the next Cooperative Agreement (CA) including consideration of the following two options: 1) establish a new 501(c)3 organization as fiscal agent, or 2) identify an existing non-profit to serve as fiscal agent. This process is being coordinated by town-appointed members of the EC with support and involvement from NPS and committee members Karen Arsenault and Paul Dest. Wells Reserve is serving as Fiscal Agent for the remainder of the first CA which ends in April 2028. The Committee anticipates having a recommendation for the YRSC by December 2026 as the next CA application begins in 2027.
- The Executive Committee will not meet during August due to scheduling conflicts.

National Park Service Update

Emma reported that YRSC funds were approved by NPS in early July and have been awarded for the Cooperative Agreement amendment.

Project Updates

York River Salt Marsh Restoration. Sally provided an overview of the York River Salt Marsh Restoration Project which implements plans developed by Northeast Wetland Restoration (with special project funding from the YRSC) to restore 132 acres of salt marsh owned by York Land Trust and USFWS. Maine Coast Heritage Trust is leading the salt marsh restoration with grant funding of \$374,900 from the Maine Natural Resource Conservation Program. NPS and Wells Reserve are supporting partners. Outreach efforts have included public talks and walks, website information, and letters to neighbors. Permitting is ongoing with restoration efforts expected to begin this fall and continue through 2029. Several YRSC members are assisting with project implementation. YRSC anticipates a future proposal to support monitoring for the project.

Current Grant Funded Programs. Work on three YRSC grant projects continues this fiscal year. York Parks and Recreation will lead kayak tours through the boating season, Phase 1 of the Goodrich Park invasives removal project will continue through December 2026, and Blue Ocean Society will conduct education programs and cleanup projects (including a new site at York Golf & Tennis) through fall 2026.

New 2026 Watershed Grant Awards. YRSC approved \$59,083 in grants for the following new projects.

- Old York Historical Society - \$10,000 for 2026 McIntire Garrison Cider House investigations and improvements.
- Great Works Regional Land Trust - \$10,000 for a conservation easement purchase of 70 acres of forested lands (including extensive river shoreline) in Eliot.
- York County Soil and Water Conservation District - \$6,219 to conduct invasive aquatic plant surveys (York Pond and Scituate Pond) and raise awareness about invasives prevention.
- Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation - \$8,165 for educational programming, beach and shoreline cleanups, and the fishing line collection program to protect the York River and marine resources.
- Eliot Conservation Commission - \$3,500 to enhance public recreational access through trail and signage improvements on the 108-acre Eliot Town Forest.
- York Land Trust - \$10,000 to acquire an undeveloped property to manage as an ecological preserve in support of climate resilience in the York River watershed.
- Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve - \$9,999 to conduct a SAR-based tidal inundation mapping and tidal restriction assessment for the York River watershed.
- York Parks and Recreation Department - \$1,200 to develop an invasive plan control plan for Steedman Woods.

Contract development and execution are complete for most of the projects, with some scheduled to move forward later this summer. Supplemental funding for the Invasive Species Management at Goodrich Park – Phase 2 was included in the Town of York contract as a separate task.

Outreach Planning

- York River Tours & Guidebook. Anna shared a new visually appealing York River watershed guidebook to highlight the York River watershed during boat tours. The guide blends maps with images and interpretive information to provide consistent messaging during all boat trips. Laminated copies will be available on the boat.
- Celebrate York River Month. Jenn provided an overview of plans for the first York River Month which will include a series of York River Watershed events from September 10 through October 10 (along the lunar cycle). YRSC volunteers are needed to support tabling during some of the events.
- Invasive Plants ID Books. Available for distribution.

Public Comments

- Jane and Robert McIlvane shared environmental concerns regarding development activities on a privately owned property on Hococka Path, adjacent to York Pond in Eliot. Activities of concern include clearcutting, construction of a road and driveway, and plans to install a septic system in the 250-foot buffer zone. After receiving a notice of violation from the Town of Eliot and being turned down by the Board of Appeals, the project is now going before Maine Superior Court. Impacts to water quality and wildlife are key concerns in this environmentally sensitive location in the upper York River watershed.

Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 PM.

Approved: August 25, 2026