

# York River Watershed Survey and Management Plan

#2002R-03

Water body Name: York River  
Location: York, Kittery, Eliot, South Berwick  
York County  
Waterbody Status: NPS Priority Watershed  
Sponsor: Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Project Duration: April 2002 – February 2005  
Grant Amount: \$42,694  
Match: \$41,306



## PROBLEM:

The York River Watershed covers 33 square miles and includes 109 miles of river and streams. Belle Marsh, Folly, Middle and Boulter Ponds supply water to the Kittery Water District. Approximately 19% of the watershed, almost 4,000 acres, has been permanently protected by land trusts and the water district. However, the Town of York has experienced a growth rate near 30% over the past 20 years and development pressure continues to pose a threat to the watershed.

The Department of Marine Resources (DMR), York Conservation Commission and Wells Reserve have monitored bacteria and other pollutants in the river. The data indicates that York Harbor does not meet state water quality standards due to high bacteria levels and that Scituate Pond does not meet state standards due to high nutrient levels and algal blooms. The DMR allows shell-fishing in the lower portions of the York River that meet state limits; however, there are partial closures due to actual and potential contamination from stormwater runoff, septic systems and boats.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this project was to conduct a shoreline survey throughout the entire watershed to locate and prioritize sources of polluted runoff and to utilize survey findings and other research to create a community-based watershed management plan for long-term protection of the York River and tributaries.

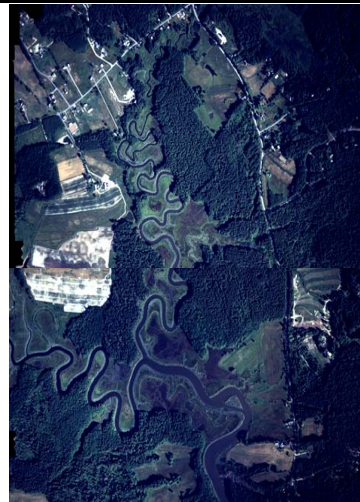
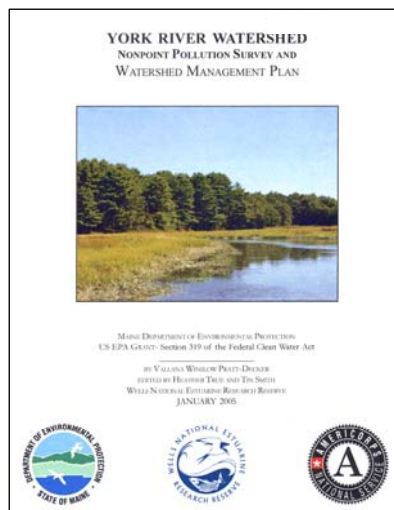


In 2002 and 2003, project staff and 40 volunteers evaluated 250 feet on each side of the river and its tributaries and documented 185 sources of polluted runoff. Project staff presented the survey results at 25 public meetings and asked for public input for a watershed management plan. Project staff also reviewed town land use ordinances, projected future build-out scenarios and developed ordinance recommendations for the watershed management plan, which was completed in January, 2005.

Public outreach included letters to the 475 landowners in the riparian zone, numerous newspaper articles, and presentations of the final WMP at meetings with the York Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board in January and February, 2005.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES:

- A shoreline survey of the York River and its tributaries was completed. The survey documented 185 NPS sites, developed recommendations for each site, and prioritized sites for future action.
- The *York River Watershed Nonpoint Pollution Survey and Watershed Management Plan* was completed in May, 2004.
- The project produced several GIS maps including build-out projections for each town, which are also being used by the towns in their comprehensive plans. The build-out analysis helped the Town of York pursue a “Watershed Protection Overlay District”, which was adopted in November, 2004.
- The York Department of Public Works and York Hospital emerged as strong partners. The DPW supports the WMP as a way to draw attention to the need for comprehensive stormwater management and funding. The York Hospital sees the WMP as a way to highlight their substantial investments in their drainage system and an opportunity to showcase their leadership in watershed protection.
- The York Rivers Association, Town of York and York Conservation Commission now have a widely supported, action-oriented plan with specific tasks and schedules to guide their watershed efforts.



## PROJECT PARTNERS:

Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission  
Rachel Carson Nation Wildlife Refuge  
Department of Marine Resources  
Mount Agamenticus to the Sea Project  
York Land Trust  
Town of York  
York and Kittery Water Districts  
York Clam Warden and Harbormaster  
Eliot Conservation Commission

Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife  
Maine Sea Grant  
York Hospital  
Town of Kittery  
Town of South Berwick  
Beginning with Habitat Project  
University of New England  
York Rivers Association  
York High School

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

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