

2025-2030 Strategic Plan

Introduction

The Memphremagog Watershed Association (MWA) envisions a future where the Lake Memphremagog Watershed is ecologically healthy, and communities are engaged in resource stewardship for the protection, resiliency and enjoyment of this significantly large drainage area. To this end, MWA crafted a 2020-2025 Strategic Plan which focused priorities on restoring degraded landscapes that contribute to sediment and nutrient loading into the Watershed streams and lakes. The planning included protecting ecologically significant areas that are minimally disturbed and in good functional health. MWA also emphasized in the plan the vital role of outreach programs to promote public education, participation and stewardship as well as collaboration within the watershed. MWA acknowledged the importance of combined efforts to ensure sustainability of the local environment for current and future generations of U.S. and Canadian residents living in the Memphremagog Watershed.

In late 2024, the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan was reviewed to assess MWA's progress toward the goals and objectives laid out in the plan. Staff and the Board Executive Committee both agreed that MWA had made substantive progress on nearly each and every goal and objective laid out in the plan.

While Staff and the Board are in agreement that 1) the initial goals and objectives in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan are still of the utmost importance to not only MWA, but for watershed health; and 2) that there is still work and progress that can be done to meet those initial needs, it is also clear that MWA is a very different organization at the beginning of 2025 than it was in 2020.

In the past five years, MWA has grown from an organization with variable 0-2 part-time employees, to an organization with 3 or more part-time to full-time employees. MWA has experienced exponential financial growth and now receives funding from multiple, state, federal, and private sources. Thanks to incredible efforts from MWA staff, MWA is working on more projects than ever ranging from land acquisitions, to on-the-ground installations of stormwater BMPs, to managing major grants, projects, and local and statewide partnerships.

Although MWA's project work has been guided by the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, it is also greatly shaped by the goals laid out in the Memphremagog Tactical Basin Plan (TBP), the priorities set forth through grants from various State programs and private foundations, by environmental needs, such as responding to historic flooding in 2023 and 2024, as well as the realities of a changing climate.

Going forward, MWA will focus our priorities more on organizational development and be less prescriptive about project objectives and goals in the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, as opposed to the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. This is because MWA has greatly expanded its financial, project, and personnel capacity, and that specific project initiatives are largely steered by external funding, climate, and existing management plans. Keeping our project goals and objectives at an elevated level in our Strategic Plans gives MWA the flexibility to utilize existing management plans and funding priorities to meet not only our goals, but environmental needs.

Key strategic issues identified below – reviewed by the staff and board members of the MWA and approved annually by the Association membership – represent the current primary focus areas of the Association. The Plan will be reviewed annually and reprioritized as needed.

Key Strategic Issues

External

- Phosphorus and nutrient loading throughout the Memphremagog Basin continue to impede water quality. Effects of climate change will intensify these conditions and will likely continue to bring historic flooding.
- Public outreach, engagement, and promotion of MWA’s work and services continues to be difficult in our communities.
- Staying ahead of changes in how water quality projects are being funded, administered, and implemented poses challenges.
- Attracting and retaining members can be challenging.

Internal

- Reliance on outdated administrative systems is time-consuming, leads to errors and confusion for staff and the Board.
- Matching workload to existing capacity presents challenges for our small organization.
- Seeking sources of long-term, stable funding for not only projects, but operating funds is challenging.
- Attracting volunteers for membership and activities to include Fundraising in support of Watershed health.
- Lack of organizational redundancy leaves MWA vulnerable to internal errors and in the case of loss of staff or board turnover.

Water Quality Projects and Programs

Goal 1: Spearhead floodplain restoration, conservation acquisition, and flood resilience projects to restore riparian land, stream corridors and wetlands in the Memphremagog Watershed to enhance habitat, promote stewardship, and reduce phosphorus loading.

Objective 1: Expand organizational presence into less-familiar portions of the watershed to identify, develop, and implement floodplain restoration, conservation acquisition, and flood resilience projects.

Objective 2: Continue to develop and implement novel practices to restore riparian lands, stream corridors, and wetlands that balance human and ecological goals with cost effective strategies.

Goal 2: Continue to work with municipalities to upgrade stormwater practices that address phosphorus loading within the Memphremagog Watershed.

Objective 1: Increase outreach and strengthen relationships with municipalities throughout the watershed.

Objective 2: Continue to implement priority stormwater practices identified in the Stormwater Master Plan.

Goal 3: Limit the spread of non-native invasive species into and throughout the watershed by managing regional grants, sponsoring annual Greeter, VIP and VIPA trainings, and increasing educational initiatives.

Objective 1: Identify areas where gaps in spread prevention are present and work to support programs in those areas.

Objective 2: Continue to develop robust programs on Lake Memphremagog by working With the City of Newport and the towns of Derby and Newport. [OBJ]

Objective 3: Monitor presence and spread of aquatic invasive species.

Goal 4: Maintain and increase healthy lake shoreland areas within the Memphremagog Watershed through Lake Watershed Action Plans, the Lake Wise Programs, direct assistance to landowners, and lake associations.

Objective 1: Continue to develop and implement projects identified in the various LWAPs.

Objective 2: Continue to play a planning and technical assistance role for Lake Associations as they react to flood events, navigate shifting policies, and lead project implementation efforts.

Goal 5: Continue current educational and outreach programs and develop new opportunities throughout the Watershed building upon Youth Discovery Program and community participation in hands-on events.

Objective 1: Maintain and increase free-to-the-public events such as Watershed Brews & News, Memphremagog Matters Symposia, etc.

Action item 1: Identify opportunities and develop new free events.

Objective 2: Grow community participation in hands-on events like the annual river clean up, VIP, and Cyanobacteria monitoring.

Objective 3: Increase MWA attendance and/or sponsorship of other community events around the watershed.

Goal 6: Maintain and strengthen close collaborative relationships with international partners.

Action Item 1: Attend and engage in the Bi-Annual Vermont/Quebec Steering Committee meetings as a voting member.

Action Item 2: Look for opportunities to strengthen relationships with international partners

Communication

Goal 1: Increase frequency and effectiveness of regular communication with members and public

Objective 1: Develop plan for regular communication with members and public

Action Item 1: Send 2 newsletters annually

Action Item 2: Consider monthly email engagement with contact lists

Action Item 3: Improve design and professionalism of email communications

Objective 2: Maintain or increase regular social media presence

Objective 3: Ensure that MWA projects, events, or notable occasions are promoted to the public through press releases, social media, partner outreach.

Action Item 1: Produce Annual Report

Action Item 2: Send at least 1 monthly press release

Objective 4: Maintain regular updates to MWA website.

Action Item 1: Periodically audit website to ensure content is up to date, design is refreshed, and content is user friendly

Goal 2: Increase connections and continue to work with local partners to create synergistic and complimentary work plans.

Objective 1: Strengthen relationships with municipal partners, selectboards, etc.

Objective 2: Expand relationships with both up-watershed and inland lake stakeholders

Objective 3: Increase presence at networking events including local, state, and potentially regional opportunities.

Objective 4: Maintain open communication with partners to align work efforts, collaborate as needed, and to promote partner events and efforts.

Internal Systems Improvement

Goal 1: Create annual membership and donor communications plan and goals

Objective 1: Create and maintain regular membership solicitations

Objective 2: Increase unrestricted individual/business donations

Goal 2: Audit internal systems to streamline, organize, and improve organizational efficiency, effectiveness, professionalism, and security.

Objective 1: Review financial, timekeeping, expense, membership, donor tracking, grants management, supervisory, and others. Upgrade and automate wherever possible.

Objective 2: Write clear procedures for all systems in place to create clear expectations, consistency, and legacy.

Goal 3: Increase Board Engagement

Objective 1: Work with the Board to develop clear expectations of Board member roles and responsibilities and more evenly distribute work among Board Members.

Action item 1: Assess workload on volunteer Board Members and identify tasks that can or should be transferred to staff or can be streamlined.

Objective 2: Develop plan for Board Member recruitment.

Goal 4: Review internal policies and procedures and update, as necessary.

Objective 1: Review and update employment policies, including those related to hiring and terminating contracts, and employee handbook.

Goal 5: Wherever possible, create organizational redundancy in areas of fiscal management, supervision, file sharing, and grants management.

Objective 1: Review internal systems and established BMPs for organizational redundancy.

Action Item 1: Create Procedures for needed areas of redundancy

Action Item 2: Cross train employees and board members

Objective 2: Create and Implement Records Retention Procedure for Organization.

Action Item 1: Create online file management system and back-up all MWA documents from private and organizational computers.

Action Item 2: Ensure MWA hard copy files are stored at the office and that important documents are scanned and electronically shared.

Action Item 3: Develop SOP for records retention

Goal 6: Cultivate 90-day organizational cash reserve.