



BUZZARDS BAY COALITION
STRATEGY 2015-2020
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our Commitment to
Restore Clean Water and
a Healthy Buzzards Bay
Watershed for Everyone

A RESILIENT BUZZARDS BAY

I am pleased to present the Buzzards Bay Coalition's *Strategy 2015-2020: Our Commitment to Restore Clean Water and a Healthy Buzzards Bay Watershed for Everyone.*

This Strategic Plan is the result of more than a year of conversations within and outside the Buzzards Bay Coalition about how we can best leverage our strengths and entrepreneurial spirit to restore and protect our irreplaceable Bay. It is the product of more than 25 years of lessons learned and goals achieved. And it was made possible by our successful 2008-2011 Capital Campaign, which laid the foundation for the Coalition's persistent advocacy, sound science, public engagement and proactive land conservation and restoration.

If you have ever swam along the Elizabeth Islands, you have seen first-hand why we all should be optimistic that we can renew a healthy Buzzards Bay. These magical places – where dense eelgrass meadows pulse in the flow of sunlight-filled water, where blue crabs scuttle and bay scallop shells and oysters cover the floor, where your diving scares up a flounder or bass from its hiding spot – are a mere ten miles from the bustle of the New Bedford waterfront and Falmouth's summer traffic. They are a testament to the Bay's resilience and living proof that we can restore the rest of the Bay where murky water and black mud now prevail.

To be sure, we face significant challenges in achieving such restoration. By far, the most serious and difficult one is nitrogen pollution. It leaches from our septic systems into our groundwater; it flows across our streets, lawns and cranberry bogs into the Bay's most sensitive estuaries, harbors and coves. Scientists estimate that decades' worth of nitrogen is slowly discharging into the Bay. Yet cleanup action lags far behind, government financing is inadequate, and public awareness is disastrously low.

But we have enormous strengths. For one, the Bay is resilient; we know it can bounce back. In addition, we have the science; we know how to bring the Bay back. The necessary clean water laws are in place; we need only to work with Bay communities and agencies to move toward compliance. And finally, so many of our watershed's natural filters – its forests, wetlands and streams – remain intact; we can still protect them.

Over the next five years, we will tackle the challenges facing the Bay and our local environment head-on through **major new initiatives focused on People, Land and**



Water. There is no silver bullet that will Save Buzzards Bay, so the Coalition will drive forward on all fronts to protect, restore and build stronger ties to this Bay for everyone. To succeed, we also need continued investment in organizational capacity and financial strength. This Plan outlines how best to accomplish that in partnership with you – our members and supporters – and many more like you.

A Crisis of Disengagement

We cannot rebuild Buzzards Bay without people. Our Bay is not a wildlife sanctuary sealed off from the outside world; it is a complex blend of nature and communities. Without connection to the natural world, people turn a blind eye to pollution and the Bay's decline.

Most children today grow up knowing more about the rainforest images on their iPads than the shells on their local beach. Unless we address this disengagement, our work will ultimately fail in the decades to come. People take care of things they know and love, and fewer people today know Buzzards Bay.

To meet this crisis, the Coalition will dramatically expand its role in connecting people to the Bay and its watershed. Look to us to:

- Become a constant, energetic source of information and programs that entice people to get involved in local water issues, take action, and, most importantly, simply get outside to experience and connect with the Bay.
- Create a network of Bay Discovery Sites in all corners of the watershed where we preserve important facets of the Bay ecosystem, repair damaged wetlands and streams and open these places as community assets for everyone to enjoy.

Showing the Way

There are answers to the problems plaguing our Bay, but community leaders are often unfamiliar with them. The Coalition must do much more to show the way to a more sustainable future for our watershed. In the years ahead, we will demonstrate and share new ways of Bay-sensitive use in partnership with towns, businesses and residents. Look to us to:

- Work with business leaders – from cranberry growers to real estate developers – to show how practices that lower nitrogen pollution can both protect the Bay and be good for their bottom line.
- Educate communities and local decision-makers how to design new wastewater treatment systems for old neighborhoods; and partner with homeowners to reduce their own impact on local waters.

Reducing Nitrogen Pollution

The path out of the nitrogen crisis will be long, but we are determined to speed up the cleanup. Look to us to:

- Push state and federal government even harder to enforce pollution laws to require nitrogen cleanup and to deliver the funding our communities need to address this multi-billion dollar problem.
- Expand our vital role in bringing the best science possible to all levels of government to foster better decisions for Bay cleanup and protection.

Saving All of the Parts

Lastly, it has been said that the first rule of successful tinkering is to save all of the parts. Yet we throw away parts of the Bay ecosystem every day: we degrade by adding pollution, we scrape clear forests and fields for new development, we pave over parts of our watershed. But when we strategically protect tracts of land, whether they be forests around our drinking water supplies, beach habitats or small spring-fed streams, we are protecting the essential parts needed to ensure a healthy Bay into the future. Toward that end, look to us to:

- Extend our role as the regional leader in permanently safeguarding and caring for many more acres of forest and wetlands each year.
- Launch priority restoration projects on rivers, streams, saltmarshes and beaches that fix damaged areas -- rebuilding the watershed's natural pollution-filtering capacity and improving habitats for fish and wildlife.

The theme of “Resilience” binds together this Strategic Plan’s natural, human and organizational goals. Resilience to adapt and endure, to grow and persevere, to restore the Bay and build an organization so that both can weather new threats and thrive for generations to come. That is our challenge, but more importantly, our tremendous opportunity. I’m excited about the work ahead and about the privilege to partner with all of you to make it happen.



Mark Rasmussen
President/Buzzards Baykeeper

TRANSFORMATION:

THE 2008-2010 STRATEGIC PLAN & THE CAMPAIGN FOR BUZZARDS BAY

The past six years have been transformational for the Buzzards Bay Coalition. With the development of our 2008-2010 Strategic Plan, subsequent ‘Campaign for Buzzards Bay’ (2008-2011), and two guiding quadrennial State of the Bay Reports in 2007 and 2011, the organization tightened its focus and greatly expanded its capacity to address the serious challenges facing the Bay and its watershed.

Faced with the sobering data and declining health trends documented in our 2007 State of the Bay report, the challenge facing the Bay was clear. Nitrogen pollution and poorly-planned sprawl development was driving our Bay toward the same deplorable conditions found in so many other East Coast Estuaries. But the data also suggested that there is still time to secure a different fate for Buzzards Bay.

Recognizing that the Buzzards Bay Coalition of 2007 did not have the staff or financial resources necessary to reverse the decline in Bay health, the Board launched ‘The Campaign for Buzzards Bay’ in 2008. That effort raised \$11,270,242 to position this organization to become a true catalyst for change.

The fruits of that investment are already visible today as we enter a new phase of organizational growth and development. The Campaign put the Coalition on a secure financial footing by establishing our permanent headquarters in New Bedford, building a nearly \$2 million Endowment base, and growing our membership to more than 8,000.

But most importantly, the Campaign invested in significant programmatic and staff growth. It has enabled us to protect more than 400 acres per year of critical watershed lands in all Bay communities and to begin to restore our watershed’s most damaged wetlands and streams. It launched robust new programs to involve and inspire decision-makers and the general public to become better stewards of the Bay. And it greatly accelerated our work to transform sound science into policy action in court, at state and federal agencies, and in town halls.

With the completion of the Campaign in 2011, we succeeded at creating a community-supported organization structurally capable of addressing the serious challenges facing the Bay. This new 2015-2020 Strategic Plan is about realizing the full potential of that organization to produce profound and lasting change for the people and environment of the Buzzards Bay region.

WITH PEOPLE

PROGRAM GOAL 1

A strong connection to our local environment and conservation ethic among watershed residents supports the long-term stewardship of Buzzards Bay.



Between 2009-2014, we:

- Reaffirmed the importance of people as a core component of the Coalition's Bay restoration strategy. Today, Public Engagement staff lead programs and increased communications with the watershed's decision-makers, residents, and youth. Since 2009, 8,800 young people in all Bay communities have participated in Coalition-led outdoor exploration and learning programs.
- Renovated the New Bedford Waterfront's historic Coggeshall Counting House into an award-winning example of green design and permanent Coalition home. Through education programs in the Richard Wheeler Bay Learning Center and rapidly-growing public use of the space, the Buzzards Bay Center has become a vital asset to the Bay community and debt-free base for the growing Coalition team.
- Expanded seasonal programming at our Discovery Center in Woods Hole – connecting 8,300 people to Buzzards Bay and strengthening our research collaborations with the Woods Hole scientific community.

→ Strategic Objectives: 2015-2020

In the next 5 years, look to us to:

- 1 Become The Source of information and programming to support and encourage more people to make personal connections with the Bay and watershed.
- 2 Raise public awareness of the challenges facing Buzzards Bay and build support for its protection through a wide variety of media and outreach tools.
- 3 Increase access to existing, and open additional, publicly-accessible centers and conservation properties in a network of Bay Discovery Sites around the watershed.
- 4 Provide solutions-based, information sharing programs for decision makers in government and business.
- 5 Increase the availability of field-based Bay exploration programs for youth.

ON THE WATER



PROGRAM GOAL 2

With nitrogen and toxic pollution reduced, the waters of Buzzards Bay are on their way to being restored and support abundant fish, shellfish and wildlife populations.

Between 2009-2014, we:

- Secured major victories that are reducing nitrogen pollution at all levels of government. Coalition advocacy resulted in a firm cap on pollution to restore West Falmouth Harbor, creation of the first Cape Cod-wide strategy for reducing nitrogen in 35 years, the completion of scientific reports detailing needed nitrogen reductions in the Bay's harbors, and strict precedents that prevent nitrogen pollution from new development throughout the watershed.
- Closely monitored and defended oil spill prevention rules for barge traffic in the Bay. Today, a decade after the Bouchard 120 Spill, Buzzards Bay hosts the strongest spill prevention requirements in the nation due to persistent Coalition advocacy.
- Expanded the development of strong science and research collaborations in all corners of the Bay to document trends and present the highest quality data to government decision-makers.

➔ Strategic Objectives: 2015-2020

In the next 5 years, look to us to:

- 1 Ensure that federal and state agencies fully implement the Clean Water Act, improve water quality regulations, and provide funding for Bay cleanup.
- 2 Prevent new and reduce existing nitrogen pollution from residential wastewater.
- 3 Actively partner with Bay communities, neighborhood groups and businesses to demonstrate on-the-ground solutions to reduce nitrogen and restore watershed health.
- 4 Support the development of new growing techniques and management practices to reduce nitrogen pollution from cranberry bogs.
- 5 Closely monitor and report trends in nitrogen pollution and expand monitoring to better respond to a rapidly changing Bay and region.
- 6 Make toxic pollution a relic of the Bay's past by defending oil spill prevention rules and cleaning up PCBs in New Bedford Harbor.

IN THE WATERSHED



PROGRAM GOAL 3

The Buzzards Bay watershed's most important forests and wetlands, rivers, streams, and groundwater are protected from poorly-planned, sprawl development. Critical areas are permanently preserved and damaged areas restored.

Between 2009-2014, we:

- Increased the rate of watershed land that is permanently protected by the Coalition to 477 acres/year. These forests, fields, and wetlands now total more than 6,200 acres protected since 1998 and help ensure a healthy Bay, rivers and drinking waters for years to come. Our Bay Lands Revolving Fund continues to fuel local land protection efforts.
- Launched new efforts to restore damaged wetlands and streams and have undertaken major projects to bring back lost natural resources. Most notable of these is the Coalition's landmark restoration of the land and fishway surrounding the head of tide on the Acushnet River.
- Opened new Coalition-managed Reserves on the Acushnet, Mattapoissett, and Weweantic Rivers. These sites form the foundation of a growing network of Bay Discovery Sites where land protection, site restoration, and public access improvements combine to save, improve, and open remarkable watershed areas as community assets.

→ Strategic Objectives: 2015-2020

In the next 5 years, look to us to:

- 1 Serve as the regional leader in identifying and permanently protecting more than 600 acres of the watershed's most critical forest and wetland areas each year.
- 2 Maintain our assistance to local land trusts and municipalities to support strong land conservation in all corners of the watershed.
- 3 Provide exemplary stewardship of Coalition-held lands and Conservation Restrictions.
- 4 Restore degraded natural resources on lands under our care at the Acushnet, Mattapoissett, and Weweantic River Reserves.
- 5 Identify and implement new, high-impact wetland and river restoration projects throughout the watershed.
- 6 Monitor the health of key natural resources in the watershed.

WITH OUR COMMUNITY

ORGANIZATIONAL GOAL 1

The community actively supports the work of the Buzzards Bay Coalition and invests financially in its long-term success.

Between 2009-2014, we:

- Grew our Membership to more than 8,000 individuals, families and businesses in all Bay communities.
- Invested in the growth of the Buzzards Bay Swim and Watershed Ride by more than doubling the participation and fundraising of these signature outdoor events.
- Raised \$11.2 million through our Campaign for Buzzards Bay and increased our annual operating budget to \$2 million to support major expansions in Bay protection programs.

→ Strategic Objectives: 2015-2020

In the next 5 years, look to us to:

- 1 Expand fundraising capacity and diversity of income sources to support a \$2.75 million annual operating budget by FY20.
- 2 Expand the Buzzards Bay Swim and Watershed Ride to engage 1,000 participants in outdoor events that connect people directly to the Bay and raise funds for its protection.
- 3 Create an Endowment capable of providing 10% of the FY20 annual operating budget.
- 4 Maintain and create vibrant buildings that allow for growth and serve the organization's public outreach mission.
- 5 Create a Capital Campaign to meet the financial needs of this Strategic Plan.

STRENGTHENING OUR TEAM

ORGANIZATIONAL GOAL 2

The Buzzards Bay Coalition is recognized as a local and national conservation leader through our commitment to the highest quality standards, evaluation metrics, and partnerships that enhance our effectiveness.

Between 2009-2014, we:

- Assembled a talented and passionate staff of 19 conservation professionals to tackle the day-to-day work of the Coalition guided by a strong, dedicated Board of Directors.
- Developed and nurtured important partnerships with research institutions such as the Marine Biological Laboratory and UMass Cranberry Experiment Station and invested in national networks such as the Land Trust Alliance.

→ Strategic Objectives: 2015-2020

In the next 5 years, look to us to:

- 1 Maintain a strong and engaged network of volunteer Board, Committee, and Leadership Council members.
- 2 Attract and invest in the highest quality professional staff.
- 3 Maintain our commitment to tracking trends in Bay and watershed health and develop new methods for revealing shifts in public opinion to continuously refine our approach to Bay restoration.
- 4 Secure formal Accreditation with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and maintain perpetual land protection and advocacy programs conforming to the highest standards.
- 5 Develop and steward partnerships with key research organizations and academia.

OUR VISION

A Buzzards Bay shoreline defined by safe swimming beaches, open shellfish beds and stretches of scenic open spaces for all to enjoy.

Healthy waters that support abundant fish, shellfish and wildlife populations.

A Bay safe from the threats of oil spills, industrial and sewer discharges and ocean dumping.

A watershed where rivers, streams, forests and wetlands that buffer the Bay are protected.



OUR MISSION & SCOPE

The Buzzards Bay Coalition is a nonprofit, membership organization dedicated to the restoration, protection and sustainable use and enjoyment of our irreplaceable Bay and its watershed. The Coalition works to improve the health of the Bay ecosystem for all through education, conservation, research and advocacy.

The Coalition works throughout the entire Buzzards Bay Watershed to protect the region's coastal, river and drinking water quality and the upland forests, wetlands and streams that support a healthy watershed/bay ecosystem.

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