Watershed Alliance of York
2027 - 2031 Strategic Plan

Across York County's 11 distinct watersheds, environmental health depends on aligning fragmented local actions into coordinated regional impact. Over the next five years, the Watershed Alliance of York (WAY) is prioritizing organizational readiness and operational maturity to prepare for a long-term vision of visible, county-wide leadership by 2031.

This 5-year plan lays out three focused areas of work:

1. **Proactive Ecological Impact**: Deploying soft-infrastructure and biological solutions guided by real-time data, paired with a diversified revenue strategy to secure financial self-determination.

2. **Operational Sustainability**: Systemizing core operating procedures, securing multi-year funding for executive leadership, and maturing board governance.

3. **Pragmatic, Inclusive Collaboration**: Creating a framework to vet high-yield partnerships and reinvigorating an "Alliance Network" to broaden and deepen engagement.

Mission

The mission of the Watershed Alliance of York (WAY) is to improve York County's water, making it cleaner and healthier for all.

Values

1. Collaborative Stewardship
We believe that the health of our water is a shared legacy and requires collaboration. We step in and step up to create the important connections for collective stewardship.

2. Community-Centric Integrity
By maintaining transparency in our operations and remaining committed to the community's well-being we ensure our environmental goals are for the greater good of all who live within our watersheds.

3. Evidence-Based Action
Our work is rooted in rigor. We value scientific discovery and data-driven insights to inform every project, ensuring that our interventions are ecologically effective.

4. Resilient Sustainability
We build for the future - restoring ecosystems and managing our organization with the fiscal prudence and foresight required to remain a champion of York County's watersheds.

5. Gritty Innovation
We are resourceful and take pride in our roots—finding creative solutions to complex problems and doing the hard work on the ground to deliver outsized impact with every dollar entrusted to us.

Vision

By 2031 WAY will have strengthened its foundations to ensure that it is positioned to permanently bridge the gap between policy and practice. As York's champions of clean water, we will act as the connective tissue that turns individual efforts into a collective movement for York's watersheds.

Focus Area

IMPACT

Impact is the measurable restoration of our 11 county-wide watersheds translated into a visible, shared story of ecological health and community connection. We define our ultimate success not just by the volume of projects, but by our ability to shift from reactive mitigation to proactive, nature-based restoration.

Five-Year Objectives

Objective 1: Proactive, Nature-Based Ecosystem Restoration

Transition our project portfolio from a reactive model dictated by restrictive funding to a proactive, prioritized pipeline. We will champion "soft infrastructure" and high-impact biological restoration—such as freshwater mussel research, dam removal, and riparian buffers—that work in harmony with nature to heal the water ecosystem.

Objective 2: Funding Diversification

Leverage our pilot scientific research and restoration successes to appeal to a wider network of local/regional foundations. The goal is to prove the long-term economic and ecological efficacy of nature-based solutions, so that we can seek to secure diversified, local, and unrestricted funding. This in turn would give WAY the autonomy to choose high-priority projects and ensure the organization's long-term financial health.

Objective 3: Translate Data into Shared Narratives

Transform our technical project metrics (e.g., stream miles, buffer trees planted, BMPs installed) into accessible, map-based visual stories and county-wide annual reports. By effectively showing how individual local efforts connect across all 11 watersheds, we will build a collective regional identity that inspires landowner, funder, and public engagement.

Focus Area

OPERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Organizational Sustainability identifies the work required to ensure mission durability including administrative, financial, and governance opportunities.

Five-Year Objectives

Objective 1: Solidify Executive Director Salary

WAY's sustainability is dependent upon the reliable, long-term funding of the lead position to be prepared to consider additional staffing in the future.

Objective 2: Review of Organizational Policies, Procedures and Processes

Ensure that the key processes for running WAY are documented and as efficient and effective as possible.

Objective 3: Governance

Establish board development pathways and build in succession planning to maintain strong oversight.

Focus Area

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is the intentional alignment of diverse partners, municipalities, landowners, and community stewards toward shared watershed health. Serving as York County's dedicated backbone organization, we connect and amplify collective watershed efforts. We will define success as having positioned ourselves to explore the next level of visible leadership by the end of our 5-year plan.

Five-Year Objectives

Objective 1: Proactively Evaluate and Position WAY for Strategic Partnerships

Develop a framework to evaluate emerging collaborative opportunities balancing capacity with mission impact. WAY will position itself as the partner of choice for clean water initiatives when timing and partner readiness converge.

Objective 2: Operationalize an Inclusive "Alliance Network"

Establish an accessible, non-dues engagement model with a clear charter of shared watershed goals. By defining non-governance pathways for individuals, organizations, and landowners to engage, WAY will cultivate and strengthen a pipeline of advocates and volunteers across the county.

Objective 3: Amplify Success Through Partner-Led Visibility

Build county-wide recognition and solidify WAY's reputation as an effective regional backbone without overextending staff resources. Maximize public awareness by strategically piggybacking on existing partner communication channels and hosting high-visibility, shared milestone events.

Measurements of Success

IMPACT

- # project completed
- # projects in pipeline by phase
- $ needed per project
- Funding amount
- Funding sources
- BMPs installed
- Acres of riparian buffer planted
- Acres of wetland
- Flood reduction
- pollution reduction
- # dams removed
- # mussel survey locations
- # mussels found
- # mussel species found/12
- # interactions during Watershed Week

OPERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

- 100% ED salary secured
- # P&Ps documented / # P&Ps identified
- 100% Board Giving
- 100% Board assessment completion

COLLABORATION

- # landowner partners
- # Alliance Network partners
- # Project partners

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