



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**March kicks off *The Confluence Project* with public programs and in-school residencies that bring students, artists, regional planners and stream scientists together to focus on our water and watersheds**

*Guilford, Brattleboro and Marlboro, Vermont*—Vermont Performance Lab (VPL) and Windham Regional Commission (WRC) are teaming up to launch *The Confluence Project*, a new collaborative effort for bringing arts, youth, community groups, and educational institutions to the civic dialogue table to help create a deeper engagement around water and watersheds.

*The Confluence Project* links Vermont Performance Lab's artist residency program with the community development work of the Windham Regional Commission. Through public programs and integrated art-science residencies, *The Confluence Project* is supporting our local schools build an understanding of our local watersheds, and fosters a new model for civic engagement and collaboration around water.

Vermont Performance Lab and the Windham Regional Commission are pleased to collaborate with many community partners to make these programs possible including: the Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center, Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, Connecticut River Conservancy, Green River Watershed Alliance, Marlboro College and the River Gallery School and three Windham County Schools: the Guilford Central School, Hilltop Montessori School and the Marlboro Elementary School.

The collaboration was initiated back in 2015 just as the Vermont legislature passed the VT Clean Water Act (Act 64) – a piece of legislation which created new programs and requirements to safeguard the public's access to clean and safe water throughout the state. The Clean Water Act is already having an impact on Vermont's local rivers, agricultural resources, and communities.

VPL's Director says, "We are delighted to be working with schools and so many community partners. The aim of the project is to ultimately create resources and relationships in our community and an ongoing and sustained way of working, serving as a regional, or potentially even national, model for how community organizations can work together with artists and local schools to enhance the quality of education through collaborative partnerships that build support for community issues to develop active citizens and bring added resources to our schools."

With an environmental focus *The Confluence Project* will develop creative avenues for student and citizen participation around the study and protection of Vermont's watersheds. The artist residencies and school activities will center on the Green River watershed and the Whetstone Brook with students and teachers at three local schools. The work provides a direct exposure to the watershed planning work of the WRC, and other initiatives from local environmental groups like the Green River Watershed Alliance.

Each school is grounding its participation in its locality taking a place-based approach to watershed study. Inspiring a new reading of the land and water in connection with culture, pre-colonial history and science, *The Confluence Project* uses the arts to invigorate grassroots conservation efforts. VPL artists will be central to the project through their engagement in school-based residencies. These residencies will involve water quality study and mapping of these watersheds through curriculum development that is rooted in both artistic and scientific research methodology.

Students at Hilltop Montessori School will work with Judy Dow, an Abenaki artist and educator, to focus on "Sawdust Alley", an 8-acre parcel along the Whetstone Brook, that is being restored to a floodplain by the Vermont River Conservancy in cooperation with the Town of Brattleboro. Students will meet river experts and regional planners, do hands-on environmental testing and historical research of the site, and engage with community members who live near the Whetstone to listen to and gather their stories and perspectives on the river. Students will work with Judy to create maps and will share their research and recommendations through presentations on how to transform the Sawdust Alley site into an ecological and cultural asset for the community.

Students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class at Guilford Central School spend each Friday throughout the school year on the Broad Brook. In May visual and teaching artist Gowri Savoor will be in residence for two weeks at the school and in the community to further student and residents' connections to waterways and watersheds through collaborative art-making and community celebrations. Workshops in the community with Gowri Savoor will invite public discourse and 3D-luminary building; the culminating performances will result in an interactive visual light community parade along the Broad Brook in Guilford and later a paddle at the confluence of the West and the Connecticut Rivers in Brattleboro, VT.

The town of Marlboro is the source of the headwaters to three watersheds. Students from Marlboro Elementary's 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade class will undertake a watershed study delving into the history and water science of the streams and rivers and look at the upstream downstream implications and responsibilities of being part of a watershed. An integrated art-science residency with teaching and performing artist Lida Winfield and local stream specialists will culminate in student projects and presentations.

In addition to this work being done within the schools, *The Confluence Project* also hosts a suite of public events based on watershed conservation, river ecology, and community conversations around our shared waterways. Cumulatively, these events are diverse enough to engage with a range of community members with various interests. But they all have the same core intention of promoting watershed awareness and appreciation.

The public programs will begin on March 17<sup>th</sup> with the opening of Gowri Savoor's exhibit *We Walk in Their Shadows* and Richard Klein's *Bottle in the River* at the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center and continuing with a free workshop entitled, "Conserving for the Green River: Conservation Easement Workshop for Landowners." The programs will continue through August 2018 with events ranging from vernal pool identification trainings, to artists talks, to forums about flood resilience with our road foreman, to lantern making workshops which culminate with the Confluence Lantern Paddle on Friday, May 25<sup>th</sup>. This will be a joyous lantern-lit flotilla with community members and handmade lanterns in the Retreat Meadows at the confluence of the West and Connecticut Rivers. Attendees may bring your own boats, paddles and PFDs, or you may rent them from the Vermont Canoe Touring Center located just down river of our starting location. The Paddle will incorporate the handmade lanterns made by the community at workshops with Gowri Savoor on May 15, May 17 and May 19.

WRC Planner Emily Davis says that, "because of the inherent strength of these unique partnerships, we are able to provide our community with meaningful opportunities to engage with their rivers and watersheds. Groups like the Green River Watershed Alliance believe that civic action around our water begins when people start caring, and caring begins when people take ownership. Through the *Confluence Project* suite of public events, we want to inspire ownership, awareness, and appreciation of our precious waterways that we have in Vermont, and in turn, create a culture of stewardship in our shared landscape. The theme of water is a powerful one, and we've found that people come together on the common ground of clean water."

**A complete listing of events can be found at [www.vermontperformancelab.org](http://www.vermontperformancelab.org) and [www.greenriverwa.org](http://www.greenriverwa.org).**

The in-school residencies and public programs are made possible with the help of our community partners and with support from the Fresh Sound Foundation, the High Meadows Fund, the Windham Foundation, The Thomas Thompson Trust, the Vermont Arts Council, the Vermont Community Foundation, as well as the individuals and businesses that support VPL's Creation Fund and Community Engagement Circle.

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#### **ABOUT THE GREEN RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE:**

The Green River Watershed Alliance (GRWA) is a collective group of citizens, and a community-led voice for the stewardship and protection of the Green River and its surrounding landscape. We unite the towns of Marlboro, Halifax, and Guilford to proactively reduce the impacts of flooding, support healthy ecosystems, and increase the overall awareness and appreciation of the Green River and its watershed. The GRWA's work is currently being funded as part of the Watershed Resilience program of the High Meadows Fund, and includes: preparing, hosting, and facilitating public events that enable community members to learn more about their watershed, studying the natural resources of the watershed so as to be used by the towns and landowners for better stewardship and natural resources planning, and providing our communities with resources to support flood resilience, habitat conservation, and community engagement efforts. [www.greenriverwa.org](http://www.greenriverwa.org)

## **ABOUT VERMONT PERFORMANCE LAB:**

Since 2006, Vermont Performance Lab (VPL) has linked nationally renowned visiting artists with the people, places and issues at the heart of our communities. We support creation of new work in the performing arts, and also creation of community by inviting people to connect with each other as they explore social, political, environmental, and other issues that impact the character and quality of their lives as individuals and citizens. By pooling resources with local partners, VPL is able to offer artists a range of spaces and opportunities to engage with scholars, students, artists, and the community at large. Our work intentionally leverages the power of the arts, culture and creativity in a way that drives a broader agenda for change, growth and transformation in our community. VPL Director Sara Coffey has more than two decades of experience as a performing arts programmer and administrator. Her creative leadership in the Vermont community has led to a new model for residencies that link artists and community partners. [www.vermontperformancelab.org](http://www.vermontperformancelab.org)

## **ABOUT WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION:**

The Windham Regional Commission (WRC) works with 27 towns in Southeastern Vermont to address regional issues by promoting economic development, increasing jobs and income; preserving the natural beauty of VT; obtaining and maintaining efficiency in government expenditure; and safeguarding and extending local autonomy in planning and development decisions. The WRC is providing technical assistance for this project in the form of resources for environmental and watershed education. They are also providing administrative and technical support to launch the Green River Watershed Alliance's work program, and they facilitate meetings and interactions with the necessary community groups related to *The Confluence Project*. Their participation is supported in part by a grant from the High Meadows Fund. [www.windhamregional.org](http://www.windhamregional.org)