



La Farge Point juts from the west bank into the Lower Pond. (Photo: Richard Benjamin)

W.E.R. La Farge

W.E.R. La Farge, poet, playwright and environmentalist, was born in New York City on June 24, 1930. In 1978, he began to reside year-round at the River Farm, owned by his family since 1908.



W.E.R. was a founding and active member of the Narrow River Preservation Association, which, over the years, has preserved so much of the river we all enjoy. W.E.R. believed in preserving watersheds, farmland and public access to recreational and scenic areas. He believed that we are all stewards of the land, inextricably bound to it and to each other.

La Farge Point Park and the U.R.I. Rowing Center were once part of the River Farm. W.E.R. donated these parcels and permanently restricted development on his land through conservation easements. The value of the gift was used as matching funds, allowing the Narrow River Land Trust, with the assistance of The Champlin Foundations and The Nature Conservancy, to preserve additional land on the Upper Pond. In 1988, through the efforts of Senator John Chafee, the lower end of the estuary was designated as the Pettaquamscutt Cove National Wildlife Refuge (renamed the John H. Chafee National Wildlife Refuge in 1999).

W.E.R. died at home on October 27, 1994 and is buried at the River Farm. His poem Earth's Song was inspired by the glacial estuary we call "Narrow River."

Earth's Song

I lie alone
remembering changes
how sudden crystals grew
from water falling
in a cup in a rock
surprising forms
acids in a cup in a rock
receiving lightning
a cup in a rock receiving
lightning

I hold my forms beyond
surprising islands

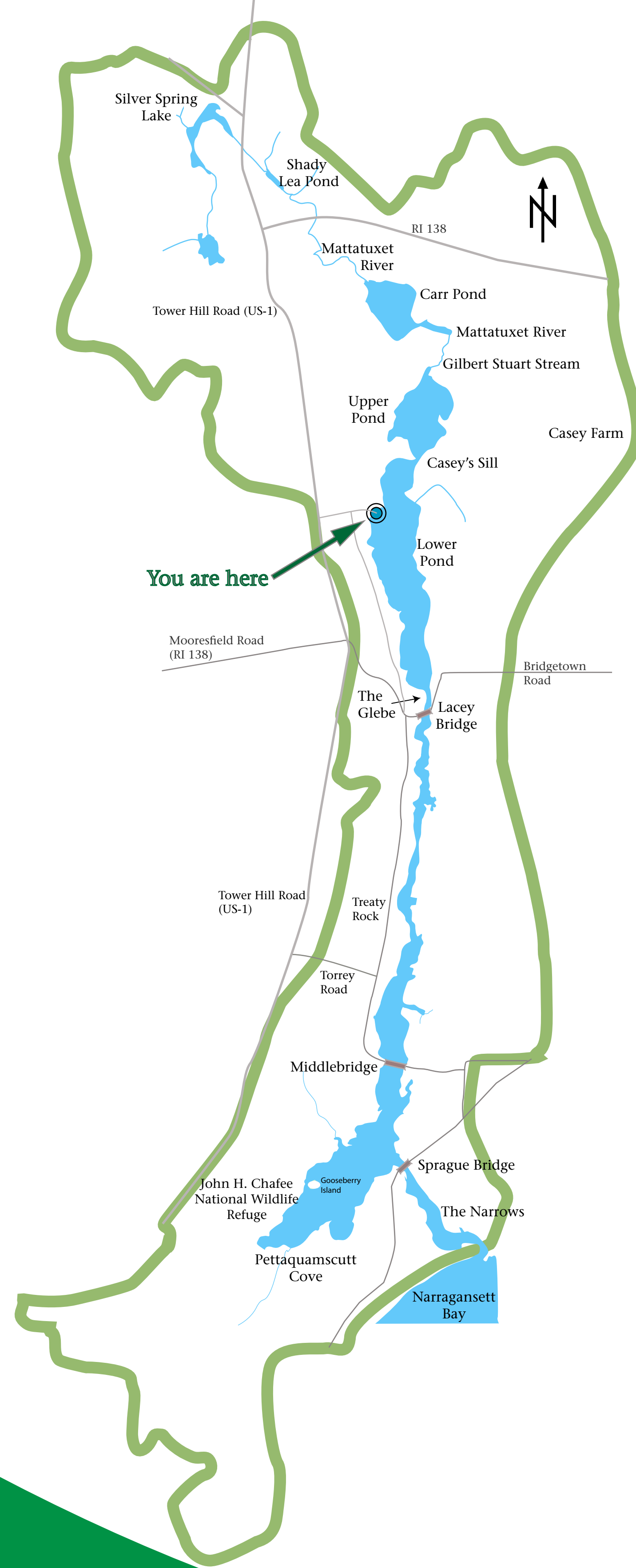
I lie alone
remembering changes
how grinding ice came down
the slide of earth
rub of rivers
knuckles of trees cracking
rocks
receiving ice surprising
cracking rocks receiving ice
a tree of rivers sprang inside
me

I am here
I lie alone
no one completes me
after lightning
I bide my time

I lie alone
no one completes me
after water
I bide my time
I hold my face beyond
surprising rains

by W.E.R. La Farge (1971)

Narrow River Watershed



The last great ice sheet began to recede from Rhode Island 26,000 years ago, then left the Narrow River Watershed by 20,000 years ago and was gone from Rhode Island by 18,500 years ago. The Upper and Lower Ponds of Narrow River, separated by shallow Casey's Sill, are two deep ice-block basins. After deglaciation, both basins contained freshwater lakes. The Lower Pond has 1,000 years of history recorded by freshwater varves, couplets of sediment known to have been deposited in one year.

The ocean waters flooded into the Narrow River basin about 2,500 years ago and filled the freshwater lakes with marine waters. Normally the water of the ponds is in three layers: a lighter, fresher layer on top; next a denser, saltier layer; and below an even saltier and denser bottom layer that is naturally without oxygen but high in hydrogen sulfide. In October 2007, the bottom waters of the Upper Pond came to the surface and mixed with the oxygenated water in the upper water column. The water turned milky-white to yellow due to the hydrogen sulfide. The water contained little or no oxygen, it was saltier, and there were unusual species of microscopic plankton. Three other occurrences of this natural phenomenon, called a *ventilation* or *overtun*, have been recorded since 1957, and there were probably many other overtuns before then.

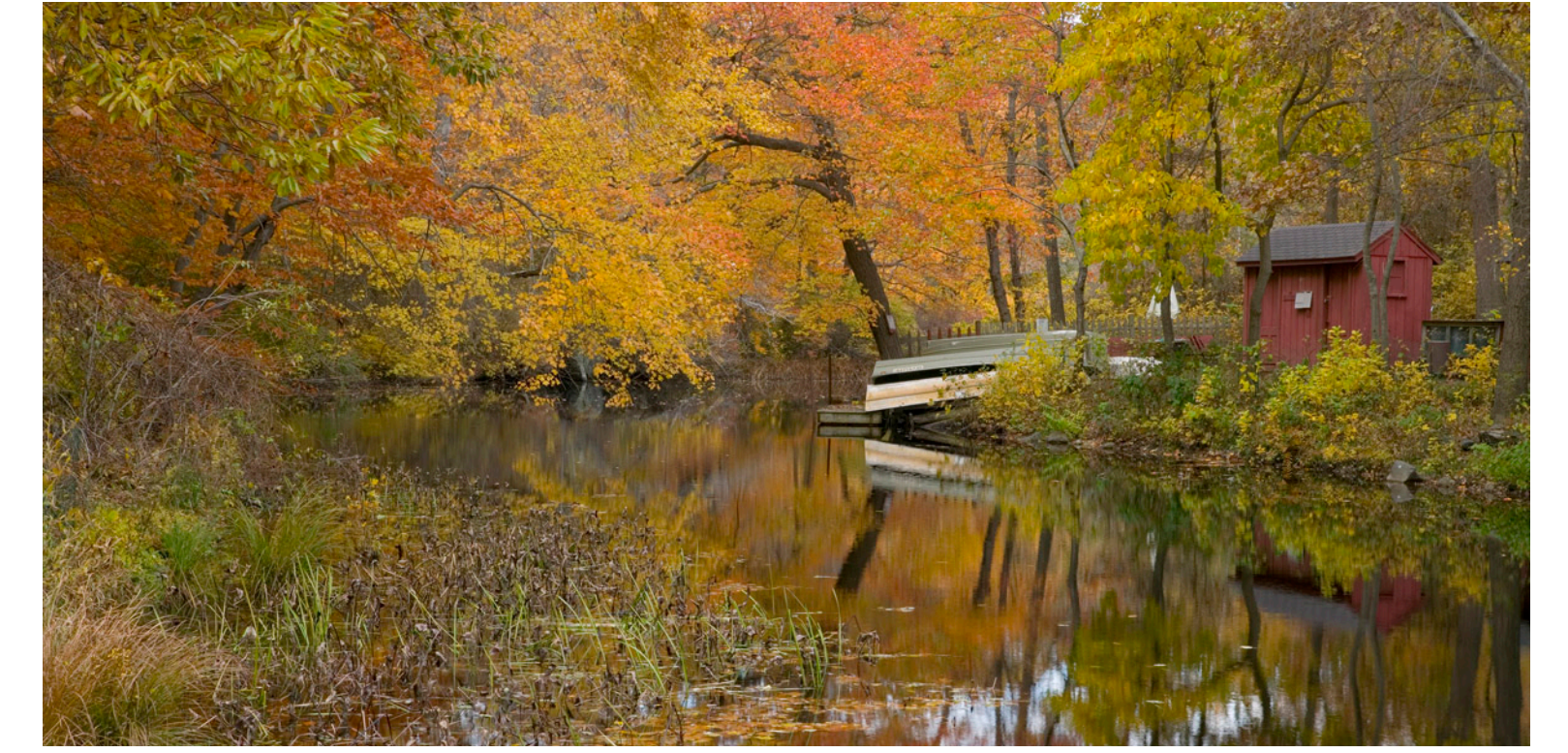


Water flows over Casey's Sill, viewed here from the east, between the Upper and Lower Ponds. (Photo: John McNamara)

The ponds and the salt marshes support a rich variety of marine life including river herring that spawn in the fresh water ponds north of the Gilbert Stuart stream. The marine life supports populations of egrets, herons, black ducks, ospreys and eagles.

When the first Europeans arrived in the early 1500s, the Narrow River Watershed was inhabited by the Narragansett and Niantic Tribes. European merchants began arriving during the early seventeenth century. At the end of King Philip's War, settlers began rebuilding their settlements. During this period one of the most important houses in the watershed, "The Glebe," was originally built as a farm house near the North Kingstown-South Kingstown line, then transformed into the rectory of Rev. James MacSparran.

Unlike most areas in Rhode Island, Narrow River was not heavily industrialized because the watershed lacked streams large enough to generate power for large factories. But the main freshwater source, Gilbert Stuart Stream, had enough flow to power the Stuart Family Snuff Mill from 1750 to 1761. Their son, Gilbert, best known for his "Athenaeum portrait" of George Washington seen on the one dollar bill, was born in a room above the snuff mill in 1755.



The Mattatuxet River just north of the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum flows into Gilbert Stuart Stream connecting it to the Upper Pond of Narrow River and providing a route for herring that spawn in the fresh water ponds in the north of the watershed. (Photo: Richard Benjamin)



A great egret (also known as a common egret), one of the many species that inhabit the watershed, comes in for a landing in the salt marsh near Middlebridge. (Photo: John McNamara)



View of Sedge Island from the Sprague Bridge (Photo: Richard Benjamin)



Preserving the water quality in the Narrow River Watershed protects the many recreational uses of the river such as boating, fishing and swimming. Visit www.narrowriver.org to learn how you can help preserve Narrow River. (Photo: Richard Benjamin)

La Farge Point Park