



TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE
2025 NOV 21 PM 2:04
PETITION TO THE TOWN COUNCIL

To the Honorable Town Council of the Town of Bristol,
The undersigned hereby respectfully requested of your
Honorable Body that:

See attached re:
Sowams Heritage Area Resolution

PLEASE NOTE:

Petition must be returned by 4:00 PM, two (2) Fridays prior to the Town Council meeting to appear on the docket of the 12-10-2025 meeting for review and possible action. It is Council policy that action may not be taken on petitions unless recommendations, if necessary, from appropriate departments are received prior the Council meeting.

DATE RECEIVED: _____

SIGNATURE

November 21, 2025

Town Council
Town of Bristol
10 Court Street
Bristol, RI 02809

ATTENTION: Town Clerk



To the Honorable Town Council,

On behalf of the Steering Committee of Sowams Heritage Area, I respectfully petition the Town Council to approve a resolution endorsing the designation of Sowams as a National Heritage Area at their meeting on December 10, 2025, as follows:

Whereas, the town of Bristol, RI is one of nine Massachusetts and Rhode Island municipalities on the northeastern shore of Narragansett Bay that comprise Sowams, the ancestral homeland of the Massasoit Ousamequin who welcomed the Pilgrims in 1621 and who forged a 50-year alliance that changed the course of history,

Whereas, this landscape is also the setting for other pivotal events in our nation's history. Here, King Philip's War began and ended; Roger Williams founded Rhode Island and the seeds of religious freedom took root; the business of slave trading ignited a trans-Atlantic economy, and moral outcry; and the dynamic interplay of land and water defined the history and culture of the region for millennia.

Whereas, National Heritage Areas are grassroots, community-driven programs that celebrate a region's contribution to America's heritage; are designated by U.S. Congress, but are not owned, controlled, or managed by the federal government; and are intended to encourage heritage conservation, community development, education, and regional collaboration,

Therefore, we are proud to join the communities of Sowams in endorsing the designation of Sowams as a National Heritage Area.

Attached are letters of support from CommerceRI and the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society. Other letters of support will be forthcoming. For more information, visit sowams.org and/or refer to the attached summary of the draft feasibility study.

Congressional designation of Sowams as a National Heritage Area will shine a spotlight on Bristol's significant role in our nation's history. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Andrea Rounds | andrearounds@me.com | 15 Milk Street, Bristol, RI 02809



November 17, 2025

Dear Sowams Heritage Area Steering Committee,

The Board of Directors of Rhode Island Commerce enthusiastically supports designating the Sowams region as a National Heritage Area.

We are pleased to join our partners throughout Sowams in stewarding the heritage, environment, and cultures of this nationally significant region.

Our mission is to help you achieve yours. At Rhode Island Commerce Corporation, we understand that each business requires different kinds of support at different times. Our team of Business Engagement Specialists are here to assist your business in navigating any obstacles you may face. Whether you are considering launching a startup, seeking to expand your existing company or looking for assistance with red tape reduction, Rhode Island Commerce's mission is to help you achieve your goals. We offer business assistance, access to funding and red tape reduction for companies of all sizes.

As a quasi-public agency, we serve as a government and community resource to help businesses expand in, and relocate to, Rhode Island. Our Specialists work with Rhode Island businesses in all industries and at all stages.

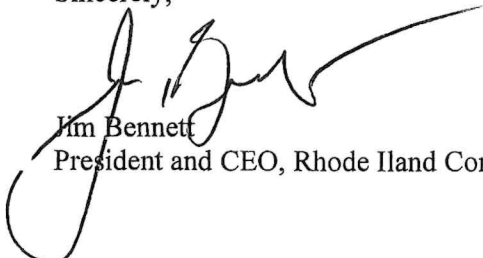
In fact, we are already working collaboratively with you on Sowams Heritage area.

Providence is one of nine Massachusetts and Rhode Island municipalities on the northeastern shore of Narragansett Bay that comprise Sowams, the ancestral homeland of the Massasoit Ousamequin who welcomed the Pilgrims in 1621 and forged a 50-year alliance that changed the course of history. This landscape is also the setting for other pivotal events in our nation's history. Here, King Philip's War began and ended; Roger Williams founded Rhode Island and the seeds of religious freedom took root; the business of slave trading ignited a trans-Atlantic economy, and moral outcry; and the dynamic interplay of land and water defined the history and culture of the region for millennia. National Heritage Areas are grassroots, community-driven programs that celebrate a region's contribution to America's heritage; are designated by U.S. Congress, but are not owned, controlled, or managed by the federal government; and are intended to encourage heritage conservation, community development, and regional collaboration.

We see opportunities for collaboration with Sowams in endorsing the designation of Sowams as a National Heritage Area and proud to join the communities of Sowams in endorsing the designation of Sowams as a National Heritage Area.

We believe that as a National Heritage Area, the nine towns and cities that comprise Sowams tell important stories about America's complex beginnings. We are pleased to be part of the Sowams NHA initiative and are committed to lifting all the communities who call this place home.

Sincerely,



Jim Bennett
President and CEO, Rhode Island Commerce



BRISTOL HISTORICAL AND PRESERVATION SOCIETY

48 Court St., P.O. Box 356, Bristol, RI 02809

Telephone (401) 253-7223

www.bhpsri.org

To Sowams Heritage Area Steering Committee:

On behalf of the Bristol Historical & Preservation Society's Board of Directors, I am writing to express our enthusiastic and unqualified support for designating the Sowams region as a National Heritage Area. The histories of the nine towns and cities that comprise Sowams shed important light on our nation's complex founding years. This designation will elevate and emphasize these stories by providing a long-overdue national platform and bringing them to the attention of a nation-wide audience.

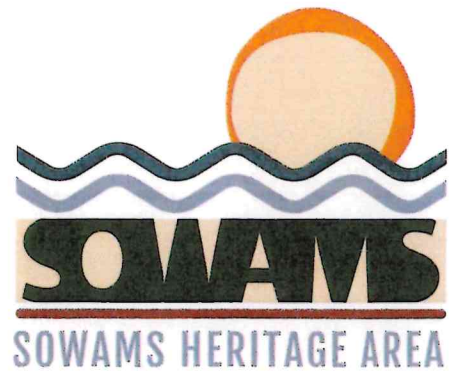
As longtime supporters of the Sowams Heritage Area, we have been pleased to collaborate on educational programs that set Bristol's history in its larger context. As such, we are deeply familiar with the Sowams Heritage Area's efforts to steward the heritage, environment, and cultures of this nationally significant region and are equally committed to serving all the communities who call this place home.

Thank you for offering us the opportunity to express our support for this initiative. We are looking forward to seeing this designation move forward, to the benefit of our entire nation.

Sincerely,



Catherine W. Zips
Executive Director



Sowams National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Summary

Sowams offers the nation a rare opportunity – to experience, in one compact place, the promise and the peril that marked America’s beginnings; to confront stories both triumphant and painful; and to foster renewed dialogue about belonging and stewardship.

By designating Sowams National Heritage Area, Congress can elevate a landscape where diplomacy once flourished, war reshaped destinies, freedom of conscience took root, and the tide of enterprise carried New England into a global age.

Designation will not only safeguard irreplaceable resources; it will invite residents and visitors alike to engage with the complex beginnings of the American story, encouraging meaningful interpretation, reconciliation, and collaborative conservation.

A Nationally Significant Place

The Sowams National Heritage Area Feasibility Study examines whether nine closely linked Rhode Island and Massachusetts communities on the northeastern shore of Narragansett Bay should be designated by the U.S. Congress as a National Heritage Area (NHA). NHAs are living, working landscapes that recognize, preserve, and share a region's important role in our country's development and celebrate its contributions to American history and culture. As grassroots, community-based programs, NHAs protect and promote a region's heritage without any form of federal government ownership, control, or management.

The Sowams Study documents a sweeping narrative that shifted profoundly in 1621, when the Pokanoket Massasoit Ousamequin welcomed Plymouth's settlers and forged an alliance that endured for 50 years until a devastating war reshaped Indigenous-colonial relations. The clash of cultures reverberated in later struggles over religious liberty, human enslavement, and industrial innovation. Sowams, the study concludes, "is the setting for one of our nation's origin stories... and ground zero for the fracturing of that alliance" whose legacy has molded American political, economic, and social life.

Spanning 140 square miles and anchored by the ancestral homeland of the Pokanoket Tribe, the Sowams National Heritage Area Feasibility Study explains why this compact landscape – nine communities bound by water, memory, and more than 12,000 years of human presence – merits a place in the National Park Service system of National Heritage Areas.

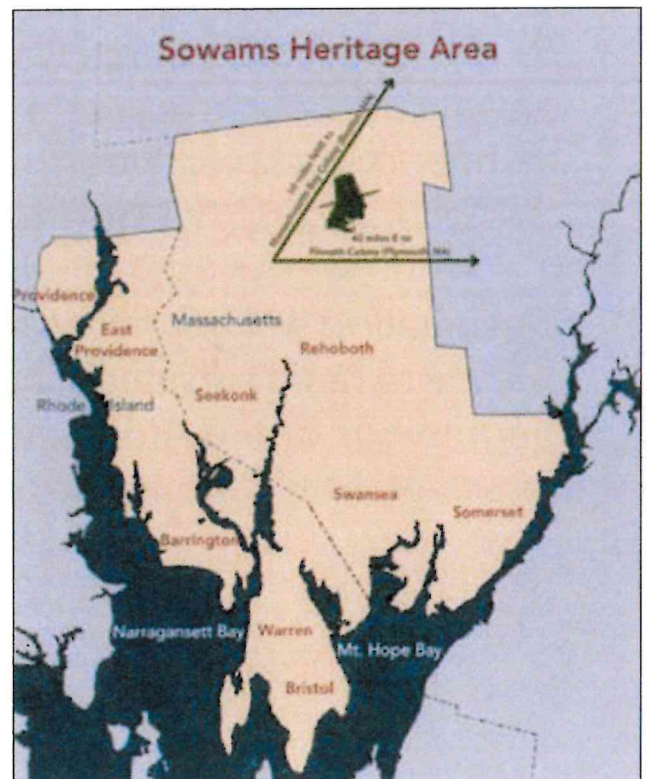


King Philip's War (1675-1676) ravaged colonial settlements and native villages throughout New England, resulting in the largest per capita fatality rate in North American history.

An Introduction to Sowams

Located on the northeastern side of Narragansett Bay, New England's largest estuary, the Sowams region is comprised of nine towns/cities—four in Massachusetts (Seekonk, Rehoboth, Swansea and Somerset) and five in Rhode Island (East Providence, Bristol, Warren, Barrington, and portions of Providence.) Within Sowams there are many rivers that break up the land mass, including the Providence River, the Seekonk River, the Barrington River, the Palmer River, the Warren River, the Kickamuit River, and the Taunton River. This nexus of land and water has defined the history and culture of the region for millennia.

The ancestral homeland of the Pokanoket Massasoit Ousamequin is 40 miles due west of Plymouth, MA, and 50 miles SSW of Boston, MA.





Sowams Heritage Area Project is led by a 15-member Steering Committee, a volunteer coalition of partners from Massachusetts and Rhode Island that represents a wide range of interests in the region, including leaders of local government, tourism entities, historical societies, museums, land trusts, the Pokanoket Tribe, and the arts and education sector. The Steering Committee commissioned Point Heritage Development Consulting, LLC (PointHDC) to assess the feasibility of creating a National Heritage Area in Sowams. The first formal step in seeking Congressional designation as an NHA, the study serves both as an analytical assessment and a tool for garnering public support.

For three years, the Sowams Heritage Area Project Steering Committee and PointHDC carried out a comprehensive public engagement strategy that provided important information for the development of the study and also helped increase the community's understanding of NHAs and the Steering Committee's cohesion and organizational capacity. The planning process included affinity group meetings; a series of community meetings; engagement of professionals with expertise in the history and cultures of the region; interviews with key stakeholders; outreach to municipal, state, and federal leaders; and discussions with Native American Tribes with connections to the study area. In the process, more than 340 meetings were held concerning the proposed National Heritage Area. The strategy also included creating a brand identity and print media, developing of a new website, and monthly electronic mailings to a list of 450 subscribers.

Although Sowams was the homeland of the Pokanoket Tribe, the surrounding landscape encompassed a vibrant mosaic of Tribes in the 17th century. Today, many descendants of those Tribes remain in the wider region of southeastern New England. Some are recognized by the federal government, some by the state governments, and some have found other ways in which to organize and recognize their communities, cultures, and history. Communication with all three of the federally recognized Tribes in the region established that they do not choose to be engaged in the initiative at this time, but would like to be kept informed. One of the primary tenets of the National Heritage Area initiative is to create a platform for all to tell their own stories and ultimately to have resources that enable the Tribes and the many other stakeholders in the region to do that. The door will remain open for future involvement. The steering committee and the coordinating entity that follows it will prioritize inclusivity while respecting Tribal sovereignty and remaining neutral in intertribal matters.



During the three-year feasibility study process, the Steering Committee of Sowams Heritage Area Project engaged more than 350 individuals, organizations and stakeholders throughout the Sowams region.



Blanket Dance, at Pokanoket Heritage Day, Warren, RI

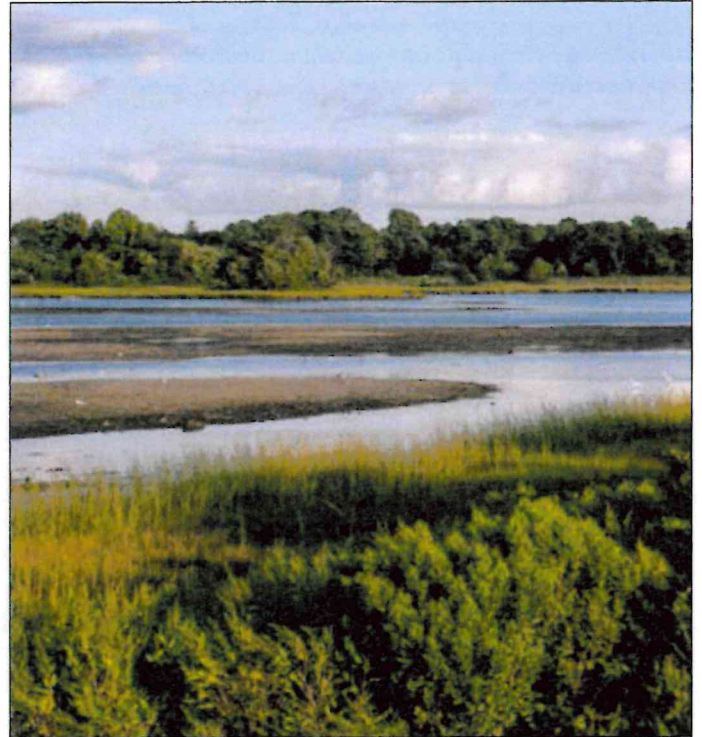
Shifting Currents and the Evolution of Place



During the Pleistocene Era, the Wisconsin ice sheet plowed through the bedrock of New England, foreshadowing a pattern of disruption and renewal that would define the Sowams landscape up to the present day. This glacial devastation would leave a primeval network of life-giving water and fertile soil, which, around 12,000 years ago, drew the first humans to this place. For millennia, the land was stewarded by the Pokanoket people until people from other worlds discovered it, coveted it, fought for it, and took it.

Sowams is not only a setting for the birth of the nation, but also a microcosm of the American quest for individual freedom – that intractable and inspiring, cruel and complex drive to break away from the old and make something new of ourselves and our lives. The Separatist Pilgrims escaped the Old World on the Mayflower and sought refuge and isolation in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Roger Williams escaped the religious strictures of Plymouth Colony and established Rhode Island, where individuals could be free to practice their faith as their own consciences dictated. American colonists escaped British rule and fought for “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

The network of rivers, streams and estuaries that empties into Narragansett Bay gave the people of Sowams the freedom to travel beyond the bounds of their own communities. Water was their connection to new worlds, products, ideas, and possibilities, which created a climate for economic freedom and innovative manufacturing. But progress came at the expense of enslaving Indigenous and African people and exploiting immigrants who followed in waves over the next 350 years. The survival, determination to create better lives, and continued contributions of all of these cultures are part of the region’s success.



The Mill Gut estuary in Colt State Park, which spans 464 acres of walking paths, biking trails, and picnic grounds, overlooks Narragansett Bay in Bristol, RI.

The 21st century ignited the Fourth Industrial Revolution, liberating Sowams in ways that were inconceivable only a generation earlier. Suddenly, everyone could access information and communicate around the world in seconds; artificial intelligence became imbedded in daily life; and industry began to recognize the lucrative benefits of a green and blue economy.

Throughout the centuries of upheaval in Sowams, the Pokanoket have been listening to nature’s beating heart. Today they continue to offer hope for the future, joined by many others in communities that cherish the land as they do and who honor those who lived and died here.

Significance, Themes, Resources and Boundary

The primary organizing elements of an NHA are a nationally significant story; the historic, cultural, and natural resources remaining on a landscape that support that story; and the capacity of communities to weave their heritage into a living landscape. While sharing significant histories may be one of the goals of an NHA, the ultimate purpose of designating an NHA is to use that history to build regional collaboration and opportunities in historic preservation, living traditions, natural resource conservation, recreation, education, heritage tourism, and community development.

As articulated in the Statement of Significance, *"Sowams, the homeland of the Pokanoket Tribe and their leader, the Massasoit Ousamequin, is the setting for one of our nation's origin stories, the critical alliance that established 50 years of peace between the Indigenous Tribes that had been part of the land for millennia and the English settlers arriving on the Mayflower. Sowams is also ground zero for the fracturing of that alliance during King Philip's War, a devastating conflict that ultimately encompassed Indigenous and colonial communities throughout New England. At the heart of that conflict lay divergent worldviews of law, land ownership, and personal freedom. In Sowams, the legacy of those differences has shaped the region's complex history from prehistory to the present."*

To convey the national significance of Sowams, the feasibility study frames five interwoven interpretive themes that examine this history and help residents and visitors understand the area's contribution to our nation's heritage.



Golrick and Cottrell, Irish grocers in 1910 on Federal Hill, Providence, RI.



Executives Marcia and Julie Blount are carrying on the legacy of their late father, Luther H. Blount, whose ship-building company now designs and builds state-of-the-art crew transfer vessels for the offshore wind sector.

The Time and Place Where Two Worlds Met

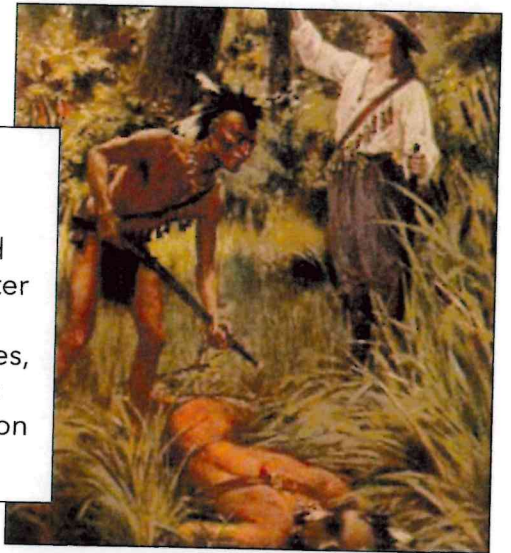
In 1621 in their homeland of Sowams the Pokanoket Tribe, whose ancestors had lived in the region for 12,000 years, and the English settlers arriving on the Mayflower forged a 50-year non-aggression treaty. Each saw their mutual survival in that watershed alliance, but their divergent concepts of law, land ownership, and personal freedom were worlds apart and would change the course of history.



The Massasoit Ousamequin (Yellow Feather) and Governor John Carver of Plimoth Colony signed a mutual protection alliance in 1621.

Causes and Consequences of King Philip's War

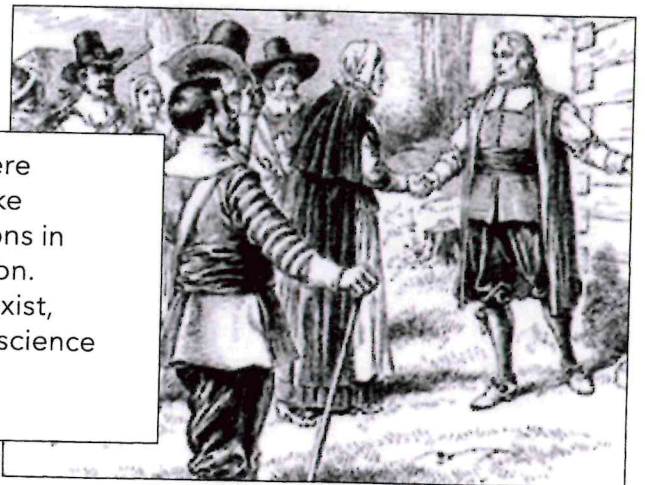
As the English colonists increasingly encroached on Indigenous lands, their alliance with the Pokanoket unraveled disastrously, erupting in King Philip's War, a devastating conflict that encompassed Indigenous and colonial communities throughout New England. After the war, the confiscation of Tribal lands, and the attempted cultural genocide, removal, and enslavement of the Pokanoket and other Tribes, realigned the region based on race, setting a dangerous precedent for the subjugation of all Native Americans in the westward expansion across North America.



The murder of Metacomb (King Philip) in the Miery Swamp, at the foot of Potumtuk (Mt. Hope) in Bristol, RI.

Freedom of Conscience and the Birth of Rhode Island

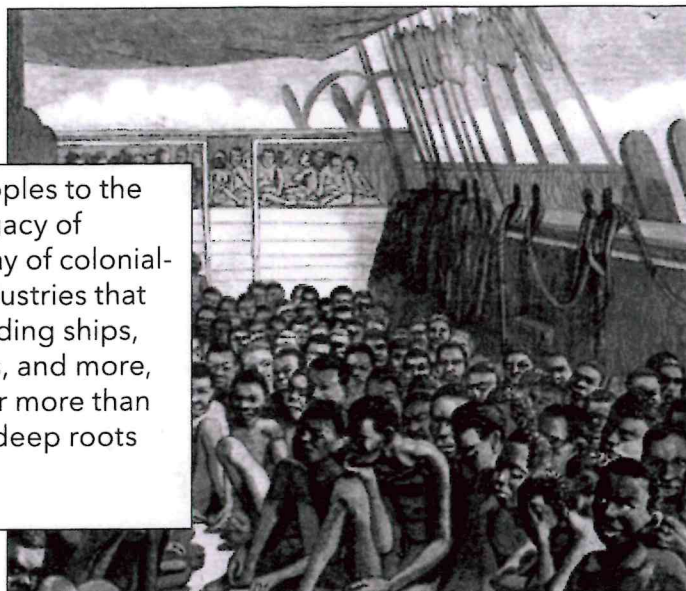
As settlers moved westward fleeing communities that were governed by strict sectarian principles, Baptist leaders like Roger Williams and John Myles, and Quaker congregations in Somerset and Providence, championed religious toleration. Williams fostered a community where diverse beliefs coexist, laying the foundation for the concepts of freedom of conscience and separation of church and state that are enshrined in Rhode Island's charter.



Shunning overt displays of worship, the early Baptists, like Roger Williams, met in people's homes.

The Era of Trading Enslaved People

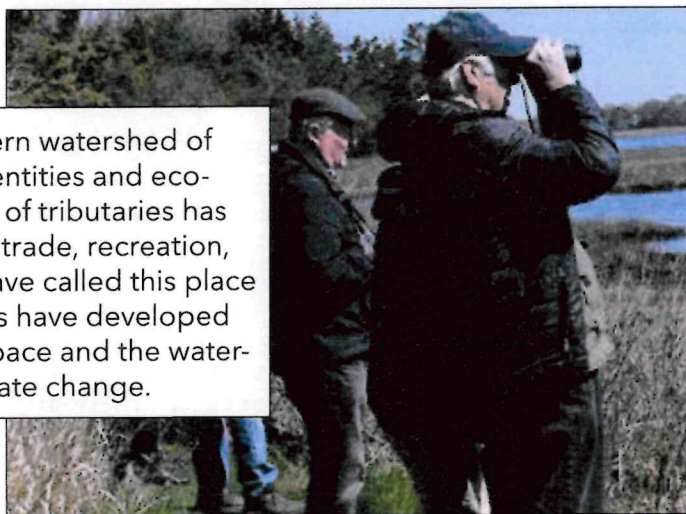
From the forced labor of Indigenous and African peoples to the economic prosperity it brought to the region, the legacy of enslavement in Sowams reflects the complex interplay of colonialism, global commerce, and human suffering. The industries that were established to support and supply the slave trading ships, including shipwrights, food suppliers, rum distilleries, and more, buoyed the economy of the entire Sowams region for more than a hundred years and left a legacy of prosperity with deep roots in slave trading.



Cargo of enslaved people, part of the Triangle Trade for sugar, molasses, rum, and manufactured goods around the turn of the 18th century.

The Interplay of Land and Water

This place where land meets water on the northeastern watershed of Narragansett Bay has defined the history, cultural identities and economic evolution of Sowams for millennia. Its network of tributaries has enriched the landscape and enabled transportation, trade, recreation, and industrial innovation for the communities who have called this place home. Over the past decades, the citizens of Sowams have developed a conservation ethic to preserve and protect open space and the watershed, which has become even more critical with climate change.



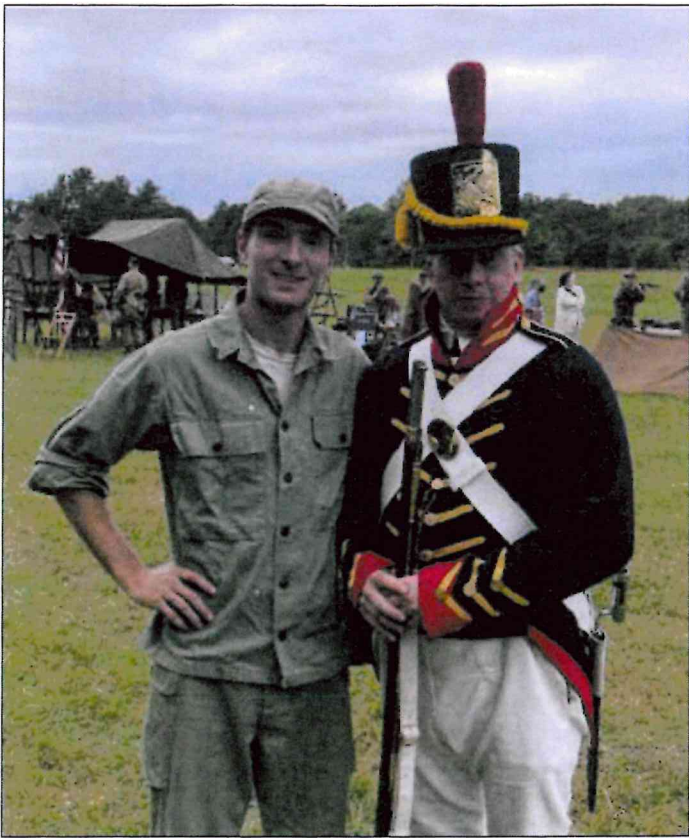
Stewarded by the Barrington Land Trust, Osamequin Nature Preserve is a popular spot for birdwatching in Barrington, RI.



Resource Inventory

Following the development of interpretive themes, the Sowams Heritage Area Project Steering Committee, in collaboration with the PointHDC planning team, assessed the type, number, and integrity of resources within the study area to determine how they contribute to a nationally distinctive landscape and illustrate the proposed themes. They developed an inventory of 187 historic, cultural, and natural resources that still retain the integrity needed to bring these themes to life. Tribal sacred places, colonial homes and farmsteads, battlefields, working waterfronts, and estuarine habitats form what the National Park Service calls a "strategic assemblage," a geographically concentrated group of natural, cultural, historic, and recreational sites that together support and illustrate a nationally distinctive landscape.

Sowams includes 96 properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including 17 historic districts. Two are National Historic Landmarks (NHL) that date to the 17th century - the First Baptist Meetinghouse and the College Hill District. Of the region's historical, cultural, and natural assets, 130 are open or accessible to the public, although some are on a limited or seasonal basis. Building on these resources are opportunities for developing thoughtfully curated exhibits, signage, and place-based storytelling. Sowams can not only share the region's histories with visitors, but also create meaningful educational opportunities for students and residents.



The USS Constitution 1812 Marine Guard participated in the "History Through the Ages" historical timeline event on the historic Redway Plain in Rehoboth, MA.



Department of Africana Studies/Rites and Reason Theatre, Brown University, Providence, RI develops new works and supports emerging artists blending scholarship and creativity on stage.

Boundary

The process of determining the boundary for a National Heritage Area is a multi-step process that layers historic, geophysical, cultural, and functional criteria on the landscape. Together they shape a cohesive region that is both meaningful and practical to manage. The proposed boundary for Sowams was informed by research and public outreach including surveys, site visits, resource assessments, and stakeholder input. Based on the ancestral homeland of the Pokanoket Tribe, it encompasses four towns in Massachusetts and two cities and three towns in Rhode Island. The area measures approximately 140 square miles. Generally, Narragansett Bay and Mount Hope Bay define the NHA's western and southern border. To the north, the border follows the northernmost edges of Providence, East Providence, Seekonk, Rehoboth, Swansea, and Somerset. The Taunton River in Somerset forms the eastern boundary.



WaterFire Festival, Salute to Veterans, Providence, RI.

Throughout the planning process, the Sowams Heritage Area Steering Committee has been motivated by a clear sense of purpose, as articulated in their mission, vision, core values and guiding principles. They envision “a vibrant network of diverse communities sharing a deep sense of belonging... where all who experience Sowams honor this sacred place and help steward the land and water that has defined the culture of this region for millennia.”

In successful NHAs, governance is not solely the function of a central coordinating entity, but rather the result of sustained engagement among organizations, governments, Tribes, businesses, and individuals who build upon the region’s identity, resources, and stories. The proposed Sowams NHA is already developing such a partnership network that is participatory, transparent, and reflective of the region’s wide-ranging voices. In this model, the coordinating entity does not dominate but instead facilitates, enabling partners to take active roles in advancing common goals.

The recommended model for Sowams National Heritage Area is to maintain nonprofit status under 501(c)(3) regulations and transition Sowams Heritage Area Project, Inc. into a formal coordinating entity. An independent nonprofit coordinating entity allows for equitable service across all municipalities in both states, the ability to leverage diverse funding sources, and the establishment of transparent governance and financial accountability systems that meet the standards of the National Park Service.

The financial projections for a Sowams National Heritage Area account for current congressional appropriations for new NHAs, which are \$150,000 per year for the first three years while the organization conducts its required management plan, and \$300,000 or more annually thereafter. The five-year budget reflects these funding assumptions, which must be matched in a 1:1 on basis through a combination of state grants, foundation support, local government contributions, earned income, and private donations.

	Five-year Projection:					
	Annual Operating Revenues and Expenses					
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Total Revenues *	312,750	323,300	384,100	655,400	681,450	2,357,00
Total Expenses	180,216	218,500	250,000	385,700	444,675	1,488,091
Profit/Loss	123,534	104,800	134,100	269,700	236,775	868,909
* Does not include in-kind support from volunteers and partners						

On May 28, 2025, the Sowams Heritage Area Steering Committee conducted an organizational retreat, which was a pivotal step towards transitioning the initiative from a planning phase into formalized governance and operational development. The Steering Committee also identified several new early implementation projects and programs to raise visibility, build partnerships, and align with the mission of Sowams Heritage Area. The retreat concluded with a detailed set of action steps, responsibilities, and deadlines to ensure steady momentum toward building a durable and inclusive organizational framework for Sowams Heritage Area.



Outreach workshop at the Sowams Steering Committee retreat in the Bristol Art Museum, Bristol, RI.



Kyle Dufur, captain of the fully restored 1938 Black Watch ocean racing yacht in Somerset Boatyard of Bristol Marine, Somerset, MA.

Analysis Of National Heritage Area Criteria

Following the guidelines of the National Park Service, the feasibility study evaluates Sowams Heritage Area using ten criteria for federal designation. In essence, NHAs feature “an assemblage” of natural, historic, or cultural resources that together represent distinctive aspects of American heritage and reflect traditions, customs, beliefs, and folklife that animate the national story. They conserve natural, cultural, historic, and scenic features, which retain integrity and provide outstanding recreational opportunities. Most importantly, they are supported by a robust partnership network in their communities - government, businesses, and heritage stakeholders - who together provide the capacity and financial resources to successfully implement the program. Based on these criteria, the region’s significance to the nation’s heritage is undeniable and deserving of recognition as a National Heritage Area.

Next Steps

Over the course of the feasibility study, a set of recommendations came out of discussions with stakeholders, community members, regional leaders, and the Steering Committee.

Pursue designation by the U.S. Congress of Sowams National Heritage Area in collaboration with regional leaders.

Continue to build and expand on the early implementation programs developed by the Sowams Heritage Area Project Steering Committee and its heritage partners.

Continue to grow the NHA partnership network through continued outreach and collaboration.

Continue to inform Tribes from the surrounding areas of the effort, leaving the door open for their future involvement.

Implement the recommendations of the governance section to build a board and staff that can meet the evolving needs of the organization.

Grow fundraising to ensure a sustainable organization and NHA.



On November 15, 2024, 348 years after the English expropriated Sowams from the Pokanoket Tribe, Brown University returned Potumtuk (Mt. Hope) land to them, Bristol, RI.

The entire feasibility study, with detailed budget projections and appendices, is available on request at info@sowams.org.