

WBUR ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE A YEAR IN REVIEW: 2022



WBUR's Barbara Moran gets the scoop from one of the goats in the barn at Round the Bend Farm in South Dartmouth, MA. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

In 2022 WBUR's Environment & Climate team worked to become the leading source for environmental news in the region, keeping pace with an increase in breaking environmental news and seizing opportunities to pursue meaningful, in-depth enterprise reporting. Thanks to your early investment and generous support, WBUR boasts an environmental reporting team that produces coverage that drives the conversation around critical issues such as energy industries, environmental justice, the state's climate preparedness, and a variety of solutions-oriented journalistic endeavors.

With two new full-time team members—including a brand new position—and recent awards, the team is proud of what it has accomplished and is eager to tackle new and bigger challenges throughout 2023. Please read on for more on what your partnership with WBUR has helped produce.

MEET THE TEAM

WBUR's Environment and Climate team charged into 2023 as a powerful unit of four. In previous years, the team boasted an editor and two reporters. The larger team means individual team members can focus on more enterprise, feature reporting without sacrificing breaking news coverage.

The existing senior editor position was also elevated to assistant managing editor, increasing the role's strategic responsibility and expanding its editorial influence within the organization. This shift underscores WBUR's commitment to environmental reporting and incorporating this work within all parts of the newsroom.



Kathleen Masterson joined WBUR as assistant managing editor in July 2022. A multimedia journalist who has reported on science, the environment and agriculture for more than a decade, she is a familiar voice to WBUR. Masterson was among the first reporters in the early years of the New England News Collaborative, the regional journalism collective WBUR helped launch and still works with regularly. Previously Kathleen was stationed at Vermont Public Radio where she covered the environment, energy and agriculture and received a national Edward R. Murrow Award for her work.



Paula Moura joined the team in September 2022 as a reporter. She was previously a Tow Fellow on FRONTLINE, where she worked on digital stories and as a reporter for the documentary “Police on Trial” about the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder. Moura has covered the Brazilian Amazon extensively, traveling to Brazil to investigate deforestation for The New York Times and report on solutions for sustainable economic growth and conservation for Foreign Policy’s podcast “Heat of the Moment.” She is fluent in Portuguese and Spanish.



Barbara Moran, correspondent, has twice been awarded the National Association of Science Writers’ highest honor, the Science in Society Award. Her work at WBUR since joining in 2018 focuses on climate science and climate solutions, with “as many quirky animal stories thrown in as possible.”



Miriam Wasser, senior reporter, was a staff writer for the Phoenix New Times in Arizona before starting at WBUR in 2019. She was valedictorian of Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism and her work has appeared in Boston Magazine, DigBoston and the Atlantic.



Bruce Gellerman, award-winning senior environmental correspondent, retired in 2022 after decades in journalism. He spent the many of those years in service to WBUR and the Greater Boston community.

Over the years Gellerman covered many challenging stories. While in recent years he’s reported on energy and environment, he was the first witness and reporter on the scene of the Watertown manhunt for the Boston Marathon bombers in 2013. And his collaborative investigative reporting led to the exoneration of Darrell Jones after he served 32 years in prison for a crime he did not commit. In addition to the serious, hard-hitting pieces, Gellerman produced joyful must-listens such as his feature on a professional bass player entertaining neighbors during the pandemic with a Sousaphone.



In addition to the core team, the Environment & Climate unit took on a WBUR Newsroom Fellow, an early-career journalist receiving paid training and mentoring, for the last quarter of the 2022 calendar year. **Aimee Moon** was in the newsroom on rotation since January 2022 and generated high-quality journalism, adding to the team’s reporting capacity.

AWARDS

One of the many ways WBUR tracks the impact of its journalism is through national recognition. In 2022, the Public Media Journalists Association (PMJA) announced its annual award winners, honoring exemplary work done in 2021. The awards recognize the best work in public media journalism from across the United States. Stations compete against others with similar-sized newsrooms and this year, the judges reviewed over 1,500 entries.

WBUR was recognized with second place in two categories:

- “Boston Under Water” won in the “Series” category.
- Correspondent Barbara Moran’s moving essay, “I Know The Water Is Coming. But I Can’t Bear To Sell My Family’s Cottage” in WBUR’s *Cognoscenti* column won for “Commentary.”

“Cooked,” WBUR’s innovative three-week automated newsletter (read more in the following pages) earned a finalist placement for Excellence in Newsletters among the 2022 Online Journalism Awards (OJAs) — the premier global awards that have honored excellence and innovation in digital journalism since 2000.

These honors affirm the high quality of our reporting and elevate WBUR’s newsroom and journalism on the national stage.

CLIMATE CHANGE

WBUR’s climate change coverage brings the global issue home to the Greater Boston area, showing listeners and readers just how the warming planet is affecting—and will affect—their daily lives. These stories of local relevance have national resonance and are often picked up by NPR, enabling WBUR to reach more communities with its work.

Wasser was invited onto [NPR’s national *Morning Edition* in August](#) to discuss her [extensive coverage of New England’s drought](#) throughout the summer of 2022—and what it means for the future.



The corn on Dave Dumaresq’s farm is smaller than usual because of the drought. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)



A woman carries a “No Eastie Substation” sign at a protest against the proposed East Boston electrical substation. The proposed site is behind her. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

Also in August 2022, Moran [broke down a NOAA report](#) on climate change impacts for Greater Boston, which predicts that sea-level rise may lead to nuisance flooding in Boston nearly 180 days each year by 2050. Boston has one of the highest rates of sea-level rise in the world, partly because the land is sinking about six inches every hundred years as it continues to adjust from the last ice age.

WBUR [reported on a new study that reveals hospitals in the Boston metropolitan area](#) have the third-highest risk for disruptions in care during a relatively moderate Category 2 hurricane, after Miami and New York. These hospitals will need to prepare for flooding and patient evacuations. Those in the Longwood area should be ready for power failures. Additional hospitals that are not flooded may be cut off by roads that are, making it difficult for patients to reach care and interrupting the delivery of supplies.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Knowing that communities of color are often the hardest hit by the effects of pollution and climate change, WBUR maintains a commitment to covering stories of racism and environmental justice—and serving as a watchdog to ensure the state is rolling out new climate policies equitably. Wasser, specifically, has doggedly followed important stories of energy development projects being proposed in these environmental justice communities.

Wasser continued to [report on the proposed biomass plant in Springfield](#), a form of energy production which is controversial and not universally recognized as “green.” The proposed construction was ultimately stopped. She has stayed on top of the now years-long resistance by East Boston environmental advocates to the proposed new electrical substation, which, despite justice concerns, [was given the green light in November 2022](#). The Energy Facilities Siting Board, which controls permitting for all large energy projects in Massachusetts, voted to allow Eversource to bypass the 14 remaining state and local permits it needed for the project.

Wasser also continues to investigate how the state is approaching the transition from natural gas to renewable energy, including [following the controversial proposal to build a natural gas plant in Peabody](#). Peabody is an area where residents already experience higher rates of cancer, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, coronary heart disease and stroke.

In May 2022, WBUR covered [the pile of construction debris containing asbestos](#) that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts dumped in Chelsea. A spokeswoman for the Attorney General said that the office is looking into how this debris ended up in Chelsea. MassDOT removed the debris in the days following the coverage.

WBUR works to hold those in power to account in all areas, including environmental policy and decision-making. Coverage of local incidents like those mentioned here ensure the highest level of the government is aware of the issues.

ENERGY

[A major report from the MIT Energy Initiative](#) found the development and deployment of new ways to store renewable energy will be crucial to transitioning to clean energy and averting the worst effects of climate change. WBUR reported on these findings in May 2022 and continues to dig deep on improvements in energy efficiency, storage and sustainability.

Senior Correspondent Bruce Gellerman produced a three-part series, “Fueling the Future,” explaining Massachusetts’ partnership with New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. The states are attempting to become one of four regions designated a “hydrogen hub” by the Department of Energy. The initiative is designed to lower the cost of separating hydrogen from water without the use of fossil fuels, providing a platform to build the



An employee assembles coin batteries in a low oxygen work bench at WPI. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

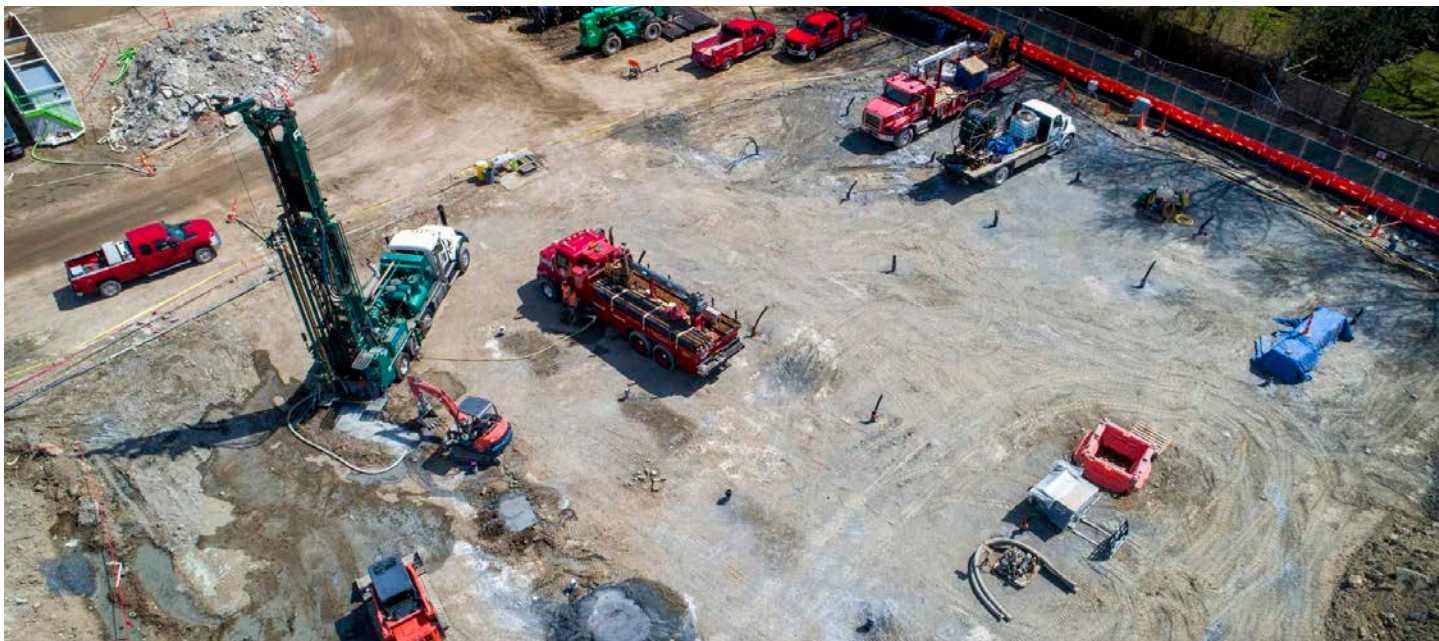


Electricity from Mayflower Wind’s offshore wind farm will be “stepped up” in voltage at the Brayton Point substation so that it can travel through the big overhead power lines more efficiently. (Miriam Wasser/WBUR)

clean technology's market.

Batteries have also been a speciality of Gellerman's energy beat. In January 2022, he informed readers and listeners [about a Massachusetts startup with a unique solution that gave dead lithium-ion batteries new life](#), which could make electric vehicles cheaper and more sustainable. [This innovative solution has national resonance and Here & Now eagerly picked up the story in March.](#)

[A different startup located in Somerville is developing batteries powered by rust.](#) They claim their low-cost, long-duration technology can store energy generated by renewable solar and wind and release it back onto the grid when sun and wind are lacking.



A drilling crew works on a vertical system of geothermal wells on the site of the new Vassal Lane School in Cambridge. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

Senior Reporter Mariam Wasser has continued to follow the story of wind power in Massachusetts, following the Environment and Climate team's landmark series on the future of offshore wind in 2021. [The offshore wind energy solution isn't perfect — and the problem of electrical transmission is a big one.](#) She is ahead of the curve in reporting on how our electrical grid needs a serious update before any significant offshore wind power can be developed.

And there was more drama in the ongoing saga with Massachusetts' largest approved offshore wind project, Commonwealth Wind. [Wasser details the company's efforts to renegotiate its contracts with local utility companies in her explainer.](#) Despite the drama, she reminds readers what's going on and why it's important.

[Gellerman reported on the geothermal projects in the commonwealth, including two schools in Cambridge.](#) Drilling deep holes to tap into geothermal energy is the most energy -efficient, cost-effective way to heat and cool buildings with no climate disrupting carbon emissions, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.



Volunteers plant seedlings from a tray of blazing star plants on the sandplain grasslands at Bamford Preserve. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)

SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM

The multitude of energy solutions offer some hope, even if they're in early stages. And offering hope is what WBUR's Environment & Climate team aims to do by reporting stories on science-based approaches to the many challenges of climate change.

- [WBUR reported on the Cool Block project in May 2022 and its work in Chelsea.](#) A city block just behind the industrial waterfront is a prime example of the urban heat islands across the U.S. Nearly every foot is covered by a roof or pavement. And so the City of Chelsea worked with various nonprofits this year to plant trees, tear up sidewalks, replace dark asphalt, and install white roofs. [NPR picked up the story for *All Things Considered*.](#) Moran followed up with a story on new science showing Boston in particular [could benefit from white roofs for cooling and heat deflection.](#)
- [Mass Audubon is conducting a pilot project to see if mussels could help hold a collapsing marsh together.](#) Coastal restoration ecologists hunted for ribbed mussels in a healthy salt marsh in Rowley, MA to transplant them into an unhealthy marsh that is eroding into the Merrimack River just a few miles away. Moran reported and also shared the story with *Radio Boston* and *Here & Now*.
- [WBUR reported on more critical land restoration in July 2022, when volunteers planted 1,000 wildflowers to restore sandplain grasslands on Martha's Vineyard.](#) Seven rare species of birds use this habitat as well as beetles, butterflies and wildflowers found almost nowhere else. As climate change threatens both human health and the natural world, experts say that protecting biodiversity hotspots like this one will offer the most bang-for-the-buck — protecting threatened species while offering other ecosystem benefits, like open space and flood protection. [This coverage was also featured on NPR's *Science Friday*.](#)
- [A new program created by the American Forest Foundation and the Nature Conservancy will pay forest owners](#) in western Massachusetts, Vermont and parts of New York to practice “climate smart” forestry — managing forests to both survive the climate crisis

and store as much carbon as possible over the next two decades.

- [Environmental advocates are also cautiously optimistic about “anaerobic digesters.”](#) Instead of food waste rotting in a landfill and emitting methane, a potent greenhouse gas, digesters capture the emissions and turn them into energy. Putting food waste in the mix doesn’t just boost digester efficiency, it also keeps those cookies and veggie scraps out of landfills and incinerators.

EXPLAINERS

Much climate science and policy is dense and complicated, and environmental advice is hard to follow and prioritize. What does it mean if an organization wants to be carbon neutral? Does conserving water in your home really help the drought? Why are electricity and gas bills rising? WBUR, thanks primarily to Wasser, is becoming known for its environmental explainers, which break down complex issues in a way that’s easy to grasp for all. The explainers are easy to quote and easy to share, which means they’re often spread far wider than WBUR’s usual networks.

After producing “[Energy prices are skyrocketing. Here’s how you can get financial help this winter.](#)” Wasser shared more on WBUR’s new daily local news podcast, *The Common*, which launched in November 2022. Featuring environmental coverage on this new platform will help WBUR reach communities and listeners new to climate reporting. [Wasser also worked closely with New Hampshire Public Radio on an in-depth explanation of what’s driving the price spike.](#) Climate issues don’t recognize regional boundaries and so the team hopes for future collaborations with other members of the New England News Collaborative.



WBUR’s Barbara Moran listens as the general manager of Savorer’s in Cambridge explains how not a single part of the pig will be wasted, including the head, and lists the various products that will be made with it at the market. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

Here are a few more explainers from this past year:

- [Get that mattress off the curb! Here's what to know about Massachusetts' new waste bans](#)
- [So you're in the market for an electric vehicle? Here's how the new federal and Mass. laws will help](#)
- [What to know about the new Mass. climate law](#)
- [How should Mass. tackle climate change? Here's what the candidates for governor say](#)

INNOVATION

One of WBUR's biggest cross-platform projects to date was a brainchild of WBUR's Environment and Climate team. "[Cooked: the search for sustainable eats](#)" was a three-week automated newsletter course that launched in May 2022. This public service aimed to help its 6,000+ subscribers (and growing) better understand the New England food system and give them real steps to reduce their "foodprint." By combining knowledge with actionable ideas, WBUR reached a new audience, who shared they were grateful for tangible info that helped them make choices in their daily lives. The newsletter course is evergreen so people will be able to sign up any time in the next year.

The project's editorial team hired students from Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition to help with research. In addition, the team fostered partnerships with several local organizations, including Edible Boston, Boston Magazine and Boston University's CSA program to expand the project's reach. [WBUR also co-produced an event about growing your own food with Grist's solutions lab, Fix.](#)

Another innovative environmental project of note is the five-part series spearheaded by *Here & Now* Co-Host Scott Tong, "Captured." The series tells the true story of a brazen attempt to dismantle the EPA during the Reagan-era and those who worked to stop it. Anne Gorsuch, then a young state legislator from Colorado, was appointed by President Reagan to lead, and quietly dismantle, the EPA. The series, which broadcast in September 2022 and is available in podcast form, also addresses how the government and corporations can be held accountable for damaging the environment.



EVENTS

In addition to the event produced in concert with the “Cooked” newsletter, WBUR hosted three additional environmentally focused events for the community at CitySpace at The Lavine Broadcast Center. On April 21, 2022, as part of Earth Week, [Wasser led a panel conversation about the promises and pitfalls of offshore wind in New England.](#)

On April 27, 2022, [WBUR partnered with the Environmental League of Massachusetts \(ELM\) to host a forum with the gubernatorial candidates of Massachusetts.](#) In this nonpartisan event (WBUR invited all major candidates, though not all accepted the invitation), the candidates discussed the most pertinent energy and environmental issues affecting the commonwealth. A hundred people attended this event in person and almost 300 watched the event via livestream.

On November 21, 2022, [author, educator and environmentalist Bill McKibben joined WBUR for a conversation.](#) McKibben has written over a dozen books about the environment and founded 350.org, the first global grassroots climate campaign, which has organized protests on every continent for climate action.

IMPACT

In addition to its weekly average broadcast reach of 320,000 local listeners, one of the metrics WBUR uses to assess reader engagement is the average amount of time spent on a webpage. If someone spends a long time on the page or the article, it means they’ve been more deeply engaged with the content than someone who quickly clicks in and out. For digital stories posted by the Environment and Climate team in 2022, the average time on the page is quite high. Most recently, the average time a WBUR reader spent on a webpage was 5 minutes and 14 seconds. Many of the environmental stories, a few of which are highlighted below, exceed this average, showing that WBUR environmental stories have gained traction with many people through many different outlets.

- Gellerman’s January 2022 coverage of the lithium batteries received almost 30,000 pageviews and the average time spent on the page was just under 7 minutes. The story was broadcast on *Morning Edition* and was shared on websites like WPI, Ascend Elements, Not All News is Bad, Newsbreak.com, and Argonne National Laboratory.
- WBUR Correspondent Martha Bebinger’s April essay [on the challenges of shopping to avoid plastic](#), released as part of the “Cooked” newsletter, received over 23,000 pageviews and the average time spent on the page was 6 minutes and 30 seconds. This piece was broadcast on *Morning Edition* and *Radio Boston* and shared nationally by NPR’s “Shots” health news column. It was also shared through the Environmental News Bits website.
- The Cool Block project in Chelsea, mentioned earlier, received almost 21,000 pageviews and the average time spent on the page was 7 minutes and 4 seconds. In addition to NPR’s inclusion on *All Things Considered*, NPR also shared the story on its Facebook page. It was cited in a report by SanAntonioReport.org; shared on the websites of City of Lancaster, PA Environmental News Bits and Newsbreak.com; and tweeted out by MACleanEnergyCenter, among others.

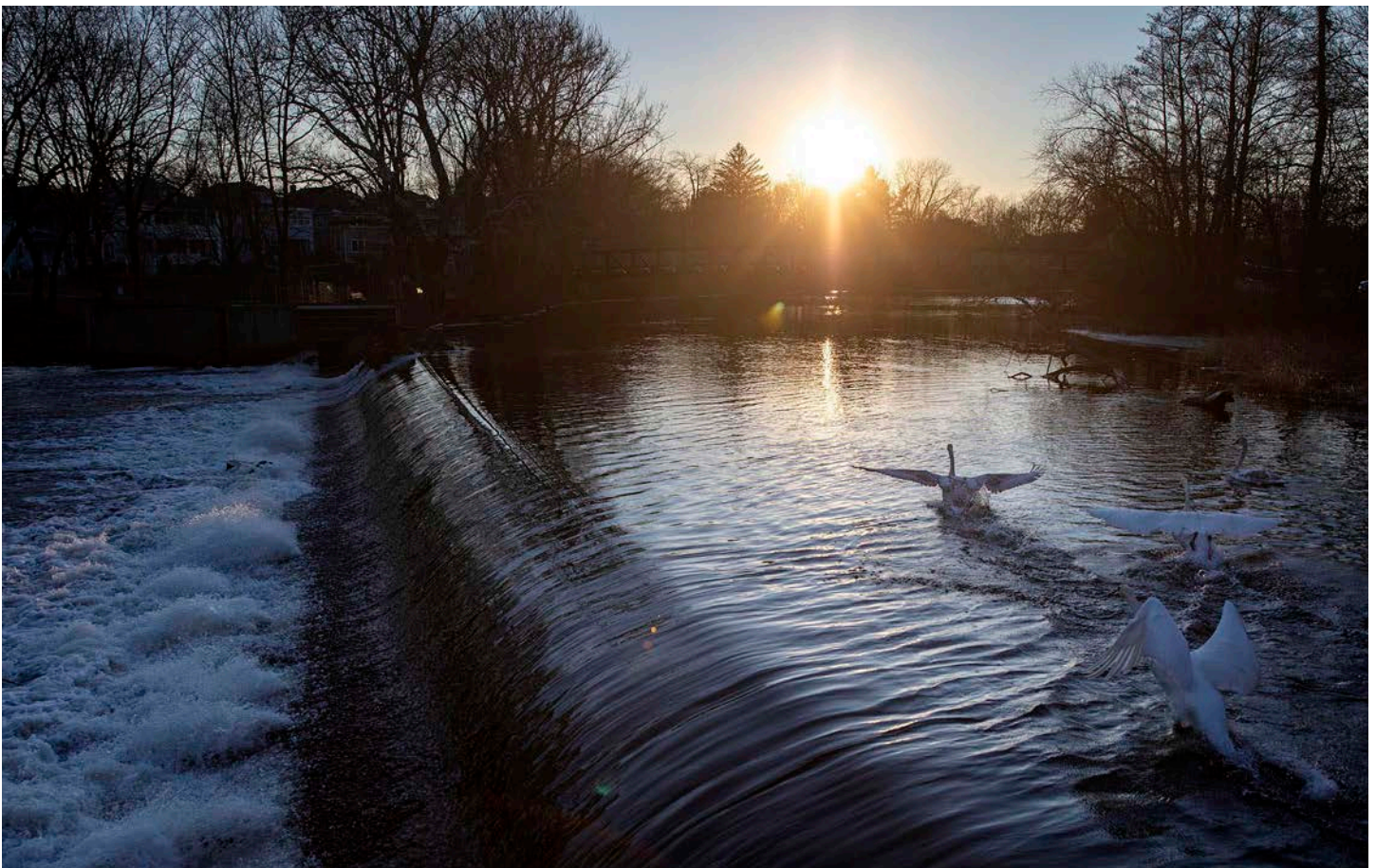
In addition to the above reach and engagement, the Environment & Climate team continues to have an impact in the WBUR newsroom, educating colleagues and encouraging other news desks to write with an environmental lens. In 2022, the team led an information session with experts on emerging attribution science and extreme weather, learnings that were put into practice in the station’s coverage. Moran mentored two early-career reporters who moved to the Environment desk for several months while Wasser was on leave, and who continued to report stories about the climate and environment upon returning to their jobs elsewhere in the newsroom.

THANK YOU

WBUR’s Environment and Climate team reports on climate change, pollution, environmental justice, energy and ecology in New England and beyond. The team is dedicated to being the top source of environmental coverage in the region, bringing you stories with local relevance and national resonance that you won’t hear anywhere else.

We want to reach audience members who care deeply about environmental news, as well as those who think the issues don’t matter to them, or feel overwhelmed by the big stakes. We’re able to do this thanks to your generosity and support.

WBUR breathes life into dry subjects like state legislation, flood insurance and water chemistry. We hope our enthusiasm—for everything from sewage outfalls to battery technology—is contagious.



A group of swans cross the Charles River by the Watertown Dam. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)