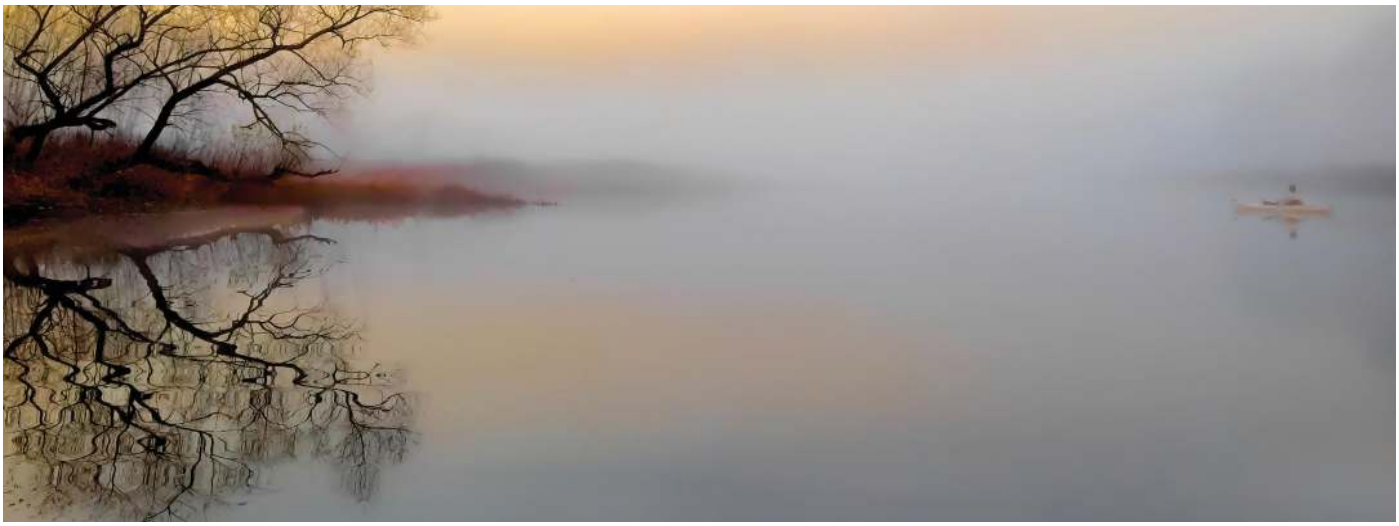
MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance

The RIVER Advocate

HEALTHY RIVERS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

SPRING 2017



Dawn mist on Sudbury River.

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Protecting rivers from drought

Mass Rivers and several of our members groups, including the Charles River Watershed Association, the Ipswich River Watershed Association, OARS, and others, have been working with both the administration and the legislature to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of the state's drought response.

While we can't make it rain, we can improve the way our state responds when it doesn't rain. This past summer's drought highlighted what can happen when our response is too little, too late, and...inconsistent. In 2016, Massachusetts was hit with the most severe drought the state had experienced since the 1960's, resulting in dry streams, loss of aquatic wildlife, and several municipal water supply emergencies. Despite many months of below-average precipitation, the state's "Drought Management Task Force" wasn't convened until July, and when the Governor and members of his administration finally asked the public to conserve water, it was too late for many streams. The state government, it turns out, currently can't require outdoor watering restrictions; it can only recommend them. Some towns independently responded to the drought with a patchwork of watering restrictions. Many residents continued watering their lawns while others in nearby towns complied with total watering bans. The uneven watering restrictions created confusion and resentment as neighboring towns fell under sometimes contradictory water restrictions or even none at all.

To its credit, the Baker administration recognized that the state needed to improve its drought resilience, and agency staff have been working to improve both our assessment of and response to future droughts. We hope to see an updated Drought Management Plan out by this year's growing season. We would like to see the Plan include a gradually escalating series of restrictions on non-essential outdoor water use, beginning when a drought is declared.

We also worked closely this summer with Rep. Carolyn Dykema (D-Holliston) and Sen. Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton) on new legislation which would give the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs the authority to limit outdoor water use for non-essential purposes. Mass Rivers' organizational and individual members helped garner nearly 50 co-sponsors for this important legislation (HD2398/SD1828).

As the effects of climate change increase, there will be more severe summer droughts. Therefore, we must respond effectively to sustain streams and water supplies for as long as possible. The proposed legislation was sent to the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture to be evaluated. Please tell your state Representative and Senator to support this legislation so we can improve our state's response to drought and protect our beautiful rivers for future generations!

MARCH, 2017

From the Director

It appears that our new president doesn't think clean air and water are part of Making America Great again.

The new administration has already announced its support for dumping more coal mining waste into streams, begun to roll back a Clean Water rule, and turned its attention to dismantling the EPA, the agency responsible for safeguarding the nation's air and water. The president is asking for a 31% cut to that agency's already inadequate budget. The EPA has just 15,000 staff. Compare that to the Department of Defense's 742,000 civilian employees. I can't tell you how this story will unfold over the next few months, let alone years. However, I can share with you some of Mass Rivers' responses to the changes:

- We are keeping an eye on developments in D.C. that affect rivers and will share them with you, along with actions you can take to make your voice heard. Please let us know if you'd like to receive these updates by emailing gabbyqueenan@massriversalliance.org. You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter.
- We're just back from a trip to Washington to meet with our federal delegation. We advocated for Wild and Scenic Rivers and the EPA, thanked them for their support for the environment, and to asked what else we can do to help.
- We're connecting with national and other New England river groups to offer up our – and your – assistance. We will ask our you, our members, to lend a hand elsewhere in the country if we can help make a difference. We are fortunate to have a large (and growing) membership of individual and organizational members to deploy on behalf of the environment!
- We're continuing to do what we do best: strengthen river protection here in Massachusetts. This is, of course, even more important now. By the time you read this, we will have held our first-ever "Lobby for the Rivers" day on March 30. Top on our list: droughts (see front page) and a water quality bill to strengthen river protection in the state.

A recent Boston Globe opinion piece by Columbia University's Jeffrey Sachs said, "Mexico can answer back, other countries can plan to match the United States in tax cuts. But who will speak up for the Earth? Who will speak up for our children and grandchildren who would inherit a degraded planet? That will have to be the job for all of us."

As always, thank you for your loyal support, and for your willingness to speak up for the Earth.

Julia

Boston rally to support local EPA staff. Left to right: Nancy Hammett (Mass Rivers board member), Julia Blatt, Nancy Goodman of ELM

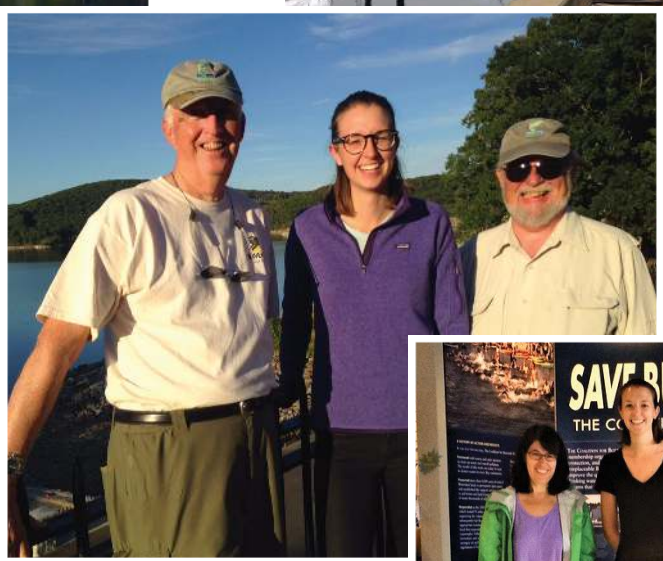
Mass Rivers Organizational Members

Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
Blackstone River Coalition
Boxborough Conservation Trust
Charles River Conservancy
Charles River Watershed Association
Charlestown Waterfront Coalition
Clean Water Action
Connecticut River Watershed Council
Conservation Law Foundation
Environment Massachusetts
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Essex County Greenbelt Association
Friends of Alewife Reservation
Friends of the Assabet River NWR
Friends of the Blue Hills
Friends of the Malden River
Greater Northfield Watershed Association
Green Berkshires
Green Newton
Groundwork Lawrence
Hoosic River Revival
Hoosic River Watershed Association
Hop Brook Protection Association
Housatonic Valley Association
Ipswich River Watershed Association*
Jones River Watershed Association
Kestrel Land Trust
Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust
Mass Audubon
Massachusetts Assoc. of Conservation Comm.
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Mass Org of State Engineers and Scientists (MOSES)
Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Millers River Watershed Council
Mystic River Watershed Association
Nashua River Watershed Association
Neponset River Watershed Association*
North and South Rivers Watershed Association*
OARS, for the Assabet, Sudbury, & Concord Rivers
Parker River Clean Water Association
Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay Riverkeeper
Sea Run Brook Trout Coalition
Shawsheen River Watershed Association
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council
Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
Ten Mile River Watershed Council
The Nature Conservancy*
The Trust for Public Land
The Trustees
Trout Unlimited, Greater Boston Chapter
Trout Unlimited, Nor'East Chapter
Trout Unlimited, Pioneer Valley Chapter
Wastewater Advisory Committee (WAC)
Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)
Weir River Watershed Association
Westfield River Watershed Association
Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee
Westport River Watershed Alliance

**Leadership Members*

Mass Rivers Hits the Road

From the Berkshires to the South Shore, this past year Mass Rivers staff hit the road to visit 23 of our member organizations. We tried our hand at fly-fishing in the Swift River (no luck, but we had fun), kayaked on the Westport River, and saw an alarmingly dry Parker River main stem. We sat down with our member organizations to learn about their goals and their challenges. These visits to Massachusetts' rivers and "their people" across the state were some of the highlights of the year for Gabby and Julia. Our conversations have helped us understand water issues across the state while strengthening our partnerships within the Alliance. We look forward to continuing these visits in 2017!



Clockwise from top left: Mass Rivers ED Julia Blatt with Ivan Usaach, Coordinator for the Millers River Watershed Council in front of the Millers River; Ivey St. John of the Charlestown Waterfront Coalition; Buzzards Bay Coalition office; Mass Rivers Policy Specialist Gabby Queenan flanked by Trout Unlimited Pioneer Valley Chapter's President and Secretary Gerald Eves Jr. (left) and Gary Metras (right) with the Quabbin Reservoir as a backdrop.

Breaking News

Governor Baker just reintroduced a bill opposed by environmentalists last legislative session that would allow Massachusetts to take over the water pollution permitting program from U.S. EPA. Under the federal Clean Water Act, EPA currently regulates discharges of stormwater, wastewater and industrial pollution into our waterways. Mass Rivers and other environmental groups oppose this bill because it will provide no environmental benefit and cost MA taxpayers millions of dollars each year. The state's environmental protection agency, MassDEP is also already struggling to perform basic monitoring, assessment, reporting and research on water quality across the state. Mass Rivers will again oppose this bill.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

Mass Rivers' mission is to protect and restore rivers across the Commonwealth.

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Staff

Julia Blatt, *Executive Director*
Gabby Queenan, *Policy Specialist*
Elissa Grad, *Development & Ops Manager*

Annual Meeting & Dinner a Success

A big thank you to our 140+ attendees for making our 2016 Annual Meeting & Dinner our best and biggest event yet! We recognized our river champions, celebrated our shared successes, and took inspiration from our keynote speaker Jamie Williams, president of the Wilderness Society. Jamie shared stories about overcoming political hurdles to protect wild lands and rivers, a message that is particularly timely. Kathy Baskin, former Water Policy Director of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and EkOngKar Singh Khalsa, Mystic River Watershed Association's former Executive Director, received our "River Friend" and "River Advocate" awards, respectively. We look forward to seeing you all again in December 2017!

Left to right: Honoree Kathy Baskin, Julia Blatt and John Reinhardt accepting award for honoree EK Singh Khalsa