MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance

The RIVER Advocate

HEALTHY RIVERS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

FALL 2019

Ducks. Photo by Mark Lindhult

State Funding Increased for Rivers

We are delighted that the latest state budget includes increases for our three top budget priorities! For the second year in a row, with your help and the help of our partner organizations, we have secured significant budget increases for river restorations, dam removals, culvert replacements, water quality monitoring, drought and flood mapping and more!

The state environmental agencies responsible for this work include the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Fish and Game's Division of Ecological Protection and the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Office of Water Resources. We've been working with a great coalition of partners on this issue at the State House throughout the session, including the Appalachian Mountain Club, Environmental League of Massachusetts, The Nature Conservancy, Mass Audubon, and the Massachusetts Organization of State Engineers and Scientists. A big thank you to our members who came to Lobby for the Rivers Day, made phone calls, sent emails and helped us advocate for rivers - we did it!

Sewage Notification Bill - On the Move!

Sometimes it's better not to be a leader. "With approximately three billion gallons of sewage going into waterways in Massachusetts every year, we are currently the leader in New England when it comes to actual volume of sewage going into the water," noted Mass River Policy Director Gabby Queenan, at a recent press conference hosted by member organization Environment Massachusetts. Although it's a disheartening bit of information, the first step in fixing a problem is recognizing that one exists. We were pleased that the story was picked up by multiple media outlets, following a year of sewage spills - and good press coverage of the problem.

The good news is that state legislators have moved our sewage notification bill forward! The bill, H.3976, would require public notification when raw sewage is discharged into waterways. The legislation, sponsored by Senator Pat Jehlen (D-Somerville), Representative Linda Dean Campbell (D-Methuen), and Representative Denise Provost (D-Somerville), was reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA). House and Senate versions of the bill are backed by more than 80 lawmakers, with strong bi-partisan support.

The legislation now awaits review by the House Committee on Ways and Means. We greatly appreciate the leadership of ENRA Co-Chairs Representative Smitty Pignatelli and Senator Anne Gobi in moving this bill forward early in the legislative session. We also wish to acknowledge the support of multiple partner organizations in this effort, including the Mystic River Watershed Association, Environment Massachusetts, Merrimack River Watershed Council, Connecticut River Conservancy, Charles River Watershed Association, and Neponset River Watershed Association.

Swift River, July 28, 2016. Photo by Mark Lindhult

FALL 2019

From the Director

SAVING THE WORLD, ONE RIVER AT A TIME

One of my favorite stories is the one about the girl who threw starfish back into the sea*:

A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement.

She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, "Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can't save all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!"

The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, "Well, I made a difference to that one!"

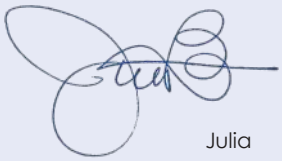
Everything about this story speaks to me – its young female hero, her empathy for the beached starfish, and her determination to persist at what appears to be an impossible task, despite the apathy, skepticism, and perhaps, even ridicule, of those watching from the sidelines.

But what I like most about it is the way the story zooms in from the big, general picture – and our perspective – of those thousands of hapless, but anonymous, starfish, to the much smaller, individual picture – and makes us consider the world from the perspective of one starfish, whose life was saved by the young girl's action.

I find this story relevant to the work we do here at Mass Rivers. You might wonder, for example, why we put so much effort into supporting dam removals when the state has over 3,000 dams, and in a typical year, less than ten are removed. There are lots of good reasons, many of which appeal to your rational brain – such as increasing climate resiliency and decreasing public safety hazards. State investment in dam removals leverages tremendous value by prying loose federal and private funding for river restoration. Certainly, the more dams come out, the more it will become obvious that river restoration brings multiple benefits to communities, including recreational opportunities and a decrease in nuisance plants, some of which can pose health hazards, like toxic "blue-green algae," or cyanobacteria. It is our hope and expectation that this work will be scaled up in the coming years.

But I hope that we don't lose sight of the fact that each river is a world unto itself, with a myriad of creatures that depend on it for life, from tiny invertebrates, dragonflies and damselflies, to trout, great blue herons, frogs, turtles, beavers, muskrats, and otters. When we bring even one river back to life, whether by removing a dam, improving its water quality, or restoring its flow, we save the world for these wild creatures with whom we share our planet. We, too, can say, "Well, I made a difference for that one!"

Thank you for being part of that difference.



Julia

*I first heard this story from my rabbi in our synagogue. It's called "The Star Thrower," by Loren Eiseley, and this adapted version comes from City Year's website.

MASSACHUSETTS RIVERS ALLIANCE ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

Association to Preserve Cape Cod
Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Berkshire Natural Resources Council*
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
Blackstone River Coalition
Boxborough Conservation Trust
Buzzards Bay Coalition
Center for Coastal Studies
Charles River Conservancy*
Charles River Watershed Association*
Charlesgate Alliance
Charlestown Waterfront Coalition
Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council
Clean River Project
Clean Water Action
Connecticut River Conservancy
Conservation Law Foundation*
Deerfield River Watershed Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Environment Massachusetts
Environmental League of Massachusetts*
Farmington River Watershed Association
Friends of the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Blue Hills
Friends of the Malden River
Friends of the Ten Mile
Greater Boston Chapter Trout Unlimited*
Greater Northfield Watershed Association
Green Newton
Greenbelt
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
League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust
MA RI Council of Trout Unlimited*
Mass Audubon*
Mass Organization of State Engineers and Scientists*
Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Millers River Watershed Council
Mystic River Watershed Association*
Nashua River Watershed Association*
Neponset River Watershed Association*
Nor'East Chapter of Trout Unlimited
North and South Rivers Watershed Association*
OARS, for the Assabet, Sudbury, & Concord Rivers*
Ocean River Institute
Parker River Clean Water Association
Pioneer Valley Chapter #276 Trout Unlimited

Member organizations, continued

River Merrimack
Save the Bay - Narragansett Bay Riverkeeper
Sea Run Brook Trout Coalition*
Shawsheen River Watershed Association
Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter*
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council*
Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
Ten Mile River Watershed Council
The Muddy Water Initiative
The Nature Conservancy*
The Trust for Public Land
The Trustees
Wareham Land Trust
Wastewater Advisory Committee to the MWRA
Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee
Weir River Watershed Association
Westfield River Watershed Association
Westfield River Wild and Scenic River Advisory Committee
Westport River Watershed Alliance

**Leadership members*

West Springfield Dam. Photo by Gabby Queenan.

Pushing Back on Hydropower

While some people consider it "green energy," hydropower generation seriously harms rivers and their wildlife. Here in Massachusetts, despite our 3,000+ dams, the hydropower potential is insignificant, compared to potential wind and solar energy sources, because most of our rivers are small, and slow-moving. The majority of the dams on our rivers are old and serve no useful purpose; yet they hurt rivers and wildlife by raising water temperature, lowering water quality, and interrupting the movement of wildlife. They can also create safety hazards for swimmers and boaters.

Mass Rivers recently led the charge against changes to state hydropower dam regulations that would incentivize dam owners to keep dams in place, with minimal oversight. The proposed updates from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources would require hydropower generators to undergo just one review to receive a lifetime of state benefits as providers of "environmentally sustainable energy." Currently, hydropower operators must undergo a new review every five years, as changes in the riverways and technological advances can prompt new requirements to protect river ecology and recreation. Mass Rivers Policy Director Gabby Queenan testified against the new proposed regulations at a hearing in Amherst, and drafted a letter opposing these changes, signed by 70 organizations from across New England. We are grateful to our many partners for supporting this effort and to all of our individual members who submitted their own comments opposing this change.

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Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

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

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Gabby Queenan, Policy Director
Gretchen McClain, Development & Ops

Save the Date!

Please mark your calendars for our next Annual Meeting & Dinner, which will take place on Wednesday, December 4th from 6-9 pm at the First Church in Belmont. We are delighted to announce that our guest speaker will be award-winning journalist, author, and podcaster Florence Williams, who will share stories from her latest book, The Nature Fix.

Florence Williams, Annual Meeting Guest Speaker.

This year we are delighted to recognize four outstanding river champions in Massachusetts: House Speaker Robert DeLeo; The Nature Conservancy's Legislative Director, Steve Long; Mass Audubon's Legislative Director, Jack Clarke; and Vandana Rao, the state's Director of Water Policy. We'll raffle off a new kayak, auction off a great stay at a vacation home (or two) and celebrate the year's successes. This event has sold out the past two years, so get your tickets early - we look forward to seeing you there!

Event details and tickets are available on the Mass Rivers website (massriversalliance.org). Questions? Call Gretchen McClain at 617-714-4272.