MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance
2343 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge, MA 02140
617-714-4272 • www.massriversalliance.org

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

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

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Katharine Lange, Policy Specialist
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Sarah Bower, Technical Specialist

Join us for our virtual Annual Celebration!

We hope you'll join us virtually for our Annual Celebration (formerly known as our "Annual Meeting and Festive Dinner" - we hope to share a meal with you again in 2021). This year's Annual Celebration will take place Wednesday, December 2, at 7:30 p.m. The hour-long event will feature a conversation with Boston Globe environmental reporter David Abel, a new video, news about recent progress we've made working together to protect and restore rivers, and a preview of plans for next year. And we are raffling off a beautiful new canoe, courtesy of our friends at Paddle Boston! Please visit our website for registration information. We look forward to seeing you.

David Abel

MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance

The RIVER Advocate

HEALTHY RIVERS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

FALL 2020

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Sewage Notification Bill

We are delighted that the Massachusetts House of Representatives unanimously (159-0) passed the sewage notification bill (now H.4921) in July. This was made possible by the skillful and dedicated leadership of bill lead sponsor Rep. Campbell and co-lead Rep. Provost. We are deeply grateful to everyone who reached out to their state representatives. Your advocacy made all of the difference in garnering unanimous support for this issue.

The bill requires sewage system operators to issue a public advisory within two hours of a sewage discharge and every eight hours thereafter until the discharge has ended. A final advisory is required within two hours of the conclusion of the discharge. The advisories are to be made available online; sent via email or text message to subscribed members of the public; submitted to the two largest local news organizations; and distributed to the local board of health, all affected municipalities, the state Department of Public Health, and the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The bill has been in progress for over six years and is a priority for state legislators, local officials, and environmental advocates, who cite its urgency to protect both public health and the well-being of the environment. It is formally endorsed by more than 80 bipartisan state legislators, over 140 local officials from communities statewide, and 46 leading state environmental organizations.

We also want to recognize the core team of our member organization collaborators who worked closely on this legislation with us and helped to make sure this bill had strong support: Mystic River Watershed Association, Charles River Watershed Association, Merrimack River Watershed Council, Connecticut River Conservancy, Neponset River Watershed Association and Environment Massachusetts.

The legislation is now in the Senate. We will keep you updated about opportunities to weigh in with your state senator to ensure the timely passage of the bill this year.

Mosquito Control Bill

In July, the Massachusetts House and Senate enacted the final version of the Mosquito Control Reform bill and the Governor signed the bill into law. We want to thank everyone who joined our call to action to call and email legislators to improve this bill. While we are still concerned about a few provisions in the bill, your outreach and advocacy led to several significant improvements.

Proposed by Governor Baker in April, the original bill would have dramatically expanded the state's authority to eradicate mosquitoes by chemical spraying. For rivers, chemical spraying can harm water quality, aquatic life and beneficial insects that are critical to river ecosystems and food chains. For this reason, we worked closely with the legislature to improve this legislation.

We would like to thank the many legislators who worked with Mass Rivers and our coalition of environmental partners to speak up in favor of proposals to amend and improve the legislation. We would like to especially recognize Sen. Jo Comerford, Rep. Carolyn Dykema, Rep. Mindy Domb, Rep. Natalie Blais and Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, all of whom worked tirelessly to improve this legislation.

The Governor's original bill would have allowed the Mosquito Reclamation Board, upon making a determination that there is an elevated risk of arbovirus, to spray pesticides anywhere in the state, with no advance notice, and with no requirement to allow an opt-out process for spraying. There was also no sunset for these expanded authorities once a declaration of elevated risk was made.

Photo by Mark LIndhult

After moving through both the House and the Senate, the resulting final bill was substantially strengthened, as it incorporated some basic environmental protections. We are grateful that we were able to build in several strong protections for both the environment and human health in this legislation. We are most proud of the inclusion in the bill of the new Mosquito Control for the Twenty-First Century Task Force. Our current mosquito management system is a relic from the 1950s, and we hope that the Task Force's recommendations will lead to a more modern system that incorporates the most up-to-date science about effective mosquito management and environmental protection. Mass Rivers has a seat on this Task Force and we will be coordinating with our environmental advocacy partners to move the strongest environmental proposals forward in the Task Force. We will keep you apprised of opportunities to weigh in during the implementation process.

FALL 2020

From the Director

DISRUPTION...AND OPPORTUNITY

Mass Rivers has an unusual dual mission: to protect and restore the state's rivers and streams, and to strengthen and connect our community of 77 member organizations. The two halves of our mission are really one, of course, because a stronger, more connected community can do a better job of protecting our rivers. We are extremely proud of the progress we've made improving river protection in Massachusetts over the past decade, but we've always felt we could do more to bring our member groups together. Our challenge is that those groups are spread throughout the state and beyond, and no matter where we hold our meetings, it's just too far away for many of our members to travel.

This year's pandemic changed all that. Beginning in April, we offered our groups the chance to meet via Zoom with a new program we call "Mass Rivers Connects." We set up monthly one-hour meetings for educators, fundraisers, scientists, executive directors, and board members. For each meeting we asked participants, "How are you adapting to the pandemic? What have you tried that's worked well? Do you have a challenge you'd like to bring to the group?" We talked about collecting water quality data while social distancing, and how to take in-person fundraising events virtual. We shared ideas for adapting educational programs to a distanced learning environment. We talked about managing and communicating with staff during a pandemic, and keeping morale up. We also held special everybody-is-invited virtual meetings on the drought, and on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As of today, we've convened over thirty productive meetings. It's wonderful to see people from Nantucket and North Adams on the same call, and it's even better to hear them share advice and information. While, like everyone else, I miss seeing people in person, I have enjoyed getting to know our member organizations better, through these discussions with staff, volunteers, and board members. Our members have not hesitated to share their best ideas and resources with each other, and long-time staff and volunteers have warmly welcomed newcomers. This, to me, is community.

These ongoing conversations with our members have brought home to me again, and again, how fortunate I am to be part of this community of smart, creative, and generous people bound together by a mutual love of rivers. While I fervently hope the pandemic comes to an end soon, I also hope we can sustain this level of connection within our geographically dispersed community in the months and years to come.

Thank you for being part of the Mass Rivers community. We hope to see YOU at our (virtual) annual meeting on December 2. As always, thank you for your loyal support! We couldn't do this without you.

Julia

MASSACHUSETTS RIVERS ALLIANCE ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

Key Leadership Members:

Charles River Watershed Association
Ipswich River Watershed Association
Mystic River Watershed Association
The Nature Conservancy
Neponset River Watershed Association
Trout Unlimited, Nor'East Chapter
(Key Leadership Members pay dues of $1000 or higher)

Leadership Members:

Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Center for Coastal Studies
The Charles River Conservancy
Conservation Law Foundation
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Greater Northfield Watershed Association
Hoosic River Revival
Mass Audubon
Mass Org of State Engineers and Scientists (MOSES)
Nashua River Watershed Association
North and South Rivers Watershed Association
OARS, for the Assabet, Sudbury, & Concord Rivers
Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay Riverkeeper
Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter
Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council
The Trustees
Trout Unlimited, Greater Boston Chapter
Trout Unlimited – MA RI Council
(Leadership Members pay dues of $250-$1000)

Member Organizations:

Association to Preserve Cape Cod
Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
Blackstone River Coalition
Boxborough Conservation Trust
Buzzards Bay Coalition
Charlestown Waterfront Coalition
Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council
Clean River Project
Clean Water Action & Clean Water Fund
Connecticut River Conservancy
Deerfield River Watershed Association
Environment Massachusetts
Farmington River Watershed Association
Fort River Watershed Alliance
Friends of the Assabet River NWR
Friends of the Bass River
Friends of the Blue Hills
Friends of the Malden River
Friends of the Ten Mile and Bucklin Brook
Green Newton
Greenbelt
Groundwork Lawrence
Hoosic River Watershed Association
Hop Brook Protection Association
Housatonic Valley Association
Jones River Watershed Association
League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust
Massachusetts Assoc. of Conservation Commissions.
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Millers River Watershed Council
The Muddy Water Initiative
Nantucket Land Council
Ocean River Institute
Parker River Clean Water Association
River Merrimack
Shawsheen River Watershed Association
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
Ten Mile River Watershed Council
The Trust for Public Land
Trout Unlimited, Deerfield River Watershed Chapter
Trout Unlimited, Pioneer Valley Chapter
Wareham Land Trust
Wastewater Advisory Committee (WAC) to the MWRA
Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee
Westfield River Watershed Association
Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee
Westport River Watershed Alliance
(Member Organizations pay dues of up to $250)

Photo by Mark LIndhult

Statewide Significant Drought

The entire state of Massachusetts has been in a gradually worsening drought since the beginning of the summer. In early fall, most of the state was in a Level 2, or "Significant Drought", with the Southeast drought region, the Miller River watershed, and the Charles River watershed at Level 3, "Critical Drought." Although it's been understandably overshadowed by the pandemic, the drought has had serious impacts throughout the state, including fish kills, the growth of toxic algae in several waterbodies, over 1,0000 fires in the state, and several municipal water supply emergency declarations.

Mass Rivers sits on the Drought Management Task Force as one of only three public members (the majority of this group is comprised of state and federal agency officials). The role of this group is to evaluate a series of metrics and determine how much of the state is in drought, and at what level. At each meeting, we present photos and data from around the state showing what drought looks like on the ground, and make the case for stronger water conservation measures. If you see strong evidence of drought in your watershed, please take a photo and send it to us so we may share the scene with the Task Force. We are also working with state officials beyond Task Force meetings to improve their drought communications strategy. It's crucial that the public knows when we are in drought, and more importantly, what they can do to lessen drought impacts to local ecosystems and our water supply. For more information on what you can do you to mitigate drought, visit the state's drought website: www.mass.gov/ma-drought-management.

Fort RIver staff gauge in Amherst showing that river at a historic low in late September. Photo by Brian Yellen

CREATING ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE THROUGH ART

Art in the Flow Series

As advocates, we often rely on science and data - lots of it - to make our arguments for protecting rivers. We do our best to supplement our data and talking points with photos, but let's face it, artists have what can feel like an unfair advantage when it comes to reaching not just heads, but hearts. Art can make us laugh, cry, wonder, and most importantly, care.

Curious about how creative people think about the way their work touches environmental issues, Mass Rivers has teamed up with five different artists and arts organizations in the Boston area (and beyond) to offer a virtual series spotlighting the important role of art and artists in the environmental movement. Join us on Wednesdays this fall at 7:30 as we talk to and sample the work of playwright Chantal Bilodeau, choreographer Jessie Jeanne Stinnett, composer Oliver Caplan, muralist David Fichter, and singer Avi Salloway. We guarantee you will come away both moved and inspired.

We wish to thank the talented artists who have agreed to participate in the new series, and our presenting partners at Central Square Theater, Boston Dance Theater, Juventas New Music Ensemble, Somerville Arts Council, and Club Passim. A big thank you to Mass Rivers board member Nagesh Mahanthappa, for incubating and spearheading this project. The series is free - to join us, just visit our website and look for the link to register. We hope to see you at an Art in the Flow conversation soon!

Greta Huang

Will Hollinger

Rachel Percy

Summer 2020 Interns

We had a full team of interns this past summer at Mass Rivers!

Mass Rivers Summer 2020 Policy Research Interns Will Hollinger (Tufts University '21) and Greta Huang (Brookline High School '22 and Teen JUST-U S) worked with former Policy Director Gabby Queenan on a best practices report for water-related bylaws and ordinances in the Commonwealth. The report is available on our website and has been distributed to environmental organizations and planning agencies across the state. Horizon Starwood (UMass '20) worked with Policy Specialist Katharine Lange on an advocacy guide for our member organizations, which will be completed later in the spring. Rachel Percy (Macalester College '22) and Shea Brams (Belmont High School '21) worked with Executive Director Julia Blatt on the new "Exploring Your Rivers" section of the Mass Rivers website.

Welcoming Two New Staff, and a Fond Farewell to a Third

Mass Rivers is growing! We are pleased to announce that Katharine Lange joined our team in July as our Policy Specialist and Sarah Bower will be joining us in November, in the new role of Technical Specialist. Katharine earned her Master's of Public Administration and Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Environmental Planning and Management from the University of Connecticut. She previously worked for the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, advocating for conservation policy on behalf of the state's 137+ land trusts. Katharine also attended UConn to earn her Bachelor's in Political Science and Human Rights. An avid hiker and cyclist, Katharine has spent the past few months exploring the rivers, bike trails, and high peaks of Massachusetts and points north.

Katharine took over the responsibilities of our former Policy Director Gabby Queenan, who left at the end of August to pursue a Masters degree at Tufts University. During Gabby's four years with Mass Rivers, she took our policy program to that "next level," establishing multiple partnerships; serving as a resource for our member organizations, state staff, and legislators; and spearheading many successful state legislative and budget initiatives. We are proud of these achievements and excited for Gabby as she embarks on this new phase in her career.

Katharine Lange

Sarah Bower

Sarah recently graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a M.S. degree in Natural Resource: Soil and Water Resource Management. While there, she studied the effects of storms and urbanization on nitrogen removal and greenhouse gas emission dynamics in fluvial wetlands and headwater streams in Massachusetts' Ipswich River watershed. Between college and graduate school, she worked on various environmental health projects at the New York State Department of Health, such as the Hudson River Fish Advisory Outreach Project, the Climate and Health Adaptation and Monitoring Program, the NYS Zika Surveillance Project, and a multisite birth defects study (BD-STEPS). Sarah earned her Bachelor's degree in Geoscience, with a minor in Biology, from Hobart and William Smith. In her spare time, she enjoys riding bikes, exploring nature trails in New England, and playing soccer.

Sarah will be helping our member organizations use regulatory tools such as the Water Management Act and the Clean Water Act to better protect streamflow and water quality.

Please join us in welcoming Katharine and Sarah. You can reach them directly at katharinelange@massriversalliance.org and sarahbower@massriversalliance.org.