MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance

The RIVER Advocate

HEALTHY RIVERS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

SPRING 2020

From the Director

I hope this newsletter finds you and your families in good health and spirits. I am writing this just a few weeks after we all – or those of us who could – began working from home, and it's hard for me to imagine how our world will have changed when you read it.

I hope you are able to spend some time outside. I have always loved and appreciated our natural environment, but in just a few short weeks, the outside world has taken on a whole new layer of importance for me. Just before those of us who were able to, retreated to our homes, I reluctantly postponed a long-planned lunch with a former board member. She urged me to make time for a one-hour walk each day I worked at home. So far, I have taken this advice to heart (rain or shine), and I'm pretty sure, if anything keeps me sane and hopeful, it will be those walks.

Rivers offer a wonderful alternative way to be outside without putting your (or anyone else's) health at risk. By the time you read this, it should be just about warm enough to take a canoe or kayak out on your local river. If you don't have access to a boat, walk along the shore. Find a sunny spot to observe nature or read. Bring your camera.

Mass Rivers member organizations, large and small, and their supporters deserve a great deal of credit for providing us with walks in the woods, and healthy rivers to paddle. Thanks to these land trusts, watershed organizations, and environmental advocates, we have access to nature in our own towns and cities. These outdoor spaces provide much-needed respite, as we struggle with a global health crisis here in Massachusetts.

At Mass Rivers we were sorry to have to cancel or postpone our spring events, but we're continuing our advocacy work to support river health, and the river advocacy community. As an alliance of 75 member groups, we're also in a unique position to bring people together virtually, so we can encourage each other, and share strategies for continuing this important work as a more dispersed, but still active and connected community. We have started to do this as well. Your contributions enable us to respond nimbly to these new challenges, and we are grateful.

Thank you for your support. Stay safe. And make sure you get your "Nature Fix," as our friend Florence Williams would say.

Julia

Mass Rivers hosts EPA Regional Administrator

In February, Mass Rivers hosted a meeting with new EPA Region 1 Administrator Dennis Deziel, several of his senior staff overseeing the agency's water programs, and about 30 representatives from our member groups. The purpose of the meeting was for us to provide our members with an opportunity to meet with the EPA's highest appointed official in New England, hear his priorities for the agency, and ask questions, share suggestions, and raise concerns. According to Regional Administrator Deziel, agency priorities include improvements to the water pollution permitting (NPDES) program, finalizing the state's stormwater (MS4) permit modifications following the settlement of litigation, climate adaptation work with wastewater treatment plants and stormwater management, and improved nutrient management, among others.

Meeting participants raised concerns regarding EPA enforcement rates for Clean Water Act violations, how the outcome of a U.S. Supreme Court case over a subsurface discharge in Maui might affect us here in Massachusetts, and how the recent narrowing of jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act put in place by the federal administration would affect river protection in Massachusetts. We appreciated EPA Region 1 leadership's willingness to sit down with us, and we look forward to continuing the dialogue.

Moving Climate Change Legislation Forward

Together with partners from both the climate adaptation and climate mitigation community, we have been working with the legislature to pass the Greenworks bill. This legislation, *An Act relative to Greenworks* (H.3997), is a bond bill introduced by Massachusetts House Speaker Robert DeLeo to improve the state's climate resiliency. Passage of the bill would establish a $1 billion, 10-year grant program to fund clean energy, energy efficiency in Massachusetts. In addition, the new program would fortify infrastructure and reduce municipal costs. The bill also establishes a $50 million Green Resiliency Fund for low-interest loans that would match the Greenworks infrastructure grants program, focusing funding on community resiliency improvements.

We have also been working closely with our partners and legislators to strengthen the bill. Changes our coalition has successfully advocated for include: ensuring funding for water infrastructure projects that would improve climate resiliency in local communities (such as funding for wastewater treatment plant upgrades to limit sewage overflows); incentivizing regional collaboration and, ideally, watershed-scale planning by adding language authorizing regional planning agencies and watershed groups to serve as contracting entities for Greenworks projects; adding nature-based solutions as eligible project types for grant funding; and adding criteria to prioritize funding for environmental justice communities that are likely to be hardest hit by the impacts of climate change.

This proposed legislation is important for both river and community resiliency. When communities are able to make critical infrastructure upgrades that reduce pollution (such as stormwater treatment efforts) and improve river connectivity (such as culvert replacements and dam removals), rivers become healthier systems that are better able to support wildlife and people. Climate change is testing our aging infrastructure in new ways and communities are struggling to respond. It is essential that we give them the tools and resources to make the right investments for the long haul.

This past month, we joined a diverse coalition of partners in testifying in support of the legislation before the Massachusetts Senate Bonding Committee. We will continue to work with the Senate to improve the legislation and move this critical set of proposals forward.

MASSACHUSETTS RIVERS ALLIANCE ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

Association to Preserve Cape Cod
Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
Blackstone River Coalition
Buzzards Bay Coalition
Charlestown Waterfront Coalition
Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council
Clean Water Fund
Connecticut River Conservancy
Deerfield River Watershed Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Environment Massachusetts
Farmington River Watershed Association
Friends of the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge
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 Association of Conservation Commissions
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Millers River Watershed Council
Muddy Water Initiative
Nantucket Land Council
Ocean River Institute
Parker River Clean Water Association
Pioneer Valley Chapter #276 Trout Unlimited
River Merrimack
Save the Bay - Narragansett Bay Riverkeeper
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
Wareham Land Trust
Wastewater Advisory Committee to the MWRA
Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee
Westfield River Watershed Association
Westfield River Wild and Scenic River Advisory Committee
Westport River Watershed Alliance

continued, page 3

Organizational Members, continued

LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

OARS
Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Center for Coastal Studies
Charles River Conservancy
Charles River Watershed Association
Conservation Law Foundation
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Greater Boston Chapter Trout Unlimited
Hoosic River Revival
Ipswich River Watershed Association
MA RI Council of Trout Unlimited
Mass Audubon
Mass Organization of State Engineers and Scientists
Mystic River Watershed Association
Nashua River Watershed Association
The Nature Conservancy
Neponset River Watershed Association
Nor'East Chapter of Trout Unlimited
North and South Rivers Watershed Association
Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter
Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic
River Stewardship Council
The Trustees

The Federal Corner

Beginning last year, Mass Rivers has been working more closely with our national partners to oppose federal efforts that would harm our rivers and streams. To keep you up to speed with these efforts, we've added this new segment to our newsletter. Below are a few recent highlights:

Navigable Waters Protection Rule. This rule replaces the Obama administration's Clean Water Rule by narrowing the jurisdiction of the Federal Clean Water Act, our founding doctrine for river protection. The final rule eliminates protections for ephemeral streams, vernal pools, groundwater affecting surface waters, and isolated wetlands. ***The federal administration's own analysis suggested that over half of the nation's wetlands and a million miles of streams will lose protections as a result of this new change.*** We submitted comments opposing the new rule and shared action alerts with our member organizations encouraging their opposition of the rule as well. Though the new rule was issued in January, it is being vigorously challenged by multiple national advocacy organizations in courts around the country.

National Environmental Protection Act. This Act requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. In January, the federal administration proposed rollbacks to the Act that ***would limit the projects agencies must assess for environmental effects and it would restrict the ability of communities and organizations to comment on proposed projects.*** We joined several state and national partners in opposing this rollback by submitting comments earlier this month.

Clean Water Act Section 401. ***The EPA released a proposed rule that would undercut state and tribal authority under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act, which empowers states and tribes to review the impacts of many different types of federally licensed projects on waterways.*** Section 401 has been used to protect water bodies and other natural, historic and cultural resources from projects that contaminate waterways and degrade fish habitat. These reviews have included major pipelines, dams, filling of wetlands, and other federal permitting and licensing actions. We submitted comments opposing the new rule and shared action alerts with our member organizations encouraging their opposition of the rule as well. We anticipate that the new rule will be issued in May 2020 and we will keep our membership apprised of what these new changes may mean for our state.

Photos by Mark Lindhult

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

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

Board Officers

Mark P. Smith, *President*
Emily Scerbo, *Vice President*
Andrea Franz, *Treasurer*
Paul Beaulieu, *Clerk*

Board Members

Anna Aguilera, Wayne Castonguay, Roger Colton, Ian Cooke, Mary Griffin, Nancy Hammett, Andy Magee, Nagesh Mahanthappa, Deirdre Menoyo, Pam Resor, E. Heidi Ricci, Eve Vogel

Staff

Julia Blatt, *Executive Director*
Gabby Queenan, *Policy Director*
Gretchen McClain, *Membership & Ops*

Annual Meeting 2019

Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo with Julia

A lively crowd of about 200 gathered in Belmont on December 4 to eat, drink, celebrate the year's achievements, and then listen, rapt, as author Florence Williams made the scientific case for spending time outside. The evening also included awards to river champions Vandana Rao, Steve Long, Jack Clarke, and Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo, an auction, a raffle, and recognition of Executive Director Julia Blatt's ten-year anniversary leading Mass Rivers. We love the way this event brings together our supporting members, our organizational members, and agency colleagues every year. A heartfelt thank you to the many volunteers, and businesses whose donations of time, talent, goods, and services made the evening possible.