MASSACHUSETTS
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Rivers Alliance

The RIVER Advocate

HEALTHY RIVERS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

FALL 2021

North River in Marshfield.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

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

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Staff
Julia Blatt, Executive Director
Sarah Bower, Technical Specialist
Katharine Lange, Policy Specialist
Gretchen McClain, Development & Ops

Annual Celebration

An afternoon in the sun! 150 people celebrated, boated, and connected with us on September 12 for our first outdoor celebration at Hale Reservation in Westwood. Attendees enjoyed a food truck, live music, beer, and a raffle underneath a tree canopy. We honored State Representative Linda Dean Campbell, State Senator Patricia Jehlen, and former State Representative Denise Provost for their leadership in getting the sewage notification law passed in the last legislative session.

Left to right: Viki Zoltay, Anne Carroll, Julia Blatt, Linda Dean Campbell, and Denise Provost

We also honored two staff at the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Office of Water Resources, Director Anne Carroll and Hydrologist Viki Zoltay for their steadfast commitment to science and leadership on the Commonwealth's drought management policy.

Thanks to our sponsors NEC Solar, Paddle Boston, Patagonia, and Wachusett Brewing Company. We can't wait to see you again next year!

New Mass Rivers program helps member groups protect river flows

You probably know that our state Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is entrusted with keeping the water you purchase from your local or regional water supplier safe to drink. What you may not have realized is that MassDEP is also tasked with ensuring the sustainability of water resources for both people and the environment. This is the main purpose of the Water Management Act, a 1986 state law that regulates water allocations for many municipalities.

Mass Rivers' newest Technical Support Program helps our member groups navigate this complicated water permitting program and advocate for improved water conservation to better protect their local streamflows. MassDEP issues permits on a 20-year rotating cycle to many municipalities around the state, allocating water for towns and cities to sell to residents, businesses, and sometimes, other municipalities. Regulatory changes to the program in 2014 created new opportunities to use the law to improve streamflows and offset the impacts of withdrawals on rivers, while also making the program far more complex.

Technical Specialist Sarah Bower has been working with an expert advisory committee and a growing group of watershed groups and other advocates since January, focusing in areas where permit renewals are imminent or already in process. She is helping communities improve the environmental sustainability of their water use, and ensure that additional water withdrawals do not further deplete our state's rivers. She is currently working closely with environmental advocates in the Charles, Concord (Sudbury, Assabet and Concord River watersheds), and Taunton River basins.

Good water stewardship is growing ever more urgent in an era of climate change. We are delighted to be able to offer our member groups this new service, and we wish to thank the First Parish of Lincoln for their support in getting this program off the ground!

FALL 2021

Julia Blatt at Hale Reservation in Westwood.

From the Director

WE'RE GROWING!

I hope this finds you well and enjoying a little sunshine following an extraordinarily long and rainy summer.

As we gear up for year-end, I thought I'd lead with the big news. I am delighted to share with you the news that Mass Rivers has been given the biggest gift in its history – a multi-year, $550,000 "transformational grant" from a generous donor. The gift will help us grow our capacity as the state's leading advocate for rivers in the face of a changing climate.

While we are proud of our many accomplishments to date, we believe the scale of the challenges currently facing our rivers – droughts, floods, stormwater pollution, dams, culverts, aging infrastructure – require us to scale up, as well. To that end, we expect to hire two staff in the next several months, to increase both our program and administrative capacity. So far this year we got a bill passed, co-led a successful effort to increase the state's environmental agency budgets, debuted a new website feature with information about river recreation across the state, introduced a new program to help our member organizations protect streamflow, and threw a big, outdoor party for you, our members and friends. And that was all with four staff. Imagine what we could accomplish together if we doubled in size.

Our vision is of clean, healthy, free-flowing rivers and streams in every corner of our state, home to thriving populations of wildlife, and enjoyed every day by residents who swim, fish, paddle, bike, walk, or just cherish their scenic beauty.

Thank you for being part of the Mass Rivers community, and for helping bring this vision to life. Have a safe and healthy fall,

Julia

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance Organizational Members

Key Leadership Members (>$1,000)

Charles River Watershed Association
Ipswich River Watershed Association
Mass Audubon
Mystic River Watershed Association
The Nature Conservancy
Neponset River Watershed Association
Trout Unlimited, Nor'East Chapter

Leadership Members ($250-$999)

Association to Preserve Cape Cod
Berkshire Natural Resources Council
The Charles River Conservancy
Conservation Law Foundation
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Mass Org of State Engineers and Scientists (MOSES)
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Nashua River Watershed Association
North and South Rivers Watershed Association
OARS, for the Assabet, Sudbury, & Concord Rivers
Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter
Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council
Trout Unlimited, Greater Boston Chapter

Staff, Sarah Bower and Katharine Lange, and Samantha Woods from North and South Rivers Watershed Association on the North River.

Members (<$250)

Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
Blackstone River Coalition
Blackstone River Watershed Association
Buzzards Bay Coalition
Members (<$250) cont.
Center for Coastal Studies
Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council
Clean Water Action & Clean Water Fund
Connecticut River Conservancy
Deerfield River Watershed Alliance
Environment Massachusetts
Farmington River Watershed Association
Fort River Watershed Alliance
Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
Friends of the Assabet River NWR
Friends of the Bass River
Friends of the Blue Hills
Friends of the Malden River
Friends of the Middlesex Fells
Friends of the Palmer River
Friends of the Ten Mile and Bucklin Brook
Green Newton
Greenbelt
Groundwork Lawrence
Hoosic River Revival
Hoosic River Watershed Association
Hop Brook Protection Association
Housatonic Valley Association
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
Millers River Watershed Council
The Muddy Water Initiative
Nantucket Land Council
Ocean River Institute
Parker River Clean Water Association
River Merrimack
Runnins River Alliance
Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay Riverkeeper
Shawsheen River Watershed Association
Stockholm Environment Institute
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
Ten Mile River Watershed Council
The Trust for Public Land
The Trustees
Trout Unlimited, Deerfield River Watershed Chapter
Trout Unlimited – MA RI Council
Trout Unlimited, Pioneer Valley Chapter
Wareham Land Trust
Wastewater Advisory Committee (WAC) to the MWRA
Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee
Weir River Watershed Association
Westfield River Watershed Association
Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee
Westport River Watershed Alliance

POLICY CORNER

FY22 state budget

Success! On July 16, Governor Baker signed the $47.6 billion state budget for fiscal year 2022. Among the agencies that received increases were Mass Rivers' three priorities: The Division of Ecological Restoration increased from $2.6 million to $3 million, and the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species program's budget was doubled from $500,000 to $1 million. The work these agencies do is critical to protecting and restoring rivers and increasing climate resilience. This funding will enable more dam removals, culvert restoration, endangered species habitat protection, streamflow and water quality improvements, and much more.

Mass Rivers worked in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, Environmental League of Massachusetts, Mass Audubon, The Trustees of Reservations, Appalachian Mountain Club, and the Massachusetts Organization of State Engineers and Scientists to advocate for these increases, including budget requests in our Lobby Day meetings. We are grateful to the Ways and Means Committee, conference committee members, and leadership for prioritizing the environment in their appropriations! We are also grateful to our partners and members who helped advocate for these important programs. We could not have done this without your support.

Mass Rivers members on the Sudbury River.

Huge federal funding opportunity

On September 9, Mass Rivers testified before the state's Joint Committee on Ways and Means to urge the legislature to prioritize water and sewer infrastructure, climate resilience, outdoor recreation and green workforce development in its American Rescue Plan Act spending.

North River in Marshfield.

The federal American Rescue Plan Act has allocated $5 billion to Massachusetts for post-pandemic recovery, presenting a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fund much-needed infrastructure upgrades that are climate resilient. Governor Baker proposed a spending plan early in 2021, but the state legislature is preferring to take a "slow and deliberate" approach. The Joint Committee on Ways and Means is holding a series of hearings to gather public input on how the money should be allocated. Mass Rivers is continuing to work closely with many partners to support shared environmental priorities.

Please reach out to your legislators while this process is ongoing and request that they allocate some of the funding for these priorities, and ask that they make non-profit organizations eligible for grant program funding. Contact Katharine with any questions or how to get involved! katharinelange@massriversalliance.org

Priority bills awaiting hearings

Mass Rivers' two priority bills on drought management (H.898/S.530) and invasive species (H.999/S.563)) coordination still await hearings before the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. We'll let you know when there are advocacy opportunities on those issues - we need local voices to demonstrate the need for these policies.

Amended regulations to improve streamflow during droughts

With climate change expected to increase the severity and frequency of droughts in our region, it is time to manage our water more sustainably. Excessive outdoor watering during dry periods exacerbates drought impacts on rivers and water supplies. This summer, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) proposed revisions to the state's Water Management Act regulations which includes a new condition on registrations that would restrict nonessential outdoor water use by registered users during times of drought. If implemented, the revisions will subject the last 20% of regulated water withdrawals - nearly 184 million gallons per day - to the same water conservation requirements that permitted users are already required to implement under the Act. Approximately 63 water suppliers and 86 golf courses will be affected by the new regulations.

Mass Rivers and many river allies submitted comments on the proposed revisions, and we are now awaiting approval of the final regulations by the state. While this is a key first step in protecting streamflows across the Commonwealth, much more still needs to be done to protect our water resources and prevent impacts from drought in the face of climate change.

Sudbury River in Concord.

Biking along the Charles River.

Explore Your Rivers

Mass Rivers is excited to release a new online feature to help you find the perfect place to get outside: *Explore Your Rivers*. We've crowdsourced all the best spots across the state for swimming, hiking, paddling, biking, and boating, and transportation options to help you get there. Many thanks to our fabulous team of interns who worked on collecting data and adding maps over the course of two summers: Shea Brams, Rachel Percy, Caley Earls, John Doolin, Zoe Zachary and Astrid Wilder. This project is still growing: send us your favorite places to recreate and photos so we can expand and include more watersheds.

Check it out on our website to find your next river adventure - happy exploring!

Attendees at our Annual Celebration at Hale Reservation in Westwood.