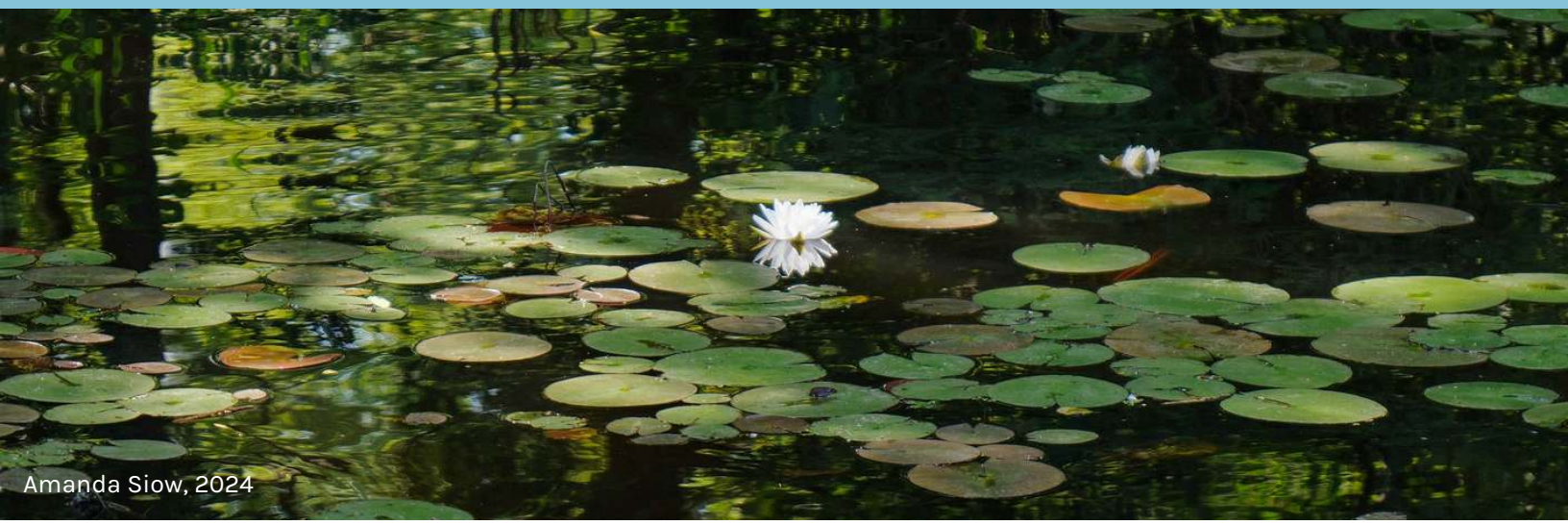
MASSACHUSETTS Rivers Alliance

Fall 2024

The River Advocate

Healthy rivers for people and wildlife



Amanda Siow, 2024

Legislative Debrief

The 2023-2024 legislative session ended in July, and Mass Rivers was there through it all to advocate for strong environmental and climate policies. We're grateful to our partners and members for their support all session long.

Mass Rivers Policy Director, Katharine Lange, at the State House with Senator Jamie Eldridge

Here's how our priorities ended up:

THE DROUGHT BILL: LEGISLATIVE STRIDES, AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Our top legislative priority this year was the drought bill (H.861/S.475). As the Commonwealth seeks to expand housing, ensuring the sustainability of our water supplies becomes even more urgent. This bill is a small yet crucial step toward creating a proactive, coordinated drought response that safeguards our environment, our economy, and public health. **The bill advanced further than it ever has, passing the Senate this June as part of the larger Climate Bill.**

Passing the Senate is a huge accomplishment, only possible with strong coalition support - again, THANK YOU for your help!

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FY25 Budget Advocacy: Success

Mass Rivers advocated for investments in our state environmental agencies this year as part of the Green Budget Coalition. In a tough budget year, legislators still increased many of our priority line items. We're grateful to Ways & Means Chairs for their leadership in crafting a strong FY25 budget.

Highlights

$54 million ($2.3M increase)
Dept of Environmental Protection
for environmental and public health protection

$110 million ($4.4M increase)
Dept of Conservation and Recreation
for state parks and recreation

$2 million ($688K increase)
Dept of Fish and Game
various programs

$8.7 million ($2M increase)
Energy and Environmental Affairs
for environmental justice

$18.7 million ($2M increase)
Energy and Environmental Affairs
various programs

$5.5 million ($500K increase)
for Division of Ecological Restoration
+ $2.8M new funding for culverts & small bridges

From the Executive Director

A new kind of climate bill for Massachusetts

Last session's climate bill never made it out of conference committee.

The Massachusetts formal legislative session is almost two years long, but much of the action happens in the last month before the session ends, as legislators scramble to pass bills and reconcile differing versions passed by the House and Senate into one final bill, in what's known as "conference committees." This year, disappointingly few bills made it into law; after being reviewed by their subject matter committees many bills didn't move at all, the two chambers had trouble reaching agreement on the ones that did, and time ran out. This year, only a minority of conference committees actually got the job done, leaving significant legislation on the table, unfinished. The climate bill was one casualty of this frustrating process.

But almost as frustrating – to me, anyway – was the legislature's narrow scope of what could be in a climate bill. In the House, the bill focused almost exclusively on reducing emissions from our energy sector. The Senate, to their credit, did include measures that would improve climate resilience here in Massachusetts, including our drought management bill (thanks to Senators Eldridge and Brownsberger!), but still, the driving force behind even that wider bill was clean energy.

I have since spoken with people, including those working in our field, and those who don't, asking them what they think are the climate issues in Massachusetts the government should work on. While emissions control certainly made the list, it didn't stop there. "Flooding," I heard. "invasive species control," "fixing the culverts," "water sustainability and drought." And, "what about finding a solution for those houses that are falling into the sea?"

These kinds of initiatives are known as "adaptation," defined by the U.N. as

> "adjustments in ecological, social or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects…in simple terms, countries and communities need to develop adaptation solutions and implement actions to respond to current and future climate change impacts."

We think Massachusetts deserves a more comprehensive climate bill, one that focuses on adaptation, addressing the challenges we face here in our own state, including flooding and drought, the sustainability of our rivers and water supplies, and yes, what to do about those houses falling into the sea. We can do things better here, and our legislators can too. We look forward to working with our legislative champions and with many partner organizations in the upcoming session to develop a bill with a broader vision for climate adaptation – and to make it a reality.

Thank you for supporting this important work.

Julia

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When the Climate Bill went to the House, Representatives made clear they wanted a narrow bill, focusing only on energy siting, so the drought management component was not adopted in their version.

The House and Senate versions of the Climate Bill went to a six-legislator conference committee, which was tasked with reconciling the two versions into the final bill that would go to the Governor's desk.

Unfortunately, despite advocacy from a wide range of climate organizations, the conference committee did not reach an agreement on a final Climate Bill by the end of the session on July 31, and the legislation was left on the cutting room floor - including our top priority on drought. We are, of course, extremely disappointed in this result. At a time when there is resounding agreement that the Commonwealth needs urgent climate action, the legislature's failure to pass major climate legislation is a loss to our communities, our rivers, and our future.

Our success in the Senate gives us a strong start to the next legislative session, which starts in January. In the meantime, we'll continue working to make change through other avenues.

STOPPING HARMFUL LEGISLATION: SUCCESS

A highly anticipated Housing Bond bill contained an amendment to create a commission to review (and likely weaken) the Interbasin Transfer Act (IBTA). One of the state's foundational water management laws, this little-known but important statute helps enable housing and growth by ensuring that local water management is sustainable through scientific review.

While it can be useful to review how our laws are functioning, the makeup of the proposed commission would have been primarily composed of water suppliers and industry groups, who are generally opposed to environmental regulation. Any hastening of the review process or weakening of the law could result in poor water management decisions.

Mass Rivers strongly opposed this amendment and successfully advocated for its deletion from the final version of the bill. We are grateful to member organizations, legislative leaders like Senator Brownsberger, Senator Comerford, and members of the Healey administration, who mobilized to help educate legislators on the value of scientific review during water management decisions.

Dam Busters Exceeds Expectations

The audience for our popular Dam Busters 101 webinar series continues to grow, attesting to the high demand for information on dam removal. Massachusetts has over 3,000 dams, many of which are defunct or in disrepair. Removal of such dams can help protect homeowners from unnecessary dam failure risks, restore rivers and natural habitats, and open up new recreational opportunities. But the process of dam removal can be daunting, so our straightforward monthly webinars can go a long way towards seeding new dam removal projects by demystifying the process.

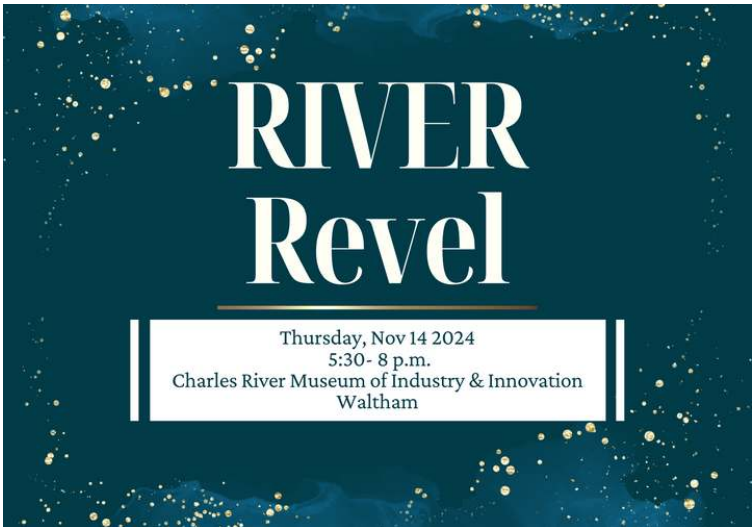
Over 500 people registered for our webinars, including people from Canada and the United Kingdom! This year's program is concluding with two in-person visits: participants were treated to a guided tour of a dam removal site in Braintree, MA in mid-September, and another site visit is planned in Acton in October. Plans for next year's webinars are underway, and the planning team will use suggestions from this year's participants to shape the 2025 series.

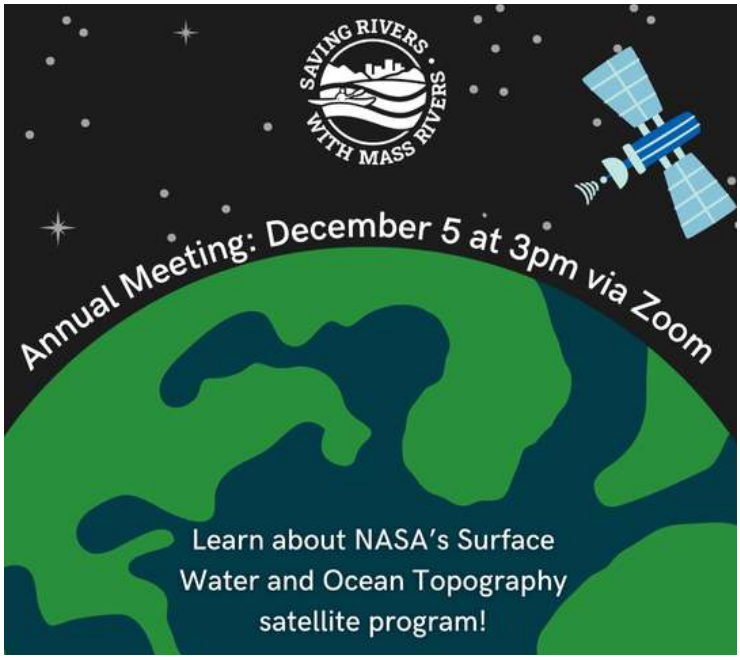
In-person site visit at the Monatiquot River Restoration Project in Braintree, MA

Upcoming Events!

Join us on November 14th from 5:30-8pm at the Charles River Museum in Waltham for a **River Revel!** Mingle with river lovers from across the state at the Charles River Museum of Industry & Innovation to nosh on delicious hors d'oeuvres and drinks, explore the museum's curiosities, and help us protect and restore our rivers by bidding on live and silent auction items.

YOU are an integral part of the movement for rivers we have been building over the last 17 years and we couldn't do it without you!





Mark your calendar for our **Annual Meeting** on December 5 at 3pm (live on Zoom)! We'll feature Prof. Kostas Andreadis from UMass as our guest speaker, presenting on NASA's groundbreaking Surface Water and Ocean Topography satellite program. Don't miss this chance to learn about cutting-edge water research and connect with fellow river advocates. See you there!

First of their Kind: Biodiversity Goals Update

This fall, the Healey administration is expected to release biodiversity goals for the Commonwealth, the first of their kind in the nation, the result of last year's Executive Order. This is an unprecedented opportunity to restore ecosystem function, conserve land and water that serve as important habitat, and create a whole-of-government approach to supporting biodiversity.

Mass Rivers has been working with the agency and our colleagues to define biodiversity and develop ambitious goals; our focus is on aquatic habitat. In February, we participated in a full day workshop to share ideas with DFG on what types of goals we want to see, like ratcheting up the pace of dam removals and culvert upgrades. Then in June, we hosted Commissioner Tom O'Shea and his staff to present to our member organizations on the agency's progress so far, and encourage organizations to send feedback.

The full set of biodiversity goals are expected to be posted for public comment this fall - check our e-newsletter, River News & Notes, to see the highlights and how you can submit comments on the goals.

Red-bellied Woodpecker in Falmouth courtesy of Tyler Moulton

Welcome, Lydia!

Mass Rivers is thrilled to welcome Lydia Olson as our new Technical Specialist!

Lydia grew up in the Greater Boston Area and found her love of the environment while volunteering as a water quality monitor in high school. She followed her passion in her academic career, earning a degree in Environmental Science and a Master's degree in Applied and Environmental Geosciences. Lydia will oversee and implement Mass Rivers' technical programming to protect river flow and water quality statewide, starting with commenting on the new MS4 draft permits expected out this fall.

Mass Rivers Organizational Members

Principal Members ($1,000+)

Charles River Watershed Association
Ipswich River Watershed Association
Mass Audubon
Mass Organization of State Engineers and Scientists
Mystic River Watershed Association
The Nature Conservancy
Neponset River Watershed Association
Trout Unlimited, MA RI Council
Trout Unlimited, Nor'East Chapter

Leadership Members ($250-$999)

Association to Preserve Cape Cod
Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Charles River Conservancy
Center for Coastal Studies
Connecticut River Conservancy
Conservation Law Foundation
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Farmington River Watershed Association
Groundwork Lawrence
Interchapter Paddling Committee- AMC
Nantucket Land & Water Council
Nashua River Watershed Association
North and South Rivers Watershed Association
OARS
Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay Riverkeepers
Shawsheen River Watershed Association
Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter
Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council
Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Trout Unlimited, Cape Cod Chapter
Trout Unlimited, Greater Boston Chapter
The Trust for Public Land
The Trustees

Members (<$250)

Barnstable Cleanwater Coalition
Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Blackstone River Coalition
Blackstone River Watershed Association
Buzzards Bay Coalition
Charlesgate Alliance
Clean Water Fund
Community Rowing Inc.
Deerfield River Watershed Association
Environment Massachusetts
The Esplanade Association
Fort River Watershed Alliance
Franklin Land Trust, Inc.
Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
Friends of Jerry's Pond
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 River Watershed
Friends of Woodlands and Waters
Green Newton
Greenbelt
Hoosic River Revival
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 Coms.
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Millers River Watershed Council
Muddy Water Initiative
Ocean River Institute
Parker River Clean Water Association
Runnins River Watershed Alliance
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
Trout Unlimited, Deerfield River Chapter
Trout Unlimited, Pioneer Valley Chapter #276
Wareham Land Trust
Wastewater Advisory Committee to the MWRA
Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee
Weir River Watershed Association
Western MA Rights of Nature
Westfield River Watershed Association
Westfield River Wild & Scenic River Advisory Committee
Westport River Watershed Alliance

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11 Curtis Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144

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Monica Driggers, Deputy Director
Katharine Lange, Policy Director
Lydia Olson, Technical Specialist
Anna Renkert, Development & Engagement Coordinator

Fall Interns

Our fall interns from Worcester Polytechnic Institute have been hard at work developing our Explore Your Rivers web pages into an app. Soon you will be able to access a wealth of information on your phone to make exploring rivers across the state easier and more accessible. Plus, we got to take our interns out for their first ever kayak paddle!

Left to right: Quan Dinh, Connor White, Randy Zhang, and Joshua Lee