MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance
11 Curtis Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144
617-714-4272 • massriversalliance.org

MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance

The RIVER Advocate

HEALTHY RIVERS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

SPRING 2024

Mass Rivers leading response to MassDEP's proposed new "Climate Resilience 1.0" regulations

Mass Rivers is convening a group of member organizations to respond to an important package of proposed new regulations drafted by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). Released on December 22, MassDEP's proposed updates include changes to the Chapter 91 Waterways Program, the Wetlands Protection Act, and associated Stormwater Handbook. Combined, these updates ("Climate Resilience 1.0") will make wetland and coastal permitting much more climate-smart; the new regulations will require consideration of sea level rise and include updates to the scientific standards used in DEP's decision-making.

While the new draft regulations are a step in the right direction, they do not go far enough in achieving ecological restoration, public safety, or preparing our communities for the impacts of climate change. In an implicit acknowledgement of this, MassDEP is also accepting suggestions for a future "Resilience 2.0" package. This is an opportunity to think bigger and urge the agency to make significant progress toward climate resilience in the Commonwealth. We'll be encouraging MassDEP to swiftly promulgate most of the current draft regulations, and to immediately begin the "Resilience 2.0" process to strengthen some of the 1.0 provisions.

Mass Rivers and its member organizations are carefully reviewing the proposed regulations and plan to submit comments by the April 30 deadline.

Two interns join our team this spring!

Our Communications Intern, Amanda Siow (Boston University, '25) is utilizing her graphic design and storytelling skills to design various projects including our annual report, policy briefs, infographics, and social media templates to elevate our communications.

Our Policy Research Intern, Owen Castle (University of Chicago '25) is exploring and analyzing water and sewer infrastructure project financing in Massachusetts to support our state environmental policy work.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

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

Board Officers
Emily Scerbo, *President*
Mary Griffin, *Vice President*
Andrea Franz, *Treasurer*
Paul Beaulieu, *Clerk*

Board Members
Wayne Castonguay, Ian Cooke, Christine Doyle, Nancy Hammett, Kwabena Kyei-Aboagye, Jr., Graham Lubie, Nagesh Mahanthappa, Deirdre Menoyo, Heidi Ricci, Ellen Smith, Mark P. Smith, Jacqueline Stone, Eve Vogel

Staff
Julia Blatt, *Executive Director*
Katharine Lange, *Policy Director*
Monica Driggers, *Senior Program Director*
Anna Renkert, *Development & Engagement Coordinator*
Mikayla Hopkins, *Bookkeeper/Office Manager*

Dam Busters 101 webinar series

The reviews are in! Close to 90% of the people who attend our popular Dam Busters 101 webinars rate them as "fantastic," "informative," and "engaging." These lunchinars (noon to 1pm the first Wednesday of each month) are helping people across the state better understand the complicated process of dam removal. Over **400 people** have registered and we have more signing up each week.

The majority of the people attending come from nonprofits and municipalities. State and federal government agency staff, as well as professionals from

Continued on Page 4

Benefits of dam removal

- Improve water quality.
- Restore natural river flows.
- Reconnect river habitats that benefit fish and wildlife.
- Reduce threats to public safety.
- Prevent flood damage to roads, bridges, and other downstream infrastructure.

From the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration

From the executive director

INVESTING IN OUR RIVERS

Mass Rivers and our partners have had great success in increasing budgets for state agencies that protect and restore our rivers. Perhaps you are wondering how this happens – or how this money is used by the agencies. Read on!

Q: What do you mean "you" increased the budgets for these state agencies? Isn't that the job of the legislature? How about new laws?
We don't get to vote on the state budget or pass new laws. However, legislators can't be experts on all things. The nonprofit community analyzes the state's budget and urges increased funding or new legislation to improve river protection and climate resilience. Legislators weigh our asks against many competing requests. Year after year, as our coalition has grown, we have made the case for investing in environmental programs. As legislators have become more familiar with the work of the environmental agencies and the scale of the climate crisis, they have increased the agencies' budgets to sustain healthy rivers and water in a time of climate change.

Q. When the state's environmental funding increases, does that increase our taxes?
No. An increase for the state's environmental agencies and their programs means their portion of the overall state budget increases relative to that of other agencies. The portion of state funding for the environment is still very low (about 1% in FY2024), despite the urgency to address climate change and the high value placed on the environment by the Commonwealth's residents.

Q. Congratulations on Mass Rivers' success in working with partners and the legislature to increase state annual environmental budgets by $40M in the past five or six years. What are the agencies doing with this new money?
Great question! Much of our effort has been focused on the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife's Division of Ecological Restoration (DER). DER's work includes dam removals, culvert replacements, and cranberry bog restorations. They have now doubled their staff to increase this work. A new DER regional collaboration program supports partners' river restoration work: one small government agency can't do it all in a state with 3,000 dams and 25,000 culverts, including many hazardous dams and undersized culverts subject to failure.

MassDEP must issue permits to ensure compliance with regulations that protect the environment and enforce most environmental laws. Yet their budget was cut dramatically in 2008. Water withdrawal permits were delayed for many years, the state lacked staff for compliance and enforcement, and some rivers went 15 years or more without water quality testing. Recent budget increases allowed MassDEP to restore this capacity and release several long-awaited regulatory packages.

The agency is now able to take on new challenges, many in response to climate change. It is

Consider a legacy gift to Mass Rivers!

We are excited to announce our new legacy giving program: the River Birch Circle. With a planned gift to Mass Rivers, you will become a member of a special community of donors who are choosing to have an enduring impact. Your gift will help to ensure rivers remain clean and flowing, and that fisheries and aquatic habitat are protected in a future changing climate.

River Birch Circle members: Chris Doyle and David Brams

> "We have a long-term commitment to the mission and the success of Mass Rivers. Mass Rivers leverages its deep knowledge of water policy to affect real change in Massachusetts for our rivers and our climate. We wanted to demonstrate our commitment with a legacy gift as Mass Rivers seeks to build a firm base for its work into the future."
>
> - Chris Doyle and David Brams, Belmont

Membership in the River Birch Circle is extended to those who have notified us that they have made a provision in their will or estate plans for Massachusetts Rivers Alliance.

Our organizational members

River Heroes
Ipswich River Watershed Association
Mass Audubon
The Nature Conservancy

River Guardians
Neponset River Watershed Association

River Stewards
Charles River Watershed Association
Mass Organization of State Engineers and Scientists
Mystic River Watershed Association
Trout Unlimited, MA RI Council
Trout Unlimited, Nor'East Chapter

River Defenders
Connecticut River Conservancy
Conservation Law Foundation
North and South Rivers Watershed Association
Trout Unlimited, Greater Boston Chapter

River Advocates
Association to Preserve Cape Cod
Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Center for Coastal Studies
The Charles River Conservancy
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Farmington River Watershed Association
Groundwork Lawrence
Interchapter Paddling Committee- AMC
Nantucket Land & Water Council
Nashua River 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
Trust for Public Land
The Trustees

River Friends
Barnstable Cleanwater Coalition
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Buzzards Bay Coalition
Charlesgate Alliance
Clean Water Fund
Environment Massachusetts
The Esplanade Association
Fort River Watershed Alliance
Franklin Land Trust, Inc.
Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
Friends of the Blue Hills
Friends of the Malden River
Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation
Green Newton
Greenbelt
Hoosic River Revival
Hoosic River Watershed 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
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Ocean River Institute
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
Trout Unlimited, Deerfield River Chapter
Trout Unlimited, Pioneer Valley Chapter #276
Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee
Weir River Watershed Association
Westfield River Wild & Scenic River Advisory Committee
Westport River Watershed Alliance

River Supporters
Belmont Citizens Forum
Blackstone River Coalition
Blackstone River Watershed Association
Deerfield River Watershed Association
Friends of Jerry's Pond
Friends of Woodlands and Waters
Friends of the Bass River
Friends of the Palmer River
Friends of the Ten Mile River Watershed
Hop Brook Protection Association
Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
Millers River Watershed Council
Muddy Water Initiative
Parker River Clean Water Association
Runnins River Watershed Alliance
Wareham Land Trust
Wastewater Advisory Committee to the MWRA
Westfield River Watershed Association
Western MA Rights of Nature

speeding up the restoration of salt marshes; developing a statewide hydraulic model to better manage stream flow infrastructure; requiring bigger culverts to anticipate streamflow from more extreme droughts and floods of climate change; monitoring PFAS in river and fish tissue and other emerging contaminants in wastewater; and adding protection for wetlands based on their ability to sequester carbon and prevent greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the umbrella agency for the Commonwealth's environmental agencies, has dramatically increased its focus on environmental justice. It started as a subprogram within the Climate Adaptation and Preparedness office, blossomed into its own office in FY23, where our budget coalition successfully advocated for $1.3 million of funding. The next year, with the Governor's strong support, we advocated again for an increase, and the legislature approved $8.8 million. That money supports staff who ensure that environmental justice principles are part of all state agency plans and actions, that impacts to communities are considered when making decisions, and that there is public involvement in policy making.

We are proud to do our part to encourage public investment in our environment. Thank you for supporting this important work! We couldn't do it without you.

Julia Blatt
Executive Director

Drought bill moves forward in legislative process

As the impacts of climate change ramp up in the Commonwealth, so too should our response and prevention measures. Mass Rivers' top legislative priority, H.861/S.475, often called "The Drought Bill," would strengthen drought management across the state and help us weather future droughts.

After leading advocacy on this bill for the first half of the legislative session, we're happy to report that it has advanced to the next step! The Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources reported the bill out favorably. Thank you to our bill sponsors, Senator Eldridge and Representative Meschino, Chairs Dan Cahill and Rebecca Rausch for their leadership in the Environment committee, and to all of our individual and organizational members who have spoken up in favor of this bill!

The drought bill is now in the House and Senate Committees on Ways & Means, where we will continue to advocate for the bill's passage.

Our Policy Director Katharine Lange met with the bill's sponsors, Senator Eldridge and Representative Meschino, as well as our partner, the Charles River Watershed Association, to celebrate the bill's advancement and plan for the next steps.

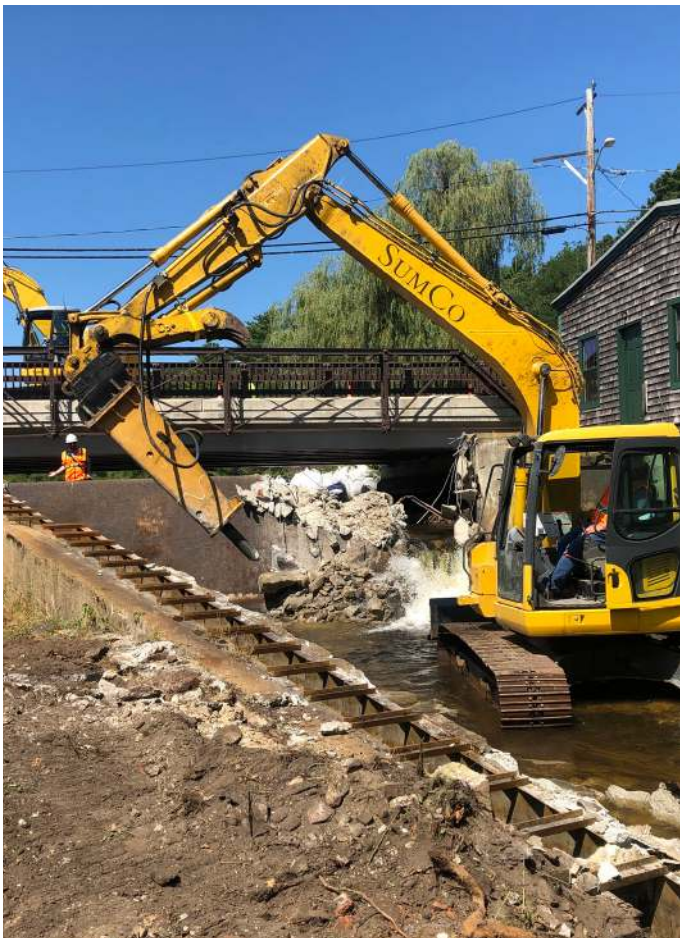
Improving water resilience on the North Shore

Mass Rivers has been working alongside the Ipswich River Watershed Association and North Shore communities to improve water supply resilience and ecosystem health in the watershed. This work is a part of a much larger and unusual regional collaboration effort led by the North Shore Water Resilience Task Force to identify and advance long-term water solutions for the Ipswich River Watershed. The Task Force pursues cooperative solutions to the region's ongoing water challenges.

Technical Program Director, Sarah Bower, joined Task Force members and other regional stakeholders at the North Shore Water Resilience Task Force's January meeting.

In August, Mass Rivers was appointed as a regional stakeholder to the Task Force's Joint Narrative Subcommittee to help develop consensus around the foundational facts underpinning the watershed's water resilience needs. The Subcommittee included a diverse group of water experts and developed a joint narrative on the water resilience challenges and opportunities in the region. This narrative was designed to direct and ground truth the work of the Task Force.

We look forward to continued progress by this group to protect and restore the Ipswich River and its watershed.



Elm Street Dam Removal in Kingston, MA

Dam Busters...continued from page 1

engineering and consulting firms, are also attending in significant numbers. We are especially pleased to report that the number of private individuals who participate increases with each session, and many of them ask great community-oriented questions.

In the sessions, experts share their knowledge of topics ranging from dam removal basics to best practices for community involvement. The series will wrap up in early fall, with two site visits to dam removal locations. You can find recordings of all sessions on the Mass Rivers website. Due to the series' popularity, we are working on extending it beyond the original Fall 2024 end date. We wish to thank our partners in this work: the Charles River Watershed Association, and the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration. Thank you to the SuAsCo River Wild and Scenic Stewardship Council and MassDER for your support. And a big thank you to the many professionals who have shared their expertise, advice, and stories!

Learn more at:
massriversalliance.org/dambusters101