MASSACHUSETTS Rivers Alliance

Fall 2025

The River Advocate

Healthy rivers for people and wildlife

Deerfield River, 2025

Legislative Updates

With the Massachusetts legislative session in full swing, our priority efforts are on the move. Mass Rivers is teaming up with members, lawmakers and other partners to advocate for several legislative initiatives. Read on for our priorities.

Nature for MA Coalition members after testifying for the bill, July 2025

The Drought Bill (S.586/H.1003)

Mass Rivers organized panels of testimony before the Environment and Natural Resources Committee from river organizations, statewide conservation groups, and a farmer to describe the impacts of drought and the need for this bill's clear approach to outdoor water conservation. The Senate drought bill progressed to the Senate Ways and Means Committee and is a top Lobby for the Rivers Day priority.

Nature for All Bill (H.901/S.2571)

One of the most important ways to help our rivers and streams is to protect the land around them. As part of the Nature for Massachusetts Coalition, Mass Rivers is urging the legislature to pass the Nature for All Bill. This bill, if passed, would set aside a portion of the sporting goods sales tax to dedicate $100 million each year to protect and restore nature and water. Mass Rivers testified in support of this bill in July, and the Senate Nature for All Bill has progressed to the Rules Committee. We are also supporting the "Protect Water and Nature Initiative" as a question on the November 2026 ballot to ensure lands and water are protected in the event the bill doesn't pass this legislative session.

Codifying the Division of Ecological Restoration (H.986/S.73)

The state Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) partners with municipalities, non-profits, and individual property owners in every corner of our state to connect and restore aquatic habitat. In its first 15 years, DER has helped municipalities and others remove over 65 dams, restore over 3,000 acres of wetland, upgrade more than 120 culverts across 90 cities and towns, and reconnect 700 miles of river. Mass Rivers testified in support of this bill to solidify Massachusetts' commitment to river and wetland restoration by making DER a permanent part of the Department of Fish and Game.

Continued on Page 3

From the Executive Director

Three ways you can make a difference for the environment

Earlier this year, my congresswoman held a call-in virtual "town hall," where she talked to hundreds of constituents about the government problems that were on everyone's minds at that moment. That was a few months and many federal crises ago, and I've forgotten what, exactly, she talked about that morning. What I do remember is repeated iterations of this plea from those on the call, "Yes, but what can we do about it?"

I sensed that her responses left her constituents mostly unsatisfied; in truth, it didn't feel like there was much most voters could do to fix the federal government, and even this elected leader was stymied by her role in the minority party.

The good news for us is that in this difficult moment for the federal government, there are still real opportunities to make change at the state level. So if you're wondering, "what can I do about it?" here are three tangible things you can do to help our rivers, the environment generally, and human and wildlife health here in Massachusetts.

1. Help get the Nature for Massachusetts ballot question onto the ballot for next November. Passage of this ballot initiative would allocate a portion of the state sporting goods sales tax to dedicate $100M annually to protecting land and water in Massachusetts. Mass Rivers is part of a coalition working together to collect over 100,000 signatures by November 9 while we also work to get legislation passed. You can help by collecting signatures.

2. Help get the Drought Bill passed. The Drought Bill (S586/H1003), would extend the life of our rivers and water supplies by restricting nonessential outdoor watering during droughts, essentially codifying the state's drought plan into law. This is an important step toward climate resilience. You can help Mass Rivers by sharing your brief story of how drought impacts you and your favorite river or stream by filling out our questionnaire linked in the QR code below.

3. Support Mass Rivers' Water Future Fund. As we gear up for our leadership transition, we have created the Water Future Fund, to ensure that Mass Rivers will thrive through the next four critical years as we implement the goals in our new Strategic Plan and respond to new challenges. We invite you to become a donor. You can find information in the link to the QR code below.

I am encouraged by how eager people are to *do something*. The day after I received my stack of Nature for Massachusetts petitions, I visited my mother's friend in a retirement community. Not only did this kind friend readily agree to sign the petition, she asked for a few to circulate in the community. Similarly, we have had an enthusiastic early response to our Water Future Fund, with nearly $1M committed from 60 donors.

As I prepare to retire at the end of this year, I would like to thank you for your support for our wonderful rivers, and for Mass Rivers. It has been my honor to lead this organization for 16 years, and I hope you are as excited as I am for the next chapter in our story. Now let's all get out there and *do something*!

Want to help? Scan this QR code to take action on the above:

Legislative Updates... continued from page 1

Environmental Bond Bill (S.2542)

Mass Rivers is supporting increased funding for the Environmental Bond Bill, which will authorize capital spending and sets policy to support environmental and climate programs. Mass Rivers is supporting increased funding for the Municipal Vulnerability Program, water future planning, and streamlined permitting for ecological restoration. We are also advocating to include drought management and Nature for All in the bond bill, and are supportive of several elements to fund ecological restoration, resilience, infrastructure for cleaner rivers, and flood management.

Water Banking Bill (H.2324/S.1443)

Reducing stormwater pollution can be costly for municipalities. The Water Banking Bill would codify cities' and towns' ability to create stormwater utilities, collect fees from new developments, and dedicate those funds to offset the costs of water conservation efforts, replacing aging infrastructure, and other steps to reduce water pollution. Mass Rives co-wrote this bill together with municipal, water supply, and environmental partners several years ago. This year we were pleased to see it reported out of the Municipalities and Regional Government Committee and ordered to a third reading.

Governor Healy Announcing the Mass Ready Act Environmental Bond Bill, June 2025

Meet the Mass Rivers Team

Lydia brings her skills in scientific analysis and presentation as our Technical Specialist where she oversees and implements Mass Rivers' technical programming to protect river flow and water quality statewide.

As our Deputy Director, Monica works to create new programs to expand Mass Rivers' reach, sustain existing programs, strengthen our connections to member organizations, improve internal operations, and drive policy change.

Our fearless Policy Director, Heather, leads our advocacy program, Lobby for the Rivers Day, and capacity building for our member groups. She is driven by a passion for the relationship between people and nature, and the power of individuals to create positive change when they band together.

As Grant Programs Manager, Andrea assists in managing all grant-funded projects and designing, executing, and managing Mass Rivers' statewide technical assistance program to remove small, defunct dams.

Meet Anna, our Development & Engagement Manager! Anna supports fundraising and growing Mass Rivers. She leads outreach and communications including the development and production of external materials, social media, a bi-weekly newsletter, and website updates.

Since 2009, Julia has served as our Executive Director! She is proud of this amazing team.

Victoria is our bookkeeper/office manager, ensuring the day-to-day administrative and financial operations of the organization run smoothly.

Events!

Rainwater Readiness Stormwater Workshops

Our 2025 Stormwater Workshops are officially underway! After a successful round of workshops in 2023, we are back with an even bigger lineup of resources and experts to support key stakeholders in meeting their stormwater goals. Our first session brought attendees together in person to hear about strategies related to stormwater management and financing. Following that, nine additional webinars will go deeper on the different funding options available for stormwater projects.

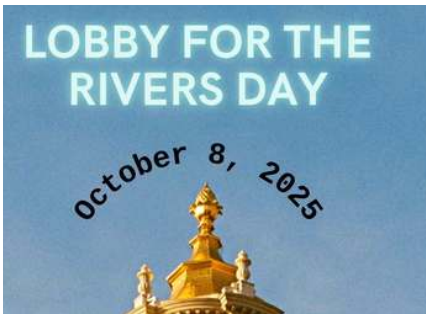
Dam Busters

We toured the Bel Air Dam removal in Pittsfield, MA with SumCo, AECOM , MassDCR and other partners leading the day. A total of 41 people attended!

We held our 1st in-person Dam Busters workshop! 32 participants joined us in Worcester to hone their community engagement skills. We heard from a panel of practitioners who have successfully engaged their communities to initiate dam removal work. Emily Vogler of the Rhode Island School of Design led an interactive session simulating the community engagement process.

Lobby for the Rivers Day

As of this writing, Mass Rivers is organizing river advocates from around Massachusetts to meet with their legislators on the fifth annual Lobby for the Rivers Day on October 8th. Several legislators are lined up to offer welcoming remarks, including Senator Rausch and Representative Barber, who co-chair the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, and the Drought Bill sponsors, Senator Eldridge, and Representatives Meschino and Rogers.



River Revel

Join us November 13th from 5-8pm at the Charles River Museum for an evening of connection, celebration, and inspiration as we reflect on how far the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance has come and look boldly toward the future we're building together. This year's River Revel is extra special. We'll honor the leadership of our retiring Executive Director, Julia Blatt, and reflect on our shared accomplishments and our vision for the next chapter. Come raise a glass, reconnect with river allies, enjoy local food and drink, explore the curiosities of the museum, and bid on beautiful silent auction items - all while celebrating the strength of our growing community.

Annual Meeting

Join us virtually on December 11 for our annual meeting. In addition to showcasing our accomplishments for the year, we will feature a presentation on Urban Streams by Dr. Rebecca Hale, Senior Scientist and Ecology Researcher at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. Dr. Hale works at the interface of biogeochemistry, hydrology, sociology, and history to ask fundamental ecosystem ecology questions in non-traditional settings like cities, including urban areas in Massachusetts where she has conducted research with local watershed organizations.

Western MA Visit

The Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT) hosted Mass Rivers' board and staff in Pittsfield for an in-depth opportunity to learn about the historical and present-day environmental justice problems associated with rivers in the area. BEAT led us on an environmental justice tour that got us up close to sites where the legacy of dams and industrial pollution are still everyday issues for the people of Pittsfield. We learned about how these problems continue to affect people's health, access to opportunity, and overall well-being. BEAT's strong work on these issues is a primer on how to mobilize a community to save its natural resources.

Mass Rivers Staff & Board meeting with member organizations

Environmental Justice tour at Woods Pond

Mass Rivers board members and staff also spent an evening enjoying a meet-and-greet event with 8 western Mass alliance members groups, where we all learned more about each others' work. Our special thanks to BEAT and to all who attended for their generous hospitality and for sharing so much great information with us.

Mass Rivers Organizational Members

River Champion ($5,000+)

Mass Audubon
The Nature Conservancy
Ipswich River Watershed Association

River Guardian ($2,000 - $4,999)

Neponset River Watershed Association
Charles River Watershed Association

River Steward ($1,000 - $1,999)

Mass Organization of State Engineers and Scientists
Mystic River Watershed Association
Trout Unlimited, Nor'East Chapter

River Sustainer ($500 - $999)

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

River Supporter ($250 - $499)

Association to Preserve Cape Cod
Berkshire Natural Resources Council
The Charles River Conservancy
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Farmington River Watershed Association
Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation
Groundwork Lawrence
Interchapter Paddling Committee- AMC
Nantucket Land & Water Council
Nashua River Watershed Association
OARS
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
The Trustees

Members (<$250)

Barnstable Cleanwater Coalition
Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Better Futures Project- Communities Responding to Extreme Weather
Blackstone River Coalition
Blackstone River Watershed Association
Buzzards Bay Coalition
Charlesgate Alliance
Clean Water Action Fund
Community Rowing, Inc.
Deerfield River Watershed Association
Environment Massachusetts
The Esplanade Association
Fort River Watershed Alliance
Franklin Land Trust, Inc.
Friends of the Bass River
Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
Friends of the Blue Hills
Friends of Jerry's Pond
Friends of the Malden River
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 Comissions
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Millers River Watershed Council
Muddy Water Initiative
New England Section- American Water Works Association
Ocean River Institute
Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage
Parker River Clean Water Association
Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay Riverkeepers
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

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance
11 Curtis Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144

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Andrea Eigerman, Grant Programs Manager

Dam Busters goes International!

In September, we partnered with Dam Removal Europe, a program hosted and funded by the World Wildlife Fund, to conduct a live-stream interview at the Bel Air Dam site visit. The link to the interview is available on our blog and features Chad Sumner of SumCo Eco-Contracting, Beth Lambert of the Mass Division of Ecological Restoration and our very own Deputy Director, Monica Driggers.

Dam Removal Europe regularly conducts live-stream interviews with dam removal managers across Europe. Their program focuses on jump-starting dam removal and increasing awareness about the hazards of defunct dams across the continent, but particularly in southern Europe where this work does not have the attention of the public or policy makers. The team at WWF attends Dam Busters regularly and is looking at our webinar series as an example of a community-building education model.