MASSACHUSETTS Rivers Alliance

Spring 2026

The River Advocate

Healthy rivers for people and wildlife

Deerfield River, August 2025

Legislative Updates

The 2025-2026 Massachusetts legislative session goes through the end of July. Here's a quick recap on where our priority efforts stand!

Advocating for environmental state agency budgets at the Green Budget Briefing, March 2026

The Drought Bill (S.586/H.5219)

Mass Rivers and our member organizations continue to advocate for passage of the drought bill, which would implement the state's Drought Management Plan with a clear and consistent approach to outdoor water conservation. As of this writing, Mass Rivers and many of our member organizations have asked the Senate Ways and Means Committee to include the bill within the parallel Environmental Bond Bill, because drought management is a key facet of ensuring a resilient future. **As of March, the House version of the drought bill has also been reported out favorably from the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, progressing to the House Ways and Means Committee.**

Green Budget Advocacy

Early in the year, Governor Healey released her FY27 budget proposal, which included cuts to multiple state agencies that support healthy rivers and clean water across the state at a time when drought, infrastructure needs, and water supply planning require stronger public investment. The proposal included a nearly $20 million cut to the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, and over $1.5 million cut to the Department of Environmental Protection. In collaboration with our Green Budget Coalition partners, **Mass Rivers is calling on legislators to fund river protection and restoration agencies at sufficient, sustained levels as they develop the state budget throughout the spring.**

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From the Executive Director

There is real momentum for rivers across Massachusetts

Over the past several months, we've seen water rise as a central issue in state policy conversations. From drought management and long-term water planning, to major investments through the Environmental Bond Bill and the state budget, the decisions being made right now will shape how our rivers and our communities adapt to a changing climate.

Mass Rivers is in these conversations alongside our members and partners, advocating for practical, durable solutions. We are pushing for smarter water use during drought, sustained investment in restoration and infrastructure, and policies that recognize the critical importance of healthy rivers.

The good news is that in the State House, doors are open to us. In one of my first meetings with a legislative office, before I could even get to our priorities, the conversation turned to how much they value working with Mass Rivers. That exchange has been repeated, in different ways, over my first few months. It's a direct reflection of the reputation Julia Blatt and previous staff built over years of consistent, principled leadership. There is deep trust in this organization, and a real appreciation for the role we play in shaping water policy.

At the same time, we are expanding our work on the ground. This spring, we launched a new technical assistance program through our popular Dam Busters initiative, helping communities and partners take the first steps toward removing outdated dams and restoring rivers. These projects improve ecosystems, reduce risk, strengthen resilience, and restore the waterways that define communities.

And importantly — thanks to your support — we are doing this work with momentum. We surpassed our $1.3 million Water Future Fund goal, giving us the ability to meet this moment with ambition.

There is much more to do, but we are ready and we are grateful to have you with us in this work.

David McGlinchey
Executive Director

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Environmental Bond Bill (S.2542)

Also known as the "Mass Ready Act", the Environmental Bond Bill will authorize capital spending and set policy to support programs to improve our environment and climate resilience. **Mass Rivers testified before the Joint Bonding Committee** and, in addition to advocating for the drought bill as a key resilience measure, expressed our support to the Senate Ways and Means Committee for water future planning, increased funding for the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program, easier permitting for ecological restoration, and codifying the Division of Ecological Restoration. Mass Rivers also supports the bill's substantial increase in funding authorization for clean water and wastewater infrastructure.

Nature for Massachusetts

The Nature for Massachusetts Coalition submitted enough signatures to meet the first ballot initiative requirement in December. The initiative now goes to the Legislature as a bill, An Act to Protect Water and Nature (H.5005), and is being reviewed by the Special Joint Committee on Petition Initiatives. Mass Rivers testified before the committee in support of the legislation, which would dedicate a portion of the sporting goods sales tax each year (approximately $100 million) to protect and restore nature and water. **Mass Rivers will continue to work with the legislature to encourage passage of the bill, while also preparing for the next stages of the ballot campaign, in case the bill does not pass.** One of the best ways to protect rivers and streams is to protect the land around them.

Nature for Massachusetts Coalition members, March 2026

Testifying in front of the Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions in support of the Protect Water and Nature ballot initiative, March 2026

Dam Busters Expands to Offer Technical Assistance

Massachusetts has over 3,000 dams, most of which are considered defunct. Dam removal is one of the most impactful environmental restoration strategies available. However, dam removal can be complicated and expensive, with only 103 dams removed in MA since 1912. Since 2023, our Dam Busters program has aimed to make this process easier.

> **This spring, Mass Rivers launched a new technical assistance program to help move dam removal forward.**

The project goal is to prepare three recipients to initiate a dam removal project or to bolster dam removal efforts in the very early stages. In January, a consultant was chosen to provide this technical assistance, and three recipients will be chosen in April.

This opportunity also fills an important funding gap, allowing applicants that may not be eligible for other funding opportunities, such as private dam owners, academic institutions, and for-profit organizations.

A scope of work will be determined for each recipient based upon site specific parameters and will be completed within an estimated $20,000 budget per site. This technical assistance program is only for the initiation of dam removal and not for dam removal alternatives, such as dam repairs and/or fish passage infrastructure.

The three technical assistance recipients will be chosen in April, and the six-month technical assistance program is anticipated to run from April to September 2026.

Regulatory Updates

Mass Rivers has been busy providing input on regulations and permits issued by the State through public comment. We commented on **two Water Management Act permits**, asking for more stringent enforcement of permit requirements. Stricter permit enforcement ensures less water is withdrawn from river basins, reducing detrimental impacts on local ecosystems and ensuring there is enough water now and in the future for both drinking water and ecological needs.

We also **commented on the updates to Massachusetts' Surface Water Quality Standards and Massachusetts' 2024/2026 Integrated List of Waters**, both regulatory requirements of the federal Clean Water Act. The updates included more stringent regulations for recreational water quality and removal of the lowest class of water quality in MA, both of which we were very excited to see! We asked the state to include more considerations for water quantity in the Standards and improve feedback for organizations that provide water quality data for the Integrated List of Waters.

At the federal level, **Mass Rivers submitted comments in opposition to two proposed rules that would be damaging to rivers.** The first was a proposal by the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers to further weaken the definition of "Waters of the United States" that would further remove streams, waterbodies, and groundwater from protection under the Clean Water Act. The second is an EPA proposal that would change what states can consider in issuing Section 401 water quality certifications. Under this proposal, nonpoint sources of pollution, like stormwater, would no longer be considered and states would be limited in the information they can require of applicants to review water quality impacts. Thanks to the many member organizations that signed on to these letters.

Welcoming Our New Policy Director, Melissa!

Our new Policy Director, Melissa Shapiro started in mid March and comes to us with extensive experience in environmental law and public policy, as well as deep expertise in legislative strategy.

We're also sending our sincere thanks and best wishes to our outgoing Policy Director, Heather Clish. Luckily, she is not going far, heading to one of our longtime, valued member organizations — The Trustees of Reservations — to serve as their new Policy Director. Heather has been a tremendous champion for Massachusetts rivers, and we are grateful for her leadership and work.

"I am thrilled to join Massachusetts Rivers Alliance! It is apparent that Mass Rivers has earned a reputation of goodwill and respect — a testament to the expertise and tactful advocacy approach of those who have come before me. I look forward to collaborating with the Mass Rivers team, our member organizations, and partners across the state to continue upholding this legacy of policy impact."

-Melissa

Water Future Fund

We did it! We successfully reached—and surpassed—our goal of $1.3M for the Water Future Fund Campaign!

Thank you to the 185 donors who supported this endeavor. As we enter a new phase for Mass Rivers, we are so grateful for the support in being able to fulfill our bold agenda for rivers and water, and bring to life the goals we've set in our 2025-2030 roadmap.

These funds will fuel critical initiatives, sustain our growth, and amplify our reach at a time when our leadership is urgently needed. As an organization that is primarily funded by individual donors like you, we are so grateful for your support!

We reached our $1.3M goal!

5th Lobby for the Rivers Day Recap!

Thank you to all of our partners and supporters for showing up in October to advocate for our rivers. River Advocates had 50 meetings with legislators from every corner of the state to discuss priority bills and have a strong voice for the rivers.

Mass Rivers Organizational Members

Key Leadership Organizations

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, Nor'East Chapter

Leadership Organizations

Association to Preserve Cape Cod
Barnstable Cleanwater Coalition
Better Futures Project- Communities Responding to Extreme Weather
The Charles River Conservancy
Clean Water Action Fund
Community Rowing, Inc.
Connecticut River Conservancy
Conservation Law Foundation
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
North and South Rivers Watershed Association
Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay Riverkeepers
Shawsheen River Watershed Association
Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter
Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council
Trout Unlimited, Greater Boston Chapter
Trout Unlimited, MA Council
Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Trout Unlimited, Cape Cod Chapter
The Trustees

Members

Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Blackstone River Coalition
Blackstone River Watershed Association
Blackstone Watershed Collaborative
Charlesgate Alliance
Deerfield River Watershed Association
Environment Massachusetts
The Esplanade Association
Essex County Greenbelt Association
Fort River Watershed Alliance
Franklin Land Trust, Inc.
Friends of the Bass River
Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
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
Hoosic River Revival
Hoosic River Watershed Association
Hop Brook Protection Association
Housatonic Valley Association
Jones River Watershed Association
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
OARS
Ocean River Institute
Old Ladies Against Underwater Garbage
Parker River Clean Water Association
Pioneer Valley Chapter #276 Trout Unlimited
Project Merrimack
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
Trout Unlimited, Deerfield River Chapter
Trust for Public Land
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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Interns

A warm welcome to our two spring interns: Walter Wei, our Graphic Design & Communications Intern and Jason Ford, our Policy Intern. Welcome to the team!