

MASSACHUSETTS

Rivers Alliance



# The RIVER Advocate

HEALTHY RIVERS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

FALL 2019



Ducks. Photo by Mark Lindhult

## State Funding Increased for Rivers

We are delighted that the latest state budget includes increases for our three top budget priorities! For the second year in a row, with your help and the help of our partner organizations, we have secured significant budget increases for river restorations, dam removals, culvert replacements, water quality monitoring, drought and flood mapping and more!

The state environmental agencies responsible for this work include the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Fish and Game's Division of Ecological Protection and the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Office of Water Resources. We've been working with a great coalition of partners on this issue at the State House throughout the session, including the Appalachian Mountain Club, Environmental League of Massachusetts, The Nature Conservancy, Mass Audubon, and the Massachusetts Organization of State Engineers and Scientists. A big thank you to our members who came to Lobby for the Rivers Day, made phone calls, sent emails and helped us advocate for rivers - we did it!

## Sewage Notification Bill - On the Move!

Sometimes it's better not to be a leader. "With approximately three billion gallons of sewage going into waterways in Massachusetts every year, we are currently the leader in New England when it comes to actual volume of sewage going into the water," noted Mass River Policy Director Gabby Queenan, at a recent press conference hosted by member organization Environment Massachusetts. Although it's a disheartening bit of information, the first step in fixing a problem is recognizing that one exists. We were pleased that the story was picked up by multiple media outlets, following a year of sewage spills - and good press coverage of the problem.

The good news is that state legislators have moved our sewage notification bill forward! The bill, H.3976, would require public notification when raw sewage is discharged into waterways. The legislation, sponsored by Senator Pat Jehlen (D-Somerville), Representative Linda Dean Campbell (D-Methuen), and Representative Denise Provost (D-Somerville), was reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (ENRA). House and Senate versions of the bill are

backed by more than 80 lawmakers, with strong bi-partisan support.

The legislation now awaits review by the House Committee on Ways and Means. We greatly appreciate the leadership of ENRA Co-Chairs Representative Smitty Pignatelli and Senator Anne Gobi in moving this bill forward early in the legislative session. We also wish to acknowledge the support of multiple partner organizations in this effort, including the Mystic River Watershed Association, Environment Massachusetts, Merrimack River Watershed Council, Connecticut River Conservancy, Charles River Watershed Association, and Neponset River Watershed Association.



Swift River, July 28, 2016. Photo by Mark Lindhult



FALL 2019

## From the Director

### SAVING THE WORLD, ONE RIVER AT A TIME

One of my favorite stories is the one about the girl who threw starfish back into the sea\*:

*A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement.*

*She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, "Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can't save all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!"*

*The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, "Well, I made a difference to that one!"*

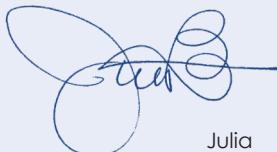
Everything about this story speaks to me – its young female hero, her empathy for the beached starfish, and her determination to persist at what appears to be an impossible task, despite the apathy, skepticism, and perhaps, even ridicule, of those watching from the sidelines.

But what I like most about it is the way the story zooms in from the big, general picture – and our perspective – of those thousands of hapless, but anonymous, starfish, to the much smaller, individual picture – and makes us consider the world from the perspective of one starfish, whose life was saved by the young girl's action.

I find this story relevant to the work we do here at Mass Rivers. You might wonder, for example, why we put so much effort into supporting dam removals when the state has over 3,000 dams, and in a typical year, less than ten are removed. There are lots of good reasons, many of which appeal to your rational brain – such as increasing climate resiliency and decreasing public safety hazards. State investment in dam removals leverages tremendous value by prying loose federal and private funding for river restoration. Certainly, the more dams come out, the more it will become obvious that river restoration brings multiple benefits to communities, including recreational opportunities and a decrease in nuisance plants, some of which can pose health hazards, like toxic "blue-green algae," or cyanobacteria. It is our hope and expectation that this work will be scaled up in the coming years.

But I hope that we don't lose sight of the fact that each river is a world unto itself, with a myriad of creatures that depend on it for life, from tiny invertebrates, dragonflies and damselflies, to trout, great blue herons, frogs, turtles, beavers, muskrats, and otters. When we bring even one river back to life, whether by removing a dam, improving its water quality, or restoring its flow, we save the world for these wild creatures with whom we share our planet. We, too, can say, "Well, I made a difference for that one!"

Thank you for being part of that difference.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Julia".

Julia

\*I first heard this story from my rabbi in our synagogue. It's called "The Star Thrower," by Loren Eiseley, and this adapted version comes from City Year's website.

### MASSACHUSETTS RIVERS ALLIANCE ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

- Association to Preserve Cape Cod
- Belmont Citizens Forum
- Berkshire Environmental Action Team
- Berkshire Natural Resources Council\*
- Biodiversity for a Livable Climate
- Blackstone River Coalition
- Boxborough Conservation Trust
- Buzzards Bay Coalition
- Center for Coastal Studies
- Charles River Conservancy\*
- Charles River Watershed Association\*
- Charlesgate Alliance
- Charlestown Waterfront Coalition
- Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council
- Clean River Project
- Clean Water Action
- Connecticut River Conservancy
- Conservation Law Foundation\*
- Deerfield River Watershed Chapter of Trout Unlimited
- Environment Massachusetts
- Environmental League of Massachusetts\*
- Farmington River Watershed Association
- Friends of the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge
- Friends of the Blue Hills
- Friends of the Malden River
- Friends of the Ten Mile
- Greater Boston Chapter Trout Unlimited\*
- Greater Northfield Watershed Association
- Green Newton
- Greenbelt
- Groundwork Lawrence
- Hoosic River Revival
- Hoosic River Watershed Association
- Hop Brook Protection Association
- Housatonic Valley Association
- Ipswich River Watershed Association\*
- Jones River Watershed Association
- Kestrel Land Trust
- League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
- Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust
- MA RI Council of Trout Unlimited\*
- Mass Audubon\*
- Mass Organization of State Engineers and Scientists\*
- Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions
- Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
- Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
- Merrimack River Watershed Council
- Millers River Watershed Council
- Mystic River Watershed Association\*
- Nashua River Watershed Association\*
- Neponset River Watershed Association\*
- Nor'East Chapter of Trout Unlimited
- North and South Rivers Watershed Association\*
- OARS, for the Assabet, Sudbury, & Concord Rivers\*
- Ocean River Institute
- Parker River Clean Water Association
- Pioneer Valley Chapter #276 Trout Unlimited

## Member organizations, continued

River Merrimack  
 Save the Bay - Narragansett Bay Riverkeeper  
 Sea Run Brook Trout Coalition\*  
 Shawsheen River Watershed Association  
 Sierra Club Massachusetts Chapter\*  
 Sudbury Valley Trustees  
 Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council\*  
 Taunton River Watershed Alliance  
 Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council  
 Ten Mile River Watershed Council  
 The Muddy Water Initiative  
 The Nature Conservancy\*  
 The Trust for Public Land  
 The Trustees  
 Wareham Land Trust  
 Wastewater Advisory Committee to the MWRA  
 Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee  
 Weir River Watershed Association  
 Westfield River Watershed Association  
 Westfield River Wild and Scenic River Advisory Committee  
 Westport River Watershed Alliance

\*Leadership members



West Springfield Dam. Photo by Gabby Queenan.

## Pushing Back on Hydropower

While some people consider it “green energy,” hydropower generation seriously harms rivers and their wildlife. Here in Massachusetts, despite our 3,000+ dams, the hydropower potential is insignificant, compared to potential wind and solar energy sources, because most of our rivers are small, and slow-moving. The majority of the dams on our rivers are old and serve no useful purpose; yet they hurt rivers and wildlife by raising water temperature, lowering water quality, and interrupting the movement of wildlife. They can also create safety hazards for swimmers and boaters.

Mass Rivers recently led the charge against changes to state hydropower dam regulations that would incentivize dam owners to keep dams in place, with minimal oversight. The proposed updates from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources would require hydropower generators to undergo just one review to receive a lifetime of state benefits as providers of “environmentally sustainable energy.” Currently, hydropower operators must undergo a new review every five years, as changes in the riverways and technological advances can prompt new requirements to protect river ecology and recreation. Mass Rivers Policy Director Gabby Queenan testified against the new proposed regulations at a hearing in Amherst, and drafted a letter opposing these changes, signed by 70 organizations from across New England. We are grateful to our many partners for supporting this effort and to all of our individual members who submitted their own comments opposing this change.

617-714-4272 • [www.massriversalliance.org](http://www.massriversalliance.org)  
2343 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge, MA 02140

RIVERS ALLIANCE  
MASSACHUSETTS



## Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

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

### Board Officers

Mark P. Smith, President  
Emily Scerbo, Vice President  
Andrea Franz, Treasurer  
Paul Beaulieu, Clerk

### Board Members

Anna Aguilera, Wayne Castonguay,  
Roger Colton, Ian Cooke, Mary Griffin,  
Nancy Hammett, Andy Magee, Nagesh  
Mahanthappa, Deirdre Menoyo, Pam Resor,  
E. Heidi Ricci

### Staff

Julia Blatt, Executive Director  
Gabby Queenan, Policy Director  
Gretchen McClain, Development & Ops

## Save the Date!

Please mark your calendars for our next Annual Meeting & Dinner, which will take place on Wednesday, December 4th from 6-9 pm at the First Church in Belmont. We



Florence Williams, Annual Meeting Guest Speaker.

are delighted to announce that our guest speaker will be award-winning journalist, author, and podcaster Florence Williams, who will share stories from her latest book, *The Nature Fix*.

This year we are delighted to recognize four outstanding river champions in Massachusetts: House Speaker Robert DeLeo; The Nature Conservancy's Legislative Director, Steve Long; Mass Audubon's Legislative Director, Jack Clarke; and Vandana Rao, the state's Director of Water Policy. We'll raffle off a new kayak, auction off a great stay at a vacation home (or two) and celebrate the

year's successes. This event has sold out the past two years, so get your tickets early - we look forward to seeing you there!

Event details and tickets are available on the Mass Rivers website ([massriversalliance.org](http://massriversalliance.org)). Questions? Call Gretchen McClain at 617-714-4272.