Mass Rivers promotes municipal stormwater management

The Massachusetts Rivers Alliance is teaming up with partners to offer a series of workshops around the state to help municipalities develop funding mechanisms to pay for stormwater management.

WHY IT MATTERS. Good municipal stormwater management can mean the difference between polluted or healthy streams, and can help prevent flooding and beach closures. Many communities, however, still balk at the cost of paying for stormwater management. As a result, most towns are not in full compliance with current federal stormwater requirements, even as new, stricter requirements are on the horizon (see From the Director, p. 2).

Stormwater originates with precipitation and snow/ice melt. It is either absorbed by soil, evaporated from the surface or becomes runoff that ends up in nearby water bodies. In natural landscapes stormwater soaks into the ground, close to where it falls. In areas dominated by impervious surfaces (roads, roofs, parking lots etc.) stormwater can create flooding and carry contaminants either directly or indirectly through stormwater drains into water bodies. Contaminated stormwater is the largest source of water pollution in Massachusetts.

THE CHALLENGE - FUNDING. Why is it so hard for communities to pay for something so basic to environmental quality, not to mention public health and safety?

The answer is that most towns haven’t figured out a good funding mechanism for stormwater management. We are used to paying by the gallon for water piped into our homes for drinking, washing, lawn watering and other uses, through water fees. We also pay sewer fees for wastewater...
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Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee
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National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was
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We have more work ahead, but I’d like to extend a big thank you
to keep pollutants out of runoff (e.g. by street sweeping), to remove pollutants from stormwater, to maintain underground pipes that transport stormwater, and
to keep out impervious materials from the riverbed. The
New federal permit directs many Massachusetts municipalities to
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Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust
Conservation Law Foundation
Groundwork Lawrence
New Bedford
Friends of the Assabet River NWR
Eel River Watershed Association
Conservation Trust
Charles River Watershed Association
Blackstone River Coalition
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Berkshire River Coalition
Berkshire Valley Land Trust
Boxborough Conservation Trust
OARS, for the Assabet, Sudbury, & Concord Rivers
Shawsheen River Watershed Association
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Neponset River Watershed Association
Nashua River Watershed Association
Mystic River Watershed Association
Merrimack River Watershed Council
Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
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Mills River Watershed Council
Mythic River Watershed Association
Nashua River Watershed Association
Napoleon River Watershed Association
North and South Rivers Watershed Association
OARS, for the Assabet, Sudbury, & Concord Rivers
Parker River Clean Water Association
Bowrhead River Watershed Association
Sudbury Valley Trustees
Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Water & Scenic River Stewardship Council
Tourton River Watershed Alliance
Tourton River and Scenic River Stewardship Council
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
The Trustees of Reservations
Tout Unlimited, Greater Boston Chapter
Tout Unlimited, Pioneer Valley Chapter
Walden Woods Project
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Watershed Action Alliance of Southeastern MA
Wet River Watershed Association
Westfield River Watershed Association
Westfield River & Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee
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Polluted stormwater is one of the most persistent problems facing rivers in our state, and is the reason more than half of our rivers
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"Keeping rivers front and center" from page 1.
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The River Advocate | Spring 2015

Organizational members of the Alliance:

AMC-Berkshire Chapter
Belmont Citizens Forum
Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Berkshire Natural Resources Council
Blackstone River Coalition
Boscodon Conservation Trust
Charles River Conservancy
Charles River Watershed Association
Chateaugay River Watershed Association
Connecticut River Watershed Council
Conservation Law Foundation
Delaware River Basin Commission
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Eel River Watershed Association
Friends of the Assabet River
Green Berkshires
Green Decade Newton
Groundwork Lawrence
Hoosac River Revival
Hoosic River Watershed Association
Hop Brook Protection Association
Hoosic Valley Association
Ipswich River Watershed Association
Jones River Watershed Association
Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust
Mass Audubon
Massachusetts Assoc. of Conservation Comm.
Massachusetts Land Trust Alliance
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Wespac River Watershed Alliance

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**From the Director**

A GROUP EFFORT

When the new draft federal stormwater requirements for municipalities (the MS4 permit) came out back in October, I knew we had just a few weeks to carefully review and analyze this lengthy technical document and its appendices, then form a response. The new federal permit directs many Massachusetts municipalities to manage their stormwater so that rivers, lakes, and beaches are cleaner and healthier. What did we like about these proposed requirements? What needed to be changed?

Polluted stormwater is one of the most persistent problems facing rivers in our state, and is the reason more than half of our rivers don’t meet the “fishable and swimable” water quality standard. Unfortunately, many municipalities have resisted taking on this important responsibility because of cost concerns — to the detriment of other communities that share their watershed resources.

We needed to make a good strong case for river stewardship by carefully analyzing this lengthy technical document and its appendices, then form a response. The new permit was out, we pulled together a “rapid response team” led by Alliance board member Nancy Hammett, and including staff from several watershed groups affected by the permit, such as the Neponset, Mystic, Connecticut, and Charles, as well as statewide environmental organizations like Mass Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, and the Conservation Law Foundation.

Each person read the permit, and focused on his or her area of expertise. Chloride pollution? Green infrastructure? Impervious cover? We came together with a shared message for the federal and state regulatory agencies. You can see our letter on our website.

We have more work ahead, but I’d like to extend a big thank you to all our members, large and small, for your thoughtful comments on this important draft permit. We hope our groups’ collective support for responsible municipal stormwater management will push this one over the finish line.

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**“Keeping rivers front and center” from page 1.**

system (the Nashua)? The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created by Congress in 1968 to preserve designated rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance Executive Director Julia Blatt accompanied Alson Field-Jama of OARS (Alliance organizational member) for two busy days on the Hill with federal legislative staff, asking them to support a funding increase for this river program.

ADVOCATING FOR BETTER WATER MANAGEMENT ACT RULES. The new Sustainable Water Management Initiative regulations are now in place, but as with many policies, the devil is still in the details. Executive Director Julia Blatt, board members Ian Cooke and Wayne Castonguay, and Alliance organizational member Becky Smith (Clean Water Action) have been using their positions on the Water Management Act Advisory Committee to improve implementation of the new policy — to make sure the new rules actually protect and restore river flow as intended.

**COMING UP: A SEMINAR ON WATER FOR LEGISLATORS.** The Massachusetts Rivers Alliance is hosting a one-hour seminar for legislators in April, at the State House, on current water topics, to focus attention on legislative priorities for water.

**“Mass Rivers promotes municipal stormwater management” from page 1.**

“Municipalities need funding for a variety of stormwater-related activities — to keep polluters out of runoff (e.g. by street sweeping), to remove pollutants from stormwater, to maintain underground pipes that transport stormwater, and to monitor water quality at the outfalls where storm drains discharge into rivers. Municipalities are also responsible for regulating the impact of local construction, development and land use, and for educating the public about how their behavior affects stormwater pollution. Without a reliable and dedicated source of funding, however, many communities have not allocated adequate funding to these important responsibilities.”

STORMWATER UTILITIES. One idea that has been gaining traction in Massachusetts and throughout the country is a “stormwater utility.” The quantity of stormwater runoff from a property is a direct result of the amount of its impervious cover. A typical storm water utility estimates each property owner’s contribution to the problem by measuring the acreage of their impervious cover. The town then assesses all property owners a small fee based on these calculations. These fees are placed in a dedicated account that helps pay for municipal stormwater management. This approach results in a fair and reliable source of funding, and encourages property owners to reduce their stormwater footprint. Towns with stormwater utilities include Reading, Chicopee, Newton, Fall, River, Westfield, and Northampton.

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*BayState Roads, Clean Water Action, Mass Audubon, Connecticut River Watershed Association, MassBayS, The Nature Conservancy, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the Massachusetts Municipal Association, MA Department of Fish and Game Division of Ecological Restoration, Massachusetts Environmental Trust, Tighe & Bond.*
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Keeping rivers front and center

A VISIT WITH THE NEW COMMISSIONER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION. In between snowstorms, we were busy the first few months of this year meeting new staff at the environmental agencies, as well as greeting some familiar faces in new positions. In February, the Alliance hosted a meeting with MassDEP’s newly appointed Commissioner Martin Suuberg, who gave us an early peek at the Baker administration’s agenda for his agency, and then gamely fielded questions from our organizational members. Commissioner Suuberg, who brings many years of experience at MassDEP to his new position, expressed a desire to find new ways to partner with municipalities to help them achieve compliance with various permit requirements. We appreciated the Commissioner’s visit, and look forward to the next one.

A TRIP TO CAPITOL HILL. Did you know Massachusetts has three federal Wild and Scenic Rivers (the Sudbury, Concord and Assabet, which counts as one; the Westfield, and the Taunton), with another being studied for inclusion in the...