



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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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
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APRIL, 2015

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 swimmable" water quality standard. Unfortunately, many municipalities have resisted taking on this important challenge 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 reviewing and supporting the new permit. Fortunately, we had just the people for the job. As soon as the 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 acreage requirements for urban areas? We had it covered. Each organization sent its own comment letter to the EPA, and the group coordinated on key issues -- and the environmental community 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.

Julia



Photo by Carole Smith Berney.

Organizational members of the Alliance:

- AMC Berkshire Chapter
- Belmont Citizens Forum
- Berkshire Environmental Action Team
- Berkshire Natural Resources Council
- Blackstone River Coalition
- Boxborough Conservation Trust
- Charles River Conservancy
- Charles River Watershed Association
- Charlestown Waterfront Coalition
- Clean Water Action
- Connecticut River Watershed Council
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Eel River Watershed Association
- Environmental League of Massachusetts
- Essex County Greenbelt Association
- Friends of the Blue Hills
- Friends of the Assabet River NWR
- Greater Northfield Watershed Association
- Green Berkshires
- Green Decade Newton
- Groundwork Lawrence
- Hoosic River Revival
- Hoosic River Watershed Association
- Hop Brook Protection Association
- Housatonic Valley Association
- Ipswich River Watershed Association
- Jones River Watershed Association
- Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust
- Mass Audubon
- Massachusetts Assoc. of Conservation Comm.
- 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
- North and South Rivers Watershed Association
- OARS, for the Assabet, Sudbury, & Concord Rivers
- Parker River Clean Water Association
- Shawsheen River Watershed Association
- Sudbury Valley Trustees
- Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council
- Taunton River Watershed Alliance
- Taunton River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Trust for Public Land
- The Trustees of Reservations
- Trout Unlimited, Greater Boston Chapter
- Trout Unlimited, Pioneer Valley Chapter
- Walden Woods Project
- Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)
- Watershed Action Alliance of Southeastern MA
- Weir River Watershed Association
- Westfield River Watershed Association
- Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee
- Westport River Watershed Alliance

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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 Alison Field-Juma 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.



Commissioner Suuberg meets with the Alliance. Photo by Alison Bowden, The Nature Conservancy.

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.

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treatment, if there is a centralized sewer system in our town. But most towns have no such dedicated charge for the third component of water infrastructure and management -- stormwater.

Municipalities need funding for a variety of stormwater-related activities -- 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 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.

WORKSHOPS. Many municipalities have asked for help explaining the need for a new funding approach to their town leaders and residents, and for help designing and implementing a utility that best meets the needs of their community. The Alliance’s stormwater workshops will provide that help. The first three workshops are planned for October, with a second series in the spring. You can check our website for dates, and check BayState Roads’ website to register.

*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.



Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

The Alliance's mission is to protect and restore rivers across the Commonwealth.

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Recognizing our heroes

We applauded the leadership of three legislators and founding member Kerry Mackin at our annual meeting in December. Senator Jamie Eldridge and Representative Carolyn Dykema received "River Hero" awards, Representative Dave Rogers received a "River Friend" award, and Kerry Mackin received a "River Advocate" award. Congratulations to our distinguished honorees, and thank you to everyone who helped us celebrate their achievements!



Julia Blatt and Rep. Carolyn Dykema



Ian Cooke and Kerry Mackin

Photos by Mark P. Smith