



MASSACHUSETTS Rivers Alliance

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**TESTIMONY ON AN ACT IMPROVING DRINKING WATER AND WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE (S1947)
BEFORE
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON BONDING, CAPITAL EXPENDITURES AND STATE ASSETS
JANUARY 30, 2014**

JULIA BLATT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Thank you, Chairman Joyce and members of the Committee. The Massachusetts Rivers Alliance appreciates the opportunity to state its strong support for S1947. Our mission is to protect and restore rivers in Massachusetts. The Alliance comprises 51 conservation groups around the state (see attached list), including most of the watershed groups in Massachusetts, and a growing group of individuals and families. Today we join an unusual, broad-based coalition of organizations supporting funding for water infrastructure. We also want to note our appreciation for the work of Senator Eldridge, Representative Dykema, and their committee.

Although Massachusetts is a water-rich state, we are also small and densely-populated, and many river basins around Massachusetts are suffering from the effects of our water use and land management. These problems are greatly exacerbated by aging, leaky, and obsolete infrastructure. About 1/5 of the Commonwealth's streams suffer from flow depletion in the summer, and more than a third of our rivers and streams don't meet the water quality standard of fishable and swimmable, due to wastewater, and especially stormwater, pollution. Combined sewer overflows, for example, dump raw sewage in streams and urban streets, and lead to beach closures in the summer.

Passage of this bill, by increasing funds available to repair and replace water infrastructure will help many communities waste less water, improve streamflow in rivers and streams, and reduce pollution in rivers, streams, and coastal waters. We particularly support provisions to encourage, plan for and fund green infrastructure, which provides multiple environmental, economic, aesthetic, and recreational benefits.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to the water-banking provision in this bill (Section 39M).

In our view, waterbanking offers a triple win:

- For towns, this legislation will provide them with a tool they can use to mitigate the impacts of new and increased water uses.
 - The fees collected can be used solely to mitigate these impacts, and must go into a water utility expressly for this purpose. This money will be protected from being “borrowed” for other municipal uses.
 - These fees will help towns comply with environmental regulatory requirements.
 - Communities can choose to establish a water bank or not, at their discretion.

- For developers, the water banking requirement may help them keep their projects moving, as they won't be responsible for offsetting their impacts onsite, which may not be possible. Instead, they will be able to pay into a fund that will allow the town to assume responsibility for mitigating the environmental impact of new water use.
- River advocates like this bill because tools like this make it easier for towns to comply with environmental regulations.
 - Mitigation can range from creating additional storm water recharge, to demand management programs, to tying into new water sources, to protecting riparian land. All these actions benefit rivers.
 - We recognize that towns are more likely to comply with these kinds of requirements if there is a dedicated source of funding.
 - Of particular importance to us is compliance with the upcoming Sustainable Water Management Initiative requirements to mitigate or offset the effects of additional water withdrawals. Water banking can help with this.
- Because we all saw the value in it, The Nature Conservancy, Charles River Watershed Association, and the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance spent many months coming to agreement with the municipal water suppliers on this bill. We do not always agree on policy, but we join with them and the Mass Municipal Association in urging you to support this provision of the bill.

Thank you for your hard work, and for considering these comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance.