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# Keeping Our Water Clean

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**When it rains, stormwater can carry dissolved pollutants into our streams, rivers, groundwater and the ocean.** Through a special permit, the federal and state governments have charged many local communities with stormwater management to protect groundwater and surface water, bays and wetlands—resources vital to supporting a healthy and resilient environment.

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## Watershed Action Alliance

Of Southeastern  
Massachusetts

Protecting water  
and natural  
resources in  
Southeastern  
Massachusetts.



WAA represents  
13 member  
organizations with  
20,000 paid  
members and  
1,000s more  
followers.



P.O. Box 43  
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**Watershed Associations partner with towns.** Watershed associations such as the Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA) often partner with municipalities to assist with stormwater discharge permit compliance, as well as improving runoff management and planning. Partnership activities include joint applications for Clean Water Act grants to fund green infrastructure (e.g., raingardens to filter stormwater) to reduce polluted runoff. Watershed associations are also vital to providing water quality data and educational services to municipalities. The North and South Rivers Watershed Association (NSRWA) provides a regional education and outreach program called WaterSmart South Shore that provides many South Shore communities with programming that helps reduce stormwater pollution.

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### What Can Legislators Do?

- **Fully fund the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Administration budget line-item 2200-0100.** DEP is responsible for enforcing permits limiting stormwater discharges to surface waters. This line item funds all of DEP's staff, including its water quality program staff. Presently, DEP staffing levels are at their lowest in more than a decade and their water quality monitoring efforts have dropped by more than 50%.
- **Fully fund the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Watershed Management Office (Budget Line-Item 2800-0101).** The Governor's budget reduces funding for DCR's Watershed Management program by \$40K (significant given their already small budget and limited staff). This office funds the DCR Office of Water Resources, which staffs the Drought Management Task Force and the Water Resources Commission, houses the state hydrologist, and oversees key projects that inform water policies such as the current water rate analysis.
- **Support H.2139, an Act to improve water quality and pollution control programs,** which directs the Water Resources Commission to conduct a gap analysis of the federal and state water pollution control programs in Massachusetts.
- **Support S.448/H.2935, an Act promoting awareness of safe recreation in public waterways,** which creates a statewide sewage discharge notification system to alert residents when combined sewer overflow discharges make rivers unsafe for recreation.
- **Fund municipal stormwater infrastructure improvements.** Given the damage that uncontrolled runoff can do when it floods our roadways, homes, businesses, and environment, it is vital to maintain and/or upgrade existing stormwater infrastructure. State matching funds for federal grants would support town efforts to upgrade aging infrastructure and remediate problem areas.



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# Will We Have Enough Water?

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Continuing population growth, combined with the worsening effects of climate change, raises the concern that we could run out of water – water that is necessary for our own survival as well as for maintaining a healthy environment.

**Surface water and groundwater provide the water** used by residents and businesses of Southeastern Massachusetts (SE Mass). Through the Water Management Act, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) manages the amount of water that can be removed for use by residents, businesses and others. DEP does this by issuing permits with water withdrawal limits and conservation requirements to ensure we maintain an adequate supply. However, years of budget cuts and deprioritization of the agency has hampered efforts. Support from our elected officials is crucial to provide DEP and other critical state programs with the resources necessary to protect our region's water and ensure residents, businesses, and the environment will have enough water for the future.

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### Specific concerns in SE Mass include:

- DEP has not determined accurate permitted water withdrawal amounts in parts of SE Mass. For example, many streams on the South Shore, including the Eel River, Third Herring Brook, Weir River and Jones River run dry because the permitted limit exceeds the amount of water needed to maintain supply and streamflow. If the source watershed's capacity to provide water without damaging the environment is not considered, our streams will dry up more often as the climate changes.
- DEP has not imposed reasonable water conservation measures for water suppliers grandfathered into the Water Management Act as registered users.
- Without environmentally-based permitted water withdrawals that are protective of the source watershed, DEP cannot provide towns with a legal threshold that limits water withdrawals for new development and allows towns to save their surface water resources. For example, Scituate is forced to provide water for new development because the DEP permits it. At the same time the town struggles to provide existing customers water and maintain streamflow during summers and droughts.

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### What Can Legislators Do?

- **Fully fund budget line item 2200-0100 (DEP Administration).** This line item funds all of DEP's staff. The agency is operating with one of their lowest staffing levels in more than a decade (down 30% from FY09).
- **Fully fund budget line item 2800-0101 (DCR Office of Water Resources).** This office staffs the Drought Management Task Force and Water Resources Commission, houses the state hydrologist, and oversees key projects that inform our water policies like the current water rate analysis.
- **Support an Act providing for the establishment of sustainable water resource funds (S.1126/H.2116).** The bill (currently under review by Senate Ways and Means) would authorize municipalities to assess a water-banking fee on new large-scale water users to address the environmental impacts of new development on water resources.
- **Direct DEP to establish reasonable water conservation measures for registered water suppliers under the Water Management Act.**
- **Maintain contact with your local watershed association** whose staff are knowledgeable about the issues in your district and have subject matter expertise.



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# Reconnecting Our Rivers and Estuaries

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**Over the past decade effort has increased** in Southeastern Massachusetts (SE Mass) towards removing dams and culverts and reconnecting our streams. Much of this effort has come from partnerships between non-profits and federal, state, and local governments, with a large contribution of money and assistance from the Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and the Mass. Division of Ecological Restoration.

As an example, South Shore watershed associations, towns, and their state and federal partners have been **leaders in Massachusetts in improving stream connectivity through dam removals** and cranberry bog restoration projects resulting in opening 16 miles of streams and rivers, providing an additional 15 miles of partial access through fish passage structures, and avoiding potentially costly liability associated with unsafe, aging dams. Additional progress has been made in other parts of SE Mass including multiple well-publicized dam removals in the Taunton River basin.

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**We have made progress, but there is more to do.** Overall, on the South Shore only 8% of available habitat has been re-opened, 20% is partially accessible, and 72% of restorable habitat is still blocked by dams. Dam removal and other restoration projects like culvert replacements and tide gate improvements not only improve access for migratory fish such as river herring and Eastern brook trout, they also improve water quality, help maintain streamflow, and improve instream habitat. When river herring and other fish can access more habitat, their populations increase, providing more food for the animals that eat them, such as striped bass, bluefish, osprey, and herons.

### On the South Shore:

- 22 dams have been removed since 2002
- 14 dams have fish passage, but still act as impediments to habitat and continuity
- 9 dams are currently under consideration for removal
- Approximately 112 dams remain

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### What Can Legislators Do?

- **Maintain or increase funding for the Mass. Division of Ecological Restoration within the Department of Fish and Game (Line-Item 2300-0101).** DER staff are responsible for overseeing dam removals, culvert replacements, flood plain restorations, flood gate restorations and major river restoration projects across Massachusetts. They also conduct streamflow analyses and investigate new water issues, like their recent study of new water conservation strategies. Under the Governor's budget, they would see about a \$90K cut (significant given their already small budget and limited staff).
- **Reinstate matching funding for the Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program** to more effectively leverage federal funds and support work in 50 coastal communities.