

# ***WATER for the Future:***

## ***Support the Sustainable Water Resources Act (SB.349/HB.255.)***

*Lead sponsors: Senator James Eldridge and Representative Frank Smizik*

Water is a valuable calling card for Massachusetts, giving the Commonwealth the competitive edge over other states. Rivers, lakes and aquifers provide clean drinking water for millions of residents and offer countless opportunities for recreation and tourism. In fact, rivers and their streams crisscross 11,000 miles around the state.

Despite getting four feet of rainfall annually, numerous communities face challenges meeting summer water demand and many rivers are running dry. Less water means increased water pollution, declining fisheries, and fewer recreational opportunities.

We will squander our state's advantage if we do not take steps today to sustain our water resources. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council predicts that 44 communities in eastern Massachusetts will exceed their allowable water withdrawal limits by 2020 under a "business as usual" scenario.

In addition, climate change in New England is expected to bring more droughts interspersed with more intense storms. We need to better manage flows during dry periods and upgrade our water infrastructure so it can moderate these impacts.

The *Sustainable Water Resources Act* seeks to use the best available science to define how much water should be left in our rivers and streams to protect these invaluable resources, while meeting public health and safety needs.

### ***Water for people***

Many communities rely on rivers for many uses. Rivers supply drinking water, absorb wastewater discharges and add recreational value.

Unfortunately, summer visits to the Ipswich River, the upper Charles River, the Jones River and other streams often bring an unwelcome surprise: a dry riverbed where a free-flowing river should be. Pro-active planning and science-based management of our shared freshwater resources will help meet the needs of both people and nature. Better management can help municipalities save scarce funds and reduce energy use by not needing to find new water supplies, incurring the expense of drilling new wells, pumping water from greater distances, and building new treatment plants.

### **The Sustainable Water Resources Act will:**

**Ensure adequate water in our rivers and streams for people and wildlife:** The Act establishes a process to develop science-based streamflow standards to ensure that fisheries and other freshwater species are sustained while meeting water supply needs for public health and safety.

**Encourage innovative and sustainable water solutions:** An opt-in "water-banking" feature of the Act authorizes public water suppliers and DPWs to charge a reasonable fee for new water withdrawals or increased sewer use. Funds would be used to conserve water supplies, increase the capacity of wastewater systems and to invest in greener water infrastructure. Measures could include local recharge of storm/wastewater, water reuse, retrofitting properties with water-saving devices, fixing leaky pipes and land acquisition for wellhead protection.

**Promote river restoration:** The Act expands the options offered to dam owners by empowering the Office of Dam Safety to include dam removal as an option for dealing with obsolete dams. Currently, the office's existing authority extends only to the repair of failing dams.

## ***Water for wildlife***

The rich diversity of our rivers and streams depends on a natural flow pattern, with its seasonal highs and lows and shifts from wetter to drier years. Paved surfaces, water withdrawals, dams, storm drainage and regional wastewater systems have all altered these flows, putting the health of our water resources at risk.

Massachusetts has 160 “flow impaired” rivers and streams. Groundbreaking work by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife has documented the disruptive effects that habitat alteration and dwindling stream flows have on river fish populations.

## ***Invest in nature, invest in us***

When our rivers and streams are healthy, the return on investment is huge. As the Commonwealth plans for the impacts of climate change, this bill provides the tools to ensure our rivers will be better equipped to withstand droughts and floods and reduce risks to human life and property.

## ***Legislative Sponsors***

**Lead sponsors** – Senator James Eldridge and Representative Frank Smizik

**Senators:** Clark, DiDomenico, Donnelly, Eldridge, Fargo, Jehlen, Joyce, Rush

**Representatives:** Atkins, Balser, Benson, Brownsberger, Campbell, Cantwell, Coakley-Rivera, DiNatale, Donato, Ehrlich, Garballey, Hecht, Kafka, Kaufman, Khan, Kocot, Kulik, Lewis, Puppolo, Sannicandro, Smizik, Spiliotis, Spiliotis, Wolf

## ***Endorsing Organizations:***

The endorsing organizations listed below urge the Legislature to support the *Sustainable Water Resources Act* (SB.349 and HB.255) for the benefit of the Commonwealth’s people and waterways.

**Appalachian Mountain Club · Berkshire Environmental Action Team · Charles River Watershed Association · Clean Water Action · Conservation Law Foundation · Eel River Watershed Association · Environment Massachusetts · Environmental League of Massachusetts · Essex County Greenbelt Association · Ipswich River Watershed Association · Jones River Watershed Association · MassAudubon · Mass Association of Conservation Commissions · Massachusetts Rivers Alliance · Merrimack River Watershed Association · Nashua River Watershed Association · The Nature Conservancy · Neponset River Watershed Association · Organization for the Assabet River · Parker River Clean Water Association · Save the Bay · Taunton River Watershed Alliance · Trout Unlimited · The Trustees of Reservations · The Wildlands Trust**

## ***For more information, please contact:***

- Steve Long, The Nature Conservancy—617-532-8367
- Jen Ryan, Mass Audubon—617-523-8448 x. 2552
- Margaret Van Deusen, Charles River Watershed Association—781-788-0007 x. 234
- Nancy Goodman, Environmental League of Massachusetts—617-742-2553 x. 103