

MYSTIC RIVER WATERSHED



2006: D 2007: D 2008: C- 2009: C- 2010: D- 2011: D

REPORT CARD

Each year, EPA Region 1 issues a report card for the Mystic River Watershed based on sampling data from the previous year. The grade is determined after comparing bacterial water quality data at 15 MyRWA baseline sampling points throughout the Watershed to state swimming and boating water quality standards.



Mystic River

WATERSHED INITIATIVE

Working together to improve water quality, public access and recreation throughout the watershed.



WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

The EPA Mystic River Watershed Initiative is a collaborative effort to improve water quality and environmental conditions as well as create and protect open space and public access to the Mystic River and its tributaries through safe public pathways and access points. The Initiative is guided by a steering committee composed of 22 organizations including not-for-profit community groups, local, state, and federal governmental agencies and is co-chaired by U.S. EPA and the Mystic River Watershed Association.

WHY IS THE INITIATIVE NEEDED?

The Mystic River Watershed is a collection of rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds that drain an area of approximately 76 square miles and 21 municipalities north of Boston. The Mystic River proper, which flows from the Mystic Lakes in Winchester and Arlington through Medford, Somerville, Everett, Charlestown and Chelsea to Boston Harbor, is one of the great urban rivers of New England. The river and the watershed that feeds it, served as an epicenter of much of the activity from which sprung settlement and economic activity in the colonies: mills, shipyards, and villages.

Unfortunately, settlement and industrial activity have not always been kind to the Watershed. As the towns and cities in the watershed developed, fields were replaced with parking lots, footpaths with highways, and pastoral river banks with polluting industrial activity and shipyards with oil storage facilities. All of these alterations have contributed to the decline of the Watershed and water quality in the Mystic River.

In the Mystic River Watershed, residents can be exposed to significant, cumulative environmental and public health hazards every day including contaminated urban rivers, fish and sediment. The Chelsea Creek, a tributary of the Mystic River, connects the lowest income, most diverse areas of Chelsea, Revere and East Boston. These areas share recreational, health, cultural, community and transportation services as well as significant environmental and public health risks associated with living in densely populated urban areas including petroleum storage terminals, designated port area, a 170,000 ton salt pile, airport-related industry, and intensive truck and road traffic. Compared to other Boston neighborhoods and surrounding communities, Chelsea and East Boston have the lowest amounts of open space acreage per person and have significant concentrations of low income and minority populations.

HISTORY OF THE INITIATIVE

In April 2008, EPA Region 1 held a Mystic River Watershed Summit that focused on Flooding, Industrial Contaminants, Bacteria and Stormwater, and Reconnecting people to the river and was attended by over 150 people. In early 2009, the Mystic River Watershed Steering Committee was created to allow environmental advocates, state and federal regulators, and business and municipal leaders to work collaboratively to promote actions that will improve environmental conditions throughout the watershed. In early 2011, the Committee came to consensus around its mission and priorities. The Committee will focus on restoring and protecting water quality, wildlife and its habitats, while also protecting and creating open public spaces for safe public access to the waterfront. In addition, the Steering Committee will promote sustainable recreational uses on the river and its tributaries with a plan to address overarching environmental justice concerns within the watershed. Members of the Steering Committee will work together to implement these actions.

Water Quality:

The Steering Committee plans to make the waters of the Mystic River Watershed fishable, boatable, and swimmable by reducing and eliminating sanitary sewer overflows, assisting municipalities with stormwater management, remediating legacy pollution, decreasing phosphorus loading, and increasing the public's awareness of fish consumption health advisories.

Open Space and Access:

The Steering Committee plans to increase safe public open space and access to the river and its tributaries (through redeveloping and remediating brownfields, developing walkways, bikeways and trails, etc.) by supporting the development and improvement of open space and access at targeted sites in the watershed while also investigating additional sites in other parts of the watershed system.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- The City of Chelsea is one of ten national partnership projects selected by EPA Headquarters to expand the use of green infrastructure. In January 2012, EPA signed a contract giving technical support to Chelsea by completing an audit of the City's ordinances, developing a green infrastructure guideline and workshop for the City's boards, and producing public outreach materials.
- In April 2011, EPA Region 1 held a stormwater workshop in Chelsea, MA to review the new provisions of the draft North Coastal small MS4 NPDES permit and low impact development techniques.
- In December 2011, EPA Region 1 signed an MOU with UMass Boston for the region's Urban Waters/Mystic River University Collaborative. UMass Boston continues to support EPA's urban waters/Mystic River Watershed efforts, beach, nonpoint source and other programs.
- EPA enforcement efforts have stopped over 14,000 gallons per day of sewage from being discharged to the watershed through illicit connections.
- EPA Region 1 has loaned over \$11,000 worth of monitoring equipment to the Mystic River Watershed Association in support of baseline and hot spot monitoring programs, as well as microbiology assistance. The lab has analyzed over 2000 samples from the Mystic River for *E. coli* and *Enterococcus* bacteria. EPA also conducts real-time monitoring using a remote sensing buoy to track water quality conditions and cyanobacteria blooms at a strategic location in the watershed.
- The Mystic River Watershed received grant funding derived from the criminal sentence imposed in the federal Clean Water Act case against ExxonMobil Pipeline Company. As a result of this case, the Massachusetts Environmental Trust issued \$1 million in grants and the North American Wetlands Conservation Trust issued \$1,663,150 in grants all for environmental projects to the Mystic River and Chelsea Creek.

HOW CAN I HELP?

EPA's Mystic River Watershed Initiative website provides background information on the watershed, a list of important contacts, updates of events and activities, and an invitation to become part of the solution. To learn more about our Mystic River Watershed Initiative, visit www.epa.gov/mysticriver.

This initiative is a watershed-wide effort. A watershed consists of the total land area and water bodies that drain into a single river or lake system, and is also the source of groundwater recharge to that system. By focusing on the watershed as a single entity, the Steering Committee's approach capitalizes on collaboration between up- and down-stream stakeholders and members are able to combine resources to address shared issues.

If you are a homeowner:

- Don't litter;
- Participate in clean ups and other river events in your community;
- Pick up after your dog;
- Don't feed waterfowl;
- Don't dump oil, wash water, or other household wastes into storm drains;
- Use rain barrels to capture and reuse water and/or consider planting a rain garden to naturally collect and absorb rainwater;
- Minimize the use of pesticides and fertilizers on your lawn;
- Encourage the development and implementation of your community's stormwater management program (see www.epa.gov/ne/npdes/stormwater/index.html);
- Report illicit discharges or connections to local and state officials;
- Volunteer to monitor the water in your area by contacting the Mystic River Watershed Association at www.mysticriver.org;
- And, share your knowledge with others!

STEERING COMMITTEE

- Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE), Roxbury, MA
- Charlestown Waterfront Coalition (CWC), Charlestown, MA
- Chelsea Collaborative, Chelsea, MA
- City of Chelsea and Town of Winchester representing all 21 municipalities
- Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)
- Friends of Alewife Reservation, Arlington/Cambridge, MA
- Friends of the Mystic Lakes, Winchester/Medford, MA
- Groundwork Somerville, Somerville, MA
- La Comunidad Inc., Everett, MA
- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (MA DCR)
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)
- Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (MA EEA)
- Massachusetts Port Authority (MassPort)
- Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
- Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)
- Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA)
- Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH), East Boston, MA
- Tri-City Community Action Program (Tri-CAP), Malden, MA
- *University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB), Boston, MA
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1, Boston, MA

*UMB serves as the Lead Academic Technical Liaison to the Steering Committee

WEB SITE

For more information about the Initiative, visit our website at www.epa.gov/mysticriver

CONTACTS

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