

**Mystic River Watershed Initiative Steering Committee**  
December 10, 2015 | 9:30 am-12:00 pm  
House Members' Lounge at the Massachusetts State House  
24 Beacon Street, Boston, MA  
Meeting Summary  
Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute

**Action Items**

- Water Quality subgroup to organize a planning call in January to discuss next steps and meeting needs; include discussion of Science Forum in late 2016 or early 2017.
- Schedule conference call in January to begin planning an Open Spaces subgroup meeting in March.
- Schedule a conference call to begin planning a meeting to learn about and discuss HUD funding opportunities.
- Municipal Subgroup to convene the next workshop on public outreach and education in February.
- Set and announce the March and June Steering Committee meeting dates.

**Decisions:**

The steering committee made the following decisions:

- The group decided to begin planning an Open Spaces subgroup meeting.

**Welcome, Introductions, and September 2015 Meeting Summary**

Mel Coté, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), welcomed the committee members, led introductions, and reviewed the agenda. Representative Denise Provost also welcomed the committee and thanked them for convening at the statehouse. The September and December 2015 meeting summaries will be available for review prior to the next steering committee meeting.

**Member Updates and Announcements**

Members provided the following updates and announcements:

Canoemobile: Several organizations and agencies including Groundworks Somerville, the National Park Service (NPS), the Appalachian Mountain Club, the United States Forest Services (USFS), the Somerville Arts Council, Wilderness Inquiry, and EPA, partnered to launch Canoemobile. The program engaged 500 school-aged children in land- and water-based educational activities. Each partner taught the participants about various aspects of the work they do. For example, the EPA presented on water quality buoys and the NPS presented historical information. This year's program was one day and focused on Somerville and Boston; but organizers hope to expand the program to 5-6 days and other surrounding communities in the future. Transportation funding is the biggest cost and challenge; it is needed to transport participants from their schools to the river access site.

Members made the following comments:

- The Steering Committee should participate next year.

- This is a great way to reach people and help them connect with the resources; we should also think about how to create floating classrooms.
- Could NPS fund the installation of a permanent dock that could be used every year for the event? Chelsea Creek might be a good place to install a dock due to historic nature of the creek.
- We could combine this program with a river clean up program and involve Coast Sweep or Bay Keepers, too.

Water Chestnut Removal: MyRWA has overseen the mechanical and hand harvesting of water chestnut for several years. They conduct the removal with an expanding list of community partners, many of whom serve on the steering committee. In addition to removing the water chestnut, the program helps connect people to the river and build a conservation ethic.

Different sections of the river pose different challenges, but the amount of water chestnut is decreasing overall. After five years of hand harvesting in the upper reaches, a significant reduction has been seen in the percentage of plants returning each year; only 10% of the amount of water chestnut seen five years ago returned this year. Due to the decrease in reproduction, this year marked the smallest amount of plants removed in the upper reach and the least amount of effort required to remove them (2 hours of effort this year vs. 2 weeks of effort when the program started). The basin is a bigger challenge and will require long-term efforts. Plants removed from the water are composted in an upland location. A member commented that she would like to discuss how to leverage this program to educate community members that it is safe to be on the river in boats and in contact with the water.

Herring Monitoring Program: A fish count has been conducted every summer at the Mystic Lakes dam since the fish ladder was installed in 2012. Individuals sign up for one-hour sessions to count herring as they pass through the ladder.

Results of the counts show an increase in the number of fish passing through the dam. MyRWA estimates 437,000 fish move through the dam. This is great news for the Mystic River and for New England, where river herring migrations have declined tremendously.

Advocates are using the data to counter arguments about the causes of herring population decline. PEW Environmental Trust operates the Herring Alliance, which advocates to protect herring at sea. The Alliance is using the data to counter the fishing industries argument that the decline in the herring population is due to habitat disappearance. The Alliance suggests the decline is actually due to massive trawling operations that capture more herring than ever before.

## **Subgroup Reports**

Municipal Subgroup: Approximately 32 municipalities attended the Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination (IDDE) workshop in Lexington. It was a positive meeting with a lot of information sharing, which helped municipality representatives connect IDDE to the MS4 permit that is expected to be final in January. A workshop on community outreach and education will be convened in February; that workshop will likely be in Medford. A third workshop focused on financing MS4 requirements will be convened later in 2016. A member noted that MyRWA has a

lot of water quality data they could provide to communities working on IDDE programs and eventually, the MS4 permit requirements.

Water Quality Subgroup: Water quality sampling recently concluded for the season; this marks the conclusion of nearly two years of data collection that will inform the phosphorous study being conducted by MyRWA, EPA, USGS, and DEP. Data analysis will begin soon and a report will be produced in early 2016.

The group discussed next steps for the Water Quality subgroup. It was suggested the group only meet when there is a specific purpose. A member commented that the subgroup conversations led to the development of a lot of work over the past two years, and that face-to-face meetings make a difference over time. It was suggested the subgroup develop next steps in early 2016.

Open Space Subgroup: The open space group completed a lot of work several years ago that led to the identification of key open spaces (including the property slated for the Wynn casino). Group members are hoping to reconvene the subgroup and make it more active again given the increase in efforts by several organizations working on open space issues. MyRWA is starting a Mystic River Greenways Project to help connect people to the river and build stewardship; they hope to collaborate with the subgroup on the project. The Solomon Foundation--which champions the protection, use and access of Greater Boston's park system--has been mapping potential projects and is moving fast to try to implement them. Other foundations are also starting to take note of the efforts and local businesses are increasingly asking how to get involved in projects that will benefit their employees.

The group discussed convening a meeting in March or April 2016. A member requested EPA to help organize the meeting. Suggested topics for the meeting included: a presentation by MyRWA of information on the Lower Mystic River; a review of where and what type of projects are being planned (e.g. Draw Seven park); a discussion of how MyRWA's Greenways Project will collaborate with the Open Space subgroup, and; HUD grant opportunities. March was suggested as a good time to convene the group. Members suggested inviting the following groups to the meeting: those who attended Dan Driscoll's presentation in June 2015, Walk Medford, and a bicycle group interested in connecting Medford and Charleston.

### **River Restoration in Urban Settings**

Nick Wildman, Restoration Specialist with the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER), presented on river restoration in urban settings. The DER is part of the Department of Fish and Game. His presentation is summarized below.

The mission of the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) is to restore and protect the Commonwealth's rivers, wetlands and watersheds for the benefit of people and the environment. To fulfill their mission, the DER solicits nominations for project ideas each year and then develops a list of priority projects that would, if completed, improve overall ecological function and health in the project area and, ideally, throughout the entire watershed. The DER selects projects based on the proposed project's anticipated ecological benefit, sustainability, stakeholder support, feasibility, and funding availability. Selected projects receive technical and

fundraising assistance. The DER has no regulatory authority and cannot mandate project implementation.

The DER completes many different types of restoration projects all across the Commonwealth. Past projects have included dam and impoundment removal, stream day-lighting, as well as flow restoration (via culvert replacement) and monitoring. Many projects have been completed in tidal environments.

Project timelines and cost depend on the characteristics of the project. On average, projects take 3-5 years on to organize and implement, and cost \$500,000. Sediment disposal costs are the largest cost associated with dam removal projects; these costs depend on the quality of the sediment (i.e. is it contaminated or not and, if so, how hazardous is the contaminant?). Property owners and the Commonwealth usually pay for the early phases of a project while the federal government funds the later phases. Federal funding sometimes comes from NOAA, USFWS, or NRCS. Property owners and municipalities are often motivated to complete dam removal projects to eliminate recurring maintenance costs (or other costs that could be avoided if restoration occurs).

Mr. Wildman encouraged committee members who have a project idea to get in touch with him sooner than later, and to let others know about the DER and how they could assist others with on restoration projects.

Members made the following statements.

- It would be good if DER could coordinate with FEMA when making changes that alter flood levels.
- An opportunity in the Mystic River watershed might be found with the Town of Winchester. They have worked hard to address flooding and are concerned that the installation of a fish ladder on the dam may impact flooding.

### **Funding Opportunities**

Participants also gave the following updates about grant opportunities:

- *DEP Grants* -- Karen Pelto, DEP, announced that approximately 50-55 thousand dollars are available for water quality and habitat restoration in the upper Mystic (from just below the lake to the confluence with the Alewife brook). This funding was made available due to a settlement related to an oil spill in the upper Mystic several years ago. The link to the funding announcement was distributed to the committee members via email. Please contact Karen via email for more information: [Karen.pelto@state.ma.us](mailto:Karen.pelto@state.ma.us).
- *HUD Grants* -- A meeting will be organized to provide interested parties with information about HUD grant opportunities prior to the spring submission deadline.
- *EPA Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grants* -- EPA is offering grants for the 19 designated Urban Waters programs; this information will be distributed via email with subject line "Funding Announcements."

### **New Business**

Member raised the following new business topics:

10-year anniversary and future plan: A member noted that the Mystic River Watershed Initiative is 10 years old this year and suggested the group think about how to celebrate the milestone and create publicity about it. She also suggested the group begin to think about an action plan and agenda for the next 5-10 years. A member suggested adding this topic to the March steering committee meeting agenda.

Emergency Stream Bank Restoration: The US Army Corps of Engineers is in the early stages of an emergency stream bank restoration project in the Chelsea River. The goal of the effort is to restore ecological integrity. A member suggested adding this topic to a future meeting agenda.

Urban Waters River Network: Ann Marie Mitroff, Groundwork USA and Groundwork Hudson Valley, described the Urban Waters River Network. The network is a peer-to-peer learning network that connects people from across the United States to share information and resources on urban waters management. For more information or to join the network, visit <http://www.urbanwaterslearningnetwork.org/>.

Friends of Alewife Reservation: Ellen Mass, President of Friends of Alewife Reservation (FAR), introduced herself and commented on some of the challenges facing the Alewife. She invited others to participate in FAR programs.

### **Next Meeting**

The next steering committee meeting is scheduled for March but may shift to April. Members commented that quarterly meetings should continue.