River Instream Flow Stewards
2003 Annual Report

The mission of the Riverways Programs is to promote the restoration and protection of the ecological integrity of the Commonwealth's rivers, streams and adjacent lands. All the Riverways Programs are based on the belief that local action is key to river protection. Riverways staff work side-by-side with local citizens, town officials and watershed associations to achieve the goals of restoration and protection of the state's riverine ecosystems. Goals include (1) protecting and restoring water quality,(2) protecting healthy stream flows; (3) protecting land along rivers and streams, (4) improving habitat for wildlife and fish in river corridors; (5) promoting pubic access to and/or along rivers for river-friendly recreation.

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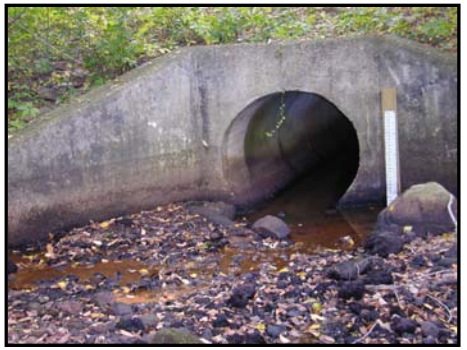
Riverways' River Instream Flow Stewards (RIFLS) is an innovative, science-based program that addresses the harm caused to rivers and streams by depleted or altered stream flow, an environmental problem that has yet to receive the attention it deserves. To make good decisions about human water use while providing for the water needs of natural communities, policy and decision makers need to understand instream flow issues and base their decisions on facts. Without quantitative stream flow data, decision makers are forced to guess at potential environmental impacts of specific proposals. Surprisingly, this data is not currently available for most Massachusetts streams and rivers. To address this need for instream flow data, RIFLS brings together a diverse group of partners and provides technical assistance to document stream flow in order to protect and restore more natural flow regimes and the aquatic communities they support.

Stream flow and water quantity have been hot topics during recent years, and even during wet years some rivers and streams have run dangerously low or dry. Although streams and rivers in Massachusetts have a natural low-flow period in late summer and early fall, poor water management practices and consumptive uses such as excessive lawn watering, leaky pipes, sewers that discharge to other watersheds, manipulation of flows at dams, and urban sprawl can exacerbate low flow conditions and cause additional stress or even death to aquatic organisms and communities. In many cases the cause of unnaturally low flow is unknown and requires further investigation. Responding to the increasing concern over stream flow, the pilot River Instream Flow Stewards (RIFLS) program began training volunteers to record stream flow measurements on their local streams this year.



First Herring Brook in Scituate (left) and the Jones River in Kingston (right) were nearly dry this October, even though the region received above-average precipitation.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Riverways Programs