



Division of Ecological Restoration 2024 Annual Report

Celebrating 15 Years of River & Wetland Restoration

DIVISION OF ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION
DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME • COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

Maura T. Healey, Governor • Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor
Rebecca Tepper, Secretary • Tom O'Shea, Commissioner
Beth Lambert, Director • Hunt Durey, Deputy Director • Alyssa Sciuto, Assistant Director



Letter from Leadership

Dear friends and colleagues,

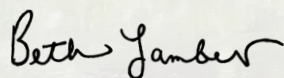
This year marked the Division of Ecological Restoration's (DER) 15th anniversary and has been a time of both reflection and action.

We've learned valuable lessons over the last 15 years that will guide us into the future. These lessons include 1) **rivers and wetlands can recover quickly** from past damage when key stressors—like dams or culverts—are removed; 2) the **benefits of river and wetland restoration are far-reaching**, from job creation to clean water, safer infrastructure, and improved outdoor recreation; and 3) **communities are eager to restore rivers and wetlands** but need resources and technical assistance to do so. Finally, we've seen first-hand the **power of partnerships**. All of our work takes place in partnership with communities, regional organizations, non-profit groups, and state and federal agencies. This is the only way to get restoration done.

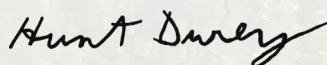
DER has been expanding its work over the last five years to meet communities' needs, and this year's accomplishments reflect our expanded impact. In 2024, together with our partners, we broke ground on 10 river and wetland restoration projects and completed five others. We awarded over \$13 million to cities, towns, and partnering organizations to support restoration work throughout the state; removed three dams; reconnected 37.8 river miles; and restored 103 acres of freshwater wetland habitat. All of this work helps people and nature adapt to climate change. We thank our partners and the Healey-Driscoll Administration for making it possible.

In the next few years, we look forward to expanding regional restoration partnerships; taking on new river and wetland restoration projects across the state; providing additional funding and technical assistance to communities; and launching trainings, toolkits, and other restoration resources for use by municipalities, landowners, and non-profit organizations.

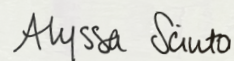
We'll see you on the river,



Beth Lambert, *Director*



Hunt Durey, *Deputy Director*



Alyssa Sciuto, *Assistant Director*



Tom O'Shea, *Commissioner*



15 Years of DER

DER was established in 2009 when the Riverways and Wetlands Restoration Programs combined to form a non-regulatory, science-based division—the Division of Ecological Restoration. This division of the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) within the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) was formed to bring greater statewide attention, momentum, and capacity to river and wetland restoration. With an emphasis on strong partnerships, DER advances restoration in the Commonwealth through dam removal, culvert replacement, restoration of wetlands and retired cranberry bogs, and building capacity of restoration partners throughout the state. This work restores healthy habitat while also helping communities increase climate resilience, prevent storm damage, improve opportunities for outdoor recreation, and address aging infrastructure and public safety concerns.



DER restores and protects rivers, wetlands, and watersheds in Massachusetts for the benefit of people and the environment.

Learn more:



www.mass.gov/der



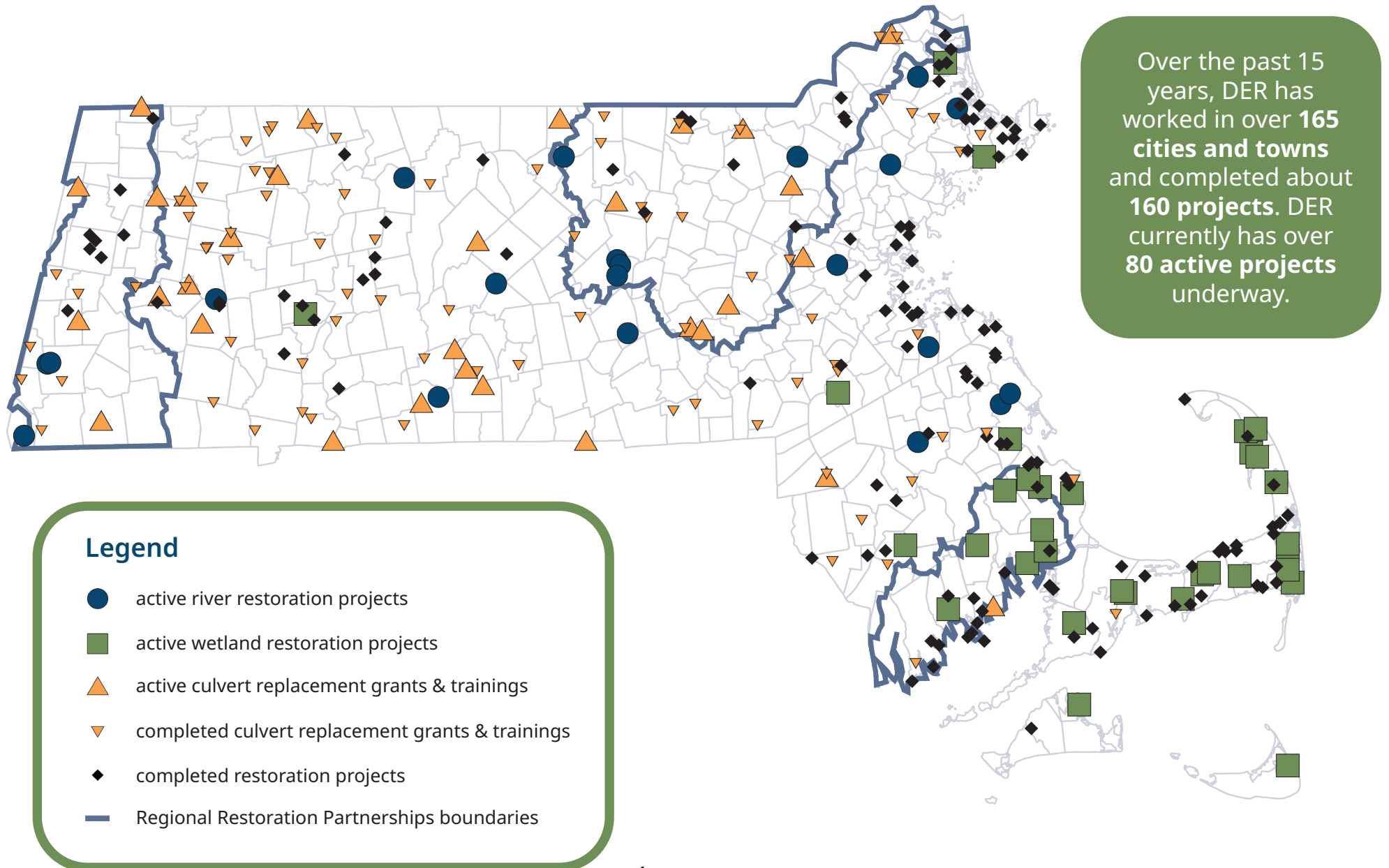
@MassEcoRestore



Massachusetts Division
of Ecological Restoration

Where We Work

DER advances restoration throughout Massachusetts. See the map below for where we work, or learn more and find a project near you by visiting [DER's interactive project map](#) on the [DER website](#).



2024 Accomplishments: *By the Numbers*

Working closely with communities, state and federal agencies, regional organizations, and non-profit groups, DER is proud of the progress made toward our restoration goals in 2024.



9

projects under construction, including 5 dam removals, 3 cranberry bog restorations, and 1 wetland restoration project



5

projects completed, including 3 dam removals and 2 cranberry bog restoration projects



49

Priority Projects in planning, design, permitting, or construction



>3,000

people reached through outreach efforts about DER and restoration



53

cities and towns received funding support for river and wetland restoration projects



50

priority restoration projects advancing through DER's Regional Restoration Partnerships Program



103

acres of freshwater wetland habitat restored



3

dams removed



37.8

river miles reconnected

2024 Accomplishments: *Dollars & Cents*

DER is proud to continue to offer financial support to partners throughout the Commonwealth for river and wetland restoration.

\$4,873,543

awarded to 37 cities and towns for culvert replacement projects. Overall, 67 cities and towns requested over **\$10.8 million** in funding.

\$854,635

awarded to support 3 Restoration Partnerships through the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program. For every **\$1** invested by the state, DER's Partnerships Program leveraged an additional **\$7** in outside funding for ecological restoration throughout their regions.

\$1,798,200

awarded to 7 Priority Projects in 8 cities and towns.

\$6,000,000

awarded to cranberry and wetland restoration projects in 12 cities and towns.

\$13,526,378

awarded to support restoration in 2024.



- Following dam removal preliminary design studies in seven cities and towns during which one was identified as an imminent public safety risk, **DER and partners removed the Dudleyville Pond Dam through an emergency order in the Town of Shutesbury**. An excellent example of the importance of partnership and collaboration for restoration, many groups came together to make this dam removal happen, which eliminated a public safety hazard, benefitted water quality, and improved passage for important coldwater fish species like eastern brook trout.
- **DER published a new report on salt marsh tidal restoration monitoring, in partnership with the Association to Preserve Cape Cod**. The report, *Monitoring and Analysis of Eight Salt Marsh Tidal Restoration Projects on Cape Cod*, Massachusetts, details the results of pre- and post-restoration monitoring at eight different salt marsh sites restored between 2002 and 2010. Long-term monitoring is critical to understand how salt marsh ecosystems respond to restoration after decades of impairment and to inform how to advance the practice of salt marsh restoration.

- **DER and partners celebrated the completion of the High Street Dam Removal and Bridge Replacement Project in Bridgewater** with a ribbon cutting event. This project removed the obsolete High Street Dam and replaced the over 100-year-old High Street Bridge on Town River, which were causing localized flooding and acting as barriers to many fish and wildlife species. This project increased climate resilience and opened 10 miles of river habitat.
- **DER held a free culvert replacement training for cities and towns, hosted in the Town of Ashburnham**. The training covered topics including the process of culvert replacement, Massachusetts Stream Crossing Standards, steps in a site assessment, funding opportunities, case studies, and offered an opportunity to visit a soon-to-be-replaced culvert.
- **Construction is wrapping up on the Quinapoxet Dam Removal Project in West Boylston**. This project will remove an aging dam just upstream of where the Quinapoxet River and the Wachusett Reservoir meet. The dam removal will restore passage for landlocked salmon, trout, and other fish and wildlife and enhance public access to the river through a new trail and an improved ADA walkway and fishing platform.





over 3,000 acres
of wetland and salt marsh habitat restored

** that's the equivalent of more than 2,272 football fields* 

over \$77M

granted to advance restoration
throughout Massachusetts

*including support for priority restoration projects and
capacity-building support for partners*



over 65 dams
removed

15 Years: By the Numbers



over 900 jobs

estimated to have been
created or maintained, and

**over \$135M in extra
economic activity**

estimated to have resulted
from DER's restoration funding



**more than 120 culvert
replacement projects
advanced in 90 cities
and towns**



~700 river miles reconnected

** that's about the direct distance from Boston to Myrtle Beach*



DER Over the Years

Since 2009, DER has worked with partners to advance projects that restore and protect Massachusetts' rivers, wetlands, and watersheds. This work has proven to have many benefits for both people and nature. Ecological restoration projects build climate resilience, improve water quality and wildlife passage, increase public safety, boost the economy, and provide recreational opportunities so Massachusetts citizens and visitors can visit and appreciate their natural spaces. DER looks forward to continuing to meet the rising demand for restoration and the challenges of climate change. As we look ahead to 2025 and beyond, here's a look back at where we've been.

2009

The Riverways and Wetlands Restoration Programs are combined to create the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER), a new division under the Department of Fish and Game.



DER staff in 2009.



The site of the Eel River Restoration, pre-restoration in 2003



The site of the Eel River Restoration, post-restoration in 2023

2010

The Eel River Restoration Project in Plymouth is completed and receives a National Coastal America Award. This project—the first cranberry bog restoration in Massachusetts—restored about 60 acres of retired cranberry bogs into wetlands and included stream channel and floodplain reconstruction, multiple dam removals and culvert replacements, and extensive plantings including 20,000 Atlantic white cedar trees.



The site of the Eel River Restoration during construction.

2011

Primarily based out of Boston, DER establishes a regional office in Westfield in partnership with the National Parks Service and Westfield State University. This new location makes it easier for DER staff to connect with and serve partners in the western regions of the state.



2012

DER commissions a study to investigate the economic impacts of ecological restoration in Massachusetts. This investigation found that for every \$1 million spent on restoration projects, 12.5 jobs are created or maintained and \$1.75 million in economic activity is produced.



The site of the Whittenton Dam removal, after removal.



The Whittenton Dam removal during construction.

2011

DER and partners complete major construction on the Broad Meadows Salt Marsh Restoration Project in Quincy. This project, the largest wetland fill removal project in Massachusetts, excavated about 500,000 cubic yards of dredged material to restore over 50 acres of salt marsh and other valuable coastal habitats.



Construction at the Broad Meadows Salt Marsh Restoration.

2013

DER and partners remove the Whittenton Dam in Taunton. Part of the Mill River Restoration Priority Project, the Whittenton Dam drew national attention in 2005 when it nearly failed during a record flood, resulting in the evacuation of downtown Taunton. This was the second of three dam removals that, together with a new fish ladder, restored migratory fish access throughout the Mill River. DER removed the first dam in 2012 and the final dam in 2018 to eliminate associated public safety hazards and reconnect over 30 miles of the Mill River.



DER staff and partners assess a culvert in need of replacement.

2017

DER's Stream Continuity Program launches the Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance (CRMA) Grants, which support cities and towns as they work to replace undersized and failing culverts with larger, safer structures. In its first year, the CRMA grants awarded \$905,000 to 13 cities and towns. Seven years later, DER has awarded over \$13,000,000 to support over 120 projects in 90 cities and towns across the state through this grant program.



2019

DER celebrates the Division's 10th anniversary.



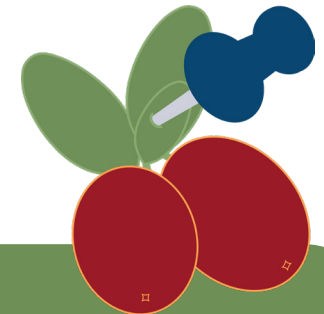
Staff at DER's 10th anniversary celebration.

2015

DER and partners remove the Plymco Dam in Plymouth as part of the Town River Restoration Project. The Town River Restoration was one of the earliest and most comprehensive river restoration projects in Massachusetts and included the removal of four dams, a bridge replacement, and the installation of a fish ladder, with the final barrier removed in 2019. This restoration work restored fish passage to an important and historic herring run, including access to hundreds of acres of prime spawning habitat.



The Plymco Dam Removal Project during construction.



2018

DER establishes the Cranberry Bog Restoration Program (CBRP), which focuses on restoring wetlands on former cranberry farmland. Now six years old in 2024, the CBRP has completed construction on seven cranberry bog restoration projects, restoring more than 400 acres of wetlands. DER has 14 projects underway, with an anticipated 750+ acres of wetlands expected to be restored in the coming years.



2021

DER launches the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program. This Program helps non-profit organizations and Regional Planning Agencies increase their capacity to lead and support ecological restoration within their regions through financial and technical assistance. In the Program's first year, three Partnerships were designated as Regional Restoration Partnerships.



The Sucker Brook Dam before removal.



Sucker Brook, nine months after removal of the dam.

2020

Along with DER's partners and people around the world, DER endures the impacts of the COVID pandemic. With rigorous safety protocols in place, DER was able to move restoration work forward with no major construction delays.

2021

The Sucker Brook Restoration Project is completed in Pepperell. An excellent example of a whole-system restoration approach, a dam removal and culvert replacement were completed as part of a larger effort by local partners to restore and protect the Nissitissit River and its tributaries. This project built on previous dam removal and culvert replacement projects and, together with conservation efforts, improved water quality, stream processes, wildlife habitat, and connectivity.



The Sucker Brook Dam Removal during construction.

2022

DER secures over \$40 million for restoration, including \$35 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. These funds have been invested in restoration projects throughout the state and DER estimates they will generate over 435 jobs and an additional \$61 million in economic activity in the Commonwealth.



2024

DER celebrates
15 years

2023

Construction begins on the Herring River Estuary Restoration Project in Wellfleet and Truro. Over two decades in the making, this project is the largest tidal estuary restoration ever undertaken in Massachusetts and the northeastern United States. With many benefits for both people and the environment, this project will restore up to 890 acres of salt marsh and other estuarine habitats.



The Herring River groundbreaking event took place in March 2023.



The Herring River restoration construction continues in 2024.

For Lifespan, a logical look to the north
regulatory hurdles in R.I. prompt
hospital system to expand in Mass.

\$175 million

U.S. health system

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Israeli leader
firm on
cease-fire

Amid a swell of
Netanyahu vows
troops in Egypt-

By Patrick Kingdley, Asa
and Thomas H.
new York Times

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that he would not accept a ceasefire agreement to end the war in Gaza until Hamas has agreed to accept the demand of Israel's military to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu said the demand is a precondition for any ceasefire agreement. He said that Israel's military would not accept a ceasefire agreement unless Hamas has agreed to accept the demand of Israel's military to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

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Spotlight on Restoration

Throughout the past 15 years, DER has seen the media spotlight on ecological restoration grow as the benefits of restoration have increasingly captured interest. This growing attention helps build support for restoration at the community, state, and national levels. In 2024, the restoration work led by DER and partners was front page news—both literally and figuratively—in many media outlets. Here's a sample of some of the restoration work that made its way to various audiences through the media.

- **Boston 25 News:** 'The threat is real': Aging dams a potential hazard to homeowners and infrastructure across Mass.
- **Greenfield Recorder:** Centuries-old Dudleyville Pond Dam in Shutesbury being removed following years of safety warnings
- **Lower Cape News:** Restorations Securing Cape Cod's Future

FRONT PAGE NEWS:

- **The Boston Globe:** Massachusetts cranberry bogs were hit hard by climate change. Now, they're a tool in the battle against it.
- **The Boston Globe:** In the Berkshires, an effort to corral climate change, one stream at a time
- **The Boston Globe:** Removing dams can prevent flooding in Massachusetts. But for the owners, it's bittersweet.
- **The Washington Post:** Why cranberry country is turning into wetlands

DER is also proud to share restoration stories on social media. Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).



Water flowed from a culvert as the Dudleyville Pond dam was taken down last month in Shutesbury.

A TREASURE TURNED TREACHEROUS

A pond at her house was the backdrop to Lois Brown's life. A dam that held it — and with it, so many memories — was about to fail.

By Erin Douglas

WATERTOWN — Lois Brown was looking for a new home in 1970 when a look next to the pond on her property.

The pond was also the backdrop for her wedding ceremony in 1971, and it was there that she met her husband, Tom.

It was a very special place, she said.

But now, it was about to disappear.

Lois Brown, 78, who now owns the property,



In 1970, the pond, as its name suggests, was a treasure. It was a place where Lois and Tom would spend their summers. It was a place where they would go to relax and enjoy the outdoors. It was a place where they would go to be with each other.

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EXPANDED EDITION

HALF-CENTURY OF GEORGE F. WILL

celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first issue of the Washington Post

How climate change is affecting religious rituals

SPECIAL SECTION

Stories of humanity to lift your holiday spirits

The Washington Post

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Hear From Our Partners

DER is grateful to the local, state, and federal organizations that we work with to advance river and wetland restoration across the state. From its inception, partnership has been a hallmark of DER's work. Restoration can only happen with strong collaboration between landowners, municipalities, non-profit organizations, and state and federal agencies. Hear from some of DER's partners about what DER has meant to them:

"[DER] has been an enduring and true partner to Friends of Herring River (FHR) in Wellfleet, MA... FHR owes DER deep gratitude and celebrates its first 15 years of accomplishments and positive impact!"

- Christa Drew, Executive Director, Friends of Herring River

"The work DER does to bring rivers back to life has been transformative for our state...We wish them continued growth and success over the next 15 years and beyond, and look forward to many more years of shared accomplishments!"

- Julia Blatt, Executive Director, Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

"Across Massachusetts, cities and towns are already experiencing unprecedented impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. For 15 years, the Division of Ecological Restoration has played a leading role in helping communities face these challenges head on—providing critical support, capacity-building, technical assistance, and funding to restore resilient ecosystems for people and nature."

- Tom O'Shea, DFG Commissioner

"DER has been a long-standing partner with the Town of Plymouth. A partner in the truest sense of the word. One that assists, provides support and the means to accomplish our shared goals and visions for our local rivers, bogs and wetlands."

- David Gould, Dept of Marine & Environmental Affairs Director, Town of Plymouth

"I've worked with DER for all of its 15 years plus several years prior with Riverways. Through innovations in science, practice, and policy over two decades, dam removal has gone from nearly impossible to being a mainstream solution for flood risk reduction and aquatic habitat restoration..."

- Alison Bowden, Director of Conservation Science & Strategy, The Nature Conservancy

"The creativity, expertise, and enthusiasm DER staff consistently provide has made it a cherished and invaluable partner on many Mass Audubon projects..."

- Tom Lautzenheiser, Senior Conservation Ecologist, Mass Audubon

"...DER has proven a reliable on-the-ground partner that is willing to see large-scale complex projects through to completion."

- Curt Rogers, Executive Director, Merrimack River Watershed Council (Merrimack Restoration Partnership)

"...Through both financial support and technical assistance, DER works to increase our capacity to take on more and bigger projects. Much more than simply a funder; they make Buzzards Bay Coalition and our local partners better at doing restoration..."

- Mark Rasmussen, President, Buzzards Bay Coalition (Buzzards Bay Watershed Restoration Partnership)

"Working alongside incredibly talented and dedicated partners like DER, the Town of Pepperell has achieved what once seemed impossible. For 15 years, DER has offered financial support and invaluable guidance, enabling communities of all sizes to benefit from successful restoration projects..."

- Paula Terrasi, Conservation Administrator, Town of Pepperell

"HVA continues to witness firsthand DER's commitment to engaging local communities, stakeholders, and other partners in the critical work of restoring the commonwealth's aquatic habitats and strengthening human connections to the land and water..."

- Lynn Werner, Executive Director, Housatonic Valley Association (Berkshire Clean, Cold, Connected Restoration Partnership)

"... Without question, DER is one of the NOAA Restoration Center's most important state partners in the northeast..."

- John Catena, Northeast and Great Lakes Regional Supervisor, NOAA Restoration Center

"Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT) is deeply grateful to [DER] for its commitments to uplifting organizations working on issues of wildlife connectivity and healthy river ecosystems..."

- Jane Winn, Executive Director, Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT)

What's Next for DER?

DER will continue to expand its project management, technical assistance, and capacity-building to meet the growing need for river and wetland restoration. DER will also play a crucial role in helping Massachusetts achieve nation-leading biodiversity conservation goals as called for by Governor Healey's Executive Order No. 618, and to advance the goals outlined in the Department of Fish and Game's Strategic Plan for 2025–2030. As DER dives into 2025, the Division anticipates prioritizing the following actions:

- Breaking ground on at least six river and wetland restoration projects.
- Completing at least four projects.
- Continuing to oversee over 85 projects, with the intention to add additional projects.
- Supporting new Partnerships through the Regional Restoration Partnerships Program.
- Awarding additional funding to advance priority restoration projects throughout the Commonwealth.
- Awarding new Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance (CRMA) grants to replace undersized and deteriorating culverts in various cities and towns.
- Leading additional free culvert replacement trainings for cities and towns as an opportunity to share valuable resources and information related to culvert replacements.
- Completing preliminary design studies for potential dam removal projects throughout the state, announced in early 2025.
- Completing a needs assessment of restoration partners and communities to inform future DER technical services and capacity building priorities.
- Wrapping up data collection and early design for two potential culvert replacement projects in Gloucester and West Newbury. These culverts, which are expected to be impacted by sea level rise in the future, will serve as case studies for this type of work and inform guidance for similar future projects.



Photo Captions & Credits

cover: DER Stream Continuity Program Manager Holden Sparacino discusses a culvert replacement project during a MassDOT Rivers and Roads training in September 2024. *(Credit: DER)*

page two: Vinica Brook meanders through the forest in Wales, MA. *(Credit: DER)*

page three, left; and page eleven, top right: DER staff pose for a photo in October 2024. *(Credit: DER)*

page three, right; and page nine, top left: DER staff pose for a photo after officially becoming a division in 2009. *(Credit: DER)*

page four, top right: The sun shines over the Great Marsh Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in Newbury, where DER and partners are working to restore degraded marsh. *(Credit: DER)*

page four, middle left: An excavator actively removes the 40-foot tall Upper Roberts Meadow Dam in Northampton in 2018. *(Credit: DER)*

page four, middle right: Crews work to remove the Tel-Electric Dam in Pittsfield in 2019. *(Credit: DER)*

page four, bottom left; and page eleven, top left: DER staff and partners assess a culvert in need of replacement. *(Credit: DER)*

page six, left: DER Restoration Specialist Jess Cohn takes notes at the site of the Windswept Cranberry Bog Wetland Restoration Project on Nantucket. *(Credit: DER)*

page seven, left: DER Stream Continuity Program Manager Holden Sparacino assesses a culvert in Western Massachusetts. *(Credit: DER)*

page eight, top left: Crews remove the Dudleyville Pond Dam through an emergency order in the Town of Shutesbury. *(Credit: DER)*

page eight, bottom right: “Restoration in Progress” at the site of the Cold Brook Restoration in Harwich. *(Credit: DER)*

page nine, top middle: The site of the Eel River Restoration in Plymouth in 2003, prior to restoration. *(Credit: DER)*

page nine, top right: The site of the Eel River Restoration in Plymouth in 2023, thirteen years after restoration. *(Credit: DER)*

page nine, bottom right: The site of the Eel River Restoration in Plymouth during construction. (Credit: DER)

page ten, top left: The site of the Whittenton Dam Removal in Taunton, after removal of the dam. (Credit: DER)

page ten, top right: The site of the Whittenton Dam Removal in Taunton, during removal of the dam in 2013. (Credit: DER)

page ten, bottom left: Construction at the site of the Broad Meadows Salt Marsh Restoration Project in Quincy in 2011. (Credit: DER)

page eleven, bottom: DER staff at the site of the Plymco Dam Removal Project in Plymouth during construction in 2015. (Credit: DER)

page twelve, top left: The Sucker Brook Dam in Pepperell, just prior to removal. (Credit: DER)

page twelve, top right: Sucker Brook in Pepperell in 2022, nine months after removal of the dam. (Credit: DER)

page twelve, bottom right: Two excavators working together to remove the Sucker Brook Dam in Pepperell in 2021. (Credit: DER)

page thirteen, bottom left: People gather in Wellfleet for the Herring River Estuary Restoration Project groundbreaking event in March 2023. (Credit: DER)

page thirteen, bottom right: Construction crews work on the Herring River Estuary Restoration Project in Wellfleet in September 2024 (Credit: DER)

page fourteen, top left: A front-page story in The Boston Globe in September 2024 about the Dudleyville Dam Removal in Shutesbury. (Credit: The Boston Globe)

page fourteen, bottom left: A front-page story in The Washington Post in November 2024 about cranberry bog restoration. (Credit: The Washington Post)

page fifteen: DER and partners look out upon the site of the completed Eagle Neck Creek Restoration Project in Truro, where salt marsh monitoring continues. (Credit: DER)

page sixteen: DER's Stream Crossing Specialist David Azinheira assesses a culvert in Western Massachusetts. (Credit: DER)