

November 10, 2025

Tori Kim, MEPA Director
Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office
100 Cambridge Street, 10th fl.
Boston, MA 02114.

Via Email: MEPA-regs@mass.gov

Re: Proposed Amendments to MEPA Regulations - Support Restoration Streamlining

Dear Director Kim:

The undersigned organizations write in strong support for the proposed changes to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) regulations (301 CMR 11.00) that would streamline the review process for Ecological Restoration Limited Projects (ERP LP). This would expand the number of beneficial restoration projects that would qualify for faster and easier review through the MEPA process.

We also request that further changes be considered such as modifying the review thresholds or procedural provisions to eliminate mandatory Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for any wetland restoration project.

Ecological Restoration projects are, by definition, beneficial projects that restore wetlands and waterways that have been destroyed or degraded by past human activities. The Commonwealth recognizes the need to speed up progress on restoration in many planning documents including the ResilientMass Plan and the Biodiversity Strategy.

Massachusetts lost nearly 1/3 of its wetlands historically. We are fortunate to now have laws that prevent most new impacts from development, but the legacy of historic impacts is extensive, and the impacts are ongoing in the absence of pro-active restoration work. Many thousands of acres of coastal and inland wetlands and miles of rivers statewide are severely damaged, degraded and fragmented by old ditches, embankments, and fill. There are about 3,000 dams, many obsolete and no longer serving any useful purpose, and more than 25,000 culverts blocking natural flows and passage of fish and wildlife. These old structures also pose risks to public safety and infrastructure when they fail during intense storms. Our salt marshes are sinking and eroding at alarming rates due to old ditches and embankments that divert water and kill marsh vegetation. Proven techniques are being applied in Massachusetts and other states to restore these natural systems including by removing historic fill, healing salt marsh ditches using hay from the marsh, and restoring natural flows by removing or upgrading water control structures.

Reversing the damage at scale will restore the public benefits wetlands provide and make them more resilient to the impacts of sea level rise, more intense storm events, and more frequent droughts.

Regulatory systems designed to prevent loss and damage to wetlands from development are escalating costs and slowing down progress on restoration. Restoration actions that take days or weeks to implement can require many months or even years of regulatory review, costing tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars per project. A new approach is needed to advance beneficial restoration projects in a cost-effective way, at a pace that matches the scope of work needed to support the

Commonwealth's climate, biodiversity, social and economic goals. Streamlining MEPA review for these projects is one important step in this streamlining process.

There are two categories of Ecological Restoration Projects under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act regulations – Ecological Restoration Projects (ERPs) (310 CMR 10.13-10.14) and Ecological Restoration Limited Projects (ERP LPs) (310 CMR 10.24(8) and 10.53(4)). The ERPs apply only to a specific list of projects – dam removal, stream crossing replacement, stream daylighting, tidal restoration, rare-species habitat restoration, and fish passageway restoration. Furthermore, ERPs must meet every item in a detailed list of requirements and conditions. ERP LPs are somewhat more flexible and can be applied to a wider range of projects. Regardless of which category a particular project falls within, the work involved is beneficial and reverses past and ongoing damage to the environment.

In conclusion, we support modification of the MEPA regulations to make all categories of wetland restoration faster, easier, and less expensive.

Regards,

E. Heidi Ricci, Director of Policy and Advocacy
Mass Audubon
hricci@massaudubon.org

Don Keeran, Assistant Director
April Wobst, Restoration Program Manager and
MassBays Regional Coordinator
Association to Preserve Cape Cod

Linda Orel
Chief Impact Officer
Boston Harbor Now

Eileen Coleman
Conservation Administrator
Burlington Conservation Commission

Laura Jasinski
Executive Director
Charles River Conservancy

Emily Norton
Executive Director
Charles River Watershed Association

Ali Hiple
Senior Policy Analyst
Conservation Law Foundation

Jennifer Carlino
Land Use and Environmental Planner
Easton Conservation Commission

Christa Drew
Executive Director
Friends of the Herring River

Neal Price
Principal Scientist
Horsley Witten Group

Molly Courson
Resiliency Program Director
Ipswich River Watershed Association

Pine duBois
Executive Director
Jones River Watershed Association, Inc

Prassede Vella
Interim Director
MassBays National Estuary Partnership

Dorothy A. McGlincy
Executive Director
Massachusetts Association of Conservation
Commissions

Robb Johnson
Executive Director
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition

Heather Clish
Policy Director
Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

John Keeley
President
Massachusetts Society of Municipal
Conservation Professionals

Patrick Herron
Executive Director
Mystic River Watershed Association

Kerry Malloy Snyder
Managing Director for Community Resilience
Neponset River Watershed Association

Samantha Woods
Executive Director
North and South Rivers Watershed Association

Matthew Brown
Executive Director
OARS

Barbara Warren
Executive Director
Salem Sound Coastwatch

Chad Sumner
Managing Principal
SumCo Eco-Contracting

Dan Galante
President
T Ford Company, Inc.

Zachary Sheldon
Policy Manager
The Nature Conservancy

Charlotte Pechtl
Conservation Agent
Town of Cohasset

Lydia Eldridge
Conservation Agent
Town of North Reading

Erin Rodgers
Program Manager
Trout Unlimited

Noah Matson
Chief Conservation and Climate Officer
The Trustees

cc: Stephanie Cooper, Undersecretary for the Environment, EEA
Kathy Baskin, Assistant Commissioner for Water Resources, DEP
Tim Jones, Director of Wetlands and Waterways, DEP
Lisa Rhodes, Wetlands Program Director, DEP
Daniel Padien, Waterways Program Director, DEP
Beth Lambert, Director, Division of Ecological Restoration