

FLOODING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Authority, Programs,
Coordination & Planning
Part IV

Presentation to the Water Resources Commission

October 09, 2025

Legislative Beginnings

The Problem in Massachusetts:

Water out of control....Disastrous floods...polluted streams...acute shortage in summer...wildlife dying...industry suffering...people confused and at a loss what to do.

Legislators met from January to May 1956 to discuss the above and find a pathway to cooperative and coordinated action.

On August 8, 1956 a bill was signed into law by Governor Herter establishing the Water Resources Commission and its responsibilities.

Living Waters, 1956

*The story of the creation of the Massachusetts Water Resources Commission
which will direct the Water Resources Division*

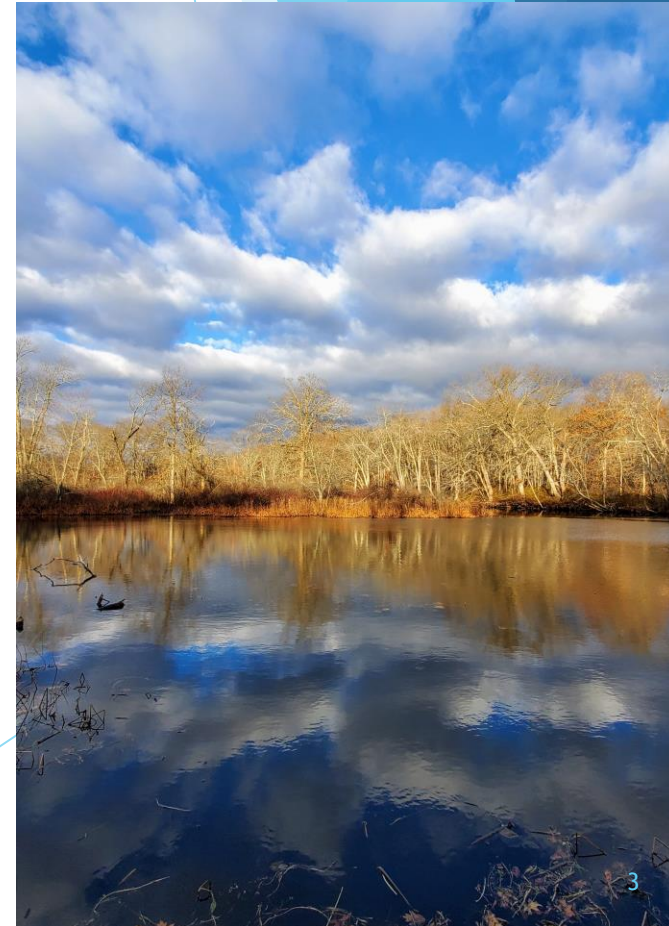
Role of the MA Water Resources Commission (WRC)

Established in 1956 (Chap. 620) by the Massachusetts Legislature

“WRC shall be the agent of the commonwealth in coordinating all activities of federal, state and other agencies in the conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water for the purpose of preventing loss of life and damage to property by erosion, floodwater and sediment in the watersheds of the commonwealth, and to obtain necessary financial assistance from the federal government, necessary for the immediate preservation of the public safety and convenience.”

“WRC shall meet and consult on matters concerning watersheds, water systems, storage basins, underground and surface supplies and shall study needs, supplies and resources with respect to water conservation and flood prevention...and shall make recommendations for legislation designed to provide the Commonwealth with a water policy based upon the common and interdependent interests of agriculture, industry, recreation, wildlife, conservation, domestic consumption and flood prevention. It shall act as a coordinating agency between all departments of the Commonwealth and shall cooperate with the agencies of the federal governments and all other states in carrying out water conservation and flood prevention programs.”

“The commission may establish rules and regulation as may be necessary for proper administration of (above).....’



Questions for the WRC

- ▶ What do you think should be Massachusetts' highest priority regarding floods?
- ▶ What other aspects of flooding should be considered by the state?
- ▶ What priorities do you see for flood loss reduction across the state?

Feedback from September meeting

Infrastructure Vulnerability

- concern about old and failing infrastructure
- Improve urban flood modeling and integrate findings into planning tools

Culvert Prioritization & Funding

Develop a statewide culvert prioritization system using geomorphic and infrastructure data

Dam Safety

Think about dam infrastructure and management practices.
Engage with DCR
Office of Dam Safety

Interagency Coordination

- Breakdown silos between agencies
- Convene cross agency working groups to align infrastructure funding and policy

Nature Based Solutions

- Slow the Flow
- More nature-based flood mitigation strategies and support aquatic restoration capacity

Reservoir Management & Hurricane Timing

Reassess reservoir lowering protocols in relation to hurricane season timing

Questions for the WRC

- ▶ How would the WRC fit into a statewide flood planning effort?
- ▶ What more can the WRC and staff do to better coordinate among agencies about flooding? Who else should we engage with?
- ▶ What's the best way to include the many non-state partners in a flood-focused discussion?