

FLOODING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Authority, Programs,
Coordination & Planning
Part III

Presentation to the Water Resources Commission

September 11, 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).....’



WRC Authority on Floods: Flood Hazard Management Program (FHMP)



Executive Order 149 (1978) - Designates the Commission as the state coordinating agency to implement the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and implement flood plain management criteria for state-owned properties in special hazard areas.

Responsibilities

- Acting as liaison between FEMA and Mass communities
- Offering technical support to NFIP communities
- Monitoring floodplain development in general
- Coordinating with FEMA on map updates and CRS activities
- Reviewing critical state agency floodplain projects through MEPA
- Coordinating with MEMA on hazard mitigation grants and planning efforts
- Coordinating with other state and federal agencies re: floodplain development issues, e.g., BCAB testimonies & FFRMS technical assistance
- Offering training on NFIP regulations, FEMA flood maps, and general good principles of floodplain management
- Assisting general callers with NFIP questions and concerns
- Coordinating with MEMA and FEMA during flood events

Programs & Projects

- Statewide Floodplain Management Framework – inter- agency coordination
- Environmental Justice Populations & Flooding in MA – discovering where these populations are being impacted
- Higher Standards in State Building Code and Local Bylaws – recommendations to BBRS for 11th edition & guide for local governments
- Strong coordination with MEMA for planning (RMAT, ResilientMass) and grants
- First FHMP Strategic Plan completed– 3-year goals and strategies
- FY25 Training & Communications Plans–improved outreach

Interagency Coordination

- ▶ FEMA request, 2019: Assessment of Floodplain Management Regulations for State-Owned Properties
 - ▶ Flood-related work is siloed and not always coordinated
 - ▶ limited flow of information
- ▶ Statewide Floodplain Regulatory and Coordination Framework - a ResilientMass Action
- ▶ Climate Chief Hoffer's recommendation on inland flooding:

“As identified in the 2023 ResilientMass Plan, EEA should develop both a Floodplain Management Coordination Framework and a Floodplain Management Plan...”

“A flood management plan should outline priority actions that can be taken statewide in the near term to address and mitigate floods and their impacts...”

Acts of 1956 (Ch.620) and EO 149 - WRC designated as the state coordinating agency

Are we doing enough?

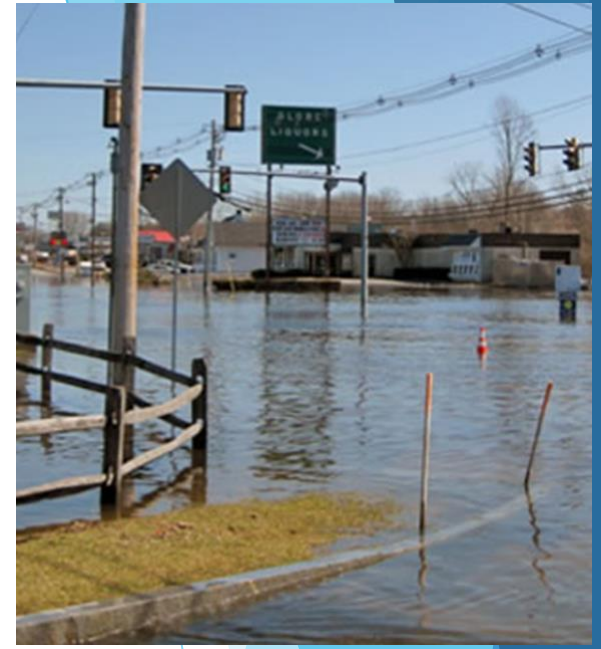
How can we be more effective?

Interagency Coordination

State Floodplain Framework, Phase 1

- ▶ Lead agencies: DCR (WRC staff), MEMA, CZM
- ▶ 12 agencies, approx. 45 individuals meeting since October 2023

“The floodplain includes all areas in Massachusetts that currently flood or are projected to flood.”



The Massachusetts Statewide Floodplain Management Framework is a **collaborative network** of entities concerned with **coordinated flood loss reduction** through strategies including flood hazard mitigation actions, restoration and protection of our floodplains, and examination of practices for improved stormwater management. These actions will consider current and future floodplains and the people who are impacted by flooding, especially those populations who are socially vulnerable.

Planning and Flood Impact Minimization

MA Integrated Floodplain Management Audit

“IFM is an approach that seeks to overcome competing demands and find solutions that provide multiple benefits for people and nature by fostering collaboration and breaking down the silos between the many floodplain stakeholders.”

- ▶ Massachusetts barriers include:
 - ▶ Lack of regional or watershed natural resource management
 - ▶ Permitting cost and complexity
 - ▶ Competition with other important issues for resources and policy action
 - ▶ Gaps in mapping, modeling, and data tools
- ▶ 8 recommendations
- ▶ Conclusion (as the state moves toward IFM):
 - ▶ *“Early capacity-building, fostering collaboration, and raising awareness of the state floodplain management framework across different levels of governments will be key to achieving these larger goals in the long term.”*

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?

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?