Only miles outside of Boston the Ipswich River is one of the best areas along the North Shore to experience firsthand the beauty, serenity, and excitement that nature has to offer. The river meanders along miles of undeveloped wetlands filled with all sorts of different native birds and wildlife that can easily be spotted from the river. The river is a favorite place among locals to spend a day canoeing, kayaking, or fishing. The river also serves a very important role to the area as the water supplier for fourteen different communities. Unfortunately, due to a combination of different problems the river is currently in a very vulnerable position as each year the river continuously drops to low levels severely endangering the river’s ecosystem. In order to help prevent these problems from escalating the river needs help from people like you! Educating yourself and finding ways to stay active within the river community will help ensure that the Ipswich River remains a healthy and thriving place for people to enjoy for years to come. Here are a few basic facts about the most threatening issues to the river today:

**Dams:** The construction of dams along the river has changed the river’s natural flow, transforming its flowing water into ponded areas and making it difficult for many native river fish to move freely within the river. Dams are also usually built on top of areas called riffles (shallow steep areas of the river that have faster flow rates) which naturally provide a great habitat for native river fish.

**Pollution:** The Ipswich River is relatively clean compared to many rivers in eastern Massachusetts; this is mostly because a lot of land is protected from development, and because efforts to clean up and prevent pollution and protect the river’s water quality have been fairly effective. However, there are some problems and parts of the river which frequently fall below the state’s water quality standards. One big problem is low dissolved oxygen levels in the summertime; fish and other river life need enough oxygen, just as we do. The other big problem is pollution that is carried into the river by rainfall
“runoff.” Follow these links to learn more about what causes river pollution: http://www.oceansidecleanwaterprogram.org/kids.asp and http://www.water-pollution.org.uk/

**Floods:** The Ipswich River is experiencing more frequent, extreme floods over the past 20 years. Similar to how a tub overflows if you leave the water on too long, the water from the river overflows and spills out. Under natural conditions, this water would go onto undeveloped wetland areas along the river, called floodplains, but many floodplains have been developed with buildings, roads and bridges. Now, they are in harm’s way during a flood. Adding to the problem, with more roads and buildings covering the land, water can’t soak into the ground and instead rushes off quickly, making flooding worse. Adding to this are the effects of global warming, with more frequent intense storms.

**Low Flows:** Low flows are the most pressing issue facing the Ipswich River today and their frequent recurrence resulted in the river being categorized as one of the most endangered rivers in America (American Rivers, 2003). Low flows increase pollution rates and severely disrupt the river’s natural ecosystem as they cause portions of the river to completely dry up killing hundreds of fish at one time.

The primary cause of unnatural low flows is water withdrawals. Water is taken from the river in such large quantities that it can leave the river at very low levels, or even completely dried up in some areas. To make matters worse, the river is naturally at its lowest levels during the summer months, which increases the problem because many towns use double to triple the normal amount of water during dry summer periods.

Here are a few ways you can get involved within your community and help protect the river!

- **Don’t waste water:**
  - Take the 5 minutes challenge. Grab a timer and see how quick you can take a shower and save water at the same time. Then visit http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/sci/showerestimation.html to calculate how much water you use during your shower!
  - Let your lawn go brown during dry summer periods; it will green up again in the fall.
  - Visit http://www.groundwater.org/kc/easywaystoconserve.html to learn more easy ways you can help conserve water around your house!
- **Start an environmental club at school**—Share your knowledge with others and bring more public support and strengthen conservation efforts to protect your local environment.
- **Organize a canoe trip with your family and friends to get out and enjoy the river firsthand!**

*Visit ipswichriver.org to join or learn more*