Media Release
For immediate release
Contact: Kerry Mackin, kmackin@ipswichriver.org
Cynthia Ingelfinger, cingelfinger@ipswichriver.org, 978-412-8200

Unsafe and Unsustainable

Should Massachusetts restore our rivers to health and manage them sustainably, or is it acceptable to pump our rivers dry, causing fish kills and other environmental damage?

This is one of the main questions that the state’s 2010 “Sustainable Water Management Initiative” set out to resolve. The Initiative has produced outstanding science that advances our understanding of how water withdrawals and other factors affect river health. However, the proposed policy and management “Framework” fails our rivers, our state and our people. We can and must meet our need for enough safe, clean water for our communities while protecting our environment, but the current proposal doesn’t do so.

Many people in our region know that the Ipswich River has been pumped dry for decades, causing fish kills and other damage to the environment. As a result, the Ipswich was named one of the most endangered rivers in the country in 2003. Less well-known is the fact that the Parker River is now pumped dry frequently in summer. In fact, about 20% of streams and rivers in the state are degraded in this way. The state’s proposal would allow this damage to our rivers to continue, and potentially to get worse, rather than aiming to restore them to health; that is not “sustainable water management.”

The Framework’s main problems are “safe yields” which are so high that they could result in pumping almost every river in Massachusetts dry for months during droughts; that is not “safe.” The Framework would also allow increased water withdrawals without requirements to minimize impacts; reward communities that haven’t saved water; and allow some of our rivers to get worse rather than better.

The safe yield proposal is so unreasonable that it would allow pumping six times more water from the Parker River than the water withdrawals that currently pump the Parker River dry. MassDEP should allow less pumping, not more. The so-called “safe yield” of the Ipswich River would be about 5 million gallons more than withdrawals that have pumped the river dry repeatedly in the past. Most Massachusetts rivers could be pumped dry for 3-5 months in droughts and for 1-3 months, even in summers with normal rainfall. The proposal fails to honor MassDEP’s commitment (following their 2009 safe yield proposal, which was a public debacle) that safe yield would “include ecological health of river systems.”

The proposal also conflicts with the Patrick Administration’s excellent work in promoting energy conservation and renewable energy. The Sustainable Water Management Framework could undermine the energy achievements, because saving water is one of the most effective ways to save energy.

Please let Governor Patrick know that the Sustainable Water Management Framework needs to do a better job of protecting our rivers; this is essential to the future health of our state, our communities and our environment. Contact the Governor at http://www.mass.gov/governor/constituentservices/contact/ or 888.870.7770.

The Ipswich River Watershed Association (IRWA) works to restore and protect the Ipswich River. For more information, please contact IRWA at irwainfo@ipswichriver.org or 978-412-8200.

Kerry Mackin is Executive Director of the Ipswich River Watershed Association and served on the Sustainable Water Management Initiative’s Technical Advisory Committee.

###
Unsafe Yield:
THE “SAFE YIELDS” THAT STATE PROPOSES ARE NOT SAFE FOR OUR RIVERS.

MassDEP SAYS THAT THE PARKER RIVER CAN PROVIDE 6 TIMES MORE WATER THAN IT DID WHEN THESE PICTURES WERE TAKEN. WOULD YOU CALL THAT SAFE FOR OUR RIVERS?

MassDEP SAYS IT WOULD BE SAFE TO PUMP 5 MILLION GALLONS A DAY MORE FROM THE IPSWICH RIVER THAN WHEN THESE PICTURES WERE TAKEN. DO YOU AGREE?

“Safe yield” is important because it sets a limit on the amount of water that can be withdrawn, so that water supplies will not be at risk of failure during dry periods and so that water withdrawals will not cause fish kills and other ecological damage.

The proposed safe yield methodology is contrary to the law and conflicts with MassDEP’s clarification on safe yield, which states that safe yield includes protection of the ecological health of rivers. If the proposed safe yields were continuously withdrawn from rivers:

- 24 out of 25 rivers in Massachusetts would be pumped dry for 3-5 months during droughts.
- 16 out of 25 rivers would be pumped dry for ~1-3 months even in normal years; some of the rivers would be dry for half to two-thirds of the summertime.
- Flows in every river in Massachusetts would fall below the state’s “Environmental Protection Factor” for 6-8 months during a drought year.
- All the rivers in Massachusetts would be in Flow Category 5 (Severely Degraded).

EEA’s safe yield figures are up to five times higher than a reasonable interpretation of the current science would support.