

# Patrick-Murray Administration Announces Integrated Water Initiative

## Commonwealth's environmental agencies to collaborate on developing a unified approach to sustainable water management

BOSTON - The Departments of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), Fish and Game (DFG), and Conservation and Recreation (DCR) will team up to launch a new interagency effort to better protect Massachusetts streams and rivers, and assure that the Commonwealth's abundant water resources are sustainably used for economic development, Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Ian Bowles announced today.

"With abundant rainfall and streams and lakes that provide world-class fishing and recreation opportunities, it is unacceptable that the Commonwealth still has areas where streams dry up in the summer, aquatic habitat is degraded, and municipalities are forced to restrict growth," said Secretary Bowles. "Working with EEA agencies, municipalities, water suppliers, and environmental groups, the Patrick Administration is launching an effort to address these challenges through an integrated approach to water resource management."

The policy will employ a practical, science-based method to protect and sustainably manage water resources. This method will develop appropriate streamflow criteria, which will factor into water resource decisions under the state's Water Management Act and other statutes. As part of this initiative, EEA and its agencies will also consider contributing causes of low streamflow in the design of integrated water management.

The goal of the effort is to inform MassDEP's implementation of the Water Management Act, and to examine application of the new methodology to other water-related statutes and requirements, including possible incentives for integrated water management programs at the regional and municipal level. As a first step in this process, MassDEP has developed a revised approach to determining safe yield, or the maximum amount of water that would be present during a drought, for each of the Commonwealth's major river basins.

"MassDEP has calculated safe yield for each of the state's 27 watershed basins," said MassDEP Commissioner Laurie Burt. "However, safe yield is just one of the 10 statutory factors required to be considered under the Water Management Act. It does not address or identify rights to withdraw water, assign allocation volumes, or take into account other environmental and economic considerations. Working with other EEA agencies and stakeholders from around the state, we look forward to developing an enhanced, science-based method to allocate water use and sustainably manage our water resources across the Commonwealth."

Secretary Bowles also announced creation of a sustainable water resources advisory committee made up of stakeholders and representatives of environmental agencies, working closely with the Water Management Act Advisory Committee and the Water Resources Commission. The committee will provide advice to EEA and its agencies on the development of a sustainable water allocation system that examines contributing causes and solutions to low streamflow. The committee will also advise EEA on a sustainable water allocation methodology that incorporates streamflow criteria, safe yield, impacts on users, conservation measures, economic impacts, mitigation options, environmental safeguards, and consideration of various river uses.

"Massachusetts Water Works Association looks forward to working with the EEA agencies and other interested stakeholders in a process which undertakes a holistic approach, examining the broad issues related to streamflow impairment, exploring and prioritizing the contributing factors and determining the best available solutions to ensure sustainable water resources for human use, protection of public health and safety and the environment," said Jennifer A. Pederson, executive director of the Massachusetts Water Works Association. "MWWA thinks that this stakeholder

process presents a unique opportunity for the Commonwealth to step away from the status quo of 'regulate and enforce' and progress to a new paradigm that advances environmental improvements through education, incentives and rewards."

"Water is a finite and increasingly expensive resource," said George Bachrach, President of the Environmental League of Massachusetts, "Massachusetts' rivers and streams are under stress. Communities are facing water constraints for consumers and wildlife alike. It will only get worse if we do not act. We are pleased the Patrick administration is facing the challenge of devising a strong, science-based system that ensures ample water for all of our needs."

A technical advisory subcommittee will review available science, using it to characterize natural and man-made conditions, and specific streamflow and habitat requirements of Massachusetts river basins.

"The science to deal with these issues has come a long way," said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "With that in hand, we are very happy to be in partnership with DEP and DFG moving forward on ensuring the protection and sustainability of the water systems of the Commonwealth."

"Our biologists devote significant resources to collecting fisheries information and field data that give us a better understanding of river ecosystems" said DFG Commissioner Mary Griffin. "We look forward to working with other agencies to use best available science to develop streamflow criteria that better protect aquatic resources."