

Kathleen Baskin, P.E.  
Director of Water Policy  
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs  
100 Cambridge Street, 9th floor  
Boston, MA 02114  
Email: kathleen.baskin@state.ma.us

Re: SWMI Framework Comments

Dear Ms. Baskin:

I am writing in response to the Sustainable Water Management Initiative (SWMI) “Framework” proposal of February 3, 2012. I am concerned that the proposal if implemented in its current form would fail to provide the necessary environmental safeguards to maintain the tangible gains to water quality in the Charles River made over the last two decades (as recognized last year’s award of the International Riverprize).

I appreciate the tremendous effort that state staff and others have dedicated to the SWMI process. The scientific findings and development of ecologically-based streamflow criteria represent a major step forward. However, the weaknesses in the proposed Framework undermine its effectiveness and would make it impossible to achieve truly sustainable water management. Particularly concerning are the provisions related to determination of safe yields in the proposed framework, the grandfathering of existing, and in some cases, unsustainable practices, and the failure to mandate greater incentives for community water conservation.

The goal of sustainable water management should be to use water wisely, so that our rivers, streams and wetlands have enough clean water to support healthy populations of native fish. Protecting the rivers that are healthy, and restoring those that are not, should be explicit goals of SWMI.

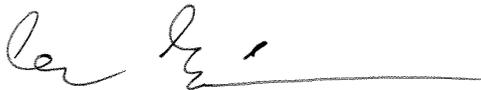
Currently, 292 sub-basins in Massachusetts – more than 20% – are seriously degraded by water withdrawals, and another 227 are losing fish and could fall into the degraded category if they were subjected to increased withdrawals. Yet the SWMI Framework proposes safe yield withdrawal limits that are several times higher than the latest science indicates is safe for fish; exempts some permitted withdrawals from having to fully minimize and mitigate the impacts of their withdrawal; and allows “non-

essential” water use when flows are below safe levels. This is not sustainable water management and appears to put special interests including water suppliers and those interested in outdoor watering (such as golf courses) over the public good or what is scientifically defensible. We encourage EEA to design and implement a strong new regulatory system to prevent ecologically negative outcomes, which must include regulations with clear numeric standards that place an upper limit on withdrawals based on scientifically corroborated minimum stream flow.

Nothing in the SWMI proposal will prevent vulnerable rivers, streams and wetlands from being pumped dry and this past winter’s abnormally dry and warm conditions raises concerns about widespread droughts and fish spawning failures throughout eastern MA and other NE states. This proposal represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to begin a process of gradual restoration of degraded rivers, streams and wetlands and provide a sustainable legacy for future generations to appreciate. We should start by establishing protective safe yield withdrawal limits consistent with the latest scientific research.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Norman Richardson', followed by a horizontal line.

Norman Richardson  
Newton Conservation Commissioner

Cc: Commissioner Kenneth Kimmell, MassDEP  
(Kenneth.Kimmell@state.ma.us)  
Commissioner Mary Griffin, MassDFG (Mary.Griffin@state.ma.us)  
Commissioner Edward Lambert, MassDCR  
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