

# South Natick Charles River Dam

## A Case for River Restoration & Tree Preservation

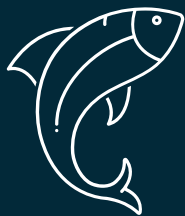
Rendering: Town of Natick

*The Charles River Dam at South Natick is an earthen dam and concrete spillway on the Charles River in Natick, MA. A historic mill dam, the present-day dam was rebuilt in 1934 after the previous dam was destroyed in a 1929 flood. Today, the structure is rated in "poor condition" and serves no purpose for power or flood control.*

In September 2022, the Town of Natick Charles River Dam Advisory Committee recommended to the Select Board to remove the spillway and restore the river. In its present condition, the dam impedes migratory fish passage, degrades the river ecosystem, and is susceptible to failure as climate change brings more frequent extreme weather events. In 2022, the Natick Select Board Voted 4-1 in favor of removal of the spillway and river restoration.

The decision of the town is to remove the spillway and restore the river. Dam repair would require the loss of 60 mature trees on the earthen dam. Spillway removal, on the other hand, would preserve the vital mature trees, which improve air and water quality, reduce heat island impacts, and mitigate flooding, and offer the chance to restore the river ecosystem, and provide the numerous benefits of a free-flowing river to wildlife and residents alike. The Natick Nipmuc people have spoken for restoring the river by removing the South Natick Dam for many years and originally opposed the construction of dams on the river. Removing the Charles River Dam in South Natick honors their legacy and is a concrete step forward in the process of healing past wrongs.

- 1720 Dam built 1/2 mile upstream
- 1722 Relocated to Indian Brook due to flooding
- 1778-1831 Bigelow Mills Dam built & rebuilt
- 1807 Bigelow's Dam destroyed by ice jam
- 1874-1908 Dam site used for industry
- 1886 Dam damaged in major flood, repaired
- 1917 Dam failed & damaged downstream bridge
- 1929 Dam partially breached in flood
- 1932-1934 Dam destroyed in flood, Town rebuilds
- 2021 Inspection rates dam in poor condition



### Impedes Fish Passage

The dam is a major barrier to resident fish including Eastern Brook Trout. Removal of the dam would reconnect the habitats of Noanet & Trout Brooks in Dover to a number of other tributaries in the longest free-flowing section of the Charles River, the 19.6 mile section of mainstem river between the South Natick Dam and the Sanford Mill Dam in Medway.



### Degrades River Ecosystem

When dams are constructed, they raise the water level upstream, creating an impoundment and submerging the natural floodplain around the river. This degrades water quality by creating slow-flowing, warmer water, accumulation of harmful pollutants, and decreased oxygen levels. This can cause invasive species growth, severe cyanobacteria blooms, habitat destruction, and even devastating fish kills.



### Susceptible to Failure

The dam is a high hazard potential dam because of the densely populated area downstream. If the dam failed during a big storm, as it did in 1929, downstream flooding would damage homes, businesses, and infrastructure, and could lead to injuries or death. With increasingly intense storms due to climate change, dam failure is an even greater concern.



Image: USFWS

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## Ways to Take Action

*CRWA and partner organizations are supporting the Town of Natick to help restore the river.*

### *Know the Facts:*

*The dam is a run-of-river dam and does not operate or function as a flood control structure. Engineering evaluations by the Town and consultants have found that removal of the spillway of the dam will not cause changes in flooding downstream.*

*The Town of Natick hired expert consultants that took sediment samples from upstream and downstream of the dam and sample results have not been found to be of concern from contamination.*

### **Talk to Your Community!**

*Tell your friends, family and neighbors about why the Town should remove the spillway, save the trees, and take action to protect Natick from the impacts of climate change!*

### **Learn more!**

*Explore "A River Interrupted", our piece that makes the case for dam removal to restore a clean, free-flowing, climate-resilient Charles River for future generations on our website, [www.crwa.org/dam-removal](http://www.crwa.org/dam-removal).*

### **Donate**

*Contribute through CRWA to help protect and restore the health of the Charles River.*

**Removing the Charles River Dam in South Natick would improve the area for both people and nature. With support from residents and elected officials, we can remove this aging dam and restore a natural, free-flowing Charles River.**

### **The Numerous Benefits of Dam Removal**

- *Improved habitat connectivity for fish and wildlife*
- *Preservation of approximately 60 mature trees*
- *Improved river ecosystem water quality and habitat quality*
- *Restored floodplain and floodwater storage*
- *Elimination of hazard potential of dam failure*
- *Improved recreational opportunities\**
- *Eliminated dam maintenance and liability for the Town*

\*Town of Natick. [Charles River Dam Advisory Committee Final Report](#), September 2022. Pages 17-18