



The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts
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[nature.org/massachusetts](https://www.nature.org/massachusetts)

September 21, 2023

Re: Watertown Dam

Dear Secretary Tepper and Commissioner Arrigo:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) enthusiastically supports the efforts to restore the Charles River and remove the Watertown Dam. TNC is an international, nonprofit conservation organization with a mission to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends at a pace and scale that addresses the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Our strategies are guided by science, including a robust analysis of resilient and connected landscapes—the priority places best suited for enabling animals and plants to adapt to climate change and for deploying the power of nature to protect communities.

Removal of the Watertown Dam would restore river connectivity and natural flow enabling migratory diadromous fish to reach upstream habitats, as well as improve upstream and downstream passage and habitats for freshwater fish, aquatic species, and wildlife. Simultaneously, restoration of natural flows and ecosystem function would promote community well-being from reduced climate risks from flooding and drought.

TNC's *Northeast Aquatic Connectivity Project* ranks the Watertown Dam in the top 25% of dams in the Northeast for restoration of stream connectivity for anadromous species. It ranks in the 50th percentile compared to other dams in the watershed for greatest ecological benefit from dam removal in MA Division of Ecological Restoration's *Restoration Potential Model*. Additionally, *Biomap* Aquatic Core Habitat extends far upstream and downstream of the dam—Aquatic Cores are the most structurally and functionally intact freshwater ecosystems in the state with highest fish and freshwater mussel diversity, strongest anadromous fish runs, aquatic rare species habitat, and habitats identified by TNC as most resilient to a warming climate.

TNC's *Coastal Resilience Mapping Tool* identified the Watertown Dam as one that increases the potential severity of inland flooding for which removal would minimize this risk, protect nearby life and property, and benefit aquatic and terrestrial organisms and water quality. Due to the densely populated area downstream of the dam, it has been classified as a Significant Hazard dam and removal eliminates the risk of dam failure with impacts to public safety, downstream flooding and transport of contaminated sediment, costly infrastructure and property damage, and owner liability. Increasingly intense storms due to climate change only increases these risks. Furthermore, removal will create additional recreational opportunities for boating, fishing, and wildlife observation.

This is an exciting project and comes at a time of unprecedented funding for restoring aquatic connectivity, fish passage, and enhancing community resilience to climate change impacts, such as flooding hazards. Additionally, it builds on potential removal of two upstream dams - the Charles River Dam and Wrentham Eagle Dam – as well as the recent Old Mill Dam removal, presenting an opportunity for more holistic watershed restoration with extensive ecosystem and regional community co-benefits. Strategic removal of such dams in MA is vital to support both regional and national efforts to restore healthy herring, rainbow smelt, and American shad populations. TNC in MA is dedicated to these same goals and has prioritized protecting and improving the health and resilience of rivers and lands by focusing on a watershed approach in our organizational 2030 goals.

Lastly, community engagement and support has been an important part of this project and it provides an opportunity to address potential risks of dam failure to surrounding EJ communities as well as help restore the relationship, use, and access of Indigenous Peoples to the river.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Marea Gabriel, TNC Freshwater Manager, at mgabriel@tnc.org.

Sincerely,

Alison A. Bowden

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Director of Science & Conservation Strategy, Co-Interim MA State Director

The Nature Conservancy

cc: MA Department of Fish & Game Commissioner Tom O'Shea