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Western Massachusetts Communities Protecting Quabbin Reservoir Call for Equitable Partnership

QUABBIN RESERVOIR WATERSHED, MA — The Quabbin Reservoir is almost ten feet below full capacity because of the ongoing drought. While the surrounding communities have faced water restrictions, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) has merely urged conservation measures for those drawing water from the Reservoir.

With exposed shorelines throughout the Quabbin, the lack of more meaningful action by MWRA is concerning. What's also concerning is the continued absence of regional equity when it comes to the stewardship of the Quabbin watershed.

A group of community leaders from a dozen communities which circle the Quabbin have joined together to form the *Quabbin Watershed Stewards* to call for necessary action to ensure that the Quabbin remains a pristine water source for the state while not having a negative impact upon the very communities upon which it relies. The Stewards have written the following open letter to eastern Massachusetts recipients of Quabbin water.

An Open Letter to Eastern Massachusetts

Eighty-eight years ago, in 1938, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts disincorporated and flooded four towns—Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott—in the Swift River Valley so that eastern Massachusetts could grow and develop with an abundant supply of pristine drinking water.

More than 1,100 structures were dismantled, including over 650 homes. More than 7,600 graves were exhumed across 34 cemeteries. Thirty-one miles of north-south rail tracks—the Rabbit Run, which made daily stops from Athol to Springfield—were torn up. Businesses shuttered. Families scattered. The dozen communities surrounding what would become the Quabbin Reservoir, fractured—many ceding land and roadways.

Today, the local governments in these 12 watershed towns help to steward an invaluable 412-billion-gallon resource, in a 120,000 acre protected watershed, ensuring compliance with state and federal water protection regulations through volunteer and municipally-funded positions. This means that our small local governments have extra responsibilities to keep those lands safe, especially from residential or commercial development that might lead to pollution.

Roughly 200 million gallons of pristine, world-class water flow from west to east each day, enabling booming economic growth for upwards of 2.7 million people in the eastern part of Massachusetts. In a world where fresh water has become a threatened resource the metro Boston area has one of the cleanest and most delicious supplies of water in America—or anywhere.

The reservoir is surrounded by trees, streams, and swamps—that keep the water clean and clear in a way that no treatment plant could. The Quabbin region leads the Commonwealth in the employment of these nature-based solutions, as well as in the prioritization of land-based ecosystem services and we're proud of it.

A Growing Crisis: Water and Resource Scarcity in the Communities That Protect Your Water

When we face water restrictions during drought conditions, those restrictions are rarely matched by conservation measures in MWRA system communities. It would seem fair that when we are under drought conditions, water users should also be taking steps to safeguard the water we are sending east.

Today, our communities face a deepening water crisis. Western Massachusetts municipalities have been forced to issue water use restrictions to protect dwindling supplies, even as eastern Massachusetts communities continue to receive their full allocation.

The Work we Lead and the Burden We Bear

Because of the watershed—and unlike other conservation areas in our communities—significant parts of our towns cannot be used for common recreational activities. Our communities also face constricting development restrictions.

In spite of our stewardship and continued sacrifice, we receive a pittance relative to the magnitude and value of our work for the residents of the Commonwealth and the economic boon of eastern Massachusetts, made possible by Quabbin water.

The cruel irony is inescapable: our people cannot drink the Quabbin water that we protect. Private wells throughout our region are dry or are tainted with PFAS, leaving our residents without reliable access to clean water. Meanwhile, we are often unable to fully fund our schools, police or fire departments, or maintain our roads, bridges, and public buildings.

For years, representatives from our communities have endeavored to engage MWRA's leadership, Board of Directors, and Advisory Board to seek a more sustainable future for the communities that protect the water on which millions depend. Progress has been slow as our communities have little to no representation on either the Board of Directors or Advisory Board.

A Direct Appeal to Eastern Massachusetts Residents

With this open letter, we are taking our case directly to you—the people of eastern Massachusetts who drink the water we protect every time you turn on the tap.

In addition to protecting the spectacular Quabbin watershed and therefore your drinking water, our conservation of open space in the Quabbin region also safeguards regional biodiversity, air quality, and climate resiliency.

A Call for Fairness

We believe that fellow community members in eastern Massachusetts would be willing to pay a few pennies more each month so that our children could have equitable access to public education, our residents could access public safety protections, and our families could drink water free of contaminants.

Together, we can honor the past, protect the present, and ensure a fairer future for all Massachusetts communities.

A Call to Action

We invite residents and lawmakers across Massachusetts to stand with the Quabbin communities. Support *An Act Relative to the Quabbin Watershed and Regional Equity* ([S.546/H.1042](#)) to ensure fairness for the towns that protect the water upon which 2.7 million people rely.

Contact your legislators using <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>. Share this message and join us in building an equitable partnership with the MWRA and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, one where those who steward the Quabbin can thrive alongside those it serves.

About the Quabbin Reservoir:

The Quabbin Reservoir is the largest inland body of water in Massachusetts, with a capacity of 412 billion gallons covering 39 square miles with 181 miles of shoreline. It is the primary water supply for Boston and 40 other cities and towns in greater Boston, serving approximately 2.7 million people. The reservoir was created between 1930 and 1946, requiring the disincorporation and flooding of four towns and displacement of over 2,500 residents.

About the Quabbin Watershed Stewards

The Quabbin Watershed Stewards is an ad hoc group of town officials and residents from the 12 Quabbin Region towns that make up the Quabbin watershed that focus on issues relating to regional issues and equity.