

An Act Relative to Drought Management (SD.1828/HD.2398)

Senate Sponsor: Jamie Eldridge
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This summer, many rivers throughout Massachusetts experienced record low flows, and many tributary streams and portions of some major rivers, such as the Ipswich and Parker, went dry. The drought also posed a challenge for public water suppliers, when several local municipal water sources became too depleted to meet demand. With climate change scientists predicting increases in both floods and droughts, we must make sure we are prepared for both extremes.

An important goal of drought resiliency is to sustain streamflows, groundwater levels and water supplies for as long as possible when precipitation is scarce. The most effective, immediate, and least costly way to achieve this is to conserve water during a drought.

The Problem

- **Massachusetts lacks authority to require water conservation during a drought.** Despite the severity of the past summer's drought, the EOEEA Secretary could only recommend outdoor watering restrictions, but could not require them.
- **Drought actions currently vary greatly within the same within drought regions.** This summer's uneven outdoor watering restrictions within drought regions resulted in basic unfairness and increased environmental impacts: some towns had no restrictions while neighboring towns, withdrawing from the same sub-basin, enacted complete outdoor watering bans.
- **With droughts expected to increase in frequency and intensity as our climate changes, it is essential that we improve and coordinate our response to drought.** This bill will help us sustain our streams and water supplies during droughts, filling a critical public health and environmental need.



Martins Brook in Norwell, MA during the summer 2016 drought.

The Solution

This bill would give the EOEEA Secretary the authority to require water conservation during a drought.

- Non-essential outdoor water use restrictions would gradually escalate as drought levels worsen.
- These restrictions would apply to all water users within a drought region.
- Agricultural water users would be exempted.

For more information contact:

Paula Costa, Office of Senator Eldridge, paula.costa@masenate.gov (617-722-1120)

David Melly, Office of Rep. Dykema, david.melly@mahouse.gov (617-722-2680)

Julia Blatt or Gabby Queenan, Mass Rivers Alliance, juliablatt@massriversalliance.org or gabbyqueenan@massriversalliance.org (857-445-0208)

Margaret Van Deusen, Charles River Watershed Assoc., mvandeußen@crwa.org, (781-788-0007 x234)