

# The Drought Bill S. 475/H.861

To Maintain Adequate Water Supplies Through Effective Drought Management

## Problem

Seasonal drought is predicted to return every summer and we do not have a common plan in the Commonwealth to conserve our state rivers, wildlife, and water supply. We have one water source and need one plan.

## Impact

- Drought led to crop failure with a net loss of \$18 million in 2016.
- 1 in 5 streams regularly run dry in the summer from excessive water withdrawals.
- Low flows endanger a million young river herrings because they were trapped in ponds and unable to migrate, which is necessary for their survival.

## Solution

Invest in drought management with a standing task force that considers the changing needs of our many regions and responds to our climate crisis.

## Call To Action

We ask that you hold a hearing for the Drought Bill as soon as possible.



Both towns above pull from the same water source, but Massachusetts' patchwork drought system allows each town to decide their own water conservation measures during drought. Therefore, some towns impose stringent measures, while others do nothing at all.

## Op-Eds

Gianna Bruno

### *How the Water Rich State Could Run Out of Water*

After the hours of rain and snow Massachusetts residents experienced during our most recent nor'easter, it could be hard to believe the state is trending towards more frequent and severe droughts. The issue is that during the winter and spring seasons, there is a large amount of rainfall, but in turn, the summer and fall seasons are becoming more dry. While the state still experiences rain and snowfall, it is not enough to replace all the water that is currently being used in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts does have a drought management plan, but it does not suffice, which is why a new, better managed drought management plan as detailed in the Drought Bill is more than necessary in this climate.

The first iteration of the Drought Bill was introduced back in 2016 while the entire state of Massachusetts was suffering a 48-week-long drought between June 2016 and May 2017. No drought management plan could have ended the drought. However, if Massachusetts had had one, unified plan (rather than the fractured plan they currently have) that consolidated the state under one water conservation plan, then more water would have been preserved and then used for essential uses, such as for farmers who needed to water their crops.

Since that 2016-17 drought, Massachusetts has continued to experience intense periods of drought that have dried up streams, parts of the iconic Charles River, and even private wells. There are currently regions in Massachusetts that are experiencing mild to significant droughts. While that range does not necessitate an emergency, how inconvenient is it that parts of Massachusetts have to suffer the consequences of those uncontrollable drought conditions?

Due to a lack of a unified plan, those citizens are forced to consider the possibility of running out of water even during non-emergency level droughts.

Let us focus on that line again. Due to a lack of a unified plan, those citizens are forced to consider the possibility of running out of water even during non-emergency level droughts. In the short term, droughts are inconvenient because water sources are running low so that means farmers have less water to effectively sustain their crops. During droughts, farmers experience an extreme loss of crop due to the lack of water which translates into a major loss of money due to the lack of crops to sell.

However, in the long term, there is not a group of people

# The Drought Bill S.475/H.861

To Maintain Adequate Water Supplies Through Effective Drought Management

Rebecca Spinner, Students for Environmental Action

The Drought Bill is absolutely necessary. There is less attention on droughts in Massachusetts because there is an assumption that the state is water rich so this story gets pushed aside



Massachusetts River Alliance

The Drought Bill allows states to be proactive in saving water during a drought, rather than waiting until an emergency strikes.

Paul Willard, Owner of Willard Farm

The drought of 2016 yielded our worst crop to date. We did not just have poor production, we had fields of crops that were dying.



For more information, please contact:  
and Gianna Bruno

Amelia Chen

---

who would not be affected by droughts, because depleted water sources means no water for houses to use for washing or drinking as well as no water available for fire control.

Sadly, droughts are uncontrollable and are getting worse now due to climate change. The only recourse for dealing with a drought is to let it run its course, but without a drought management plan that actually conserves water, the plan is unproductive; therefore, a water emergency could be seen in the foreseeable future without action now.

It appears to be a pretty cut and dry situation, pardon the pun: droughts are bad (and are getting worse) so there needs to be a plan set in place in order to conserve water for essential purposes. While Massachusetts has a drought plan, it is so fragmented and confusing that it is producing the opposite of what it intended to do: it is not conserving our state's water!

Let me break it down. In Massachusetts, every town within a region has a different drought management plan. So, right now when a drought is declared, each town decides whether or not non-essential outdoor water uses are either banned, limited, or completely allowed, even though they are all pulling from the same suffering water source. The drought management plan provides us with essential guidance on when and how to make simple changes with a big impact to conserve water when we are running low. For example, all that is asked is that you skip a car wash or refrain from watering your lawn during drought periods.

The current system is as follows: House A (Waltham) and House B (Watertown) are right next door to each other and use water from the same well. When a drought is declared, House A is told that it is not allowed to water its lawn nor wash the cars, but House B is told that it is perfectly fine to water its lawn and wash the cars. So not only is their shared water source depleted because of the drought, but it is also drying up even more because House B is not conserving any water at all. This example demonstrates the necessity of having neighbors cooperating in order to conserve vital resources such as water.

The Drought Bill is essential. It creates one, unified drought management system across the regions. The proposed unified system is necessary because it will be consistent across the regions and will stay updated to handle the various needs in a changing commonwealth. Once this system is in place, when a drought is declared, all towns across a region will be conserving water, which means Massachusetts will be able to conserve water rather than continuing to deplete its precious, yet finite resource.

The Drought Bill has been passing through the Massachusetts legislature since 2016. Email, call, or go talk

to your representatives and let them know that this bill needs to be passed ASAP, before Massachusetts is stuck facing a water emergency.