The Coalition to End Sewage Pollution

Shared Principles

July 16, 2025

Overview

This document describes the founding principles of a coalition of community advocates and organizations created to address the dumping of sewage in Massachusetts' waterbodies during rainstorms. The coalition is focused on eliminating combined sewer overflows (CSOs) and on the need for a unified and regional approach to water quality because rivers and watersheds transcend municipal borders. By coordinating advocacy across city and town lines and their governments, the coalition seeks to deliver lasting and effective solutions through policy change and infrastructure projects.

The shared principles in this document provide a framework for ending CSOs and improving water quality. They emphasize that environmental health is community health and demand the return of swimmable and fishable rivers and streams. We call for the elimination of CSO sewage pollution through sewer separation and the use of green stormwater infrastructure. We also recognize the need for gray infrastructure solutions. Sewage pollution is a regional, environmental justice, and climate change issue. Solutions must therefore be equitable, climate-resilient, community-driven, and implemented across municipal boundaries.

Purpose

This document exists because these waters are held in public trust and belong to the residents of Massachusetts. Therefore, community advocates and stakeholders must be involved in planning to end sewage pollution in their waterbodies. This is a collection of shared community principles from the community's watershed advocates.

This document is created by community advocates and stakeholders with the express purpose of forming a coalition to arrive at consensus.

This document serves as a response to the latest plans to eliminate sewage overflows, describing key community principles and linking these principles to community ideas for infrastructure projects.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set us on course to stop dumping sewage into our rivers.

Key Principles

- **Environmental Health is Community Health.**
  Any plan to control Combined Sewer Overflows must consider the complete health risk of continued discharges and the risk of exposure associated with flooding. Our waterbodies must allow for healthy, resilient ecologies that maintain the biodiversity of fish, birds, reptiles, mammals, and other wildlife. The rivers shall flow, be free from sewage, and perform essential ecosystem functions. Healthy ecosystems promote physical and mental health for residents and visitors.
- **Swimmable and Fishable Water Quality Shall Be Achieved.**
  Our waterbodies must meet Class B Standards to protect the health of the public while supporting state parkland recreational use.
- **Sewer Separation is Key.**
  Wherever possible, sewer and stormwater systems must be separated with the goal of closing all CSOs. Green stormwater infrastructure must be added during sewer separation to prevent stormwater pollution. There may be circumstances under which various forms of gray infrastructure, such as storage tunnels, could be an acceptable alternative to sewer separation.
- **Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) Should Be Maximized.**
  GSI is a desirable component of CSO control, providing valuable co-benefits, including mitigating the urban heat island effect, improving air quality, sequestering carbon, fostering mental health and wellbeing, and providing access to nature for generations to come.
- **Community Participation is Integral to the Planning Process.**
  Community members and local expertise must be valued alongside technical considerations. The process needs to be transparent, and community input is genuine and robust, leading to better outcomes.
- **Sewage Pollution is an Environmental Justice Issue.**
  Sewage pollution has a disproportionate impact on already vulnerable populations. Planning must address inequities, including health and accessibility to natural resources. Vulnerable residents need to have a voice in the process.
- **Sewage Pollution is a Climate Change issue.**
  Climate change is expected to exacerbate the sewage pollution problem. Plans to eliminate CSOs must address climate change through climate-resilient strategies and account for future climate-driven impacts.
- **Environmental Burdens on our Communities Must Not Be Increased.**
  Sewage pollution must be considered alongside other environmental hazards, including flooding. Solutions must not worsen other problems.

Coalition Participants

as of 07/16/2025

The following organizations are participants in this document:

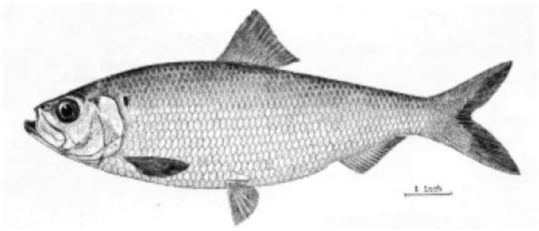
Mystic River Watershed Association
www.mysticriver.org

Charles River Watershed Association
www.crwa.org

Green Cambridge
www.greencambridge.org

Alewife Study Group
www.alewife.org

Save the Alewife Brook
www.savethealewifebrook.org



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Updated Combined Sewer Overflow Control Plan

PROJECT GOALS - 2025

Four decades after the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority was created, sewage is still dumped into the Charles River, Mystic River, Alewife Brook, and other local waters during rainstorms. A new Long Term Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Plan is currently being developed by Cambridge, Somerville, and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority that we believe must address and solve that longstanding problem.

The updated Long Term CSO Control Plans are an opportunity to create a comprehensive, phased approach to achieving regulatory compliance, environmental sustainability, and community health. By integrating immediate actions, short-term, medium-term, & long-term infrastructure projects – including both green and gray solutions — the plan should ensure measurable progress and meaningful benefits for the region.

IMMEDIATE:

Studies and Assessments:

Real-Time Onsite Notification Study, due by 08/31/2025

Odor Control Study, due by 06/01/2025

Floatables Elimination Study

Analysis of non-point source controls should be included in MWRA's Use Attainability Analysis documentation submitted to MassDEP December 2025.

Regulatory Submissions:

CSO Permittees (Cambridge, Somerville, MWRA) submit the draft updated Long Term CSO Control Plan (LTCP) to MassDEP and EPA by December 31, 2025.

Stormwater Management:

Improve local Stormwater Management regulations & local government operations. Require retention of the 100-year storm on site as the local control required in private redevelopment.

Health and Environmental Assessments:

Mandate a study by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health on the long-term human health risks of CSOs.

Require a biological assessment of Alewife Brook.

Construction of Green Stormwater Infrastructure Projects Tributary to the Charles, Alewife, and Mystic Rivers:

The cities will include GSI projects in all infrastructure projects and throughout all phases of the updated LTCP.

Collaboration:

Work with the MBTA to maximize CSO mitigation opportunities in and around the Alewife MBTA Station during station reconstruction planning.

SHORT-TERM:

Best Management Practices (BMPs):

Incorporate Real-Time Onsite Notification, Odor Control, and Floatables Elimination as BMPs Best Management Practices in the Nine Minimum

Controls (NMC) compliance plan of the CSO permittees (Cambridge, Somerville, MWRA.)

Permitting:

Odor Control to be included in the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit.

Analysis and Evaluation:

Conduct a cost-benefit analysis that fully values green stormwater infrastructure (GSI), similar to approaches in Philadelphia and New York, alongside an affordability analysis.

Infrastructure Mapping and Feasibility:

Map separated storm sewers in combined sewer system catchments.

Identify possible routes to restore hydraulic connection with variance waters.

Conduct a restoration feasibility study.

MEDIUM-TERM:

Dredging CSO sediment:
Alewife Brook is being used as sewer infrastructure, much to our dismay. The Brook should be maintained at least to the same degree that sewer pipes are. Cambridge, Somerville, and Massachusetts Water Resources Authority will work with the Army Corps of Engineers to develop and execute a plan to remove sediment in the concrete channel of the brook.

Gray infrastructure including underground storage:
Underground storage can handle large volumes of stormwater and sewage, making it effective for managing significant storm events.

LONG-TERM:

Complete Sewer Separation:

Achieve full sewer separation in Cambridge and Somerville by 2050.

Plan sewer separation and green stormwater infrastructure projects with 5-year milestones to demonstrate progress during the Water Quality Variance.

Integration of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI):

Ensure GSI is constructed alongside sewer separation to manage stormwater after it is removed from combined pipes.

GSI is essential for:

Reducing stormwater flows and managing stormwater to prevent flooding and environmental degradation after sewer separation.

Key Environmental, Social, Economic, Climate, Conservation, and Sustainability Benefits of GSI:

Reduces flooding risk

Mitigates urban heat island effects

Improves water quality by filtering pollutants

Enhances air quality by reducing particulates and smog

Supports ecosystem health, biodiversity, and wildlife habitat

Promotes social interaction and community connections

Improves public health and well-being

Reduces costs associated with gray infrastructure

Helps mitigate drought effects