



Massachusetts Water Resources Authority



Boston Water and Sewer Commission



City of Cambridge

## **PUBLIC NOTICE March 2010**

### **Lower Charles River Basin Combined Sewer Overflows Update**

This notice and enclosed map poster comply with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requirements to provide information about Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) discharges, potential public health impacts, and the progress of CSO control measures being implemented to improve the water quality of the Lower Charles River Basin.

The water quality of the Lower Charles River Basin has greatly improved over the past two decades, but continues to be impaired at times due to bacteria and other pollutants from a number of sources, including cross connections between sanitary sewers and storm drains, urban stormwater runoff, and CSOs.

Portions of Boston, Cambridge and Brookline are served by combined stormwater and sanitary sewer systems common in older cities. During large rainfall events, the increased volume of stormwater together with the sanitary flow can exceed the capacities of the local and MWRA systems and contribute to combined sewer overflows to the Charles River Basin. These overflows relieve the sewer system to prevent system flooding and sewage backups into homes, businesses and streets.

As recently as the early 1980's, there were more than 20 active overflow locations (CSO outfalls) along the Charles River Basin or its tributaries. Most have been permanently closed through the CSO control efforts of Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), Boston Water and Sewer Commission (BWSC), the City of Cambridge, and the Town of Brookline, and there are now nine outfalls that can release untreated CSO to the Charles River Basin during heavy rainfall. In addition, MWRA's Cottage Farm CSO Facility can release treated CSO to the basin at Outfall MWR201.

As part of the Boston Harbor Case (D. Mass. C.A. No. 85-0489-RGS), MWRA is undertaking certain corrective actions to reduce or eliminate CSO discharges to Boston Harbor, the Mystic, Charles and Neponset rivers, and Alewife Brook. MWRA, in conjunction with BWSC, the City of Cambridge and the Town of Brookline, is completing projects that are intended to significantly reduce CSO discharges to the Charles River in accordance with a long-term control plan that is approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and DEP and mandated by federal court order.

Work already completed by MWRA and the communities has greatly reduced CSO events and discharge volume to the Charles River. MWRA estimates that average annual CSO discharge volume to the river has been reduced by 98% since 1987, when MWRA accepted responsibility for developing and implementing the long-term control plan. More information about the long-term control plan can be found in MWRA's latest CSO Annual Progress Report, at <http://www.mwra.com/annual/csoar/2009/csoar2009.pdf>.

The enclosed map poster also provides more information on CSOs to the Lower Charles River Basin, as well as related website links and email and telephone contacts.