



August 2, 2010

Mark Casella, P.E.
MassDEP CSO Coordinator
5th Floor, One Winter Street
Boston, MA 02108

RE: CSO Variance Alewife Brook and Mystic River
NPDES permit Nos. MA0103284, MA0101974, and MA0101982

Dear Mr. Casella:

The Mystic River Watershed Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed variance to CSO discharges into the Alewife Brook and Mystic River under the above captioned NPDES permits.

The Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the Mystic River Watershed. The mission of MyRWA is to work to protect and restore the Mystic River, its tributaries and watershed lands for the benefit of present and future generations and to celebrate the value, importance and great beauty of these natural resources. This includes working to improve the water quality in the Mystic River and all of its tributaries. As an important aspect of this mission MyRWA has been conducting scientifically rigorous testing of the water quality of the Mystic watershed for over 10 years, and actively using the data generated to work with the commonwealth, cities and towns to improve the quality of the water in the watershed. Because of this, MyRWA is concerned about CSO discharges into the Mystic River and its tributaries and the impact of those discharges on the water quality in the watershed.

High quality data is required for sensible decision making in future water quality issues. The Mystic River Watershed Association respectfully requests that the conditions of the variance require that the MWRA gather and provide the data for a basic understanding of the causes of the water quality impairment in Alewife Brook and the Mystic River. It is clear that the water quality impairments that result from CSOs and SSOs are equally a stormwater volume problem as much as they are a problem of infrastructure for sewage. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority needs to address pollution problems beginning with an examination of stormwater and work with municipalities to find opportunities to prioritize locations for removal not only CSO discharges from the system, but of stormwater discharges as well.

The current conditions of Alewife Brook represent a serious public health hazard as the result of sewage pollution and the frequent flooding that brings the waters into the houses in Arlington and Cambridge. The conditions that MyRWA requests as a part of this variance are fundamental toward gathering basic information that leads to a reduction of those pollution levels and the protection of public health in these areas.

The goal of MyRWA is that all CSOs that discharge into Alewife Brook and the Mystic River will be closed and that the Mystic River will be determined to be and will be maintained as a Class B watershed. This will eliminate any need for a variance.

The Mystic River Watershed Association requests the following conditions be placed on the extension of the variance in light of the fact that this variance is currently required:

- 1) The development of a detailed sampling plan that seeks to answer the question of the relative contributions of pollution from Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs), Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) and from stormwater outfall pipes. This plan would include a reassignment of the ongoing sampling of the receiving water body by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MRWA) to a focus on wet weather days and/or sampling of CSO discharge water quality. Most importantly, a monitoring plan should be developed and made available for review that demonstrates that the appropriate set of data is being collected to answer the specific question of the relative contributions of the various outfall pipes. This plan should be reviewed by peers within the scientific community.
- 2) The development of a study of the relative contribution of pollution from Sanitary Sewer Overflows in both Alewife Brook and the Mystic River that includes both the bacteria and nutrient concentrations as well as the volumes of those discharges. The Mystic River Watershed Association believes that during moderate to large storms, the impairment of the Mystic River water is caused equally, or to a greater degree, by the discharges from Sanitary Sewer Overflows rather than just the contributions of the Combined Sewer Overflows. The contribution of SSOs is not established within the variance that has been applied to the Mystic River and Alewife Brook, yet evidence indicates that SSOs are a major contributor to pollution levels in the watershed during major storm events. MyRWA would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate the comments of Roger Frymire on the inadequacy of the reporting forms for SSO discharges that are currently used to report such discharges.
- 3) The renewal of the variance should be contingent upon improved reporting of Inflow/Infiltration (I/I). I/I is the contribution of rainfall to the sanitary system that strongly contributes in SSOs with sewage spilling into the Mystic and Alewife at high levels. The Annual I/I Report was required to provide an “assessment”. In other words, the intent of the Annual I/I report was to inform the Community on the severity of the problem, the prioritization of remediation, and opportunities for cost-effective investments to improve the system. The Annual I/I report as currently published does not include information that informs

on actions. Changes should include I/I data from small storms (3 month, 6 month and 1 year storms) and spatial data that shows what parts of the municipal and MWRA system are under greatest strain. Finally, the I/I report does not include a self assessment currently. A self-assessment should be required to determine where investments to the system are having the greatest impact.

- 4) MWRA should be required to examine and revise the statistics used within the assignment of a “Typical Year” for modeling purposes. The storm and rainfall frequency data should be updated to reflect current weather including realistic assessments of 1, 5, 10, 25, 50 and 100 year storm events.
- 5) As a condition of the variance cities, towns and authorities should be required to participate in a program requiring notification of all interested parties of all CSO and SSO discharges within the Alewife Brook/Mystic River system within 24 hours of such a discharge.

We would like to again thank the Department of Environmental Protection for this opportunity to comment on the proposed variance to CSO discharges into the Alewife Brook and Mystic River.

Very truly yours,

EKongKar Singh Khalsa
Executive Director
Mystic River Watershed Association