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Press Release

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North Shore Water Resilience Task Force Making Critical Progress in Safeguarding Ipswich River Watershed and Water Supply

Unified Effort Producing Results to Protect River & Drinking Water

Boston (06/07/24) – The North Shore Water Resilience Task Force (the Task Force) is forging ahead with a dynamic, inclusive process to set the stage for unprecedented action steps to ensure long-term water supply and environmental sustainability in the Ipswich River. Since the Task Force members formally committed to work together by signing a charter agreement on September 28th, 2022, they have been making steady progress towards this goal.

Progress includes securing \$400,000 in state funding through legislative earmarks, which is supporting three important studies, establishing working sub-committees and creating a comprehensive [website](#) to share the work of the Task Force. A foundational principal of the Task Force is to enable and empower, but not dictate, informed decisions by its members in order to protect the natural resources of the watershed and ensure reliable drinking water supplies for the foreseeable future.

“Through unprecedented collaboration and focus, the Task Force is building the foundation for fact and science-based consensus to capture the unique opportunity we have for major investment to provide resilience for the river and the water our communities need,” said **Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr (R-Gloucester)**.

“The Salem and Beverly Water Supply Board is honored and excited to participate actively in the Task Force and its subcommittees and we look forward to continuing their efforts for the future of water supplies in the basin and the sustainability of the river,” said **Alan F. Taubert, Jr, P.E., CEM Executive Director**.

“Low flows are the most pressing issue facing the Ipswich River. On behalf of the River, we are excited to participate in this unprecedented regional collaboration to ensure there is enough water for our communities and our ecosystem now, and into the future. We are heartened by the efforts of our fellow Task Force members, legislative delegation, and state agencies to address this issue and we look forward to reaching a consensus-based decision on the best path forward for all stakeholders,” said **Erin Bonney Casey, IRWA Resiliency Program Director**.

\$400,000 Secured for the Work of the Task Force

In total, the Task Force has received **\$400,000** in funds through Massachusetts legislative earmarks (**\$100,000** in FY2022; **\$150,000** in FY2023; and **\$150,000** in FY2024). These funds are being managed on behalf of the Task Force by the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC). A portion of these funds has been allocated to the following ongoing studies:

- **\$100,000:** Assessment of the water security and resilience needs and opportunities in the Ipswich River Watershed. (Dewberry Engineers)
- **\$50,000:** Modeling study of the relative impacts on Ipswich River flows of a range of potential water supply alternatives. (Horsley Witten Group / Weston & Sampson)
- **\$25,000:** Evaluation of water infrastructure timelines and decision junctures among Task Force member communities to help guide and inform regional action. (Dewberry Engineers)

These studies will be completed by July 2024, providing the Task Force with detailed data and analyses to evaluate alternative water supply options and formulate recommended actions to address the region’s water management needs.

“Access to clean drinking water is vital for the children and families of our North Shore communities, which is why I am proud of our work at the state level to provide funding and support to our towns,” said **Representative Tram Nguyen (D-Andover)**. “Thank you to the Task Force members for their engagement in this indispensable work and to Senator Bruce Tarr for his leadership in our region.”

Creation of Three Working Subcommittees

In addition to regular task force meetings, two subcommittees established by the Task Force carried out work in 2023 and a third began work in 2024. These groups include Task Force members and state and regional stakeholders and are facilitated by the Task Force facilitation team.

- **Earmark Subcommittee**, which has 7 members, designs, and manages procurements of technical studies involving earmarked funds and oversight of all contracted work.
- **Joint Narrative Subcommittee**, which has 7 members, was charged with developing an inclusive narrative that describes the water resilience challenges and opportunities in the region served by the Task Force.
- **Conservation and Demand Management Subcommittee**, which has seven members, is exploring possible water conservation and demand management strategies that could be beneficial as part of a regional approach to long-term water resource sustainability.

“A plan for the regionalization of water resources has to begin with collaboration, and this task force provides that,” said **Representative Kristin Kassner (D-Hamilton)**. “Working to achieve consensus on the water resilience challenges and opportunities with the Joint Narrative Subcommittee was a critical turning point toward reaching our ultimate goal of finding a practical, effective solution to water issues in our district.”

Comprehensive Website Created and Live Online

Created by the MAPC, the website, which was launched in April 2024, gives a comprehensive overview of the Task Force goals, members, issues of importance, and collaborative progress to date. It also features a map of the Task Force communities and the watershed, the Task Force Charter, the 2023 Annual Report, a “joint narrative” description of the critical issues at stake, and featured media and press efforts, as well as summaries of Task Force meetings.

For more details, visit the <https://www.mapc.org/resource-library/north-shore-h20/>.

As temperatures begin to rise again this summer, the Ipswich River Watershed – which provides drinking water for 350,000 people and essential habitat for countless wildlife species from Burlington to Ipswich – could face the pressures of naturally low groundwater storage, frequently stressed stream flows, increased demand and withdrawals, and the effects of evapotranspiration that naturally happens during the summer months. This combination of conditions can result in higher water temperatures, impaired water quality, and negative impacts on fishing, recreation, and property values. Climate change further exacerbates these challenges.

The Task Force represents the first regional structure for collaborative engagement to protect the river and ensure future water supplies. The range of solutions members are exploring, include:

- Intermunicipal water sharing along with regional infrastructure and other capital improvements.
- Increased storage capacity to capture more water during periods of higher flow in the river.
- Reducing local withdrawals by importing water from other basins or through desalination.
- Optimizing the timing of withdrawals and enhancing water conservation efforts.

Most significantly, while the path forward is not straight, simple, or inexpensive, the options being explored will become more feasible when approached collaboratively and regionally.

North Shore Water Resilience Task Force Overview

The Task Force charter agreement, originally signed on September 28, 2022, was a major milestone toward creating health and resiliency for the Ipswich River watershed and ecosystem. The agreement, which was over two years in the making prior to its signing, established a framework and ground rules for all Task Force members, including the Ipswich River Watershed Association (IRWA) and all the cities and towns in the watershed or deriving water from it. The charter agreement is a collaborative effort to improve water supply resilience and ecosystem health in the watershed. It was the first time in history that every city and town and IRWA had agreed in writing on the need to address both issues equally and simultaneously.

The Task Force is led by Co-founder and Chair Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr (R-Gloucester). It has been convened by 22 members of the legislature who represent the region in the House and Senate and its work is facilitated by Martin Pillsbury and Leah Robins from the MAPC and Sara Cohen from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and it is supported by 26 official stakeholder organizations.

The Task Force includes the 18 communities of Andover, Beverly, Boxford, Burlington, Danvers, Hamilton, Ipswich, Lynn, Lynnfield, Middleton, North Andover, North Reading, Peabody, Reading, Salem, Topsfield, Wenham, and Wilmington. It also includes the Ipswich River Watershed Association and the Lynn Water and Sewer Commission, Lynnfield Center Water District, and Salem and Beverly Water Supply Board. U.S. Congressmen Seth Moulton (D-MA) and Senators Ed Markey (D-Mass.) and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) participate in the work of the Task Force and support its efforts, as do additional state and regional stakeholders.

The Task Force provides a regional framework for proactive engagement to protect the Ipswich River and secure future water supplies for all dependent communities, by:

- Exploring water supply alternatives, such as including connecting to out-of-basin sources, increasing in-basin storage, intermunicipal water sharing regionalization, and reducing demand through conservation.
- Using credible experts to understand the impact of these alternatives on watershed hydrology and ecosystem health.
- Collectively pursuing the most viable solutions, including addressing planning, logistics, regulatory requirements, governance, legal structures, and funding.

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Additional Resources:

<https://www.mapc.org/resource-library/north-shore-h20/>

<https://www.ipswichriver.org/charter/>