WATER SUPPLY CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
to the Mass. Water Resources Authority

485 Ware Road
Belchertown MA 01007
(413) 213-0454
fax: (413) 213-0537
email: info@wscac.org

WSCAC Virtual Meeting Minutes
Date: Tuesday, October 13th, 2026
Time: 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

WSCAC Members in Attendance in Bold:

- **Christine Bennett**, MWRA Advisory Board
- William Copithorne, Town of Arlington
- Steven Daunais, Tata & Howard
- **Bill Fadden**, OARS
- **Bill Kiley**, BWSC
- **Paul Lauenstein,** Neponset (Chair)
- **Paul Rybicki**, Partially Supplied Community
- **Martin Pillsbury**, MAPC
- Janet Rothrock, League of Women Voters
- Bill Merriam, Framingham resident, Foss Reservoir abutter
- **Erin Bonney Casey,** Ipswich River Watershed Association
- **Warren Kimball,** Nashua River Watershed Association
- **Lydia Olson,** Mass Rivers Alliance
- Evan Pesut, Trout Unlimited
- **Nina Gordon-Kirsch**, CT River Conservancy
- Christopher Dreher, Educational Institute

Non-Members in Attendance:

- Jason Duff, DCR/WRC
- Kathy Baskin, MWRA
- Andreae Downs, WAC
- Bill Pula, Public
- Adrianna Cillo, BWSC
- Eileen Simonson, Public (Ex WSCAC ED)
- Moussa Siri, WSCAC

I. Introduction and Vote on Meeting Minutes

a. Introduction

Moussa Siri welcomed participants, reviewed the agenda, and thanked Jason Duff of the Water Resources Commission (WRC) for joining and agreeing to present. He then turned the meeting over to Paul Lauenstein for the vote on the September 24 minutes.

b. Attendance check and vote to approve September 24 meeting minutes

Paul Lauenstein, after greeting participants and making sure a quorum was reached, asked for a motion to approve the September 24, 2026 meeting minutes. Warren Kimball made the motion, and Erin Bonney Casey seconded it. Paul asked if there were any further discussion or corrections. Hearing none, he called for votes to approve the minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously with no opposition or abstentions. After the minutes were adopted, Paul took attendance.

Paul announced that the comment deadline on MWRA's 20-million-gallon-per-day (MGD) donor-basin request had been extended to October 28. Members could still submit individual comments. He also urged the water conservation and forestry working groups to continue the work they had begun on sustainable forest management and water conservation.

II. Briefings

a. WSCAC Updates – Moussa Siri

Moussa Siri indicated that WSCAC had submitted its comments on the MWRA donor-basin request just before the deadline was extended. He added that further comments would be needed on requests from communities seeking to join MWRA, the next ones being Wayland and Weymouth. He asked all members to contribute, so that WSCAC's submissions would represent the full committee's views.

Moussa added that the WSCAC Executive Committee will be renewed in November, as indicated by the Bylaws. He indicated that six of the eight members to be filled under the Bylaws were filled and that Christine Bennett was interested in joining. He asked members to show interest or nominate other people they think would be a good fit. He added that the Executive Committee would meet to discuss the candidates before the vote at the November 19 joint meeting with the Advisory Board and Wastewater Advisory Committee (WAC).

Moussa reminded members to check their conflict of interest training, which is required every two years, and send him a certificate when they complete it. He also encouraged members to join the working groups. He indicated that the water conservation group had been active, while the forestry group had met less often over the past fiscal year. He clarified that working groups discuss issues and bring matters to the full committee when a decision is needed, as they don't have the power to make decisions.

b. WAC Updates – Andreae Downs

Andreae Downs reported that WAC members and several WSCAC members attended the unveiling of the Laskey water storage facility, named in recognition of Fred Laskey's service. WAC

also submitted comments on EPA's draft guidance on PFOA and PFOS in biosolids. Andreae said the risk assessment needed comparisons with background PFAS levels and other exposure sources. WAC favored reducing PFAS production and use at the source. She noted that landfill capacity was limited and that questions remained about whether incineration destroyed PFAS. She argued that wastewater ratepayers should not bear the cost of pollution created by others.
Question: Paul Lauenstein asked whether WAC thought one part per billion was appropriate or whether the level should be higher or lower.
Answer: Andreae said WAC had not taken a position on a specific level. WAC wanted EPA to study background exposure and other PFAS sources before drawing conclusions about biosolids.
Andreae said WAC would discuss its comments on the combined sewer overflow (CSO) long-term control plan at its next meeting. The joint meeting on November 19 with the Advisory Board would address staffing needs for MWRA's construction programs, including the water redundancy tunnel, the Deer Island rehabilitation, and CSO projects. WAC also requested updates on wastewater construction, protection of headworks equipment against flooding, and maintenance of pipes and interceptors.
Question: Paul Lauenstein asked about the project to change how methane was used at Deer Island to improve efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.
Answer: Andreae said the combined heat and power project was still in the planning stage and had not broken ground. She also described plans for battery storage to reduce reliance on diesel backup power and for solar canopies covering much of the parking lot.

c. Advisory Board Updates – Christine Bennett
Christine Bennett said the Advisory Board was preparing comments on the CSO long-term control plan and completing its annual water and sewer rate survey. Preliminary survey results were expected in about a month. Although the Board's donor-basin comments were not yet final, it supported reviewing MWRA's request for up to 20 MGD on a regional basis to avoid repeating the same donor-basin analysis for each community. Christine stressed that receiving-community applications would still require close review of water conservation, leak reduction, local sources, and drought management.

d. MWRA Updates – Kathy Baskin
Moussa introduced Kathy Baskin, MWRA's new Director of Planning and Sustainability and WSCAC liaison, who is taking over from Steve Estes-Smargiassi. Kathy spoke about her work in consulting, at a watershed association, and in state government. She had served as Director of Water Policy and, most recently, as Assistant Commissioner for Water Resources at MassDEP. Through those roles, she had worked with the WRC and the Interbasin Transfer Act for many years.
Kathy reported that Quabbin was at 77.5 percent of capacity on October 1, still slightly below normal despite the recent rain. Rainfall had varied widely across the region, and reservoir levels had changed little. MWRA was checking with communities that rely on partial or emergency supplies. Cambridge might need about 13 MGD, and Lynn about 8 MGD, although both were holding off at the time. Some partially served communities could also need additional water because of low well levels, treatment plant rehabilitation, or drought.

Kathy thanked attendees of the donor-basin public hearing and noted the extended comment period. She explained that the donor-basin review covered only part of the Interbasin Transfer Act analysis and that receiving areas still needed to submit their analyses. Moussa welcomed Kathy and said he would work with her on topics for future WSCAC meetings.

III. Presentation

Topic: Planting for our Future: Introducing the MA Native Plant Palette

Jason Duff, a Water Resources Planner in the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Office of Water Resources and staff to the WRC, presented "Planting for Our Future with the MA Native Plant Palette." He began with the state's drought and water conservation outreach, then discussed the Native Plant Palette and gardens developed using the tool. His supervisor, Anne Carroll, often co-presented with him but was unable to attend.

Drought in Massachusetts. Jason showed photographs of dry streams, low reservoir levels, wildfires, and impacts on fish and other aquatic life. He said these examples helped explain to audiences outside New England that Massachusetts had also experienced serious drought. The state had been in some level of drought since August 2024. Watering restrictions were one response, though requirements varied by community.

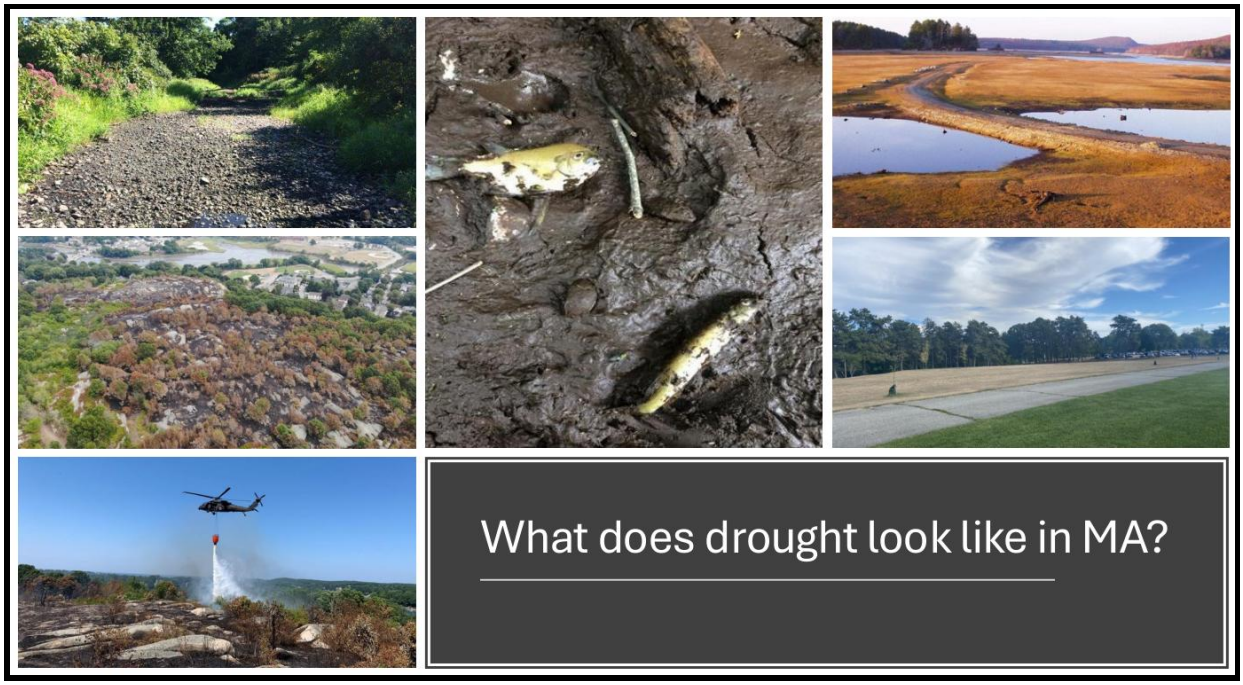


Figure 1. Examples of drought impacts in Massachusetts. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

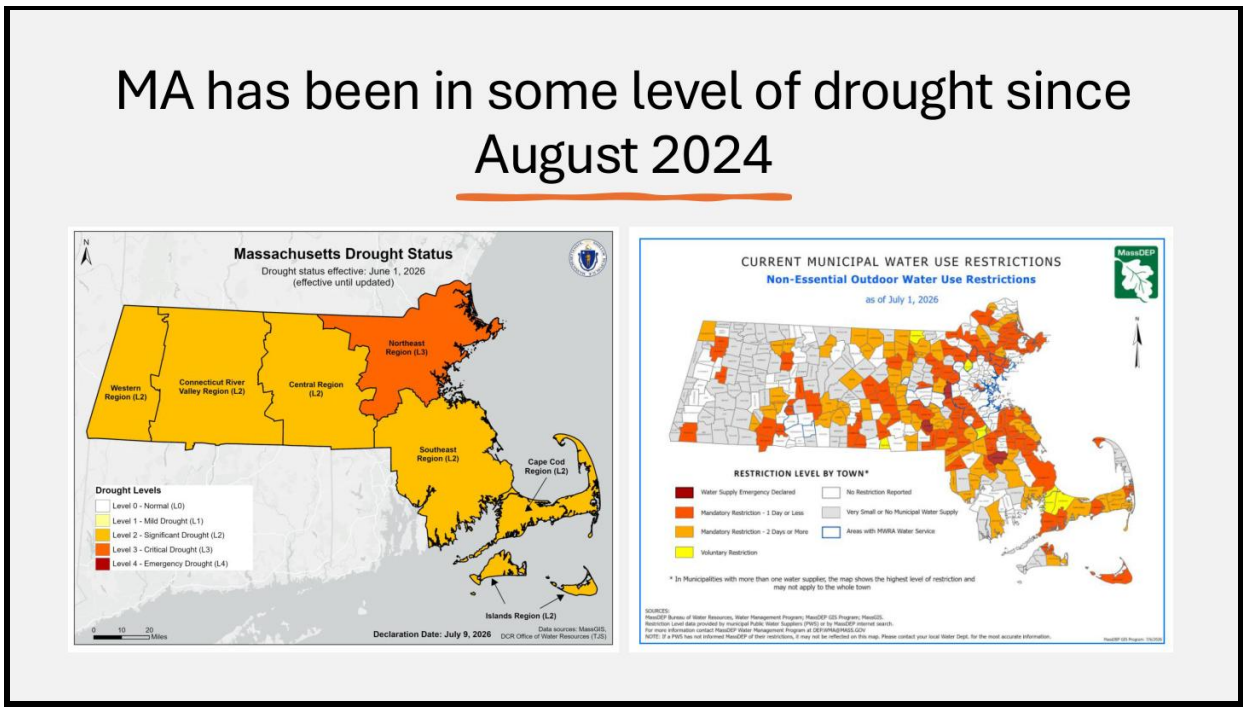


Figure 2. Presentation map of drought conditions in Massachusetts. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

a. Water conservation resources

Jason outlined the state's water conservation work under regulation, policy, and education. The Water Management Act and Interbasin Transfer Act provided regulatory requirements; the Water Conservation Standards and Drought Management Plan guided policy. He said the standards, last updated in 2018, remained useful. They covered planning, water loss, metering, pricing, residential and other water uses, and public education.

The Massachusetts water conservation toolkit makes much of that guidance available online. Jason described the home water use calculator, which estimates household use, compares it with that of an efficient home, and suggests improvements. The toolkit also includes guidance on leaks and water-smart gardens, along with graphics that water suppliers, municipalities, and nonprofits can use in their outreach. Short videos address common questions, including why drought can persist after rain and why a drought may be declared even when water supplies still appear adequate.



Figure 3. Examples of interactive and technical resources in the water conservation toolkit. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

b. Recent water conservation work

The Drought Resiliency and Water Efficiency Grant Program funded 13 projects in its first round and 12 in its second. Applications for FY27 were due November 12. Jason encouraged members to share the opportunity with municipalities, public water suppliers, nonprofits, schools, colleges, and universities. Private businesses were ineligible.

Jason described work with the USGS to improve the management and availability of water data. DCR was also analyzing anonymized residential water-use data from Flume devices, including estimates of use by fixtures and appliances. The results could help staff assess current household use and consider changes to the conservation standards. A separate funded review would examine the water-needs forecasting method, including water efficiency, climate change, and population projections. Jason also discussed his work with the Alliance for Water Efficiency, where he co-chaired the education and outreach committee.

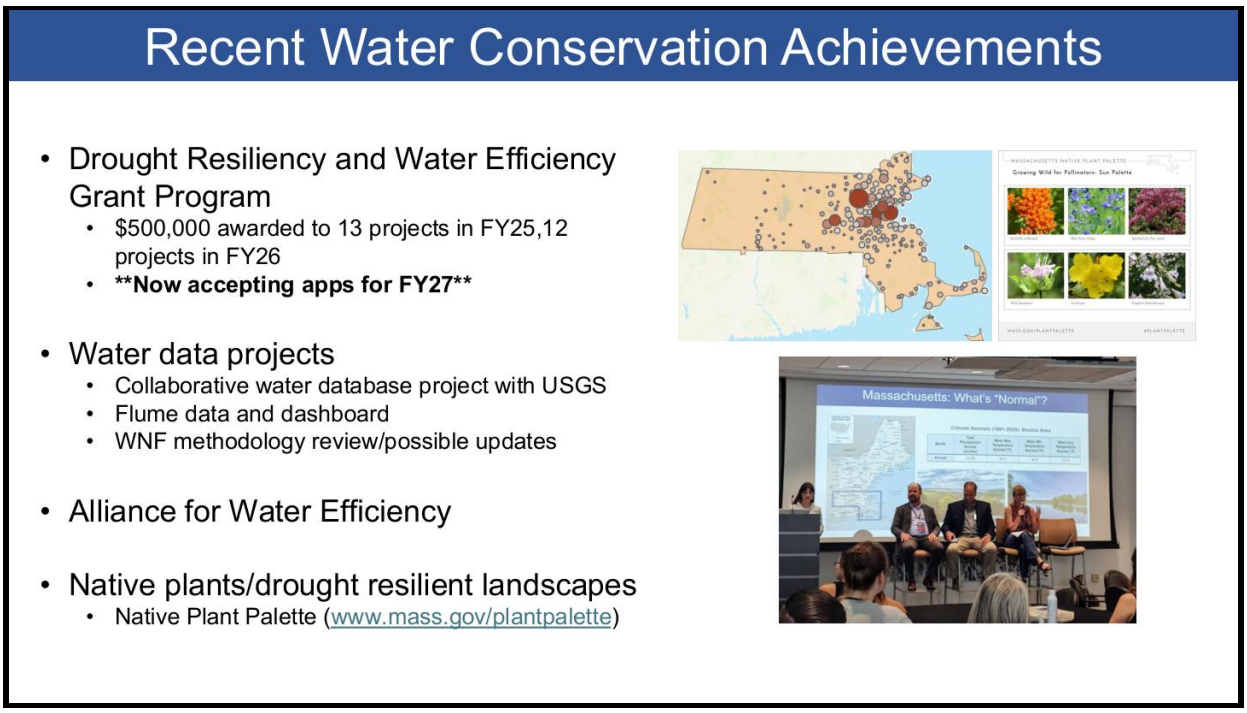


Figure 4. Recent conservation initiatives and water data projects. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

Question: Paul Lauenstein asked whether the Alliance for Water Efficiency compared water use efficiency across states and how Massachusetts ranked.
Answer: Jason said the Alliance had produced a scorecard several years earlier, primarily to provide each state with feedback. He did not remember Massachusetts' ranking but offered to look up the results. Paul asked about the state's residential standard of 65 gallons per person per day. He recalled higher water use in some desert states, where residents irrigated lawns. Jason said that western climates and water restrictions differed from those in Massachusetts, and that some communities were moving to restrict grass lawns.
Question: Adrianna Cillo asked whether green infrastructure could also help.
Answer: Jason agreed that capturing water and redirecting runoff could help conserve it.

c. Native plants and communication

Jason said it could be difficult to explain outdoor watering restrictions when residents saw full reservoirs. Outreach materials encouraged smaller lawns and less watering, but he wanted to help residents create gardens that required less water over time. He noted that Massachusetts had many attractive native plants that could survive with little or no supplemental watering. These plants also supported pollinators and wildlife and gave residents more choices for designing their yards.



Figure 5. Examples of outdoor water conservation outreach. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

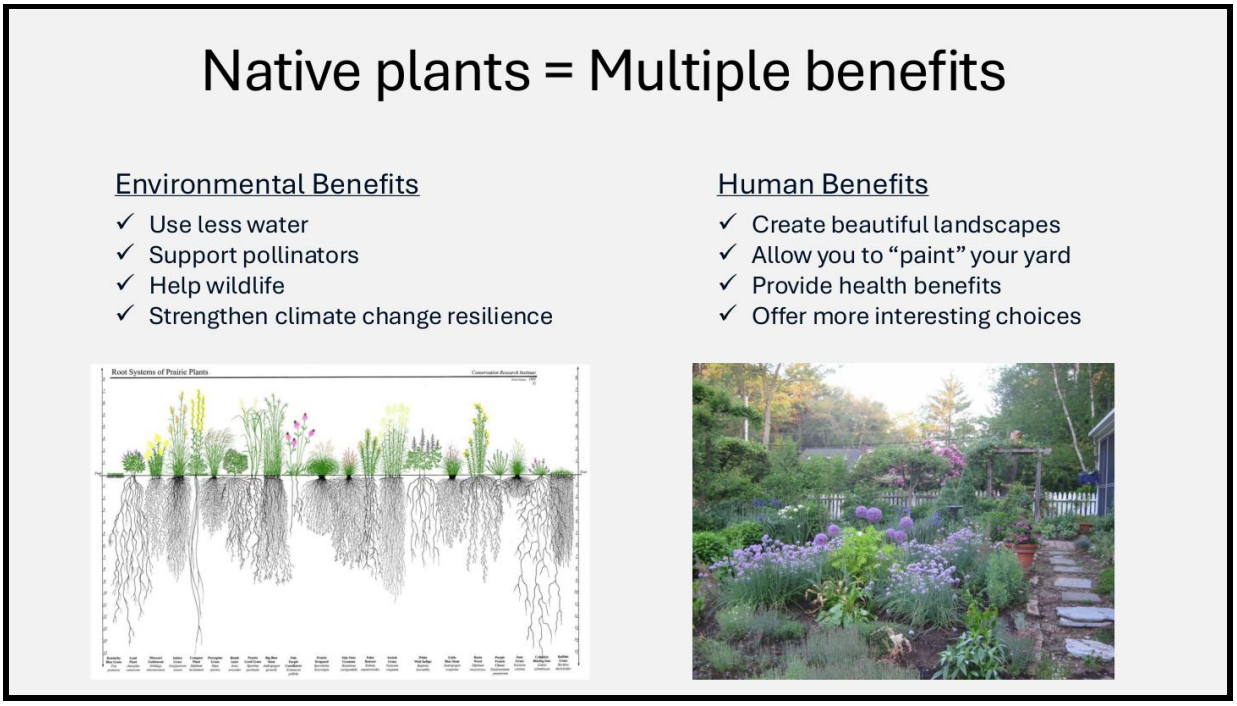


Figure 6. Environmental and human benefits of native plants. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

DCR's Growing Wild for Pollinators program distributed native plants, wildflower seeds, and educational materials. Jason said funding had increased from about $50,000 to $200,000 and that the program was mapping where recipients planted their gardens. He also mentioned Greening the Gateway Cities and pollinator work by other state agencies.

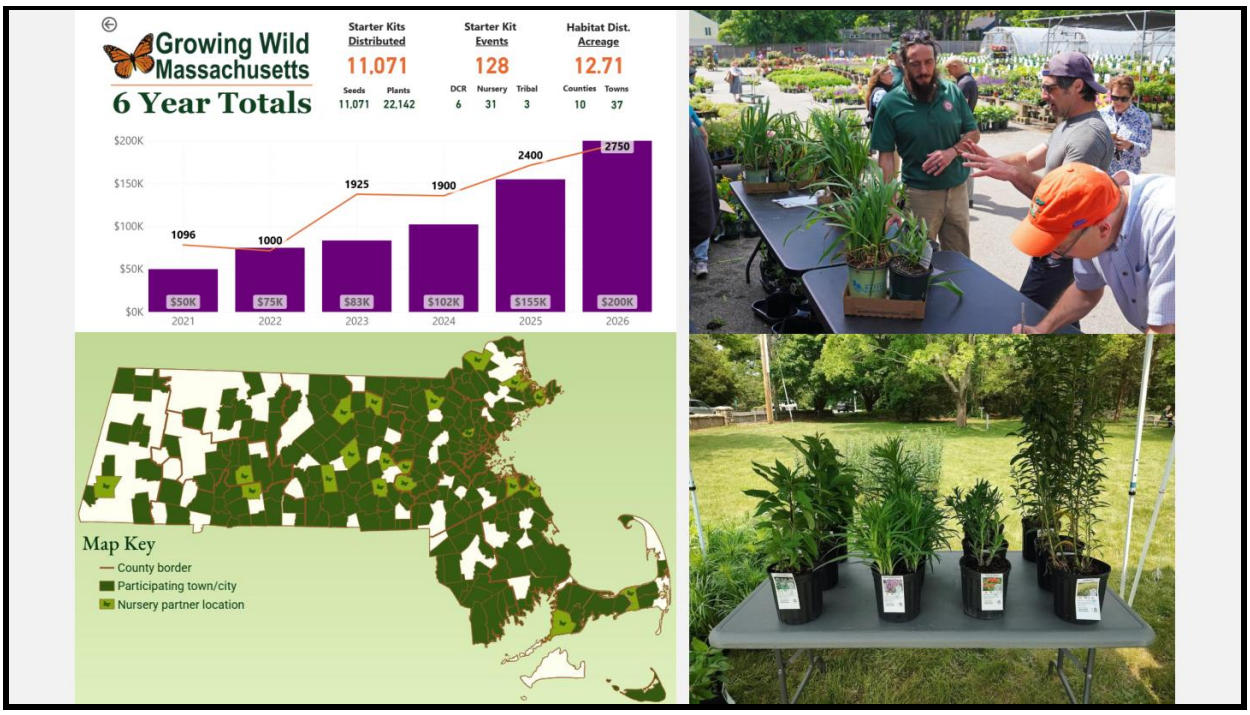


Figure 7. Growing Wild Massachusetts program results, funding, and reach. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

Question: Andreae Downs asked why Gateway Cities particularly needed greening.
Answer: Jason said he had not worked closely with the program but understood that these mid-sized cities often faced economic challenges. The program supplied trees at no cost and provided foresters to plant them and monitor their progress. That support made it possible for communities to do more than they could with information or free trees alone.

d. **Massachusetts Native Plant Palette**

Jason introduced the Massachusetts Native Plant Palette, a web application developed with partner organizations to help people choose native plants and design gardens. It was designed for users at any level of gardening experience. Recent updates added searches by common name, Latin name, or keyword; drag-and-drop plant selection; easier editing; and new tutorials. Palettes could now include more than eight plants. Users could share them via images, social media, and individual links. Jason later set aside the live demonstration to leave time for questions.

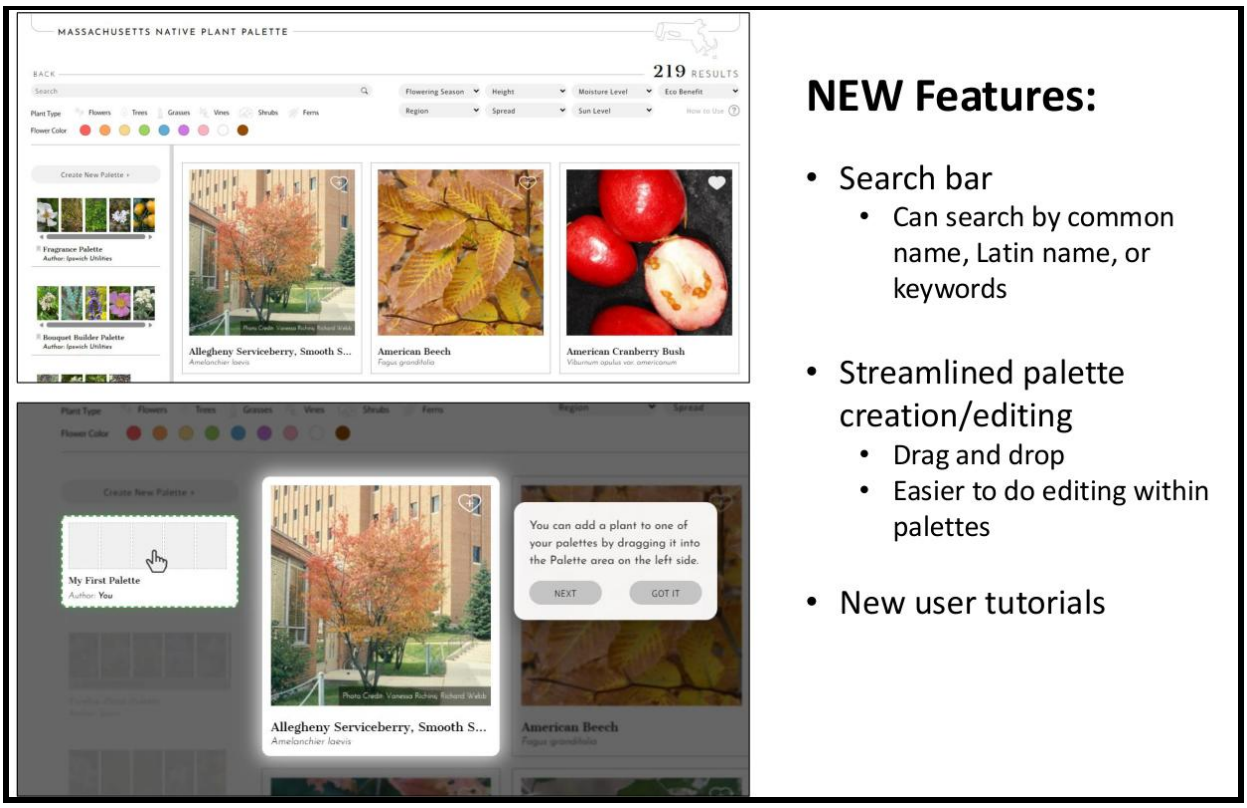


Figure 8. Native Plant Palette search and palette design features. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

e. Demonstration gardens

The first Plant Palette garden was developed in partnership with the Ipswich Water Department. The team removed about 150 square feet of grass, amended the soil, and planted drought-tolerant plants from a local nursery. Rain-barrel water was used to help the plants establish. A Climate Week event and ribbon-cutting introduced the garden to the community.



Figure 9. The first Plant Palette garden in Ipswich. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

The second garden was developed with the Town of Danvers at its educational garden in Endicott Park. The team designed a palette for raised planter boxes with built-in water reservoirs, planted the boxes, and hosted an educational event about the plants and the tool.



Figure 10. The second Plant Palette garden in Danvers. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

At the Sarah Greenwood School in Dorchester, Jason and colleagues primarily worked with eighth graders to select plants for a school garden. The students used the tool to design and name the

Sarah Greenwood Nature Collection. The team returned with the selected plants and helped the students plant an area behind the school. Jason said that working with students could also bring information about native plants home to their families.

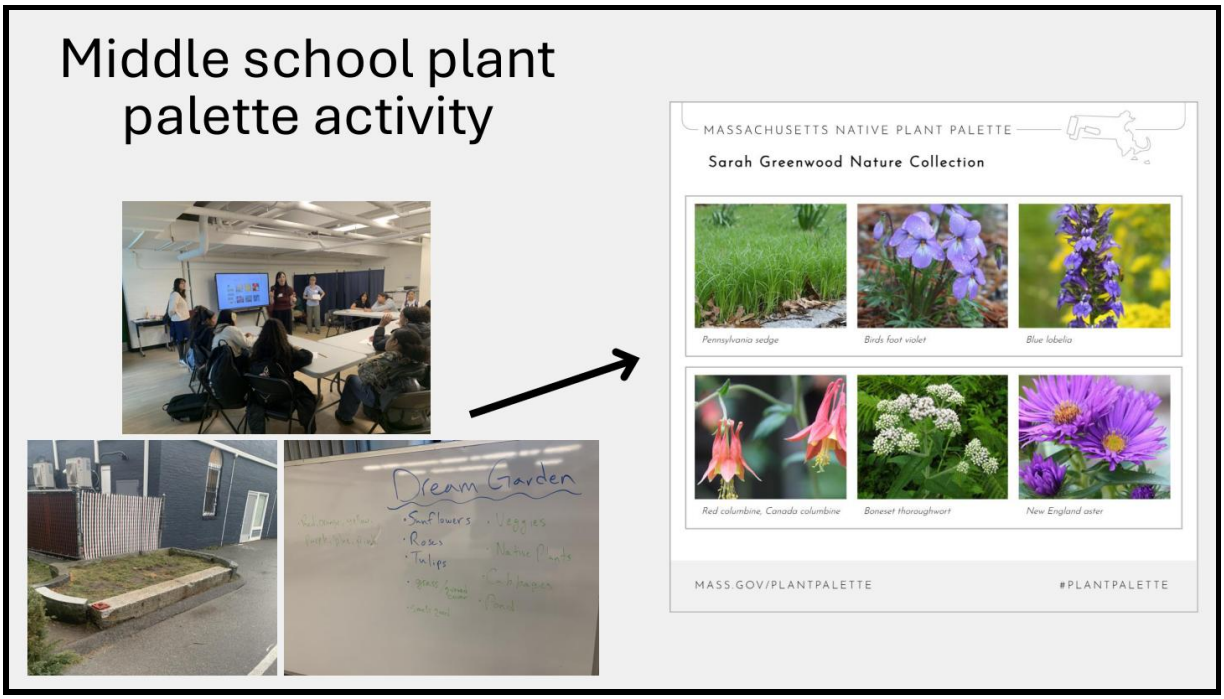


Figure 11. Sarah Greenwood school plant palette activity. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.



Figure 12. Installation of the school garden. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

Jason described a restoration palette developed by the Charles River Conservancy for Hell's Half Acre along the Charles River. He noted that at least some of the selected plants had already been planted. DCR was considering additional gardens in its parks, including pollinator and rain gardens. Staff also wanted to turn the school activity into a lesson plan for other schools, make further improvements to the tool, and explore a mobile application. Jason invited suggestions from members.

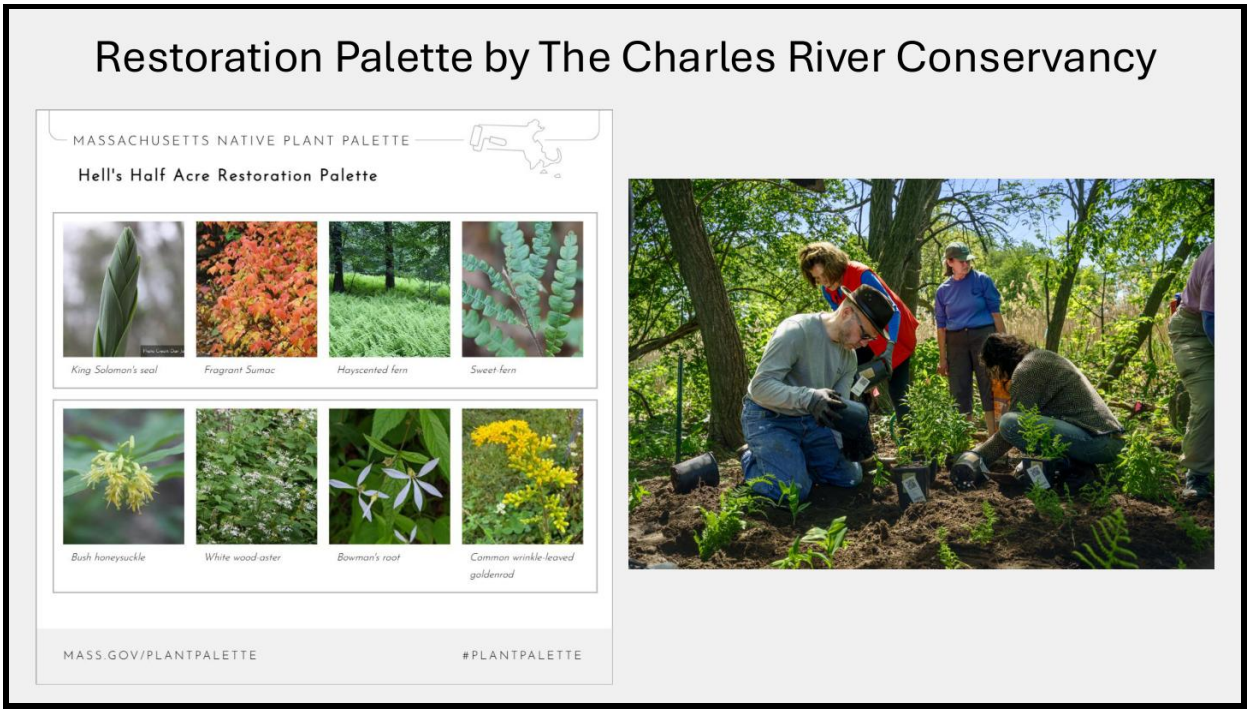


Figure 13. Charles River Conservancy restoration palette and planting. Source: Jason Duff presentation, October 13, 2026.

Questions and answers

Question: Andreae Downs asked how native plantings could be protected from invasive species on DCR properties and in other parks. Answer: Jason described the Charles River Conservancy's work at Hell's Half Acre, where Japanese knotweed and other invasive species were a problem. The Conservancy was testing herbicides and manual removal. Its restoration palette included native plants that could compete with invasive species and cover the ground after removal. He said the approach would depend on the plants and conditions at each site.

Andreae said her local park faced similar problems. An annual garlic mustard pull helped with one species, but bittersweet, Japanese knotweed, honeysuckle, and burning bush were also present.

Question: Paul Rybicki asked when the 2018 Water Conservation Standards might be updated.

Answer: Jason said he had no timetable. Staff were reviewing Flume data and other information on residential use and water loss before making recommendations. Any changes would require WRC approval. He expected revisions to specific parts of the standards, since much of the existing guidance remained relevant, but the discussion was still underway.

Comments: Paul Lauenstein described "Secrets of a Waterless Lawn," a water-bill insert he prepared while serving on Sharon's Water Committee. His lawn received rain but no artificial irrigation. He explained that building soil organic matter, encouraging deep roots, leaving grass clippings, and avoiding pesticides helped maintain it. The grass could turn brown in summer and recover in spring and fall. Paul had sent Jason the flyer and noted that lawn irrigation increased demand when water resources were already under the greatest stress.
Jason said he would look at the flyer.
Comments: Moussa Siri said he heard mixed reactions to drought decisions: some environmental advocates thought the Drought Management Task Force was too lenient, while some water suppliers thought it was too strict. He suggested giving the public a clearer explanation of how the task force reached its decisions.
Jason agreed. Moussa thanked him for the presentation and for demonstrating how plant choices could help conserve water.

IV. Meeting Adjournment
Paul Lauenstein requested a motion to adjourn. Warren Kimball made the motion, and Paul Rybicki seconded it.
Paul Lauenstein called for a vote in favor and adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:35 AM.

Next meeting: November 19, 2026, at 10:00 AM via Zoom, jointly with the MWRA Advisory Board and WAC.