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## Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# North Shore Water Resilience Task Force Enters Next Phase with New Data, Funding, Partnerships

*Task Force forges ahead: critical studies, new subcommittees chart a sustainable water future for the Ipswich River Watershed and water supplies*

**Boston (08/18/25)** – The North Shore Water Resilience Task Force (the Task Force) has continued to build momentum toward regional water supply resilience and long-term ecosystem protection for the Ipswich River basin. In the past year, the Task Force has been successful in assembling an analysis of its member communities' water resiliency needs, along with a rigorous analysis of supply alternatives in the watershed, and is ramping up its pace of operations as it works toward a consensus plan for a thriving future for the Ipswich River and the communities that depend on it.

### Completion of Technical Studies Lays Roadmap for the Task Force Future Initiatives

Last year, the Task Force commissioned targeted studies, which included:

- An Assessment of water supply needs and opportunities in the Ipswich River Watershed. (Dewberry Engineers)
- An analysis of water supply alternatives for their potential to improve river flow conditions (Horsley Witten Group / Weston & Sampson)
- An evaluation of timelines and decision junctures for large water supply capital investments among Task Force member communities to help guide and inform regional action (Dewberry Engineers).

With these foundational studies complete, the Task Force has begun exploring specific, actionable strategies to improve regional water supply resilience and ecosystem health and a framework for consensus decision-making. In the coming months members will work together to evaluate the components, costs, and timelines of potential future water supply scenarios, including introducing new sources of supply into the region and expanding sharing among existing water supply systems.

### New Subcommittees Focus on Lower Basin, Conservation Best Practices, and PFAS Contamination

To support the next stages of the project, the Task Force has launched two new subcommittees, bringing the total number of subcommittees to five.

The newest subcommittees include:

- **The Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) Subcommittee**, which has 8 members, and is exploring strategies to bridge any potential gaps between the federal PFAS compliance deadline and when infrastructure would be in place to allow communities to access alternative regional sources, such as the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA) or a potentially expanded Salem and Beverly Water Supply Board (SBWSB) system. The group is assessing local PFAS compliance readiness and considering interim solutions such as water sharing, temporary treatment, intensive conservation, and/or regulatory flexibility to support near-term compliance.
- **The Lower Basin Subcommittee (LBS)** is exploring one or more regional infrastructure strategies to address water supply and ecosystem needs in the Lower Ipswich River Basin. The group – comprised of high-level town officials from Peabody, Danvers, Middleton, Topsfield, Hamilton, Wenham, Ipswich, Salem, Beverly, as well as the Ipswich River Watershed Association (IRWA) and SBWSB – is drawing on the facilitation expertise of the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), the foundational studies completed to date, and other content experts as needed, during a multi-phase process to hone in on a consensus plan, which the full Task Force would vote to approve.

## **Additional \$200,000 Secured for New Vendors Supports Critical Decision-Making Phase**

In addition to the \$400,000 in state funding the Task Force received in prior fiscal years, another \$200,000 in legislative earmarks was secured in Fiscal Year 2025.

Managed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC) on behalf of the Task Force, this latest funding is directly supporting the decision-making phase now underway with two new contracts:

- **Facilitation Services:** \$164,000 enabled hiring an additional facilitation team to lead the complex process of seeking consensus among members of the LBS on infrastructure solutions for the Lower Ipswich River Basin. (Consensus Building Institute)
- **Decision Support Tool:** \$87,000 enabled hiring a water resources software and engineering firm to develop an interactive, web-based Decision Support Tool (DST) to evaluate regional water supply alternatives. Guided by subcommittee input and the completed studies, the DST will enable comparing supply scenarios by cost, infrastructure needs, benefits, and regulatory requirements, offering an interactive exploration of trade-offs. (EKI Environment and Water)

With these new partners, the LBS has initiated a series of structured, recurring meetings to advance cooperative, consensus-driven regional supply initiatives, with a target of engaging the public on these ideas before year's end.

CBI has already confidentially interviewed all subcommittee members, developed a framework for negotiation and engagement, and convened the subcommittee to review study results and begin sharing interests and developing criteria for decision-making. EKI is working closely with CBI and the subcommittee to create supportive visualization tools.

By setting clear objectives for 2025, the Task Force remains positioned to meet the ambitious timeline mandated in its charter—to reach consensus within three years on one or more actions to improve regional water supply resilience and ecosystem health, and to use that consensus to develop an implementation plan that benefits all the communities it represents.

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### **Additional Background:**

#### **NSWRTF Proactively Addressing Future Threats to the Ipswich River Basin's Water Resiliency**

As temperatures soar 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 – faces the pressures of naturally low groundwater storage, frequently stressed stream flows, increased demand and withdrawals, and the greater evaporation and water loss from plants 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 ongoing 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
- 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 and Jason Duff 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 connecting to out-of-basin sources, increasing in-basin storage, intermunicipal water sharing, 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

To learn more about the NSWRTF, visit its website, hosted by MAPC, for an overview of the Task Force's goals, members, issues of importance, and collaborative progress to date. Additional features include, a map of the Task Force communities and the watershed, the Task Force Charter, its Annual Reports, 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/>.

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#### **Additional Resources:**

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

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