

November 20, 2019

Dear Town of Natick Conservation Commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) to provide input on plans for the South Natick Dam. CRWA is one of the country's oldest watershed associations, dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Charles River and its watershed. I want to thank you for the important work you do to protect local water resource including those in the Charles River watershed.

CRWA is extremely interested in the South Natick Dam project. Any changes to this iconic and beloved site along the river will likely have broad and significant impacts. We regret that no one from CRWA is able to attend today's meeting in person, however, I was able to attend the Town's informational session on the South Natick Dam project on November 13th. There are elements of the Town's current approach that we support, as well as elements where we would recommend a different approach.

CRWA strongly supports the consideration of climate change impacts in decisions about the future of this site. Many communities, like Natick, are realizing that local dams, designed using historical precipitation patterns, are vulnerable in today's changing climate. The Town is aware of this and is taking action. Additionally, the Town has identified this section of the Charles, which is surrounded by multiple town-owned open space parcels as an asset that can help the community be more resilient to climate change and is planning a thoughtful, comprehensive and inclusive redesign of the area to that end. CRWA strongly supports this approach as well.

CRWA, however, is concerned that the decision to rehabilitate the dam, without a thoughtful consideration of dam removal, is short sighted. Therefore, we support consideration of dam removal as a possible alternative course of action at this site.

Dam removal has many benefits including:

- Elimination of the threat of dam failure
- Elimination of the need to continue to inspect and maintain the dam
- Reestablishing natural wetland habitats and flood plains
- Better river connectivity for fish passage
- Elimination of "impoundment" areas behind the dam where water is stagnant and algae and invasive species often thrive and sediment accumulates

In the particular case of the South Natick Dam, by considering dam removal, instead of dam rehabilitation the Town may also have an opportunity to preserve a large number of mature trees growing on the existing earthen dam. Furthermore, because of the ecological and community benefits of dam removal, this project could be eligible for substantial grant assistance from a number of state and federal sources.

CRWA worked with the Town of Bellingham, the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration (DER), and others to remove the Old Mill Dam along the Charles River mainstem in 2017. CRWA is currently working with DER to investigate removal of the Watertown Dam, another iconic and beloved spot, where aging infrastructure and tree root encroachment are driving the need for action. CRWA is also working with the Town of Wrentham to investigate the removal of a small dam along a Charles River tributary. We look forward to working with the Town of Natick on the South Natick dam site as well.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out to me at jwood@crwa.org. I look forward to continuing to be involved in this important conversation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Dyer Wood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Dyer Wood, Deputy Director
Charles River Watershed Association