

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority Environmental Justice Strategic Plan



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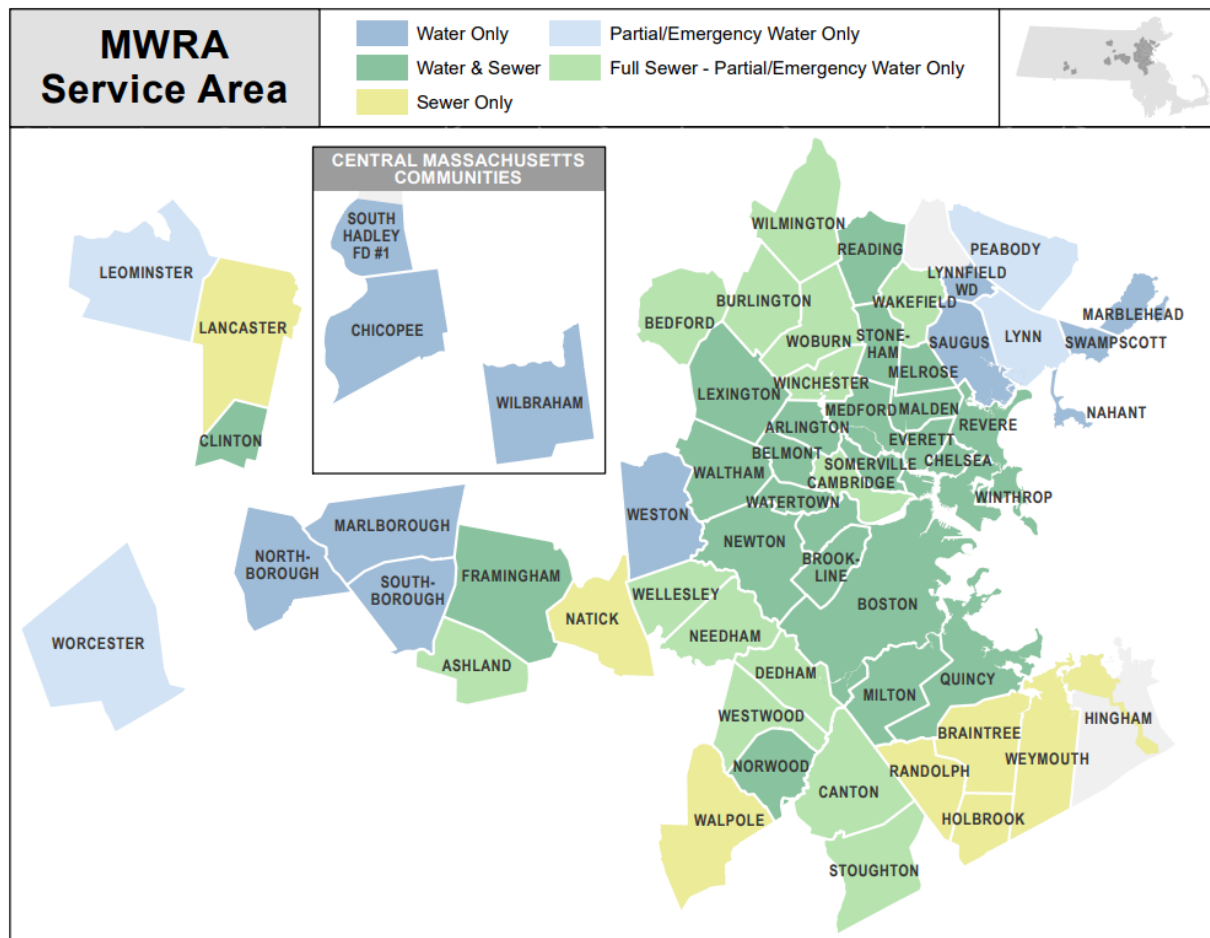
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I. MISSION:

The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) was established by the legislature in 1984, tasked with cleaning up Boston Harbor and modernizing the region’s water and wastewater systems. MWRA now provides wholesale water and wastewater services to over 3 million people in 61 communities throughout the Commonwealth. MWRA's mission is to protect public health, ensure environmental stewardship, maintain customer confidence, and support a prosperous economy by providing reliable, cost-effective high-quality water and sewer services.



MWRA’s Five Year Strategic Business Plan for fiscal years (FY) 2021-2025 provides a management tool for identifying and prioritizing the strategic initiatives critical to MWRA’s mission. It ensures staff are all working toward the same goals and objectives and also tracks progress and identifies new issues as they arise. It provides transparency for our ratepayers and helps to ensure these initiatives are carried out within the annual capital budget spending limits adopted by the MWRA Board of Directors. Within the Strategic Business Plan, MWRA’s goals and initiatives are grouped by the following strategic priorities: Water Quality and System Performance; Water Management and System Performance; Infrastructure Management and Resilience; Finance and Systems Management; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Workforce Development; and Environmental Sustainability.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STRATEGIC PLAN PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES:

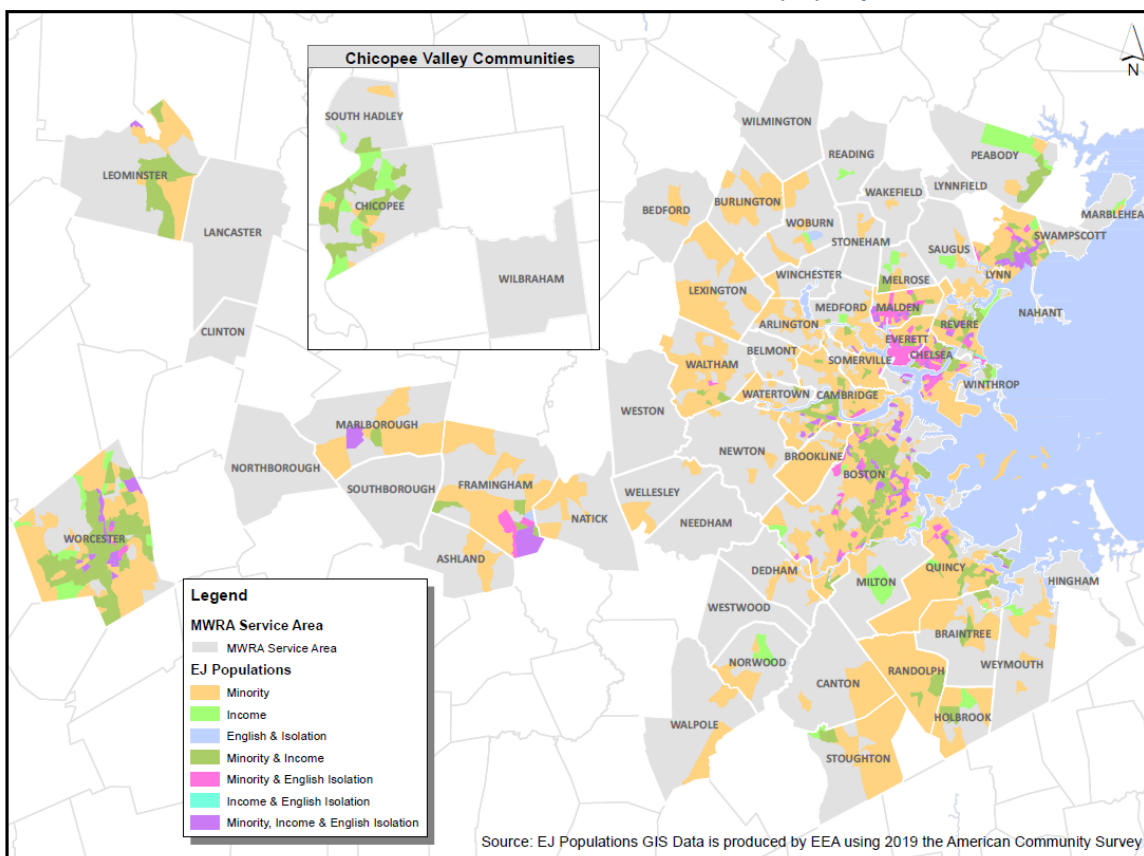
The Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs (EEA) 2017

<https://www.mass.gov/environmental-justice> Environmental Justice (EJ) Policy directed all EEA agencies to develop their own EJ Strategies. This EJ Strategic Plan outlines MWRA’s actions and visions for promoting EJ considerations across MWRA’s programs, policies and activities.

Environmental Justice (EJ) is the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental hazards and to live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment regardless of race, color, national origin, income, or English language proficiency. EJ requires equal protection and meaningful involvement of all people and communities with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of energy, climate change, and environmental laws, regulations, and policies and the equitable distribution of energy and environmental benefits and burdens.

EJ Populations are those segments of the population that EEA has determined to be most at risk of being unaware of or unable to participate in environmental decision-making or to gain access to state environmental resources, or are especially vulnerable. Based on EEA’s definition and mapping, approximately 60% of residents in MWRA’s service area also live in EJ Populations.

MWRA Service Area & EEA Environmental Justice (EJ) Populations



III. DEVELOPMENT AND GOALS:

MWRA's commitment to EJ is embedded in our mission and spans beyond the context of this EJ Strategic Plan. MWRA recognizes that its role as a public entity places it in a position to be a leader and a role model in making sure that our mission is carried out in a manner that moves towards a more equitable and just society. MWRA also recognizes the importance of providing accessible communication, engaging with communities, and fostering involvement from all members of the public.

This EJ Strategic Plan will be the roadmap as MWRA continues to incorporate EJ principles into our decision-making processes and will be used to guide, achieve and expand on our goals, activities and initiatives. As a living document, this strategy shall be reviewed regularly and revised as necessary in consideration of evolving EJ goals, programs, policies, and activities. Through the following initiatives, MWRA intends to better serve the needs of and strengthen communication with all the residents of MWRA member communities, including EJ Populations. MWRA hopes these initiatives will serve to aid and empower EJ Populations, including indigenous tribes and organizations, in their efforts to build and sustain environmentally sound communities.

IV. COMMITMENT TO OUR MEMBER COMMUNITIES:

MWRA's EJ commitment to our member communities includes the following initiatives relating to communication and outreach, public engagement and participation, training, hiring, grants and zero interest loan opportunities, and environmental and public health.

A. Communication & Outreach

- MWRA will continue to utilize its website at MWRA.com to convey relevant, accessible, and updated information to the public, including EJ Populations. The website is continuously updated with a variety of useful information including; press releases, public notices, information on and links to public meetings, information regarding upcoming and ongoing construction, employment opportunities, contact information, special projects and initiatives, water quality data, information regarding combined sewer overflows (CSO), financial reports, environmental and planning documents, and information on grant and zero interest loans.
- MWRA's website currently includes a Google Translation Tool, to ensure webpages can be translated into a variety of languages. MWRA is also in the process of redesigning and upgrading the website, which will improve accessibility and include built-in language translation capabilities.
- MWRA's website includes a specific [Environmental Justice Webpage](#), which provides information regarding MWRA's commitment to EJ, MWRA EJ contact information, links to EEA EJ resources and maps. This EJ Strategic Plan, and information on translation and interpretive services, will also be available.

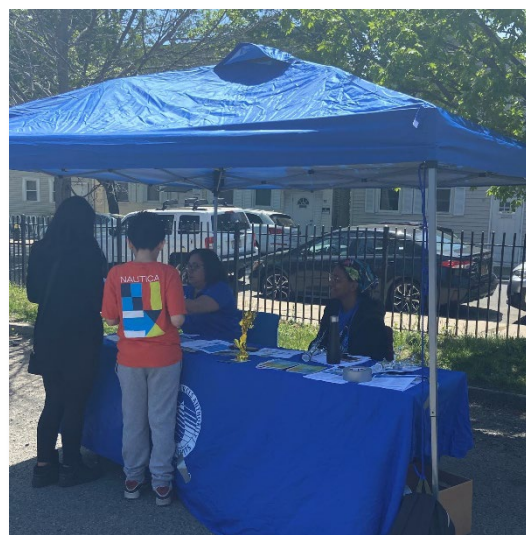
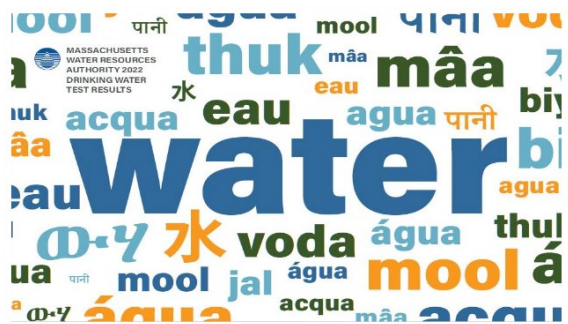
- MWRA will continue to evaluate available tools to share information, specifically targeting EJ Populations. MWRA currently uses social media platforms including Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter (X). MWRA will utilize EEA resources and conduct additional research to identify alternative media outlets and non-traditional engagement methods. Options may include community email listservs, senior and community centers, neighborhood associations, and culturally specific newspapers.
- MWRA will continue to expand the use of [Everbridge](#), an online platform through which members of the public can sign up to receive text and/or email notifications from MWRA regarding a variety of topics including: construction projects updates, impacts to water or wastewater service, meeting notices and minutes, water quality reports, job postings and other topics. Subscribers can tailor notifications they wish to receive based on topic or geographic location (e.g., updates on a construction project in their neighborhood).
- MWRA will continue to maintain several existing avenues to receive communication from the public including an [Ask MWRA](#) email address and various 24/7 telephone hotlines. More information can be found at MWRA's [Who to Ask: How to Contact Us Webpage](#).
- MWRA will continue to distribute public notices and flyers to surrounding and impacted communities regarding upcoming and ongoing MWRA construction projects. Special attention will be taken to ensure notifications are distributed to surrounding and impacted EJ Populations who may already be disproportionately impacted by existing environmental burdens. Notices will convey information about the project such as purpose, expected impacts to the community, schedule, and MWRA contact information. Notices will be written using plain, non-technical language and will be translated appropriately.
- MWRA will work with EEA and the Interagency Work Group to ensure compliance with the Executive Office for Administration and Finance (A&F) Bulletin #16 which provides guidance to state agencies as they develop Language Access Plans to (a) Improve access to state services, programs and activities on the part of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) persons; (b) Reduce disparities and delays, if any, in provision of state services/programs to eligible LEP persons; and, (c) Increase agency effectiveness. MWRA will make interpretive and translation services available at public meetings and forums when significant LEP Populations are identified in the area or may be impacted by the topic, and as requested.
- MWRA will conduct public meetings, listening sessions, and forums in a manner that is inclusive of EJ Populations. Both remote and in-person participation options may be offered, to increase accessibility and participation. MWRA will also consider the timing (day/evening) of public meetings to allow for maximum participation from community members.

B. Public Engagement and Participation

- MWRA will continue to provide its Portable Water Fountains as a free public service to community events in MWRA member communities. In 2022, MWRA brought water fountains to over 100 community events across our service area, including many in or serving EJ Populations. In addition, MWRA staff will also continue to attend community events to engage with the public and distribute educational materials including information on MWRA’s water and wastewater systems, indoor and outdoor conservation, water quality, and employment opportunities.



- MWRA’s School Program will continue to bring hands-on activities and demonstrations on topics including surface water quality, water supply and conservation, and responsible sewer use to classrooms across the MWRA service area. During the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years, staff visited 117 schools in communities with residents considered EJ Populations. MWRA’s School Program also provides training for teachers to assist with the integration of these topics into their curriculums. An annual Poster and Writing Contest is also held for students in grades K-12 in MWRA communities, which challenges students in MWRA communities to create posters or write essays, poems or stories about topics such as “What I Love about Boston Harbor” and “Don’t Flush That!”
- MWRA mails its Annual Drinking Water Quality Report (AWQR) to every household in MWRA water communities. Readers can access the online version of the AWQR in multiple languages on MWRA’s website with the Google Translate tool. MWRA also publishes a Spanish language report for distribution and offers a larger-print report.



Public Engagement Highlight:**MWRA's Updated CSO Long Term Control Plan Public Engagement Strategy**

MWRA's community engagement strategy associated with its Updated Combined Sewer Overflow Long Term Control Plan, which is being developed in partnership with Cambridge and Somerville, provides an ongoing example of MWRA's commitment to public engagement and participation, specifically with EJ Populations.

A combined sewer overflow (CSO) occurs when a large rainstorm overwhelms a combined sewer system, causing stormwater mixed with wastewater (or sewage) to discharge into a waterbody. Since the late 1980's, MWRA, along with several community partners, has achieved significant CSO reductions and improvements in water quality in the water bodies of metro Boston, reducing CSO volume by 88%. However, there is still more work to be done and MWRA, in partnership with Somerville and Cambridge, is in the process of developing an Updated CSO Control Plan to further reduce CSOs to the Charles River, Upper Mystic River, and Alewife Brook.

Over the next three and a half years, MWRA and our partners will develop and model alternatives to reduce CSOs and are committed to meaningfully engaging impacted communities and clearly sharing critical information throughout the process. It is important that the public actively participates in the development of CSO solutions, rather than be presented with alternatives after they are determined. As most of Cambridge and Somerville are comprised of EJ Populations, it is especially important that our engagement efforts reach those speaking languages other than English. To assist in public engagement, we are also partnering with Somerville's consultant, the Consensus Building Institute (CBI).

MWRA, Cambridge, and Somerville held two public meetings in 2022 on the Updated CSO Long Term Control Plan, incorporating principles of MEPA's Public Involvement Protocol for Environmental Justice Populations. The first meeting in June 2022 provided an introduction on the Updated Control Plan, while the second meeting in December 2022 focused on our work updating precipitation projections to reflect the future impacts of climate change. Both meetings were held virtually over Zoom and included a presentation and Q&A. In order to reach the widest audience possible, the meetings were interpreted live into eight languages commonly spoken in Somerville and Cambridge. Prior to these meetings, notifications were posted on each entity's website and flyers were distributed to community groups. Five additional public meetings are planned over the next three and a half years, mainly focusing on collaboratively developing, screening, and measuring the results of CSO reduction alternatives. MWRA and partners plan to include translation and interpretation services for the remaining five public meetings, as appropriate.

In addition to the public meetings, MWRA and partners are utilizing various other methods of public engagement. Surveys are being used not only to receive information on who is participating, but to understand what they are hoping to gain from the Updated CSO Long Term Control Plan development process. After the second public meeting, participants were asked to fill out a detailed survey. Major themes of survey responses were summarized and will guide the rest of the planning process. Surveys are expected to be utilized throughout the project to engage the community. A specific [Updated CSO Control Plan Website](#) has been created that describes the project, which includes recordings and slides from previous presentations, an FAQ section, and news about upcoming events and meetings. The public can sign up to a listserv for regular updates and use this website as an important resource throughout the planning process. Lastly, we plan to expand outreach efforts through participation at regional public events, such as the HONK! Festival in Somerville, in order to engage with residents in person, and conduct focus groups outside of the public meetings to gather input.

C. Training

MWRA will continue to implement the following initiatives in an effort to provide training and education for staff on EJ topics and considerations.

- MWRA will continue to educate staff on this EJ Strategic Plan and EJ principles including, MWRA's responsibility to work collaboratively with communities and EJ populations.
- MWRA staff will be encouraged to attend trainings hosted by MWRA's internal EJ Taskforce, EEA or third party consultant. Topics may include instructions for using EEA EJ resources and mapping and how to foster meaningful community engagement.
- MWRA will continue to host its Lunchtime Speaker Series. A joint effort of MWRA's EJ Task Force and Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Workgroup, this series features presentations by notable experts on a variety of topics related to EJ, DEI and Public Health. All staff are encouraged to participate either in person or online, and the events have been well attended. Recent speakers include Massachusetts Climate Chief Melissa Hoffer, staff from the Boston Public Library Leventhal Map Center, Biobot CEO and co-founder Mariana Matus and GreenRoots. While the primary goal of this Speaker Series is to educate staff on important topics related to EJ and DEI, these presentations also provide MWRA a valuable opportunity to develop partnerships with participating organizations, presenters, and community groups.
- MWRA will continue to seek opportunities for staff to volunteer and support EJ efforts in the communities in which we work and live. In 2023, MWRA partnered with GreenRoots to participate in two clean up events, picking up trash and debris at Island End Park in Chelsea.



D. Hiring:

- MWRA acknowledges the importance of having an agency workforce that reflects the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of the residents of Massachusetts, including the key role that such a workforce plays in advancing equitable decisions regarding environmental and energy permitting, siting, regulatory development, grant disbursement, and law enforcement. MWRA is committed to incorporating diversity hiring practices, and to providing training for hiring managers to promote equitable decision-making, including using criteria in interview questions that require successful applicants to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the needs of EJ Populations, vulnerable neighborhoods, and other under-served communities. Further, MWRA has and will continue to attend career fairs that promote social responsibility, EJ, and DEI.
- In order to ensure representation of protected class individuals and candidates for underutilized job groups, MWRA's Affirmative Action Program will continue to review every job referral. Additionally, as part of DEI recruitment and Office of Federal Contractor Compliance Programs (OFCCP) outreach activities, the agency actively engages and shares job announcements with employer partners such as the Urban League of Massachusetts, Boston Veterans Services, STRIVE, and Boston Justice Resource Institute. Further, as part of its talent acquisition strategy, MWRA will continue to post opportunities in targeted newspapers, such as the Banner and El Planeta.
- In addition to serving on MWRA's interview selection committees, Affirmative Action representatives will continue to assist Human Resources staff in creating and vetting interview questions for jobs. The Five-Year Business Plan includes updates to Affirmative Action workforce goals every year.

E. Grant and Zero Interest Loan Opportunities:

- MWRA's [Community Support Program](#) will continue to administer water and wastewater financial assistance programs. These programs are available to certain MWRA member communities, most of which contain EJ Populations. MWRA staff are available to and work closely with communities who are interested in these programs and seeking assistance.
- MWRA's Local Water System Assistance Program (LWSAP) and Lead Service Line Replacement Program (LLP) provide 10-year interest-free loans to MWRA water communities. Several communities with high numbers of lead service lines also contain EJ Populations. Participating communities can benefit from lead removal grants to meet federal goals and assist residents that may be unable to afford the removal of lead service lines (Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) currently offers technical assistance grants for lead inventory development). A community's participation in this program has the potential to positively impact EJ Populations. These Populations may be disproportionately impacted by the presence of lead service lines and associated health impacts.

- MWRA's Infiltration and Inflow (I/I) Program is a grant and loan program available to MWRA wastewater communities to fund local I/I reduction and sewer system rehabilitation projects. Participating communities can receive up to a 75% grant and a 25% 10-year interest-free loan for qualifying projects. A community's participation in this program has the potential to positively impact EJ Populations by reducing I/I entering the wastewater collection system thereby reducing the potential for surcharging and CSOs during wet weather.

F. Environmental and Public Health

- In order to maintain and ensure the reliability of its water and wastewater systems, MWRA performs maintenance on its vast network of infrastructure including treatment plants, facilities, pipelines, tunnels and aqueducts. MWRA also periodically constructs new infrastructure to improve system resiliency and performance. MWRA will work to ensure construction projects equitably benefit all members of its member communities, including EJ Populations. MWRA will consider environmental impacts and mitigation measures during project planning, design and construction in an effort to ensure that EJ Populations are not disproportionately impacted.



- MWRA will continue to ensure that all construction projects adhere to applicable local, state and federal environmental permitting and regulatory requirements, including review under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and MEPA EJ Protocols, as appropriate. MWRA will aim to apply the principles of MEPA EJ Protocols to all MWRA construction projects, including those that do not require MEPA review.
- MWRA continuously tests its drinking water in accordance with all state and federal standards. Monthly and annual water quality test results are posted on MWRA's website, along with contact information for MWRA staff in case of questions. Routine testing uses six general indicators of water quality including microbial, turbidity, corrosiveness, and disinfectant, chemical and mineral analysis. MWRA continues to maintain high-quality drinking water, protecting public and environmental health in member communities, including for EJ Populations.
- MWRA will continue to support testing for lead in schools, including in EJ Populations. MWRA, in coordination with MassDEP, provides no cost lab analyses and technical assistance for schools and daycare centers in MWRA water communities.
- MWRA is committed to water conservation and efficiency. MWRA's [Water Conservation Program](#) will continue to provide low-flow water fixtures (showerheads, faucet aerators, leak detection dye tablets, and educational brochures) to communities, residents,

environmental groups, and other interested stakeholders within the service areas. MWRA purchases these easy to install kits in bulk and provides them upon request.

- Beginning in early 2020, MWRA implemented a monitoring program to track COVID-19 in wastewater. This data provided public health officials across the Commonwealth with vital information necessary to make decisions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, in 2020, MWRA stored and assisted in the distribution of 770,000 KN95 masks to elderly residents in Massachusetts on behalf of MassHousing.



- MWRA will continue to maintain public access and recreational opportunities as a resource to all members of the public, including EJ Populations. Both MWRA's Deer Island Wastewater Treatment Plant and Nut Island Headworks are part of the Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park and provide extensive publicly accessible recreational opportunities including walking, jogging, sightseeing, picnicking, fishing and bicycling. At Deer Island, MWRA maintains 60 acres of open space, including 2.6 miles of paved accessible perimeter path, 10 landscaped overlooks with interpretive signage and dramatic views of the Boston Skyline and other Harbor Islands and a new ADA accessible fishing pier. This state of the art fishing pier was constructed by the Department of Fish and Game in an effort to promote and provide accessible opportunities for a wide range of saltwater anglers in an urban environment. Deer Island was specifically chosen as a host site due to its proximity and accessibility from surrounding urban areas. Nut Island provides 20 acres



of open space including paved trails and fishing opportunities. Deer Island and Nut Island are each the site of Annual "Reel Fun Fishing Day" community events, hosted in collaboration with the National Park Service, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and Wildlife, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Boston Harbor Now, and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay.

MWRA also partners with host communities in MetroWest to create and maintain trails on inactive aqueducts to provide additional publicly accessible open space and recreational opportunities. Through this program, approximately 20 miles of trails have been opened for public use and enjoyment.



V. **CUMULATIVE IMPACT ANALYSIS:**

Under the requirements of the EEA EJ Policy, MWRA is required to measure our progress on EJ work and report about it annually. MWRA will work to develop a methodology, metrics, and data to quantify the cumulative impact of activities and proposed projects, taking into account activities located in or impacting EJ Populations. Further, MWRA will collaborate with other local, state and federal agencies and review and build upon current work designed to identify EJ Populations as well as Indigenous Organizations and Tribes with disproportionately high and adverse environmental exposures.

Examples of metrics and data MWRA may include in its Cumulative Impact Analysis relate to construction projects located in or near EJ Populations, public meetings, usage of translation and interpretive services, loans and grants awarded to communities that contain EJ Populations, and water quality.

A. **Climate Change Resiliency Efforts.**

- Protecting MWRA infrastructure and ensuring continuous drinking water and wastewater services without disruption is critical for health and safety in our 61 service communities. MWRA is cognizant that approximately 60% of residents in our communities also live in EJ Populations and that failure of our facilities or disruption in service would be particularly impactful to these EJ Populations. MWRA is continuously working to mitigate the impacts of climate change on our facilities and increase resiliency.

- As a result of climate change, the metropolitan Boston area has and is expected to continue to experience more intense precipitation events, increasing temperatures, and rising sea levels. Over the past decade, MWRA has prioritized evaluating and proactively addressing the vulnerability of our coastal infrastructure. MWRA assessed each coastal facility to determine its risk of



flooding in a 100-year storm (based on FEMA maps) with 2.5 feet of sea level rise. 16 vulnerable facilities were identified and flood protection measures have been installed including walls around critical equipment and stop logs at windows and doors. 2.5 feet of sea level rise is in line with the latest projections in Massachusetts' Coast Flood Risk Model and the Greater Boston Research Advisory Group Report through the 2050-2070 period. This work has significantly mitigated the near and mid-term flooding risk to our facilities.

- MWRA will continue to consider climate change and opportunities to increase resiliency as our infrastructure and facilities are planned for upgrades and rehabilitation projects. MWRA recently completed a major upgrade of its Chelsea Creek Headworks facility which was originally built in the 1960's and is a critical component of the MWRA's wastewater system. Impacts of climate change were considered during design of this rehabilitation project and mitigation measures were incorporated during construction to improve resiliency of the facility, now and into the future.
- The impacts of climate change are expected to result in increasing frequency and duration of storms. MWRA will continue to ensure that its large reservoirs can capture and accommodate this additional water by conducting routine inspections and maintenance of all its dams, dikes and spillways.



B. Greenhouse Gas Reduction

- MWRA's service area is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, most notably extreme heat, sea level rise, and more intense storms. EJ Populations are likely to feel the brunt of these changes and are most at risk. Rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a key strategy to mitigate these risks. In support of the Commonwealth's leadership and net zero greenhouse gas emissions 2050 target, MWRA continues to take measures to mitigate and reduce greenhouse gas emissions across its operations.



- Since MWRA started collecting data in 2006, its greenhouse gas emissions have dropped 38%, already meeting the State's interim 2025 target of 33%. These reductions are mainly driven by reduction in electricity usage due to the implementation of energy efficiency projects throughout MWRA's operations, and installation of renewable energy infrastructure, including steam generators that utilize digester gas, hydropower facilities, solar arrays, and wind turbines. MWRA continues to investigate ways to reduce greenhouse gases further, such as electrification of heating at facilities, expanded use of electric vehicles, additional renewable energy projects, and optimizing energy use in operations.
- Additionally, to ensure that energy savings and greenhouse gas emission reducing efforts are considered in capital planning, MWRA has adopted a social cost of carbon of \$125 per metric ton of CO₂ for use when evaluating the life cycle costs of new projects. The social cost of carbon is an estimate of the economic costs, or damages, of emitting one additional metric ton of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.



VI. Additional Information

If you have questions regarding MWRA's EJ Strategic Plan or to find out more about MWRA's EJ initiatives, please contact Tomeka Cribb, Associate Special Assistant for Affirmative Action and Compliance at Tomeka.Cribb@mwra.com or 617-788-4033. MWRA responds to public inquires and concerns with thorough investigations, implementation of necessary corrective actions, and feedback and communication with the complainant.