
Public Education and Participation in Water Quality Decisions



To help engage the public in discussing water quality issues that affect the Assabet River (in Sudbury, MA), the Organization for the Assabet River (OAR) and the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) collaborated in an outreach, education, and participation project that included a series of eight advisory focus group sessions, a pair of public workshops, and which culminated in the recent publication of a final report.

This discussion is happening in the context of state and federal Clean Water Act requirements to reduce nutrient pollution of the Assabet River. A study prepared by the state assessed the sources of pollution and actions necessary to bring the river into compliance with its water quality standard of Class B, supporting fishing and swimming. The nutrient study identified two main sources of phosphorus, the main pollutant: municipal wastewater treatment plant discharges, and the sediments captured behind the six old mill dams along the river.

This project was supported by grants from the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council and the EPA's Alternative Dispute Resolution Program. Particular attention was paid to phosphorous pollution, associated eutrophication (excessive aquatic plant growth), and potential steps that could be taken to reduce phosphorous levels, including dam removal and additional wastewater treatment.

Read [the final report](#). To find out more about this project or other related projects, read more [CBI case studies](#) or [contact CBI](#).