

*Charles River Conservancy*

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2021**





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# WELCOME

2021 had us all heading for the outdoors!

Celebrations, business meetings and classroom learning all moved outside to take advantage of space and fresh air—and the Charles River Conservancy was there to welcome all of these visitors, new and returning.

Thanks to the support of our donors, we not only met the increased demand by educators and students, we made learning from the river fun, safe and accessible by

- connecting the Morse Elementary School to Magazine Beach Park with a MathTrail;
- leading multiple teen groups on their first kayak trip;
- bringing the river into the homes of remote learners with our floating wetland activity kit;
- working with educational partners to leverage our region’s largest outdoor classroom—the Charles River.

Our development of STEAM curriculum with experiential learning opportunities will have an impact far beyond the pandemic. We continue to expand and integrate this work throughout our programming, with the goals of not only supporting meaningful opportunities for education in the present but also creating lasting connections to the Charles for the future.

This year also included important milestones for our advocacy on the I-90 Allston Multimodal Project and with the DCR Special Commission to advance equitable access to the river and long-term resilience for this important resource in the heart of our cities. The Earth Day Cleanup and volunteer events also returned to enhance the natural beauty and benefits of the Charles River parks.

As you read through what the CRC accomplished in 2021 in the face of uncertainty and challenges, know that we cannot do this important work without you—our volunteers, donors, partners, and friends. Whether you like a photo on our social media, donate, or volunteer with us, we thank you for being a part of the Charles River Conservancy community.

**Laura Jasinski**  
Executive Director



**Joan Pickett**  
Board Chair





# MISSION

We strive to make the Charles River and its parks a well-maintained network of natural urban places that invite and engage all in their use and stewardship.

# VISION

The Charles River Conservancy lies at the center of the Charles River, its parks, and the park's users. We similarly envision a future in which the Charles River and its parks are celebrated, well-utilized, and connected centers of public life.

# GOALS



*Cultivate active engagement with the Charles River*



*Define the parks as a platform for community and cultural life*



*Advocate using research and placemaking*



*Ensure long-term organizational sustainability*

The CRC is proud to work in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).







Clyde Carmant

# MATHTRAIL

We were thrilled to partner with MathTalk and Magazine Beach Partners to bring a Gigantic Number Line to Magazine Beach Park. Located on the Magazine Beach Footbridge and installed last summer, the Gigantic Number Line uses colorful decals and educational prompts to introduce early math concepts to children in the outdoors through public art! Using the optional and free bilingual app, Measure! Everything!, kids and others can learn using innovative augmented reality (AR) technology that connects them to the Charles River.

In order to engage with neighbors and youth through a co-design process, we held a community design session and a classroom session with MathTalk to solicit local feedback on the design of the Gigantic Number Line. Students and neighbors saw their ideas become part of the project. To celebrate the installation, we held a community launch party and hosted 8 on-site activations where CRC staff introduced community members and park goes to the installation and Measure! Everything! app.



Clyde Carmant

443 decals installed

36 STEAM Saturday participants

326 total community members engaged on-site and in co-design sessions

## Partner Spotlight: MathTalk

Looking for a way to engage with his children outdoors, Omo Moses founded MathTalk to activate public areas and create opportunities for playful learning, believing that math literacy is a cornerstone of economic opportunity. By sharing these educational public art installations, MathTalk provides youth with the tools needed to expand their math literacy and STEAM skills.

MathTalk staff members like Keith Griffin and Javier Maisonet are vital to connecting MathTalk installations to the community. Keith, a

Cambridgeport native and resident, has been integral in helping the CRC bring a MathTalk installation to Magazine Beach Park. With MathTalk since 2018, Keith helps bring these installations to life and strengthen community relationships with his carpentry skills and experience coaching youth sports leagues. Having worked with youth for most of his life, Javier joined MathTalk in 2017 and brings an enthusiasm for MathTalk's emerging technology and artful installations. National team members like Javier are working to put similar installations across the country.

*“MathTalk has been grateful for the CRC’s commitments to a community co-design process and to ensuring community usage of the installation by coordinating group visits and pop-in events, creating and disseminating tailored activities, and promoting MathTalk on social media.”*

**Javier Maisonet**, Chief Growth Officer, MathTalk



Clyde Carmant



Clyde Carmant

## Expansion

We hope that the installation on the Magazine Beach Footbridge will be just the beginning of outdoor learning involving math concepts. We have started plans for a network of hotspots that have the potential to further extend the classroom outdoors for K-5

students and families. As we look to the future of this program, we aim to engage local communities and neighbors in envisioning and advocating for outdoor educational experiences for children by the Charles River and nearby parks.





# VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

In 2021, our beautiful parks were used more than ever with community members continuing to crave outdoor recreation and quality time with friends and loved ones. We provided opportunities for volunteers itching to get outside and give back to their community and outdoor spaces. With health and safety measures developed with DCR in place, we scheduled a return season of horticultural and maintenance support.

Starting in March, we doubled open-to-all event opportunities to welcome volunteers who energetically removed litter, managed invasive plants, cared for park trees and gardens, and restored park benches. As demand for the parks increased, so did our attention to these publicly owned resources. We spent more time in the parks with staff and volunteers to meet the growing demand of those who rely on their neighborhood parks.



“

*We continue to be amazed by the dedication and passion of our volunteers and supporters who love the parks and the Charles, and we would not be able to continue shepherding this work without generous financial support of our sponsors.”*

**Sasha Vallieres,**  
Volunteer Program  
Manager, CRC



## Hell’s Half Acre

We made significant progress during the 2021 season using both community volunteers and certified contractors, Land Stewardship, Inc. Target species for the second year of invasive plant management included Japanese knotweed, common reed (*Phragmites australis*), buckthorn shrubs



(*Frangula alnus* and *Rhamnus cathartica*), garlic mustard, shrub honeysuckles, Asiatic bittersweet, and black swallow-wort. We look forward to continuing this work in 2022. Keep an eye out for volunteer opportunities to help move this exciting restoration work forward.



## 2021 Cleanups

In addition to weekly events, CRC hosts two multisite cleanups: the **Charles River Earth Day Cleanup** in the spring and **CoastSweep** in the fall. Our volunteers at CoastSweep grabbed a whopping 7,441 pieces of trash that totaled 235 pounds! Volunteers tracked what kind of litter they found, and the results were shocking (right).



### CoastSweep Trash Collected

-  **1352 PLASTIC PIECES**
-  **1174 CIGARETTE BUTTS**
-  **823 FOOD WRAPPERS**
-  **593 FOAM PIECES**
-  **532 GLASS PIECES**
-  **492 BOTTLE CAPS**
-  **415 PLASTIC BOTTLES**
-  **238 PPE**
-  **239 CANS**





# FLOATING WETLAND

Year two of this innovative resilience project yielded lush and verdant plant growth on the floating wetland that caught the eye of those on land and in boats. We enjoyed taking local students, supporters, and others on kayak tours to view blooms up close.

In addition to the wetland highlighting the lack of shoreline vegetation in the area, we continue to advance the project's goals of researching its impact on the river's health and utilizing it to engage the public on that topic.



## Research

Our multi-year research partner, Northeastern University, gathered a second year of data to examine how the wetland impacts the local ecology in order to understand its potential to improve water quality and increase the river's climate resilience. We held a virtual webinar in which the CRC and Northeastern provided updates from the second summer and explained how future phases of the floating wetland project might be implemented on a local and basin-wide scale to meet regulatory requirements and water quality standards to make the Charles swimmable.



## Education & Engagement

We found many ways to connect the community to the floating wetland and are grateful to partners that helped us expand the impact and benefits of the project. This included

- working with MIT Sea Grant to develop floating wetland activity kits to give students a look into a real-life example of wetland ecology research on the Charles River;
- piloting kits with Cambridge Public Schools, as well as at Prospect Hill Academy Charter School's STEAM Saturdays; and
- introducing local youth groups to the project and bringing them out on the water to see it up close.

## Envisioning the Future

As we look ahead, we value community input to understand the opportunities and benefits that an expanded wetland could provide. In addition to our engagement with schools and youth, our outreach this year included

- engaging Mayor's Summer Youth Education Program (MSYEP) participants to solicit feedback from the community and use that input to dream big about how they would design a floating wetland; and
- working with Community Design Lab to gather ideas from young minds in the design of our floating wetland expansion.



**10** MSYEP students



**220+** FW webinar views



**378** youth engaged in STEAM



**10** kayak tours







# ADVOCACY

The Charles River Conservancy not only stewards and activates the Charles and its parks, we also provide input on and advocate for the future of these beneficial and valuable resources, making sure to do so through lenses of climate resilience and access for all. We supported and signed on to multiple letters regarding the I-90 Allston Multimodal project, celebrating when an at-grade design was announced.

We kept an eye out for public comment opportunities to give input on management plans, funding proposals, reconstruction projects and more regarding our beloved public resources along the Charles, urging legislators and government agencies to consider accessibility, inclusion, ecosystem health, and climate change in their project plans and designs.



 <p><b>1 major milestone</b></p>	 <p><b>20+ advocacy communications</b></p>
 <p><b>9 comment letters signed</b></p>	 <p><b>60+ partner organizations engaged</b></p>

## I-90 Allston Multimodal Project

A member of the Allston Multimodal Project Task Force, the CRC continued to engage with community members, partners, and stakeholders to build consensus and meaningfully advocate for project improvements that prioritize climate resilience, connections to the river and parks, and transit, cyclist, and pedestrian safety and access. CRC Board

Member Gautam Sundaram and colleagues from Perkins&Will and cbt produced an all at-grade design with riverfront restoration strategies that provided the vision and framework for the new design. Their hard work was rewarded when MassDOT announced an all at-grade design in 2021, signaling a victory for advocates and stakeholders!



## DCR Special Commission

The CRC appreciated our executive director being able to serve on the DCR Special Commission as a representative of DCR's 120+ statewide Friends' Groups. The Commission provided an important opportunity to reflect on and to guide the management and operation of DCR's public resources. Through coalition building, the CRC solicited input from over 60 Friends' Groups who signed onto recommendations at three crucial points to support the Commission's process and outcomes: (1) after the inception of the

special commission, (2) after attending stakeholder listening sessions, and (3) after the draft report was released. The CRC and other advocates emphasized the need to fund our parks, to focus DCR's work on resilience and equity, and to foster and to better leverage relationships with Friends' Groups, guidance that influenced the ultimate recommendations of the Commission's final report. The CRC looks forward to continuing to partner with and support DCR in its stewardship of the Charles.



*The need for investment in our natural resources and public parks is urgent, and we must respond by ensuring DCR is fully equipped to meet today's climate change and equity challenges."*

**DCR Friends' Groups' November 1, 2021  
Comment Letter on Draft Special Commission Report**





Aaron John Bourque

# THE RIVER BANK ANNUAL FUND

In Fiscal Year 2021, The River Bank, our annual fund program, provided important support to our unique programs, projects and administration. We engaged with and thanked donors at all levels, providing walking and kayak tours, email spotlights and access to signature events.

The River Bank not only ensures the CRC's financial stability and growth, it also connects supporters

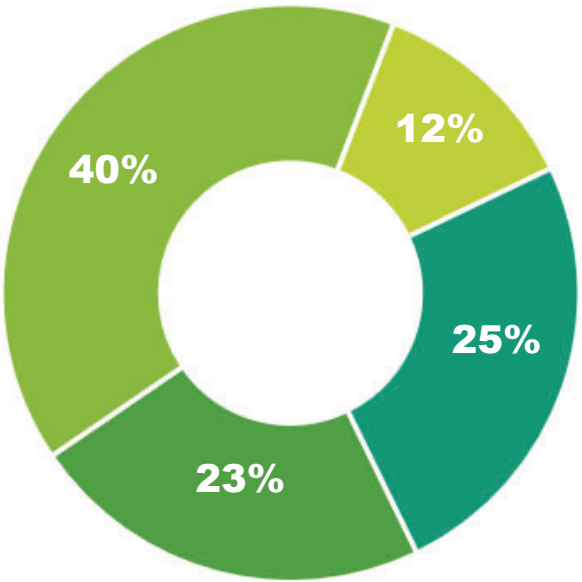
to our work in a way that is meaningful to us all: protecting and stewarding the Charles River and its parks.

We thank each and every one of our supporters that helped us secure our future and chart our path in 2021. Thank you for your continued support and engagement!



# FINANCIALS

The CRC's fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30. In FY2021, which ended on September 30, 2021, the CRC had **\$571,700** in Revenue and **\$597,200** in Expenses.



## Revenue

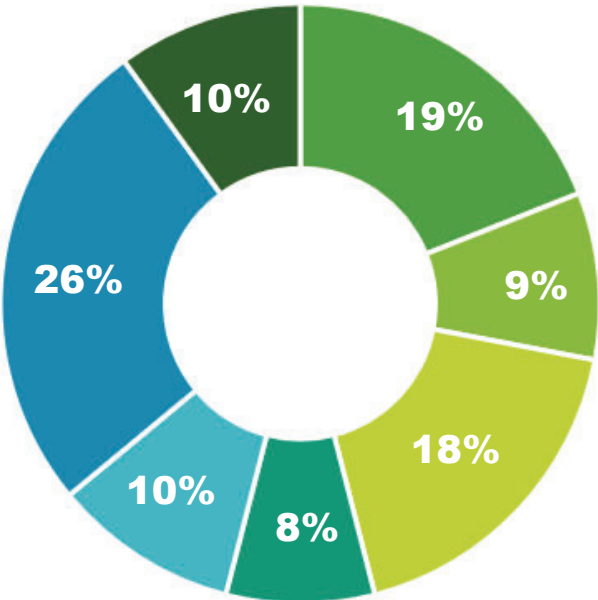
### Sources

- Individuals
- Government
- Corporations
- Foundations



### Type of Support

- Unrestricted - **63%**
- Restricted - **37%**



## Expenses

- Floating Wetlands
- Advocacy
- Education and Other Projects
- Communications & Outreach
- Conservancy Volunteers
- Administration
- Development

For a copy of our complete Fiscal Year 2021 financials, visit [thecharles.org/about/public-documents](https://thecharles.org/about/public-documents)





Aaron John Bourque

# DONORS

*Fiscal Year 2021 (October 1, 2020–September 30, 2021)*

**\$25,000 or more**

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**\$10,000 to \$24,999**

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**\$5,000 to \$9,999**

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“Our community of supporters makes our work possible.”

**Laura Jasinski,**  
Executive Director, CRC



# GET INVOLVED

## 1. Connect

Sign up for our monthly e-newsletter, check out our website, and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok. Learn more at [thecharles.org](https://thecharles.org)

## 2. Volunteer

Join us for one of our Saturday volunteer events, which are free and open to all, or schedule an event for your company or group during our 2022 season! Learn more at [thecharles.org/volunteer](https://thecharles.org/volunteer)

## 3. Donate

Your financial support will enable innovative ecological projects, maintenance to keep these public spaces welcoming for all, and advocacy to ensure that the public's interest in the parks is protected. Learn more at [thecharles.org/support](https://thecharles.org/support)



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