

Improving Water Quality in the Charles River Watershed by Controlling Private Sources of Stormwater Pollution in Bellingham

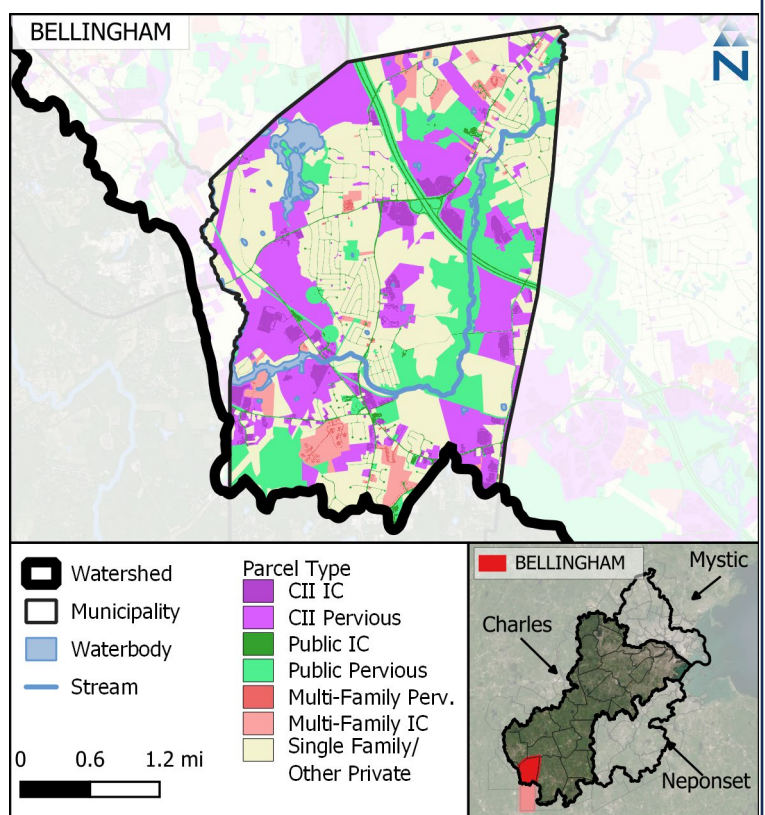


U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 1

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Bellingham is part of the Charles River Watershed, where pollution from untreated stormwater runoff has degraded water quality. Runoff can originate from impervious cover (IC) like roofs and parking areas and pervious areas like lawns and open space. However, runoff from impervious surfaces generates higher pollutant loads if left untreated. The map to the right shows IC and pervious areas on different land uses, including private commercial, industrial, institutional, and multi-family residential (collectively CIIM), single-family residential, and public lands that make up Bellingham’s stormwater load.

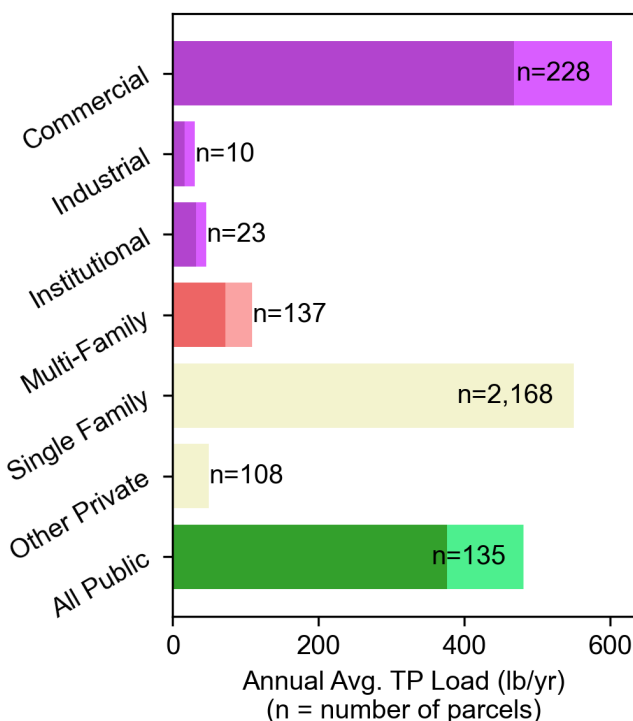
Bellingham already manages its stormwater runoff from public areas through a municipal stormwater permit program (MS4). However, as a step towards meeting water quality goals in the Charles River Watershed, EPA plans to begin a Clean Water Act (CWA) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting effort to address stormwater runoff on currently unregulated private parcels in Bellingham and other municipalities in the watershed. This permitting effort will be implemented using EPA’s CWA Residual Designation Authority (RDA).



More information on RDA in Massachusetts and the preliminary designation related to this effort can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/npdes-permits/watershed-based-residual-designation-actions-new-England>.

What are the major sources of stormwater nutrient pollution?

- Stormwater pollution can contain nitrogen and phosphorus (collectively nutrients) from fertilizers and yard waste, oil and grease from roadways and driveways, pathogens from pet and wildlife waste, and other toxic pollutants. In this fact sheet, examples are presented using total phosphorus (TP) as a surrogate for all stormwater pollutants.
- Overall, runoff from Bellingham contributes 1,867 pounds of phosphorus per year, which is about 2% of the phosphorus load of the Charles River Watershed.
- Private CIIM parcels contribute 42% of all TP in Bellingham, including 31% from impervious areas.
- The contributions of TP from public lands, CIIM parcels, and other private sources (including single family residences) within Bellingham are detailed in the chart to the left.



RDA in Bellingham

In September 2022, EPA issued a preliminary residual designation for certain CII properties (those with ≥ 1 acre IC) in the Charles River Watershed. The table to the right provides an example of how NPDES permits based on a residual designation could address the amount of total phosphorous contributed by privately owned parcels, including the number and types of parcels in Bellingham.

- Looking at CII parcels in this example, 48 parcels, out of the 261 total CII parcels, contribute 36% of the municipality's total load (1,867 pounds per year of TP) to the watershed. The map below shows the location of these properties.
- While RDA may address stormwater pollution from certain areas in Bellingham, the primary regulatory mechanism to control stormwater is still the MS4 permit.

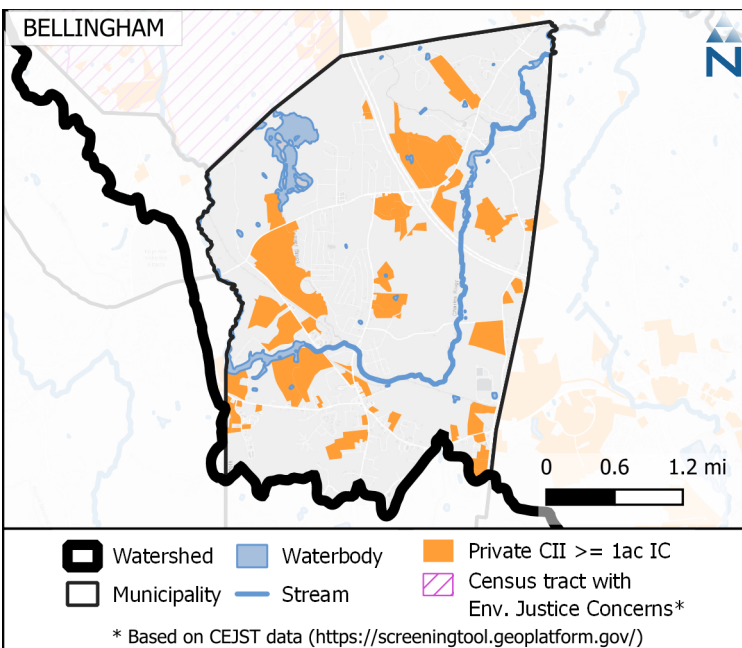
Attribute		Commercial	Industrial	Institutional
Count	All Parcels	228	10	23
	Parcels ≥ 1 acre IC	42	3	3
TP Load (pounds per year)	All Parcels	602	30	46
	Parcels ≥ 1 acre IC	428	24	43

How Will the RDA Permitting Program Impact Bellingham?

- The amount of runoff from Bellingham will be reduced since certain private sources of stormwater will now be responsible for addressing their share of polluted stormwater runoff.
- CII entities will implement small-scale green infrastructure and other infiltration practices on their properties which will lead to less flooding and other positive impacts in Bellingham. Some examples of the types of stormwater management practices that could be implemented by permittees are shown below.
- Bellingham and all municipalities will have an opportunity to consider how the RDA and the MS4 permitting programs can work together to incentivize positive environmental impacts in their communities. Examples include developing stormwater funding mechanisms that credit stormwater controls on private property, developing tracking and accounting systems that quantify pollution reductions on both public and private properties, and ensuring that potential impacts to areas of your community with environmental justice concerns (see map below) are addressed.

What to Expect Next?

- In the first half of 2024, EPA conducted outreach to municipalities and other stakeholders, including communities with environmental justice concerns. Updates from these outreach sessions are available on EPA's website: <https://www.epa.gov/npdes-permits/watershed-based-residual-designation-actions-new-England>.
- EPA is still evaluating its permitting approaches and implementation timeframes. Once a draft permit is issued, Bellingham and all members of the public will have a chance to provide EPA with written comments.



The numbers, graphics, and technical calculations and conclusions set forth in this technical information fact sheet are pre-decisional, subject to change, and may be different than the final calculations relied upon in the draft and final permits. EPA will publish its draft RDA permit and RDA determination in the Federal Register for public comment and will consider all significant public comments.