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## USACE hosts open house July 30 in Millis, MA, for Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area Master Plan revision

**CONCORD, MA.** – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), New England District will host an open house on July 30, 2025, in Millis, MA, to share details on a draft revision of the 1984 Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area (CRNVSA) Master Plan for the CRNVSA located in Millis, Medfield, Norfolk, Franklin, Holliston, Needham, Sherborn, Bellingham, Dedham, Dover, Medway, Newton, Wrentham, Walpole, Natick, and Boston.

The open house will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Millis Public Library Roche Bros. Community Room at 961 Main Street in Millis. The public open house will cover the proposed changes to the current CRNVSA Master Plan. Team members will share instructions on how to submit comments and provide an opportunity for the public to ask questions and provide feedback. A 30-day public comment period will begin on July 30, 2025, and end on August 30, 2025.

### Master Plan Overview

The Master Plan is defined as the strategic land use management document that guides the comprehensive management and development of all recreational, natural, and cultural resources throughout the life of the water resource development project. It defines "how" USACE will manage the resources for public use and conservation.

The current Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area Master Plan, last approved in 1984, needs revision to address changes in regional land use, population, outdoor recreation trends, and the USACE management policy. Key topics to be discussed in the revised Master Plan include revised land use classifications, new natural and recreational resource management objectives, recreation facility needs, and special issues such as invasive species management and threatened and endangered species habitat.

The Master Plan revision will not address the technical and operational aspects of the lake related to flood risk management or the water conservation missions of the project.

### Submitting Comments & Reviewing Draft Plans:

Comments must be submitted in writing at the open house or digitally via the comment form on the Master Plan Revision webpage during the 30-day public comment period that begins on July 30, 2025, and ends on August 30, 2025 (<https://www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Flood-Risk-Management/Massachusetts/Charles-River-NVS/Charles-River-Master-Plan/>) or emailed to [charlesrivernaturalvalleymasterplan@usace.army.mil](mailto:charlesrivernaturalvalleymasterplan@usace.army.mil).

On July 30, the website will also have digital copies of the draft Master Plan, Environmental Assessment and associated documents, a comment form with instructions, and a downloadable presentation covering the topics highlighted in the open house.

### **About the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area**

The Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area lies throughout 16 Eastern Massachusetts communities in the middle and upper areas of the Charles River. The Charles River extends inland from Boston Harbor and meanders for approximately 80 miles to Hopkinton, a straight distance of about 30 miles. Thousands of acres of undeveloped wetlands, which normally appear dry, lie along the river and form a natural reservoir that store floodwaters in times of excess precipitation. These wetlands make up huge volumes of natural storage that soak up water like sponges. Potential development on these wetland areas threatened to eliminate the storage area of the natural reservoir. If development had been left unchecked, floodwaters that would normally settle in the natural water storage area would rush downstream, causing flood damage to existing development in the lower reaches of the river. The natural valley storage areas reduce flood levels by retaining this excess water.

A 1972 study of the Charles River watershed showed a need to protect the natural valley storage areas from further development. The study recommended that the federal government purchase and preserve these lands as a viable means of flood control. The Corps purchased the first acres in May 1977 and made its most recent acquisition in September 1983. Resolutions to acquire remaining lands are continuing. To date, the Corps has purchased land in 17 different areas at a cost of \$8.3 million.

The Charles River Natural Valley Storage areas total approximately 8,095 acres. These lands are located in Millis, Medfield, Norfolk, Franklin, Holliston, Needham, Sherborn, Bellingham, Dedham, Dover, Medway, Newton, Wrentham, Walpole, Natick, and Boston. Note: Although there are no storage lands in Cambridge, Waltham, Watertown, Wellesley, and Weston, the Charles River Natural Valley Storage areas protect land and property in these communities also. The watershed of the Charles River covers 307 square miles.

In addition to its primary role of flood damage reduction, project lands are used for recreation and fish and wildlife management. Hiking, canoeing, fishing, hunting, and cross-country skiing are some of the more popular activities. Of the 8,095 acres, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife manages 2,640 acres affecting nine parcels.

For more information about the Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area, visit the project website at <https://www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Flood-Risk-Management/Massachusetts/Charles-River-NVS/>.

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