



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Community Swim in the Charles—the First in More Than 50 Years

CAMBRIDGE -- On Saturday, July 13, the Charles River Conservancy (CRC), the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and the Charles River Swimming Club (CRSC) will be holding a community swim event in the Charles River from 9AM - 12PM off the River Dock at the Esplanade near the Fiedler Head sculpture and the Hatch Shell, in Boston. Additional event partners include the Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA), The Esplanade Association (TEA), and Community Boating. Pre-registration is required for all swimmers.

“For more than a decade, the Conservancy has been working to bring public swimming back to the Charles River,” said Renata von Tscherner, CRC president. “Swimming has been central to our advocacy efforts to expand recreational opportunities in the river and parklands. This public swim event marks an exciting milestone for the many individuals and groups who are dedicated to restoring the Charles.”

Since 2007, the CRSC has hosted a popular one-mile swim race on the Charles from the same location, which was held on June 1st of this year. This swim race, however, is an exclusive competitive US Masters swim, which is not open to the general public. The July 13 community swim event is intended for the general public; people seeking a recreational swimming experience in the Charles River.

This public swim event marks an historic moment for the Charles River. Recreational swimming has not been legally permitted in the river since the 1950s when swimming was banned due to an awareness of pollution and related health risks. Once a popular activity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries at Magazine Beach in Cambridge, along the Esplanade, and downstream from the

Longfellow Bridge in Boston, the industrialization along the river and surrounding area took its toll on water quality.

In 1995, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established the Clean Charles River Initiative, with a goal of making the lower Charles River, from Watertown to Boston Harbor, fishable and swimmable by 2005. Through the efforts of federal, state, and municipal agencies, non-profit organizations, private institutions, and local residents, tremendous progress has been made toward achieving this goal. Approximately \$500 million has been spent on projects to improve Charles River water quality and as a direct result the river has improved from an EPA grade D in 1995 to a grade B in 2011. Today, the Charles River is one of the cleanest urban rivers in the U.S., meeting the state standards for safe swimming most days of the summer.

“Fifteen years ago, swimming in the Charles would have been unthinkable,” said Bob Zimmerman, Charles River Watershed Association executive director. “We are pleased that CRWA’s work restoring the river, along with our 18 years of water quality monitoring and testing has paid off and a community swim is now possible. Educating the public about the health of the Charles is so important, and every summer, CRWA flies color-coded flags daily at 11 participating boathouses in the lower basin to inform people of the river’s water quality.”

“The Esplanade Association is excited to be partnering with the Charles River Conservancy to host the Community Swim on the Charles River,” said Margo Levine Newman, TEA board chair. “This swim event intends to celebrate how much the water quality has improved as well as draw attention to all the work that still needs to be done. The Charles River is an amazingly valuable resource and we are thrilled that the Boston community is able to enjoy it for swimming as well as boating and fishing. We look forward to the day when there is a return of river swimming along the Esplanade for more than just special events.”

Thanks to the generous support of the Boston Foundation, the Swimmable Charles Working Group, which includes representatives from the Conservancy, the CRWA, TEA, EPA, and DCR, has been exploring potential locations for new public swimming areas in the Charles lower basin. In addition, the Charles River Water Quality Commission (CRWQC), established by the state legislature in 2009 with members appointed by the governor, is charged with finding ways to bring back swimming to the river. This Commission is staffed by the CRC.

Although there has been great success cleaning up the river, perceptions of “dirty water” in the Charles linger in part, because of the yellow-brown color of the water. This natural color of the Charles is due to tannins from organic matter that seep and wash into the slow-moving river. This natural “staining” of the river is normal and characteristic of slow moving rivers and lakes, even in rural and undeveloped watersheds. Despite this reality, memories of the once polluted Boston Harbor and Charles River are cemented into the public’s consciousness, because of the Standells’ 1966 hit song “Dirty Water,” which has become a fun anthem for local sports fans, making people weary of coming in contact with the water. Educating the public about the health of the Charles is an integral part of the Conservancy’s efforts to promote recreational swimming.

While the water quality is much improved and now considered swimmable many days of the year, the sediment on the river bottom contains toxic heavy metals, PCBs, and other contaminants that have built up from industry, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century when tidal flow was eliminated by the construction of the Charles River dam in 1911. As a result, to ensure public safety, only deep-water swimming is possible, which is why the swim event is permitted at the river dock along the Esplanade; the depth of the water ensures that swimmers will not come into contact with any sediments. Water quality testing will also be completed in the days prior to the swim, ensuring the river meets the state public health standards for swimming that day—if it does not, the swim will be cancelled and rescheduled.

Registered participants will be assigned one of four 30-minute time slots. Swimmers must be 12 years or older and youth swimmers under the age of 18, must provide documented proof of their ability to swim. For those unable to register for this swim, a waitlist has been established for future swims. The Conservancy encourages all those interested in swimming to sign up on the wait list, which can be accessed from www.thecharles.org.

On the day of the event, on-site check-in will begin at 9AM. At 9:20, a short program will begin to acknowledge this historic event and the public-private partnerships that have made swimming in the Charles possible. Meteorologist Bruce Schwoelger will serve as master of ceremonies for the program and the swim. City of Boston Chief of Environment and Energy, Brian Swett will also be in attendance. The swim will begin at 10AM with half-hour sessions until noon. Lifeguards and public safety officials will be present both on the dock and in the water.

Though swimming or wading is not permitted anywhere in the Charles River, except as part of these sanctioned events, the Conservancy and its partners aim to raise awareness and celebrate the efforts that have gone into cleaning the river, as well as to highlight the need for continued cleanup to enable recreational swimming in the future.

For more information, please contact Janet Curtis, development & communications director at 617-300-8172 or by email at jcurtis@thecharles.org.

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The **Charles River Conservancy** is dedicated to the stewardship, renewal, and enhancement of the urban parklands along the Charles River, for the enjoyment of all. The Conservancy promotes the active use and vitality of the parklands, increases recreational and cultural opportunities, and works to ensure the beauty and integrity of this extraordinary public resource.

On the Web at: www.thecharles.org.

The **Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation** is steward of one of the largest state parks systems in the country. Its 450,000 acres is made up of forests, parks, greenways, historic sites and landscapes, seashores, lakes, ponds, reservoirs and watersheds.

On the Web at: <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/index.htm>

The **Charles River Swimming Club** was founded in 2005 with the dual purpose of organizing competitive swimming events in the Charles River and facilitating the return of public river swimming. Our main event is an annual one-mile swim in the Charles' basin.

On the Web at: <http://www.charlesriverswimmingclub.org/wp/>

The **Charles River Watershed Association**, an internationally recognized leader in sustainable river management, uses science, advocacy, and the law to protect, preserve and enhance the Charles River and its watershed. Since 1965, CRWA has figured prominently in major clean-up and watershed protection efforts, working with government officials and citizen groups from 35 Massachusetts watershed towns from Hopkinton to Boston. Their initiatives over the last 50 years have dramatically improved the quality of water in the watershed and fundamentally changed approaches to water resource management.

On the Web at: <http://www.charlesriver.org>

The Esplanade Association works to restore and enhance Boston's Charles River Esplanade. TEA included a river swim area in its 2020 Vision Plan.

On the Web at: <http://www.esplanadeassociation.org>

Community Boating works to advance sailing for all by minimizing economic and physical obstacles to sailing. In addition, CBI enhances the greater Boston community by using sailing as a vehicle to empower its members to develop independence and self-confidence, improve communication, foster teamwork, and acquire a deeper understanding of community spirit and the power of volunteerism.

On the Web at: <http://www.community-boating.org>