

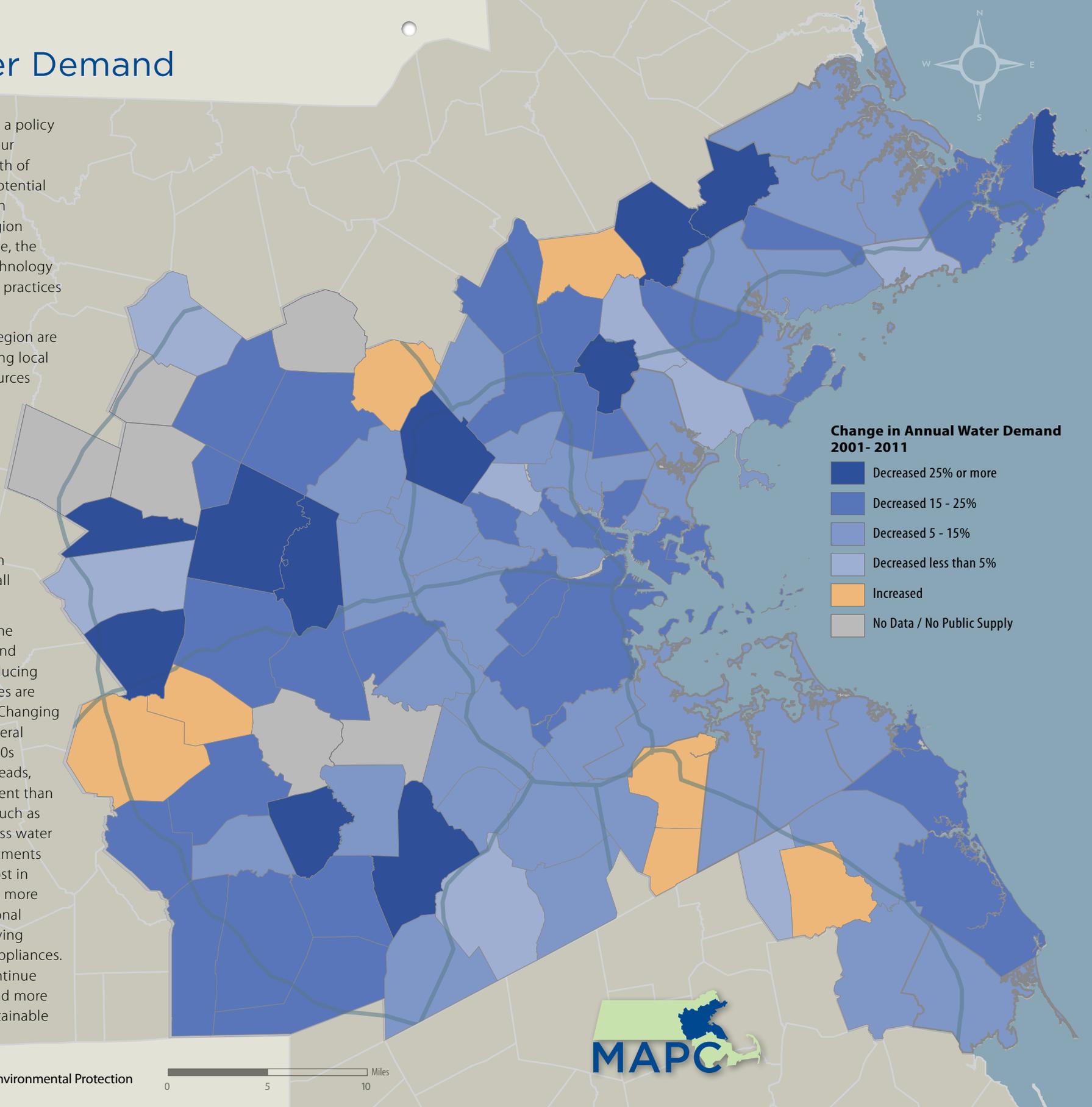
Declining Water Demand

Reducing water consumption has been a policy goal for decades. Wise stewardship of our freshwater resources improves the health of lakes and streams and minimizes the potential for shortages during drought periods. In recent years, water use in the MAPC region has continued a slow and steady decline, the result of infrastructure investments, technology improvements, and water conservation practices by residents and businesses.

All but six municipalities in the MAPC region are served by municipal water systems, using local sources, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), or both. Region-wide water use has declined by 15.1% between 2001 and 2011. This decline has come from slow but steady decline in the "base demand," which excludes seasonal use associated with irrigation and pools. Eighty-eight systems reduced their water use during this period, including those both large (Boston, 21.9% decrease) and small (Rockport, 26% decrease).

Several trends most likely account for the declining use. New plumbing fixtures and appliances are more water efficient, reducing demand as housing units and businesses are remodeled or appliances are replaced. Changing consumer preference and state and federal regulations adopted in the 1980s and 90s mean new fixtures like toilets, showerheads, and faucets are much more water efficient than earlier models. New home appliances such as washing machines use up to 30-50% less water than older models. Infrastructure investments by water utilities have reduced water lost in transmission due to leaky pipes. Finally, more utilities are using progressive and seasonal water rates to encourage water conserving behavior and investments in efficient appliances. Nevertheless, many rivers and lakes continue to be stressed by water withdrawals, and more progress is needed to achieve truly sustainable water use patterns.

Data Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection



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