



**Conservation Partners Meeting Minutes
(Formerly called Steering Committee)**

Friday, December 8, 2023

Virtual

Attendees: Virtual attendees on record. (~ 85)

Staff Attendees:

- Robb Johnson, ED
- Barbara Chrenko, Programs Manager
- Paige Buller, Intern

Handouts: (Virtual: emailed or on website: <https://massland.org/programs/meetings-retreats>)

- Agenda for today's meeting emailed to all hybrid registrants
- Minutes of September 22, 2023
- Quarterly Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC) Public Policy Update
- Presentation materials

- 1) **10:01 AM Kathy Orlando** Chair, MLTC Conservation Partners (CP) convened the CP meeting.
 - a) *Meeting Introductions and logistics.* Participants introduced themselves as Kathy called their names. She clarified if late, or missed, they would be able to introduce themselves after her screen list was done.
 - b) *Review of September 22nd Minutes.* Christa Collins moved and Buzz Constable seconded the motion to accept the minutes of September 22, 2023 CP meeting. Hearing no further discussion, Kathy called the vote.
VOTE: Unanimous
 - c) *Next meeting: Friday, March 8 via Zoom*
- 2) **MLTC Staff Report -- Robb Johnson**, MLTC Executive Director gave the following update (**Attachment A**):
 - a) Robb reviewed upcoming Conservation Partners meetings for both March 8th (Virtual) and the Annual Meeting on June 14th (Hybrid and election of board)
 - b) Robb reviewed the upcoming programs for Stronger Together networking calls, and mentioned that planning is underway for a substantial land protection training course to launch in fall 2024.
 - c) Mass Land Conservation Conference (MLCC) on March 23rd at UMass Amherst with overnight accommodations available. Field trips will be on April 26th around the state and options are needed for SE/Cape and Island field trips.
 - d) Robb thanked all of the sponsors for MLCC (**Attachment A**)
 - e) Heidi asked if Land Protection workshop will include municipalities. Robb clarified that working with municipal partners around land conservation projects will be included but that working on zoning was outside the scope of this introductory land protection course. Focus will be on Land Trusts (LTs) and their work. Heidi stressed and Rita Grossman agreed that zoning is a key issue requiring training.
 - f) Land Protection course will have tuition. Amount and possible support for funding are being explored.
- 3) **LTA Report – Jen Plowden**, New England Program Manager provided the following update (**Attachment B**)
 - a) *Appraiser program updates.* Jen reviewed efforts to date to increase the pool of qualified appraisers and thanked everyone who was involved in the networking event. Goal is to get the word out about achieving conservation qualifications in the appraiser community. Reviewed program updates and credited the Maine Land Trust Network which got this launched. Melissa Cryan thanked Jen for this work. She also mentioned concerns about the workload for the state when working with “yellow book” appraisers newly certified but

maybe inexperienced in land conservation. Mentorship option with experienced appraiser in conservation suggested.

- b) *Advancing Excellence Program*. LTA is working with MLTC on this new program to be launched in 2024 to help ensure strong land trusts so protected lands remain so in perpetuity. Focus will be on best practices and non LTA members will be encouraged to participate. Program has 3 years of funding from an anonymous foundation. LTA will grant some of the funding out to land trusts that apply for support. An intention to pursue accreditation is not required to take part in this initiative. Jen asked for everyone's input on greatest LT needs and there will be an advisory council to provide feedback on the program, and folks may be invited to complete a survey. There will be an update on this program at the March meeting. Appreciation for these programs was expressed.
- c) Federal policy updates were included in the MLTC Policy update handout (**Attachment C**).
- d) Upcoming LTA webinars were listed.
- e) LTA does have job openings in New England.
- f) Policy update was posted in the chat.

4) **The State's Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative: Elements of initial report: Kurt Gaertner**, Assistant Secretary for Environmental Policy; **Bob Wilber**, Director of Conservation Services; and other EEA staff.

- a) Kurt expects the report of the Climate Forestry Committee to be released next week which summarizes the work on this initiative since it launched in June as part of the Healey / Driscoll administration goals to tackle climate change. Conserved lands playing a key role in addressing climate change and achieving net zero goals by 2050 are recognized.
- b) The goals are to inform the state's forestry management and acquisition strategies:
 - i) Accelerating forest conservation and reducing forestry loss.
 - ii) Mitigate climate change and promote resilience through science based actions.
 - iii) Explore incentives/options to engage private forestry land owners and forestry businesses to reduce climate impacts.
 - iv) Increase transparency of state agencies working on this initiative and networking between all stakeholders.
- c) Charges for and work by the Climate Forestry Committee:
 - i) Preserve a significant portion of unprotected forests in Massachusetts by 2050 (~ 685K acres).
 - ii) Generate management guidelines by and for DCR and MA Fish and Wildlife.
 - iii) Collaborate with the Climate Resiliency Initiative.
 - iv) Maximize and grow carbon sequestration capacity for the state's forests store. Re-forestation over the past 100+ years has resulted in the state having some of the most carbon-intense lands in the nation.
 - v) Two well-attended public meetings were held in the past six months on this work.
 - vi) Will address aspects on how to manage trade-offs in adapting to climate change.
 - vii) Recommendations so far include:
 - (1) Retain forests as forests and increase the pace of forestry conservation.
 - (2) Div. of Fisheries and Wildlife advised to include climate implications in their goals.
 - (3) Will include storm-induced ecological disturbance recommendations. Active versus passive management being addressed and debate continues about best strategies.
 - (4) PILOT payments being addressed as municipalities deal with conservation reduced tax income.
 - (5) Soils quality and invasive species management included in the resilience section.
 - (6) Wood product production and climate-sensitive methods included.
 - (7) Recommendations for forest reserves and land conservation references Biomap.
 - viii) Bob Wilber thanked Kurt for the summary and he noted that he and Vanessa Farny worked with DCR and Fish and Game, meeting 6-8 times per week. Interesting discussion on selection criteria for forest reserves and conservation as relates to climate resiliency with needs for increased funding and more tax incentives. How to adjust PILOT to meet municipal needs and perhaps financial recognition for communities with large conserved areas for ecological services. LTs acknowledged for all their work.
 - ix) Vanessa Farny acknowledged the work done in a short time period. Will be seeking more collaboration and engagement on this.

- x) In response to questions about what will actually happen based on the recommendations, the Commonwealth will need to react to his report.
- xi) Rita Grossman asked about exemptions (Dover Amendment) for nonprofit schools and solar siting which can allow forestry destruction giving the example that just occurred in Wakefield. Kurt noted that this is not included.
- xii) Heidi Ricci also thanked Kurt et al for their work and asked how the cooperative efforts needed across departments and communities can be addressed. Collaboration is being addressed. Heidi also asked about significant forest clearing for maintenance projects and infrastructure on Article 97 lands. There is an Energy Infrastructure Committee meeting now to address these issues on a large scale and Kurt acknowledged that this is an issue.

5) **State Agency Updates – Agency news- Kurt Gaertner and Bob Wilber, EEA**

- a) Kurt introduced Dave Viale who noted the Mass Farm Action Plan was just released: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-farmland-action-plan/download>
 - i) Dave thanked everyone who worked on this lengthy plan and suggested reading the executive summary and recommendations. Plan focuses on land access; farm viability; accelerating pace of conservation and climate change; and resiliency. A full time position has been posted to accelerate implementation of the plan. Looking forward to partnerships. More volunteers welcome; please reach out to Robb or Barbara if interested in joining an MLTC working group that is considering how to advance one or more aspects of the plan.
 - ii) DAR is hiring another position to monitor APR stewardship; and a Stewardship Director.
 - iii) Resilient Mass Action Plan tracker: <https://resilient.mass.gov/actiontracker> which tracks MDAR work which includes a “biomap” for agricultural lands. Grants for private APRs also included. Dave is working on funding agricultural preservation and on working their strategic plan
 - iv) January 17th is the next meeting of the ACEP-ALE (Agricultural Conservation Easement Program / Agricultural Land Easement) program subcommittee from 1-3pm on Zoom and link shared in chat: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlof-CqrzOpE9MX-ph0So5DlrkzTxOYk7tn>
- b) Melissa Cryan and Vanessa Farny provided the following update on grant programs:
 - i) Land and Water Grant funding process is open and in process. Deadline for appraisal has passed.
 - ii) The Outdoor Recreation Legacy program grant (Federal) for larger communities (30K population +) and must be Federal EJ community should be posted soon. Grant max is \$15m. Notice of funding activity has been posted. Park Service is interested and please contacts Melissa ASAP if interested.
 - iii) Vanessa noted that the Drinking Water Protection grant should be posted soon. LTs can collaborate with the eligible municipalities. Also, the Conservation Partnership Grant should be posted soon.
- c) Kurt gave a progress report on CR review process and believes substantial progress has been made and he thanked Bob Wilber who gave this update:
 - i) Approaching normalcy with CR review process to achieve timely turnaround. Bob thanked everyone for their patience with the delays and thanked staff. They are on track to complete year-end sensitive CRs, and four auxiliary reviewers have helped accelerate their pace. 15 CRs will be completed with Secy. Tepper’s signature next week; 38 are under review by DCS; 16 are under EEA legal review; and 51 have been returned to the applicant with feedback. Currently 65 CRs in the backlog have not yet had any review begin. The Commonwealth is engaging an outside law firm to process to resolve backlog and Bob is optimistic.
 - ii) Two new DCS civil services positions will be posted very soon – hopefully next week: Public Land Protection Act Coordinator and Assistant CR Reviewer; and DCS Resilient Land Open Space Grants Administrator. Candidates that apply in the first 14 days are prioritized.
 - iii) Resilient Lands Initiative will be scheduling a meeting on Wednesday, January 31st at DFW in Westborough.
 - iv) In response to Robb Johnson’s question, the 65 CRs in backlog include some that were submitted over a year ago. Bob indicated they should all be reviewed in 2024.
 - v) Robb thanked everyone for their work to resolve the CR issue.

6) **Policy Update – Robb Johnson (MLTC) (See Attachment C)**

- a) Robb referred everyone to the handout which is available on this link:
https://massland.org/sites/default/files/files/mltc_policy_update_2023_dec.pdf
- b) For MLTC, the Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC) work remains a top priority.
- c) Expansion of CLTC (Conservation Land Tax Credit) is called out in the Climate Forestry Committee report to get this addressed.
- d) Linda Orel provided an update on the bill requiring the Commonwealth to create nature based climate solutions for land acquisition for flooding. Re-filed a bill to create a pre-disaster plan to update the 2018 SHMCAP (State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan) to protect humans and structures from disasters. FEMA was to hire a consultant to follow through on creating a position to do this. Last week press release on resilient coasts notes that MEMA will hire a consultant to get study done. Bottom line is this bill is no longer needed due to this recent development. Linda Orel plans to meet with MEMA on this. Robb noted this will also address inland flooding from rivers as well as coastal flooding. Linda thanked everyone who worked on this.
- e) Heidi noted Mass Audubon's Clean Energy/Solar program on December 12th in Lakeville:
<https://www.massaudubon.org/programs/shaping-the-future/90299-growing-solar-protecting-nature-local-events-southeast-region>
- f) Robb asked everyone to pay attention to Enews for updates on farmland conservation and to review the Federal updates in the Policy hand-out.
- g) Kathy asked if anyone is replacing Whit Beals on Solar Sighting and Robb will follow up and Heidi volunteered to assist in this.
- h) Robb noted the compelling memorial service for Whit Beals.
- i) Janet Milkman noted the off shore siting for windmills and impact of transmission lines on the shore as it concerns Article 97 affected lands for clean energy. Kurt said there are two pieces of legislation pending. Heidi noted that a separate interagency group is looking at offshore clean energy infrastructure impacts and aligning with existing disturbed areas and infrastructure. Heidi noted other collaborative initiatives for clean energy infrastructure and how to minimize Article 97 impacts.

7) **Committee and Working Group Updates**

- a) Early Career Conservation Network (ECCN) – **Mariah Fogg** (Berkshire Natural Resources Council) gave the following update on this group formed in 2017 for professionals in their first 10 years. Five events across the state. Topics included accessibility. ECCN launched a survey last month to ECCN members, which is still open. Link in Chat for new one to assure needs being addressed. <https://forms.gle/p5pXubFbypEBFH7Q7> Barbara Chrenko asked if ECCN is looking for mentors. Mariah noted that the survey will be asking about this and will provide update when data is reviewed.
- b) **Agriculture Working Group – Kathy Orlando** (Sheffield Land Trust) provided this update.
 - i) Working on strategies to increase agricultural conservation. Please contact Robb or Kathy if interested in this work. And mentioned the ACEP/ALE January 17th meeting as earlier referenced.
 - ii) LTA has regular group sessions on the Farm Bill. Robb noted to reach out to Lori Faeth at LTA if interested in participating.

8) **Other announcements.** Buzz asked that the links in Chat be shared with registrants.

12:07 p.m. Buzz moved and Rita seconded the motion to adjourn. Hearing no further discussion, Kathy called the vote to adjourn. **VOTE:** Unanimous

Respectfully submitted,
Rita Gibes Grossman, MLTC clerk

Attachment A Staff Report



Upcoming Meetings

Conservation Partners Meeting

- Friday, March 8 via Zoom

Conservation Partners & MLTC Annual Meeting

- Friday, June 14 hybrid, location TBD



MLTC Program Updates

Stronger Together networking calls

- Large Regional Land Trust Executive Directors: January 11
- Small Staffed Land Trusts: trail management January 16, 1 pm
- Development: sustaining donors January 25, 4 pm
- Stewardship Roundtable: unhoused encampments February 8, 1 pm

Land Protection Course (coming Fall 2024)

2024 Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference

- March 23, at UMass Amherst!**
- Field trips around the state on April 26**
Love to have one in SE/Cape/Islands – anyone?
- Watch for registration in January: massland.org**

*• Larger rooms
• Better AV
• Closing reception
• Overnight lodging*

Thank your planning committee!
 Buzz Constable, Tessa Dowling, Vanessa Farny, Mariah Fogg
 Abby Hardy-Moss, Cynthia Henshaw, Nick Rossi, David Santomena
 Vidya Tikku, Bob Wilber, Barbara Chrenko, Robb Johnson



We couldn't do it without our Sponsors!

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 Franklin Land Trust -- Kestrel Land Trust - MA 401(k) CORE Plan. - New England Forestry Foundation
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 SWCA Environmental Consultants - USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service

Partner

The Community Preservation Coalition - The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts
 Horsley Witten Group - Law Office of Stephen J. Small - The Trust for Public Land

Attachment B LTA Report / Jen Plowden



Thank you!

Jen Plowden
New England Program Manager
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Appraiser Program Updates

We're working to increase the pool of qualified appraisers!

- Alliance taking a blended approach of education, awareness building, and networking to increase the number of appraisers working in conservation.
- Partnership with the Appraisal Institute's MA-RI-ME Chapter.
- Hosted four-day Conservation Easement Valuation course and two two-day Yellow Book courses.
- Cumulatively enrolled 74 appraisers – Thank you for helping get the word out!



Appraiser Program Updates

Thanks to everyone who participated in a networking event in 2023

- Thanks to all who participated in networking events!
- Chris LaPointe (Greenbelt)
- Meredith Houghton (Sudbury Valley Trustees)
- Carol Wilkinson (Mass Audubon)
- Buzz Constable (MA Land Trust Coalition)
- Christine Smith (MA Dept. of Fish and Game)
- Christine Berry (MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation)
- Ron Hall and Chris Chisholm (MA Dept. of Agricultural Resources)



Appraiser Program Updates

What's next?

- Sharing information with appraisers about how to get on service provider and state vendor lists
- Building a list of appraisers who have participated in these programs for distribution
- Hosting receptions in partnership with state associations
- Best practices handout and webinar
- Planning responsive programming for 2024



NEW - Advancing Excellence Program

An Alliance program to increase capacity and impact in Massachusetts

- Through this program, the Alliance will:
- Work in partnership with land trust community to increase its capacity and impact and ensure conserved lands remain protected in perpetuity
- Advance conservation in Massachusetts by helping land trusts identify and take the next steps towards excellence
- Foster best practices that lead to more sustainable organizations and a resilient and durable land trust community that reinforces the state's strong network
- Work closely with MLTC to deliver the program



Advancing Excellence Program

- Program discovery and needs assessment to begin in January 2024
- Alliance and MLTC will work together to identify greatest risks and opportunities
- Discovery will inform specific capacity-building program design and strategies
- Likely will include three tiers of services:
 - Organizational fundamentals for small and volunteer-led organizations
 - Advanced risk management
 - Assessment and preparation for land trusts interested in exploring accreditation



Advancing Excellence Program

- Service delivery will include training, mentoring and coaching, and grants
- Alliance will be hiring a New England Program Coordinator who will have an important role in delivering this program in Massachusetts
- Alliance will design a grantmaking program that will distribute \$210,000 to Massachusetts land trusts over the course of three years
- Alliance is looking to form an advisory council to provide feedback during 6-month discovery phase
- If you're interested, please email Jen Plowden (jplowden@lta.org)

<mailto:jplowden@lta.org>



Government Relations Update

Federal policy updates included in MLTC update

- Expanded partnership with Natural Resource Conservation Service
- During the next several months, we will be hiring five new staff – one focused on the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and four focused on helping land trusts with Agricultural Land Easement Program and RCPP applications.
- We will continue to keep you updated as our partnership expands.

Upcoming webinars

- [Basic Risk Management: Tips from TerraFirma](#) – January 4
- [Convert Information to Data to Streamline Monitoring](#) – January 11
- [Federal Tax Issues: The Latest and Greatest for 2024](#) – January 30
- [Building your Technology Tools for Monitoring](#) – February 1
- [Introduction to Design Principles for Interpretive Signs](#) – February 7
- [Easement Violations](#) – March 13
- [Easement Monitoring Basics](#) – March 28
- [Drafting Conservation Easements](#) – April 2
- [GAAP Accounting for Beginners](#) – April 16

Land Trust Careers

Land Trust Alliance:

- [Government Relations Intern](#)
- [Western Program Coordinator](#)

10 jobs in New England currently posted on Alliance's [Job Board](#)

Submit a job [here](#)



**Attachment C
MLTC Policy Updates**

**Public Policy Update
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC)
Conservation Partners Meeting
December 8, 2023**

Healey-Driscoll Administration Updates

Forests as Climate Solutions

On December 8, EEA is expected to announce initial recommendations and actions under its [Forests as Climate Solutions initiative](#), which was launched by the Governor on June 8 as a strategy to ensure Massachusetts forests are managed in ways that advance the Plans are expected to include increased investment in land conservation to prevent forest conversion, new guidelines for climate-oriented forest management on state lands, new incentives for private and municipal woodland owners to implement climate-oriented forest management, and expanded assistance to forestry and durable wood products businesses. The possibility of establishing new goals for forest reserves on public and private lands has also been mentioned.

Farmland Action Plan

On December 4, 2023, the Administration released the [Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan](#) for 2023-2050, a long-range strategic plan to address It sets goals and priorities to significantly expand protection of remaining farmland, make more public land and marginal or abandoned land available for farming, increase technical assistance grants and farmland support programs, ensure equity criteria are applied in all land protection and technical assistance programs, and enact zoning measures that support farmland.

Climate Report Card

On December 1, 2023, EEA released its Massachusetts Climate Report Card, featuring assessments of the Commonwealth's progress in meeting its climate mandates and goals to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to climate change. While Massachusetts has made progress, a strong policy response to existing and emerging challenges will be needed to meet the Commonwealth's ambitious 2030 targets. This candid look at the Commonwealth's progress to date helps provide accountability to the public, advocates, lawmakers, and the state itself and inform the adoption of new strategies to reduce emissions.

Climate Chief's Recommendations

On October 24, Climate Chief Hoffer released her [recommendations](#) for a whole-government approach to the climate crisis, with 39 recommendations regarding climate-related practices and policies of the executive agencies. Recommendations focus on strategies to meet goals in the state's statutorily-mandated Clean Energy and Climate Plan, including protecting natural and working lands.

Climate Resilience Planning

On October 11, Governor Healey adopted the [2023 Resilient Mass Plan](#), an updated state hazard mitigation and climate adaptation plan identifying strategies and measurable actions state agencies will take to ensure Massachusetts can withstand, recover from, adapt to, and mitigate natural hazard events. The plan includes numerous specific actions that will be tracked on the [ResilientMass Action Tracker](#).

As part of the ResilientMass Plan, on November 28 the Administration announced launch of the [ResilientCoasts Initiative](#), a strategy for addressing impacts of climate change along the Massachusetts coast. Under the leadership of a new Chief Coastal Resilience Officer at the Office of Coastal Zone Management, the aim is to identify regulatory, policy, and funding mechanisms to develop long-term solutions addressing coastal impacts of climate change.

Increased Tax Incentive for Septic System Upgrades

The tax relief law signed by Governor Healey on October 4 included a tripling of the tax credit for replacing failed septic systems or cesspools, to a new maximum of \$18,000. The increased credit reduces the burden on homeowners looking to replace failed systems, and thus protect local water and wildlife.

Energy Infrastructure Siting Commission

This fall, Governor Healey [signed an Executive Order creating the Commission on Clean Energy Infrastructure Siting and Permitting](#) (CEISP) and swore in Commission members, including representatives from TNC, Mass Audubon, and MACC. To meet the emissions limits and Net Zero goals outlined in the Clean Energy and Climate Plans, Massachusetts will need to site a significant amount of new energy infrastructure, including new solar and wind generation, storage, transmission and distribution infrastructure. The CEISP is charged with providing recommendations on legislation, regulations and policies to reform siting and permitting to rapidly deploy ‘clean’ energy generation, storage, and infrastructure to meet energy and climate goals, enhance stakeholder engagement, and avoid impacts on nature and people. The Commission is expected to have recommendations completed by March 31, 2024.

Solar Siting

On October 2, [Mass Audubon released a report](#) on solar siting, with findings that it is possible to meet Massachusetts’ clean energy goals while avoiding and minimizing impacts to important and sensitive natural and working lands. The report includes important policy recommendations necessary to meet these objectives. In July, The Department of Energy Resources released its own [Technical Potential of Solar Study](#), which used different methods for spatial analysis of lands reportedly suitable for solar facilities.

At the national level, on October 12, the Land Trust Alliance joined major solar developers, conservation and agricultural groups, environmental justice groups, and tribal entities in announcing an agreement to advance large-scale U.S. solar development while supporting land conservation and local community interests. The [Solar Uncommon Dialogue agreement](#) commits to implementing large-scale solar development in ways that recognize the role that natural and working lands play in combating climate change and protect lands already in conservation. It expresses an ambition to secure increased funding for federal and state programs that support private land conservation. Contact Zachary Sheldon (zsheldon@lta.org) for more information.

Executive Orders on Biodiversity, Plastics

On September 21, Governor Healey signed an Executive Order directing the state to create new [biodiversity conservation goals](#) for 2030, 2040 and 2050, and strategies to meet them. She also signed an Executive Order to immediately ban purchase of single-use plastic water bottles by state agencies. Read more [here](#).

2023-2024 State Legislative Priorities (updates since September 22 are in bold)

MLTC supports a limited number of legislative priorities that advance our primary strategic objectives of increasing state investment in land conservation, advancing the work of land trusts, and maximizing the integrity of conservation land and unprotected lands of significant conservation value. **In the current two-year legislative session, Joint Committees are due to report on bills under their review by February 7, 2024, so MLTC and partners will be working between now and then to encourage favorable reports on our priority bills.**

Top MLTC Priorities

An Act relative to the conservation land tax credit ([H.2839/S.1940](#), Rep. Jones and Sen. Tarr) **MLTC's top legislative priority this session.** A hearing on the bill was held June 6th before the Joint Committee on Revenue. Linda Orel (The Trustees) coordinated submission of [joint testimony on behalf of 21 organizations](#) and a panel including Robb Johnson, Tara Christian (TNC), Alain Peteroy (Franklin Land Trust) and Jessica Whritenour (The 300 Committee Land Trust) delivered live testimony. This bill would raise the annual cap under the Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC), the state income tax credit for donations of conservation land, from \$2 million to \$5 million - phased over three years. The program cap would revert to \$2 million after 10 years. The bill also amends the definition of an eligible "public or private conservation agency" to include all land conservation trusts regardless of their corporate structure. (The current statute inadvertently excludes land trusts that are chartered as charitable trusts rather than non-profit corporations.) Passage is a recommendation of the Resilient Lands Initiative and Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative. MLTC will continue to work closely with coalition partners including The Trustees and TNC on strategies to move this forward. Thanks to all who contacted their legislators to request co-sponsorship. Stay tuned for our next ask!

State Operating Budget

Under ELM's leadership, a [broad coalition of our partners advocates for "Green Budget Priorities"](#) in the state's operating budget. Governor Healey signed the FY24 budget on August 9th. The approved budget includes significant increases to several lines of importance to the land conservation community, including DCR State Parks and Recreation, funded at \$105.6 million (\$20.6 million more than last year); Department of Environmental Protection, funded at \$52 million (\$6.6 million more than last year); EEA Climate Adaptation and Preparedness, funded at \$10 million (\$4.6 million more than last year); EEA Office of Environmental Justice, funded at \$8.8 million (\$7.4 million more than last year); Division of Ecological Restoration, funded at \$5.4 million (\$1.1 million more than last year); and the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, funded at \$1.5 million (\$500,000 more than last year). The Healthy Soils Program was funded for the first time with \$1,020,000, following release of the Healthy Soils Action Plan earlier this year. **ELM will soon begin coordinating advocacy for the FY25 Green Budget.**

Environmental Bond

The Commonwealth issues bonds to fund capital spending on the land acquisition and restoration programs that are critical to our work. According to latest information from the Administration, spending authority from the 2018 Environment and Climate Bond is not yet depleted, so action on the next Bond bill is unlikely before 2024. As action on that becomes timely, MLTC will be working closely with our conservation partners to advocate for the bill to authorize investments that expand and create new programs in alignment with our priorities.

Other Bills MLTC Supports

An Act relative to uniform partition of heirs property ([H.1744](#), Rep. Roy., SD 2816, Sen. Payano)
In October, Sen. Pavel Payano submitted a late-file Senate version of this bill, mirroring the House version. The bill was heard before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary on October 31, with multiple speakers in favor. Click [here to see testimony](#) submitted by American Farmland Trust. Heirs property is real estate owned by the legal heirs of a previous owner when there is no will. Under state law, multiple heirs take ownership as tenants-in-common, an unstable form of ownership that too often results in the heirs losing the land through a forced partition sale. The bill would institute new process protections for heirs in such situations by requiring that co-tenants receive fair market value in any partition sale, and generally providing that co-tenants have an option to buy. With endorsement by the Uniform Law Commission, provisions of this bill have already been adopted in 22 states and districts. Millions of dollars of inherited wealth have been lost nationally by families who were vulnerable to real-estate speculators, disproportionately impacting low-income property owners without resources for estate planning. Nationally, forced partition sales have been cited as a significant factor in conversion of agricultural property. MLTC joins a coalition including American Farmland Trust, The Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, Mount Grace Conservation Land Trust, The New England Land Title Association and the Greater Boston Real Estate Board in favor of this legislation.

An Act investing in natural and working lands ([S.448](#), Sen. Comerford)

A hearing on this bill was held October 11 before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. Meeting the natural and working lands goals in the Clean Energy Climate Plan (CECP) will require new tools. This bill would create a local opt-in program under EEA called **"Farm and Forest Friendly Communities,"** to incentivize municipalities to make land use and planning decisions that reduce loss of farmland and forests. Communities would receive technical and financial assistance and increased payments in lieu of taxes on state-owned land. Consistent with CECP recommendations, this bill would also direct DEP to set a MEPA review threshold for projects that involve certain levels of forest clearing or farmland conversion, and recommend a successor to the SMART solar siting incentive program that would minimize impacts to priority forest and farmland. Read a [summary and bill text here](#).

An Act to encourage solar development on buildings and disturbed land ([H.3225](#), [S.2150](#), Reps. Lindsay Sabadosa & Sean Garballey/Sen. Mark)

A hearing on this bill was held June 20 before the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy. Massachusetts has committed to deploying solar energy that maximizes clean energy generation, avoids impacts on humans and natural communities, and connects efficiently to the grid. This bill would help achieve these goals by encouraging installation of solar panels on buildings and disturbed sites, such as parking lot canopies, brownfields, and roadway cuts. It would require the Department of Energy Resources to make change to existing policies and programs, such as net-metering and SMART, to increase incentives for generation and siting of solar projects in the built environment. Sierra Club is leading the effort on this bill. MLTC signed on to [joint testimony](#) submitted June 23, 2023.

An Act to create a commission to determine the feasibility of voluntary acquisition of flood risk properties ([H.876](#), [S.557](#), Rep. Sarah Peake, Sen. Marc Pacheco)

A hearing on this bill was held May 17th before the Joint Committee on Natural Resources. The Trustees is leading the effort on this bill, and [submitted testimony on behalf of a coalition of 12 organizations](#), including MLTC. This bill would create a new commission to bring together agency officials, legislative leaders, and expert stakeholders to study the feasibility of a voluntary acquisition program for properties that are subject to risk of catastrophic flood damage — helping **owners and renters move out of harm's**

way while conserving land and restoring wetlands to increase climate resiliency. The commission would be tasked with making concrete recommendations to lawmakers for how to address this difficult and pressing **issue, especially for Massachusetts' most vulnerable residents.** Learn more about the bill [here](#). As noted at the top of page 2 above, the Healey-Driscoll Administration launched a ResilientCoasts Initiative on November 28. As part of that initiative, MEMA will hire a consultant to conduct a statewide study (including coastal and inland lands at risk of flooding) that will hopefully meet many of the objectives of this bill. Lead advocates for this bill intend to meet with the administrative officials to emphasize the importance of recommending a pre-disaster statewide property buyout program in their report, and to ensure the study process includes the following: Meeting with stakeholders and experts; prioritizing the needs of EJ communities, low income homeowners, and tenants; ensuring recommendations encourage wetland and flood plain restoration to provide climate resilience benefits and ecosystem services, and providing a deadline for the report to be issued.

Outdoor Recreation Act ([H.757](#), [S.488](#) Rep. Natalie Blais & Sen. Paul Feeney)

A hearing on this bill was held October 11th before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. This bill would create a statewide dedicated fund to ensure the success of the newly created Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation and provide grants for outdoor recreational purposes, with priority given to projects that benefit underserved and Environmental Justice populations. There would be no increase in sales tax, but existing sales tax revenues received by the Commonwealth from the sale of sporting goods would be placed in the Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund for the purposes of conservation, creation, preservation, and restoration of natural resources for recreational use. The Trustees and Charles River Watershed Association are leading the effort on this bill. MLTC signed onto [joint testimony submitted](#) on October 6, 2023. A fact sheet on the bill can be found [here](#).

An Act to reimburse the George L. Darey Inland Fisheries and Game Fund (S. 499, Sen. Gobi)

A hearing on this bill was held on November 29 before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. The effort is coordinated by The Nature Conservancy and The Trustees, and MLTC signed on to joint testimony from 12 organizations in support. The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife), which works to conserve and restore critical fish and wildlife habitat and plant species and to deliver education programs, is primarily funded through hunting and fishing license fees deposited in the Inland Fisheries and Game Fund. This legislation would create consistency and reimburse MassWildlife for the loss of revenue associated with providing both discounted (currently reimbursed) and free hunting and fishing licenses.

Land Trust Alliance Federal Policy Updates

Congress

On Nov. 15, Congress passed a continuing resolution to fund the government through mid-January. Unlike previous continuing resolutions, the current measure follows a two-tiered "laddered" approach that funds four agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through Jan. 19 while all other federal operations will expire on Feb. 2.

The two-tiered approach was designed by Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) who said it would give lawmakers more time to pass and negotiate full-year appropriations bills. However, it remains to be

seen if Democrats and Republicans can put aside their differences to get this done ahead of the next deadlines.

2023 Farm Bill

The continuing resolution that was signed into law on Nov. 16 included a one-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill that expired on Sept. 30. In announcing the extension, the leaders of the House and Senate agriculture committees noted that **“this extension is in no way a substitute for passing a 5-year Farm Bill and we remain committed to working together to get it done next year.”**

Committee staff continue to draft and refine Farm Bill language, which we do not expect to be released until Congress passes funding bills to fund the federal government through the end of the fiscal year.

While the delay is unfortunate it does provide Massachusetts’ land trusts with ample opportunities to connect with their legislators to ensure our [2023 Farm Bill recommendations are incorporated into the Farm Bill](#). We urge all land trusts to keep us updated on what you all are hearing back from your [legislators](#).

Forest Conservation Easement Program Act

A top Farm Bill priority remains establishing a Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) that would ensure that private forestland remains intact and in production.

As of today, there are still no co-sponsors from Massachusetts, so we urge all Massachusetts land trusts to reach out to their elected official and urge them to co-sponsor H.R. 3424 in the House and S. 2631 in the Senate. Additional information can be found by visiting www.foresteasement.org.

Current Federal Funding Opportunities

As a reminder the Alliance has launched a site dedicated to providing a listing of all current federal funding opportunities. To access the website, [click here](#).

Comment Letters

On Sept. 29, the Alliance [submitted comments](#) to the U.S. Department of Energy in response to its Noticed of Proposed Rulemaking to revise regulations for the coordination of federal authorization for proposed interstate electric transmission facilities. The Alliance urged the Department to explicitly add **conservation easement holders to its definition of “affected landowners” when reviewing proposals, as well as explicitly include land trusts in its definition of “communities of interest” when requiring project proponents to create engagement plans with the public around proposed transmission project siting.**

Expanded Partnership with Natural Resources Conservation Service

As previously noted, the Alliance has built a long-standing partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. During the next several months, we will be hiring five new staff – one focused on the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and four focused on helping land trusts with Agricultural Land Easement Program and RCPP applications. We will continue to keep you updated as our partnership expands.