



Conservation Partners Meeting Notes

Friday, June 12, 2026

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Hybrid Meeting

In-person: Sudbury Valley Trustees Barn, 18 Wolbach Rd., Sudbury MA; and via Zoom.

Attendees: Virtual attendees on record. (77 registered; at least 48 attended); In-person registration sheet at MLTC's office.

Staff Attendees:

- Robb Johnson, outgoing ED
- Katy Coburn, incoming ED
- Barbara Chrenko, Programs Manager
- Lauren Berk, Development & Operations Coordinator
- Ashley Hoffman, Conservation Programs Intern

Handouts: (Virtual: on website: <https://massland.org/events/june-2026-conservation-partners-meeting>)

- Agenda for today's meeting on June 12, 2026
- Minutes of meeting held on February 27, 2026
- [State Public Policy Update](#) June 2026
- [LTA Federal Policy Update](#) June 2026
- [LTA Updates](#) June 2026
- [Recent Pertinent Legal Cases](#)

1) **Kathy Orlando**, Partner Engagement Chair, convened the CP meeting.

- a) *Meeting Introductions and logistics.* Kathy welcomed everyone and asked everyone to introduce themselves. Participants present in person introduced themselves first followed by the ones present over zoom, as Kathy called their names. **Katy Coburn**, the new Executive Director of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC) (katy@massland.org), kicked off the process by introducing herself.
- b) *Review of February 27 meeting minutes:* Moved by Buzz Constable, seconded by Vidya Tikku. Approved by all, unanimously.
- c) *Next meeting:* Friday, September 25, 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid: location: Blackstone Heritage Corridor Visitor Center, Worcester MA and via Zoom)

2) MLTC Annual Meeting (Election of Trustees) – Kathy Orlando

Robb welcomed Katy Coburn who introduced herself to everyone present.

Elections for the Board of Trustees were conducted in accordance with the MLTC bylaws.

Voting Procedures

- Only current land trust members were eligible to vote.
- Organizations with multiple representatives present were instructed to designate a single voting member.
- Remote participants voted via a Zoom Poll featuring options for "In favor", "Opposed", or "Abstain". Non-voting attendees were asked to ignore the poll.
- In-person participants voted via a show of hands.

Recognition of Service

A special thank you was extended to **Buzz Constable**, who is stepping down after serving as an MLTC Trustee from 2017 to 2026, which included a term as Board President from 2018 to 2022.

Election Slates

- **Candidates for Re-Election (One-year term beginning July 1, 2026):**
 - Janet Milkman – Barnstable Land Trust
- **Candidates for Re-Election (Three-year terms beginning July 1, 2026):**
 - Mary Griffin – Orleans Conservation Trust
 - Jenny Hansell – Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC)
 - Diana Ruiz – Native Land Conservancy
- **Candidate for a New Three-Year Term:**
 - **Max Feldman** – Deputy Director of Mount Grace Land Trust. Max brings an extensive background in operations, finance, strategic planning, and organizational effectiveness, having previously served on the Mount Grace Board of Directors for nine years (including three as president).

Members present in person voted with a show of raised hands and those attending virtually voted with an online poll.

Buzz Constable moved and Amy Henderson seconded. The motion to accept the proposed slate was accepted by all present, with four members abstaining. No opposition was noted.

Conservation Advisory Council Updates

The Coalition expressed immense gratitude to outgoing council members and extended a warm welcome to incoming representatives:

- **Outgoing Members:** Ed Becker, Julie Brandlen, Jack Clarke, Bernie McHugh, and Wes Ward.
- **Incoming Members:** Laura Johnson (Co-chair), Julia Blatt, Robb Johnson, and Jim Levitt.

- 3) **MLTC Staff Report -- Robb Johnson, MLTC Executive Director** gave the following update
All slides will be posted on the website, including links.

a. Upcoming Events & Announcements

- **Massachusetts State Dinner at Rally**
Date/Time: Friday, September 18, 2026 | 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Location: Denver (Location TBA). Generously underwritten by the Land Trust Alliance.
- **Land Trust / State Agency Retreat**
Date: Wednesday, October 7, 2026 (Full Day)
Location: Petersham, MA (Details forthcoming). Special thanks to the planning committee.
- **2027 Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference**
Date: Friday, March 19, 2027
Location: UMass Amherst
Notice: The Call for Proposals opens this August. Heartfelt thanks to the planning committee, including Rachel Bruce, Tessa Dowling, Vanessa Farny, Abby Hardy-Moss, Amy Henderson, Cynthia Henshaw, Vanessa Johnson-Hall, Nick Rossi, David Santomenna, Vidya Tikku, Barbara Chrenko, Katy Coburn, and Lauren Berk.

b. Updates & Tools: Filling Gaps in State's Open Space Datalayer

An overview of the **MLTC Parcel Reviewer** tool was presented by Robb. The tool is designed to identify and survey spatial data gaps within the EEA Protected and Recreational Open Space data layers. EEA has funded this effort and hired MLTC to do the work. MLTC will send land trusts individualized emails in July with their access code to complete the survey, as well as instructions, and will offer office hours.

- **High-Priority Reviews:** Specific focus areas were highlighted, including 13 remaining parcels for the *Berkshire Natural Resources Council Inc.* (e.g., Fletcher Farm Conservation Area in Lanesborough) and 90 remaining parcels for the *Nantucket Conservation Foundation Inc.* (e.g., Pocomo Rd parcels).
- **Instructions:** Users must enter an MLTC-provided access code to verify eligibility before completing the survey. Surveys must be completed and submitted within a single session at admin@massland.org to successfully save and amend data.

Nick Pitel from BNRC asked if organizations need to update parcel info with EEA or also on the MLTC tool? Robb suggested doing both. When asked if we will try to do this for municipalities, Robb said we may do so in year 2, but it's a much more complicated data set.

4) LTA Report – Mariah Fogg, New England Program Coordinator

All slides are posted on the website, including links.

a. Advancing Conservation Excellence Programs

- **Land Trust Leadership Retreat: Practical Strategies**
 - *Date/Time:* Wednesday, June 24, 2026 | 9:00 am – 3:30 pm
 - *Location:* Wildlands Trust Stewardship Training Center, Plymouth, MA
 - *Audience:* Designed for land trust board members and senior staff.
 - *Guest Presenters:* Hal Minis (Brewster Conservation Trust), Karen Grey (Wildlands Trust), Colin Novick (Greater Worcester Land Trust), Rachel Horgan & Alison Falk (Essex County Greenbelt Association), William Mullin (Provincetown Conservation Trust), Kristin DeBoer (Kestrel Land Trust), and Mark Gerath (Groton Conservation Trust).
- **Strategic Planning for Small Organizations Short Course**
 - *Dates:* Three consecutive Tuesdays: October 15, 22, & 29, 2026 | 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm via Zoom.
 - *Focus:* Interactive sessions with practical tools for small land trust boards and staff.
 - *Cost:* \$50 for members | \$75 for non-members (Covers the entire organization). Registration is opening soon.

b. Grants and Federal Updates

- **Grants Recap:** Over 200k targeted Micro Grants and Organizational Development Package Implementation Grants have been awarded. These include targeted micro grants, organizational development packages and implementation grants up to \$10,000. Award notifications for the *Pathways to Conservation Excellence Grants* (\$10,000-\$15,000) are scheduled to go out in June.
- **Federal Updates:** National policy updates are ongoing; resources are kept current on the Land Trust Alliance website.

c. Rally 2026 & National Events

- **LTA Rally 2026:** Scheduled for September 16–19 in Denver, CO. Scholarship applications are due by June 17. Early-bird registration is open through July 31, and general registration runs through August 24. A "How to Rally" webinar will air on September 3.
- **Massachusetts State Dinner at Rally:** Hosted Friday, September 18 from 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm in Denver (Location TBA). The dinner is largely underwritten this year thanks to the Land Trust Alliance.
- **Upcoming events in July** include webinars on remote monitoring, development programs, private benefit, and financial risk.

d. Personnel and Regional Opportunities

- **LTA Job Board:** Current open positions include Executive Director roles at Concord Land Trust, Barnstable Land Trust, and Sheffield Land Trust (Operations), as well as regional management roles at Northeast Wilderness Trust (VT) and Blue Hill Heritage Trust (ME).

- **Staffing Notice:** A new New England Program Manager will be announced soon. In the interim, members should contact Mariah Fogg (mfogg@lta.org) or Rex Linville (rlinville@lta.org).

5) State Agency Updates – Lisa Primiano, Director of Conservation Services; Katharine Otto, MDAR Farmland Action Plan Coordinator; and other agency staff

- a. **State Budget Updates-** No major operational impact was anticipated for the relevant conservation programs. Staff are reviewing conservation needs and project funding carefully.
- b. The **Conservation Land Tax Credit** is fully subscribed for calendar year 2026 and 2027 and is already moving into allocation planning for 2028. The cranberry bog tax credit remains undersubscribed, but funds cannot be shifted legislatively from one program to another.
- c. **PILOT Commission** – The first meeting was introductory, focusing on how PILOT currently works and concerns from communities about conservation land coming off tax rolls. Community members were encouraged to participate in listening sessions and provide input.
- d. **Integrated Land Use Strategy-** A statewide integrated land-use strategy is underway, covering housing, energy, economic development, conservation and climate resilience. The process has been extended to the end of the calendar year. A conservation workgroup will be formed with MLTC participation.

e. Conservation Restrictions

Current status:

- **229 CRs** were under DCR review.
- **63 CRs / 28%** were with the state review team.
- **166 CRs / 72%** were with land trusts, municipalities, conservation commissions, attorneys, or landowners.

The backlog has largely been addressed. Current submissions are from recent months. First review is still running approximately **3–4 months**, but subsequent processing may be faster.

A new Conservation Restriction tracking system is close to external rollout. It should improve transparency on how long CRs spend with the state and with applicants.

The Model CR Working Group has met three times and is working on revised language. A draft is expected toward the end of the year. Comments are still being accepted through the survey/process.

Megan Gordon asked if there will there be a way for the conservation community to give feedback on the non-conservation land uses? Lisa said she will double check with Kurt when he returns from vacation, but yes there should be the opportunity.

Meredith Houghton asked what is the timeline for the model CR working group's work? Lisa responded that we should have a first draft in one year.

f. Forest Reserves / Forests as Climate Solutions

Vanessa Farny provided an update on forest reserve planning.

- Forests as Climate Solutions includes a target of designating **10% of Massachusetts forests as Forest Reserves**.
- Agencies are identifying suitable state forest lands for passive management.
- Not all reserve lands will be state-owned; land trusts may have opportunities through grants or other partnerships.
- Public input opportunities are expected in summer/fall, likely mid-to-late fall.

g. Land Conservation Assistance Grant Program- Darya Mattes, Grants Administrator, DCS

Program purpose: funds costs associated with conservation projects, such as surveys, appraisals, open space and recreation plan updates and other pre-conservation costs.

This year, 44 applications were received, of which 32 are expected to be funded – these include 19 land trusts and 13 municipalities. The program’s rolling application format has created contracting delays. EEA is considering having MLTC administer the program in FY27, with EEA contracting once with MLTC and MLTC then contracting with grantees. The goal is faster and more flexible contracting, ideally within about a month. Program scope and grant types would not change.

h. **MassWildlife Updates- Emily Myron, Assistant Director for Land and Habitat Conservation**

Habitat Grant Program

The annual Habitat Grant RFP is open earlier than usual. The new deadline is **July 6 at 11:59 p.m.** Grant range: **\$5,000–\$75,000**, no match requirement noted while focus remains on habitat restoration. Applications are through EEA’s new grant management system. Applicants were encouraged to log in early and report any issues.

Upcoming Walks

- **June 27:** Birds, bees, and wildflowers walk at Crane / Falmouth
- **June 28:** Whip-poor-will walk at Covey / Belchertown
- Muddy Brook walk to be rescheduled

Hunting Law Proposal

MassWildlife summarized the Governor’s proposed legislation to end the Sunday hunting ban and reduce archery setbacks and broaden crossbow authorization. The rationale included public health and safety, tick-borne illnesses, crop damage, wildlife management, forest regeneration, and accessibility. Support was noted from organizations including Mass Audubon, SVT, Farm Bureau, Nursery Growers Association, and Tick Free Martha’s Vineyard.

Questions about modeling and technical details were directed to MassWildlife’s website and staff.

Rita Grossman noted concerns regarding the potential expansion of Sunday hunting on conservation lands, particularly where those lands abut Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and private properties where hunting is already permitted. She emphasized that Sundays are currently highly valued by hikers, birders, and other recreational users during hunting season, as they provide a hunting-free day for outdoor activities. The greatest concern relates to conservation parcels that are adjacent to or in close proximity to lands where hunting occurs. She stressed that, if Sunday hunting moves forward, significant safety measures and clear communication protocols will be necessary to protect non-hunting visitors and minimize conflicts among different user groups.

i) **Farmland Action Plan & Partnership Program -- Katherine Otto**

The group celebrated the **1,000th APR** in Massachusetts, representing approximately **75,000 acres** of protected farmland. The next ALPC meeting is scheduled for **July 22 at 10:00 a.m.** A question was raised about the status of Open Space Act regulations; an update was provided that regulations have moved through the agency office and that the Secretary has approved the version. No firm timeline is available however. There was discussion about whether MLTC and others should contact the Secretary or Governor’s Office to encourage action, given the long wait.

5) Featured Topic: Legal & Regulatory Updates

Buzz Constable, MLTC Legal Advisory Committee

An update on recent and ongoing legal cases impacting municipal acquisitions, conservation restrictions (CRs), and Article 97 protections was provided:

- Town of Nahant v. Northeastern University (SJC 13844): Argued Feb 2, 2026; decision pending. Focuses on whether an eminent domain taking of 12 acres of parkland was a pretext to block development. MLTC joined the Amicus Brief.

- Sunpin Energy Services, LLC v. Zoning Board of Appeals of Petersham (SJC 13860): Argued Apr 8, 2026; decision pending. Addresses whether local ZBAs can deny solar farm permits based on local tree-clearing and statewide climate impacts.
- Emerald Necklace Conservancy v. City of Boston (SJC 13865): Argued Apr 8, 2026; decision pending. Examines whether long-term stadium leasing and new rights-of-way in Franklin Park require Article 97 approval. MLTC, Kestrel, and Greater Worcester Land Trust joined the Amicus Brief.
- Banevicius v. Town of Barnstable (SJC 13845): Decided May 20, 2026. The court ruled that abutters/interested parties lack standing to object to right-of-first-refusal process failures under Ch. 61A. MLTC, Kestrel, and Greater Worcester Land Trust joined the Amicus Brief.
- Town of Westwood v. Westwood Land Trust (Norfolk County Superior Court): Ruling issued May 7, 2026. Upheld the CR holder's right to deny a lease to a local farmer. The Town has stated it will not appeal.
- Town of Wellesley v. DECAMM, EOEH & LC and Mass Bay Community College: Filed June 9, 2026. Explores whether land acquired for education but consistently used as open space/trails receives Article 97 protection, amidst competing demands for state housing development.

Kathy asked if anyone has questions, to follow up with Buzz after the meeting.

6) **MLTC Policy Priorities Update- Robb Johnson, MLTC**

Nature for Mass was described as a major current priority and an important opportunity for conservation funding. The campaign phase will run through **November 4**. If passed, implementation will still require legislative and administrative follow-through. The signature gathering is nearly complete. Members were encouraged to stay involved.

The Environmental Bond Bill was also discussed. The House debate was expected the following week. Concerns focused less on total funding and more on outside policy sections, especially provisions that could penalize communities for having local regulations stronger than statewide standards. Federal grant language was also flagged. Members with federal funding should watch for new award or SAM-registration language related to race, gender, or diversity certifications and review carefully before signing.

7) **Committee and Working Group Updates**

a. **Early Career Conservation Network (ECCN) – Julia Fitzpartick, Greenbelt**

The ECCN supports professionals within their first ten years in the conservation field. The network is led by a volunteer organizing committee and supported by MLTC. <https://massland.org/resources/early-conservation-career-network>

Recent activities:

- March pre-conference gathering at Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary
- Largest event to date, with 44 attendees
- April virtual lunch-and-learn on reducing overwhelm and preventing burnout
- Early summer foraging event at Greater Worcester Land Trust's Sibley Farm, led by Russ Cohen

Upcoming Programs:

- Native bugs event later in summer
- Mindfulness birding in the Berkshires in fall
- Virtual peer-to-peer connection opportunities
- 2026–2027 mentorship applications opening soon

New organizing committee members welcomed:

- Amy Burt, Wildlands Trust
- John Turvey, Essex County Greenbelt Association

b. Agriculture- Kathy Orlando (Sheffield Land Trust)

The Agriculture Committee is selecting a new regular meeting date and confirming timing for the next network call. Members with comments on agricultural language in the model conservation restriction should send feedback to MLTC or the committee contact. Recommended language is being developed.

Kathy moved to close the meeting, Vidya seconded.

Kathy thanked all for their participation and closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Vidya Tikku, MLTC clerk