



**MASSACHUSETTS
LAND TRUST
COALITION**

Conservation Partners (CP) Meeting Minutes
Friday, March 8, 2024 10:00 AM – 12:15 PM via Zoom

Attendance: On record at MLTC (93 as of 10:16AM)

Hand-outs: (Emailed/or links in Agenda)

- March 8th Meeting Agenda: <https://massland.org/programs/meetings-retreats>
- March 8th Policy Update: <https://massland.org/programs/meetings-retreats>
- December 8th Meeting minutes

Kathy Orlando, Partner Engagement Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:01

1. Kathy reviewed the Zoom meeting logistics and noted the record number of attendees.
2. Participant introductions were conducted and concluded at 10:16AM.
3. December 8th Meeting Minutes. William “Buzz” Constable moved and Pat Loring seconded the motion to accept the minutes. Hearing no further discussion, Kathy called the vote to accept. **VOTE:** Unanimous
4. The next CP Meeting: Friday, June 14th (hybrid, in-person location, pending confirmation, will be at the Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, MA)

LTA Report, Jen Plowden, New England Program Manager, gave the following report and a PDF of her presentation was sent to all. **(See Attachment A)** Jen discussed as follows:

1. LTA’s upcoming programs:
 - a. Advancing Conservation Excellence Program
 - b. Strategic Fundraising Program: <https://landtrustalliance.org/resources/learn/explore/building-a-strategic-fundraising-program-massachusetts>
2. LTA Advocacy Days will be on April 15-18th and stipends to help with travel expenses are still available
3. Jen provided an update on Government relations; a remote monitoring toolkit; a stewardship tea and talk (will not be recorded) and reviewed the Learning Paths on the Resource Center. Links for additional resources were shared in the presentation.
4. Ray Lyons noted he had heard issues with accreditation however said that NEFF has just become accredited and he thanked all at LTA for the smooth and streamlined process.

MLTC Staff Report, Robb Johnson, MLTC Executive Director provided this update. **(See Attachment B)**

1. Mass Land Conservation Conference (MLCC) update: On Saturday, March 23rd at UMass Amherst and registration is going very well. Registration link was posted in the chat. He reviewed each aspect of the MLCC and thanked all the sponsors noting the key role they played with their financial support.
2. Program updates were given and Robb noted improvements to website coming soon, including a one-step calendar of MLTC’s programs. He noted registration options for upcoming programs will be posted soon.
3. MLTC Board of Trustees has three openings. Contact Kathy Orlando, Robb or any board member with suggestions. Board elections will be at the MLTC Annual Meeting on June 14th.

Policy Update, Robb Johnson & Jack Clarke (MLTC Policy Chair) Robb provided the following updates. **(See Attachment C)**

1. Updates given on priority legislation concerning funding and legislative priorities.
2. Environmental Bond bill will be up for reauthorization and anticipate a 2025 vote. Advocacy work will begin shortly and Robb welcomed input in on land trust priorities that MLTC should advocate for.
3. Working diligently, using multiple strategies to get funding increased on the Cons Land Tax Credit. CLTC funding is grossly below capacity to meet demand and one out of seven CLTC applicants are dropping off the wait list.

4. The CR backlog has been an ongoing issue and this will be addressed later in this meeting. Still waiting for supplemental legal support to be brought on board for CR review, as funding for it has already been approved.
5. Public Lands Protection Act (PLPA) intended to codify key aspects of EEA's No Net Loss Policy pertaining to proposed changes in use of lands subject to Article 97 protection. Aspects of EEA's administration of the new law are still pending implementation. Robb described a new PLPA Portal that EEA recently launched, and a PLPA Tracker that is due soon, which will allow the public to monitor the status of proposals to change use of Article 97 lands. Robb noted that PLPA improvements include replacing the previously discretionary policy with binding law, and a transparent and clearly articulated process needs to be used, especially on the aspect of "replacement" land for Article 97 lands being transitioned. There is still additional education to help people understand what the law doesn't and doesn't do. It doesn't prevent the conversion of Article 97 land, but imposes clearer "guardrails" and processes that must be followed before the legislature can approve such conversion. Buzz emphasized the transparency of the process with the new law, and noted we can expect increasing pressures to repurpose Article 97 land for sustainable energy infrastructure, such as transmission lines. Buzz also thanked Robb for his "above and beyond the call of duty" work on PLPA and Doug Pizzi noted that PLPA would not have passed the Senate without the "cash in lieu of" option included. Robb also noted that PLPA gives EEA the power to review whether proposed replacement lands meet standards of the law, but does not give them the power to rule on whether proposed conversions are justified in the first place, or whether sufficient alternatives analyses have been conducted. For that, advocates will need to remain vigilant and involved at the local level.
6. LTA Advocacy Days re-mentioned. (See LTA Attachment A) Both Ray Lyons and Collin Novik are attending and have attended in the past and would be able to answer questions.
7. Farm Bill and Forest Conservation Easement Program Act need MA congressional support:
<https://www.conservationfund.org/fcep>
8. Jack Clarke thanked Robb for the comprehensive update and noted that the Policy Committee is meeting regularly to advance these issues.

State Agency Updates – Bob Wilber, Director of Conservation Services provided this update.

1. Bob thanked Robb for his policy update presentation and noted EEA's efforts to assure a transparent process for PLPA.
2. CR Review: Bob noted that 253 CR applications are in process and:
 - a. Gave a status report by the numbers and status for each part of the CR review process. 43 are nearly done – back to applicants for signature; 122 are in various stages of review; 64 are "packaged for review" by the outside law firm that is authorized but has still not been brought onboard; 24 have yet to have review started. EEA is tracking CR applications with related time deadlines, e.g., June 30th grants, to assure timely completion and said the review process has improved. Of those under review now, 53 have grant-related deadlines. Unfortunately this means that CRs without time-sensitive deadlines are getting delayed review, as long as the backlog persists.
 - b. Noted staffing changes, including a maternity LOA return and a new staff member both due on March 11, which should improve and accelerate the CR review process.
 - c. Summarized new staff for specific programs, including three more auxiliary CR reviewers.
 - d. Noted the formalized process improvements for the CR review process. Bob agreed with the need for improved timeline to avoid long delays. Going forward, when an auxiliary reviewer is assigned a CR, that reviewer will reach out to the applicant to facilitate direct communication.
 - e. Clarified that "straightforward" CRs are being directed to auxiliary legal review who will serve as the CR reviewer, but the specific law firm has not been selected as of today. These will be managed using the standard CR submission portal.
 - f. Explained the root cause of delay due to out-of-state move of the skilled CR reviewer in late 2021, when it was determined that someone who was not within an easy commute to the office was not eligible; his position was then vacant for over a year which created the overwhelming backlog of CRs. Lindsey Ketchel noted the tremendous urgency driving LT work with landowners, especially with climate change, and would be happy to do whatever to assist with improvements. Bob responded that they are looking for more auxiliary reviewers. Please contact him with recommendations.

- g. Bob noted based on chat comments that multiple internal issues arose and EEA working every day to resolve these and believes additional staff will improve the situation.
 - h. Bob asked everyone to adhere to the current template and submit as *complete* of an application as possible. Further discussion ensued.
 - i. Daniel Leahy emphasized the power of contacting elected legislators to advocate for CR review improvements. Discussion ensued about this option and which organizations have employed this action vs. not and whether it would be effective. Rob Warren emphasized the logistical issues and need to support EEA and questioned if perhaps the state review process has become more intensive and cumbersome than it used to be. Bob noted that he appreciated everyone's comments and he's convinced with the new additional capacity, improvements will accelerate.
3. Tree planting is expanding beyond Gateway cities with focus on health. Also launching "Cool Corridors" program to remove impervious cover and create micro forests.
 4. Melissa Cryan announced that the FY25 grant application process is now open, posted for:
 - a. Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC)
 - b. Conservation Partnership Grant, with a new maximum award of \$300,000.
 - c. Landscape Partnership Grant DUE THURSDAY April 18th
 - d. Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) Grant
 - e. Public meetings are posted (insert here).
 - f. The Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2023 (SCORP) was approved and posted: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-statewide-comprehensive-outdoor-recreation-plan-2023-scorp-2023/download>
 - g. Vanessa Farny noted that the Landscape Partnership Grant deadline is Thursday, April 18th.
 5. *Canopy 2024: Forests, Climate, and Innovations Forum* is on March 21, 2024 at UMass Amherst from 9-3P. The link was posted in the chat: <https://www.mass.gov/canopy-2024-forests-climate-and-innovations-forum>
 6. APR and Farmland Action Plan updates. David Viale had technical difficulties and presented at 11:35A
 - a. Noted that new staff hired to implement the Farmland Action Plan: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-farmland-action-plan>
 - b. Reminded that APR applications are rolling to allow for an efficient process and noted that MDAR's limit on value per acre has been increased and should not prohibit qualification.
 - c. David noted that state's program does not have soil requirements and a viable farm could meet criteria even if below viable soil limits for some agricultural uses.
 - d. Locally important soils may not qualify for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) funding but could qualify for state funding.
 - e. Kathy noted that there is a straightforward State process if project does not qualify for the Federal program (ACEP or Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)).
 - f. David noted there are three upcoming events about the APR program specifically for landowners. One on March 12th in Hadley and two more in April. Contact David if you have a landowner(s) interested in upcoming sessions: David.Viale@mass.gov

Committee and Working Group Updates

1. **Early Career Conservation Network (ECCN) –**
 - a. **Mariah Fogg** (Berkshire Natural Resources Council) summarized the goal of ECCN and described the pre-Conference networking event which will be at Smith College's Field Station and then to a brewery for socialization and networking. Link was shared in Chat for more information.
 - b. **Robin Austin** (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy) shared results of the ECCN 2023 Members Survey (**See Attachment D**). Of note that there were no students and very few AmeriCorps/TerraCorps respondents.
2. **Agriculture Committee – Kathy Orlando** (Sheffield Land Trust). Kathy noted that MLTC's Ag Committee is continuing to work with the state to assure an efficient process for farmland protection. Link in chat for Farmland Protection program.

Keynote Presentation: Katie Theoharides, President and CEO of The Trustees, was introduced by Buzz Constable who reviewed her credentials and resume and noted her "return" to land trust work (**See Attachment E**).

1. She joined the Trustees in 2023 and noted her past LT experience, Defenders of Wildlife, advocacy work in Washington, DC; Hilltown Land trust and former Massachusetts Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs from 2016-2022.
2. Her focus at the Trustees is moving forward and how to have impact. She noted how Trustees is unique in the country and is the largest owner of conservation land in the state including historic structures and two museums.
3. She described challenges and responses including temporary impacts of COVID and budget shortfalls requiring some layoffs to resolve.
4. She reviewed regional leadership and climate change priorities and the urgency therein.
5. Strategic Planning active now for the next five years prioritizing nature-based solutions; cultural inclusiveness; connectivity; climate change adaptation and resilience; access to open space in urban environments and advocacy.
6. Challenges include:
 - a. Land donations have significantly decreased and financial resources are required to conserve land.
 - b. Aged conditions of the Trustees' properties and buildings requiring updates for climate resiliency. Although Trustee's lands sequester more carbon than their structures create, Trustee's will pursue optimum energy efficiency.
 - c. Katie clarified the power of networking and collaboration between conservation and housing. LTs must participate or risk being considered part of the problem. If done right and proactively, can address both goals.
7. Rita Grossman asked if their resiliency work will be done in a way that can serve as a model for others and it will be.
8. Ongoing questions in chat and everyone thanked Katie for her excellent, articulate presentation.

Announcements

1. Michele Grzenda, Lincoln Conservation Commission, asks the LT community to provide comments during the current comment round re: DEP regulations on how LTs need streamlined permitting efficiency for trail maintenance, invasives control and other work that is important to land trusts. Permitting challenges can plague organizations that are trying to maintain and increase access to conservation lands. Though not the subject of currently proposed regulatory revisions, this comment window may be a good opportunity to be heard. She plans to share more information via MLTC's eNews in April. Action items were placed in the Chat.
2. Heidi Ricci emphasized Michele's comments and noted that MSMCP, Mass Rivers, CLF, and MACC have been networking and providing feedback to DEP on how to remove barriers on restoration projects, etc.

Adjournment: Buzz Constable moved and Pat Loring seconded the motion to adjourn. Hearing no further discussion, Kathy called the vote. **VOTE:** Unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 12:17PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Rita Gibes Grossman, clerk

Attachment A / LTA Report



Advancing Excellence Program

An Alliance and MLTC program to increase capacity and impact

- 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
- Program discovery and needs assessment underway
-
- **BUILD A STRATEGIC FUNDRAISING PROGRAM**

A short course for land trusts in Massachusetts

- Learn how to build a strategic fundraising program for your land trust during four 75minute virtual training sessions on May 2, 9, 23 and 29.
- These trainings will be followed by three optional peer sessions on June 26, July 31, and August 28.
- We'll give you the tactics you need to better engage with people and raise more money. [Learn more.](#)
- \$50 per MLTC/Alliance Member organization; \$75 for nonmember orgs. *If you're not a member of the Alliance but are a member of MLTC, [email Barbara Chrenko](#) for a discount code.*

Government Relations Update

Federal policy updates included in MLTC update

- Learn more about federal funding opportunities on the Alliance's [new site](#) dedicated to providing a listing of all current federal funding opportunities
- Advocacy Days: April 15-18. Learn more and register [here](#).
- Expanded partnership with Natural Resource Conservation Service
- During the next several months, we will be hiring additional staff to focus on the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and Agricultural Land Easement Program.
- Justin Merrifield was hired as a Senior Project Manager for the NRCS Easement Acquisitions team.

Land Trust Careers

Land Trust Alliance:

[Project Specialist, NRCS Easement Acquisitions Team](#)

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

Submit a job [here](#)

REMOTE MONITORING TOOLKIT

LEARN HOW REMOTE SENSING TECHNOLOGY CAN BENEFIT YOUR LAND TRUST!

- The [Toolkit's](#) case studies and guidance will help you understand:
- What is remote monitoring and what are the best ways to use it for stewardship and beyond? What are the limitations?
- How are organizations using this technology for stewardship and to meet Standards and Practices?
- What types of technologies are available to land trusts? What should you ask if you talk with a vendor?
- The advantages of using this technology to enhance other applications that you use for baselines, violation resolution, climate-change tracking, and carbon sequestration.

STEWARDSHIP TEA AND TALK

- March 21, 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. EDT
- Join us to discuss the most pressing stewardship issues for lasting conservation facing you and your peers.
- The discussion includes preserve management issues, conservation and trail easement stewardship, capacity and funding, technology, managing violations and trespass, timely TerraFirma claim filing, dealing with the impacts of climate change and anything else that you want to bring to the exchange.

- Please note this event will not be recorded.

LEARNING PATHS ON RESOURCE CENTER

- Easement stewardship
- Fee land stewardship
- Acquisitions
- Organizational management for board members
- Financial management
- [HTTPS://LANDTRUSTALLIANCE.ORG/RESOURCES/LEARN/WAYS-TOLEARN/LEARNING-PATHS](https://landtrustalliance.org/resources/learn/ways-to-learn/learning-paths)
-

UPCOMING WEBINARS

- [Easement Violations](#) – March 13
- [Managing Risk Tied to Restoration](#) – March 19
- [Staffing Your Land Trust](#) – March 20
- [Managing Difficult Human Resources Situations](#) – March 26
- [Easement Monitoring Basics](#) – March 28
- [Drafting Conservation Easements](#) – April 2
- [Preparing for Natural Disasters: Wind and Water](#) – April 11
- [GAAP Accounting for Beginners](#) – April 16
- [Starting a Planned Giving Program](#) – April 23
- [Anatomy of a Successful Pass-Through Project](#) – April 24
- [Effective Cross-Cultural Communication](#) – May 7
- [Effective Communication with Landowners and Neighbors](#) – May 14
- [Equitable Youth Programming](#) – May 21
- [Is Your Land Trust Ready to Protect Water](#) – May 23
- [How to Be a Great Board Chair](#) – May 30
- [Commercial Use Provisions in Easement Drafting and Interpretation](#) – June 5

Thank you! Jen Plowden, New England Program Manager Land Trust Alliance / jplowden@lta.org (978) 595 - 3871

Attachment B / MLTC Staff Report



MASSACHUSETTS
LAND TRUST
COALITION

Conservation Partners Meeting
March 8, 2024
via Zoom

Upcoming Meetings

Conservation Partners & MLTC Annual Meeting (hybrid)
• Friday, June 14 tent. @ Fruitlands in Harvard

Watch for September Meeting Date – TBD soon!



2023 Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference

- **Saturday March 23, at UMass Amherst!**
- **Pre-Conference webinars open to all, even if not attending**
- **25 great workshops**
- **Keynote on Centering Indigenous Peoples & Nations in Land Protection and Conservation**
- **Lunchtime networking and end-of-day reception**
- **Field trips around the state on April 26, May 17**
- **Learn more, register: massland.org/conference**



MASSACHUSETTS
LAND TRUST
COALITION

We couldn't do it without our Sponsors!



Supporter

Berkshire Natural Resources Council - BSC Group, Inc - Buzzards Bay Coalition - Essex County Greenbelt Association
Franklin Land Trust -- Kestrel Land Trust - Land Trust Alliance - MA 401(k) CORE Plan for small non-profits
New England Forestry Foundation - Norcross Wildlife Foundation - Sheriff's Meadow Foundation -
Sudbury Valley Trustees - SWCA Environmental Consultants - Tighe & Bond - USDA/NRCS

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

Other Program Updates

New website launching soon!
One-stop list of all upcoming events

Several topical networking calls scheduled, and registration coming soon for Multi-session Workshops

- **Building a Strategic Fundraising Program** with LTA; David Allen leading - 4 weeks, from May 2
- **Landscape-Scale Land Conservation** with Jim Levitt, Lincoln Institute - 5 weeks, from May 7
- **Land Protection Tools & Techniques** with UMass Extension and Mass Audubon 10 weeks, starting September 12

Calendar



TYPE

Any

APPLY

FRI
8

Fri, Mar 8 2024, 10am - 12:50pm

March 2024 Conservation Partner Meeting

Zoom

Land trust staff and board members as well as conservation partners are welcome to this quarterly meeting, featuring relevant news from state agencies, a timely update on state and federal policy matters, announcements, and a featured topic. Formerly known as "Steering Committee Meetings", these meetings are convened by MLTC's Partner...

[Register »](#)

FRI
22

Fri, Mar 22 2024, 4:30 - 6:00pm

Pre-Annual Land Conservation Conference Gathering

Massachusetts State House, MA

Join other Early Conservation Career Network members for an evening of learning and networking before the annual Land Conservation Conference! We will hear from interdisciplinary artist, designer, and woodworker Gina Siegel about their ongoing work 'To Understand a Tree, which they have created while an artist-in-residence at the...

[Register »](#)

SAT
23

Sat, May 25 2024, 8am - 6:30pm

2024 Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference

UMass Amherst Campus Center 1 Campus Center Way, Amherst

The conference keynote address will feature Dr. Carmen Ranco speaking on "Centering Indigenous Peoples and Nations in Land Protection and Conservation: Wabanaki Possibilities". Dr. Ranco is a citizen of the Penobscot Nation, is a Professor of Anthropology, Chair of Native American Programs, and Faculty Fellow at the Mitchell Center for...

[Register »](#)

WED
10

Wed, Apr 10 2024, 12 - 3pm

Topics of Special Interest to Small Staffed Land Trusts

Zoom

The topic of this quarterly networking call is still being determined. Come with your questions, and feel free to share your experiences, so we can learn and support each other. This call will not be recorded...

MLTC Board of Trustees

Nominations open for three Trustees

– Reach out to Kathy Orlando, Robb Johnson or any Board member

Brief MLTC Annual Meeting with Board election will be part of next Conservation Partners Meeting



MASSACHUSETTS
LAND TRUST
COALITION

Policy Update

Green budget coalition

Environmental Bond

Priority Bill – Conservation Land Tax Credit

CR backlog

PLPA Implementation

LTA Advocacy Days

Farm Bill – Forest Conservation Easement Program Act



MASSACHUSETTS
LAND TRUST
COALITION

Attachment C / MLTC Policy Update



MASSACHUSETTS
LAND TRUST
COALITION

Public Policy Update

March 8, 2024

Healey-Driscoll Administration Updates

Conservation Restriction Review Backlog

MLTC continues to field many questions and concerns from member land trusts about delays in review and approval of Conservation Restrictions (CRs) by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA). We have been advocating and strategizing with senior leaders at EEA on this matter for over two years now, most recently in meetings with EEA staff on March 4 and 5th. Given the sheer size of the backlog that accumulated during staff transitions, and the high volume of new CRs that continue to come in for review, the problem has been slow to resolve. EEA continues to employ contract reviewers to help with the backlog, and an additional staff person to assist with review is scheduled to start on March 11. As we learned in December 2023, EEA also approved engaging an external law firm to assist with legal review, but as of March 6 the firm had yet to be brought on board.

PLPA Implementation

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) maintains [a website](#) with a great deal of information of importance to any community facing proposed diversion of public parks and conservation land to another use. It includes guidance for how to comply with *An Act conserving open space in the Commonwealth* (commonly referred to as the Public Lands Preservation Act, or 'PLPA'), which took effect on February 17, 2023. The PLPA Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions sections provide important information on what has changed under the new law. In recent weeks, a new "[PLPA Portal](#)" was launched on this webpage that proponents are instructed to use to submit materials for EEA's review under provisions of the law. We are now anxiously waiting for launch of the "PLPA Tracker", which will provide public access to information on such submissions, and updates on status of any EEA review or legislative action on the proposals. We are also anxious to review and comment on draft regulations, which are due no later than mid-May, per provisions of the law.

Energy Infrastructure Siting Commission

On September 26, 2023, 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. **On February 16, 2024, the Commission on Energy Infrastructure Siting and Permitting [released questions for public input](#). The Commission encouraged comments by Friday, March 1, to provide a summary before the Commission's meeting scheduled for the following week, but will continue to accept comments through March 15. Outcomes of the Commission's deliberations are expected to inform**

pending legislation (such as [H. 3688](#)) that would expand the number and type of projects eligible for expedited permitting through the Energy Facilities Siting Board.

Comment Period extended for Revised Wetland, Stormwater and Water Quality Regs

On December 22, 2023, DEP released a [suite of proposed revisions](#) to existing regulations related to wetlands protection, stormwater management, Chapter 91 public access to waterways, and Section 401 Water Quality Certification. Public comments on the draft regulations **are due at 5 pm on April 30, 2024**. DEP encourages electronic submission by email to dep.wetlands@mass.gov, with "Wetlands-401 Resilience Comments" in the subject line.

Administration releases Environmental Justice Strategy

On February 15, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) unveiled Massachusetts' first Environmental Justice (EJ) Strategy, a roadmap for embedding environmental justice and equity into the programs and policies of EEA and its agencies. It includes universal themes across agencies and offices, such as meaningful community engagement, analysis of project benefits and burdens, language access plans, staff training, and metrics and tracking.

Forests as Climate Solutions Report Released

On January 3, the Healey-Driscoll Administration released its Report of the Climate Forestry Committee: Recommendations for Climate Oriented Forest Management Guidelines. The report aims to inform development of climate-oriented management guidelines for state forest land to help achieve goals of the 2050 Clean Energy and Climate Plan. It includes recommendations to:

- Increase permanent land conservation of unprotected forest lands;
- Enlarge state forest reserves;
- Encourage state agencies to be more specific about the rationale for forest management projects and their carbon and climate implications;
- Reduce MassWildlife's habitat management goals for species dependent on young forests, shrublands, and grasslands to increase carbon storage and sequestration;
- Apply updated Best Management Practices when forests are actively managed; Recognize the importance of natural disturbance (e.g., leaving dead trees on the ground for their biodiversity benefits);
- Launch a publicly available dashboard in 2024 to monitor forest carbon metrics and trends, including where and how wood from Massachusetts forests is being used and the impact on carbon storage of use in long-lived wood products.

In conjunction with release of the report, the Administration [announced allocation of \\$50 million](#) to invest in forest conservation -- including new forest reserves -- and incentives that encourage municipal and private landowners to adopt climate-oriented management approaches.

Executive Order on Biodiversity

On September 21, 2023, 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. **On February 29, the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game convened partners, including many land trust representatives, for a full-day workshop to weigh in on a vision, goals, strategies and metrics to inform this initiative.**

2023-2024 State Legislative Priorities (updates since December 8, 2023 are in bold)

MLTC supports a limited number of legislative priorities that advance our primary strategic objectives: 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 **were due to report on bills under their review by February 7, 2024, though extensions were granted in some cases.**

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 6, 2023, 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. **A favorable report from the Joint Committee on Revenue is currently pending in the House Clerk's Office.** MLTC continues to work closely with coalition partners including The Trustees and TNC on strategies to move this forward. Stay tuned for our next ask!

State Operating Budget

On January 24, Governor Healey released her proposed FY25 operating budget, initiating a multi-step process that will lead to adoption of a final budget in the summer. All environmental agencies fared well in her proposal, which seeks to continue last year's precedent of spending at least one percent of total state revenue on environmental programs. Earlier in January, the Governor announced mid-year cuts to balance the current operating budget in response to an unexpected shortfall in tax collections. The Administration essentially held environmental agencies harmless, though it cut some special project earmarks totaling \$722,500.

The House Ways & Means Committee will unveil its own FY25 budget proposal on April 10, with debate ensuing the following week. Under Environmental League of Massachusetts (ELM) leadership, a broad coalition of partners is advocating for "Green Budget Priorities" in the FY25 budget. This year the coalition has developed priorities that include a mix of targeted increases for some programs and level funding for others to ensure continued progress toward climate and conservation goals in the current challenging budget environment. The coalition is advocating for increases in funding for the Department of Environmental Protection, DCR State Parks and Recreation, the Department of Public Utilities Administration, the Department of Fish and Game, and DCR Watershed Management. Level funding is requested for the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, EEA Climate Adaptation and Preparedness, Office of Environmental Justice, Division of Ecological Restoration, and Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program.

Environmental Bond

The Commonwealth issues bonds to fund capital spending on the land acquisition and restoration programs that are critical to our work as well as other environmental projects. 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 2025**. **In anticipation of the next bill, MLTC has begun 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)

The bill was heard before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary on October 31, 2023, 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. **The Judiciary Committee failed to report the bill favorably, sending it to study. The coalition continues to meet to discuss strategies for moving forward.**

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

A hearing on this bill was held October 11, 2023, 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](#). **The Environment and Natural Resources Committee failed to report the bill favorably, sending it to study.**

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, 2023, 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. **The Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy Committee extended the deadline for reporting on this bill to April 7, 2024.**

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 17, 2023, 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](#). The Healey-Driscoll Administration launched a ResilientCoasts Initiative on November 28, 2023, under which MEMA **has hired** 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. **If done well, this study could meet many or all of the objectives of this bill.** Advocates for this bill will encourage administrative officials to ensure the study emphasizes 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. **The Environment and Natural Resources Committee reported this bill favorably.**

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

A hearing on this bill was held October 11, 2023, 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](#). **The Environment and Natural Resources Committee failed to report the bill favorably, sending it to study.**

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. **The Environment and Natural Resources Committee reported this bill favorably.**

Land Trust Alliance Federal Policy Updates

March 8, 2024

Congress

On Feb. 29, the House and Senate passed another continuing resolution (CR) to extend funding for the federal government. The measure extends funding for four agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through today, March 8, while all other federal operations are set to expire on March 22.

On March 3, Congress released the first six appropriations bills including Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. The Interior bill includes a \$51 million cut to the Fish and Wildlife Service as well as cuts to the National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management. The Agriculture bill provides a small increase to overall agency funding, but includes slight decrease for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The bills do not include harmful policy riders or the deep cuts pursued by the House Freedom Caucus and are expected to pass and be signed into law before the March 8 deadline which would avoid shutting down those agencies.

As a reminder, it is crucial that Congress passes and the president signs into law all 12 appropriations bills before April 30 or else a 1% across-the-board reduction to all agencies including the Department of Defense – kicks in per the debt ceiling agreement reached last year between President Biden and then Speaker McCarthy.

2023 Farm Bill

In addition to the ongoing debate over funding the federal government for the remainder of the fiscal year, the House and Senate Agriculture Committees have yet to close the gap on the two major issues that have been holding up passing the next Farm Bill – how to pay for increased reference prices in the commodity title and how to handle Inflation Reduction Act dollars. Therefore, the timing of the next Farm Bill remains unclear. However, both House and Senate Agriculture Committee leadership continue to press for passage of this critical legislation.

While it remains unclear as to when we will see language and subsequent committee markups, the Alliance continues to meet with committee staff to reiterate our priorities. We urge Massachusetts' land trusts to do the same by connecting with their legislators to ensure our [Farm Bill recommendations](#) are incorporated. If you hear back from your elected officials, please let the Alliance know as we are tracking all feedback from members of Congress.

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. One of the newest funding opportunities added was the announcement by the Biden-Harris administration of the 2024 request for proposals for the America the Beautiful Challenge.

Now in its third year, the program was launched in support of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law which “is dedicated to funding landscape-scale conservation and restoration projects that implement existing conservation plans across the nation.” This year the program is expected to award up to \$119 million in grants to communities nationwide.

To access the website and obtain additional information about the America the Beautiful Challenge and other funding opportunities, [click here](#).

Join Us at Advocacy Days

Registration for [2024 Land Trust Alliance Advocacy Days](#) is now open! As of today, we only have three individuals from the Commonwealth registered to attend.

From April 15-18, staff and board members from land trusts have the opportunity to visit Washington to meet with their congressional delegation, attend meetings with key agency staff and network with their fellow land trust leaders. Two weeks prior, on April 5, we will host our annual issue briefing and first timers training virtually.

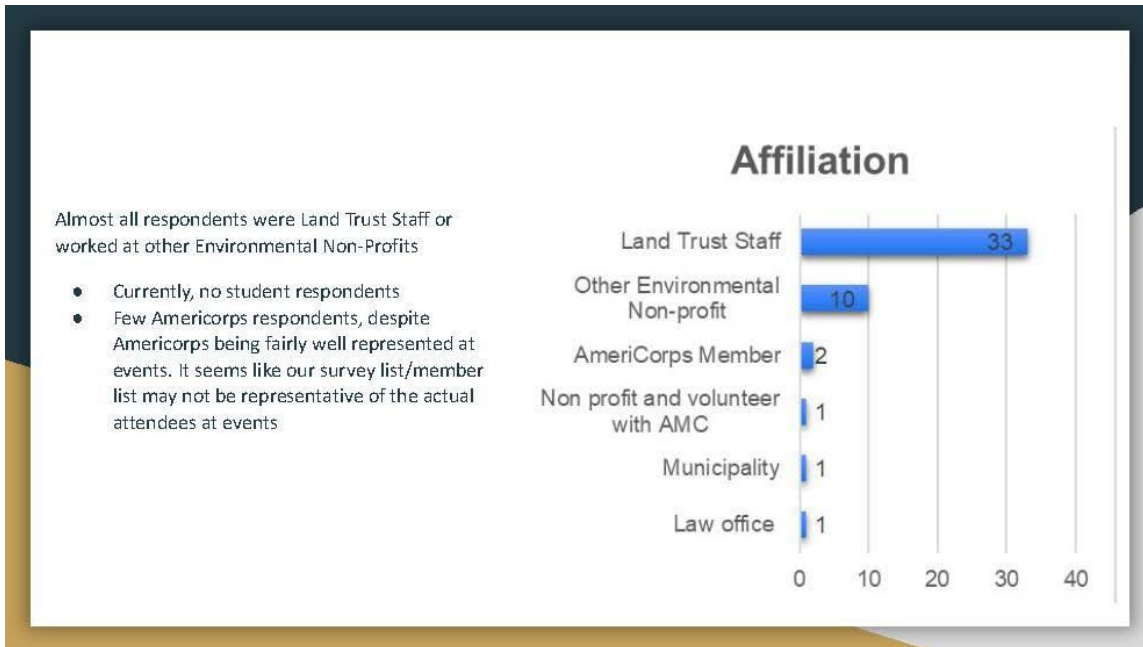
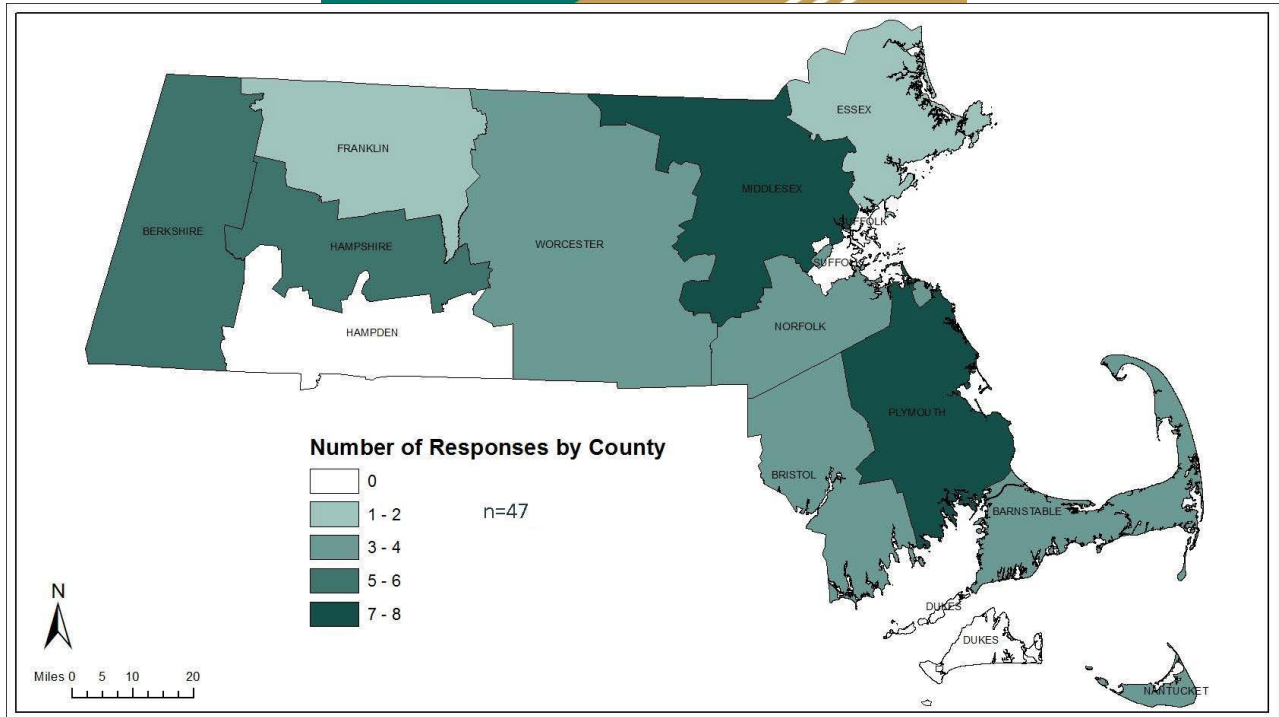
While there is no registration fee, travel arrangements and hotel accommodations must be paid by participants. Discounted hotel rooms are now available on a first-come, first-served basis through March 31. The Alliance also is proud to offer a limited number of travel stipends. For additional questions, please email policy@lta.org.

Expanded Partnership with Natural Resources Conservation Service

As previously noted, the Alliance has built a long-standing partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service – one that now includes an expanded partnership agreement. In January, we welcomed Justin Merrifield to our team as senior project manager for the NRCS Easement Acquisitions team. This team will be responsible for rolling out assistance for land trusts on NRCS easements. In the next several months, we will be hiring additional staff to focus on the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and Agricultural Land Easement Program. We will continue to keep you updated as our partnership expands.

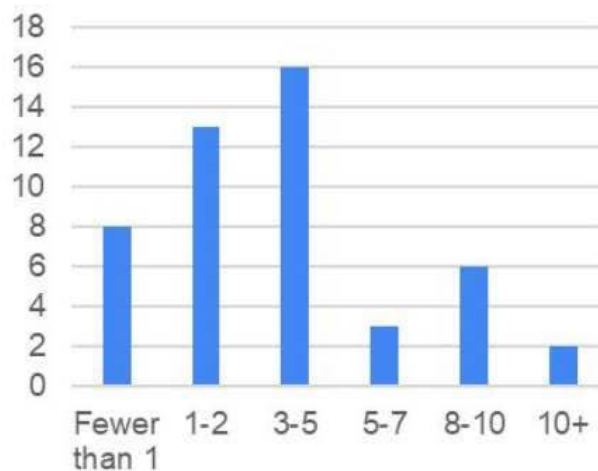
Attachment D / Early Career Conservation Network Survey Results

Results of ECCN's 2023 Member Survey

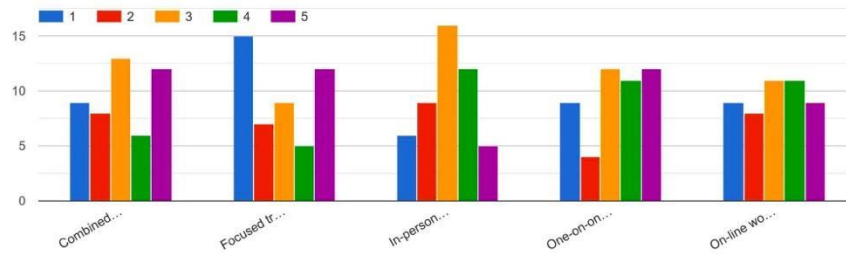


- 27 organizations represented
 - 18 Land Trusts
 - 9 “other” (watershed associations, municipality, etc.)
- Top organization’s responses
 - Berkshire Natural Resources Council (9)
 - Wildlands Trust (5)
 - Mass Audubon (4)
 - Kestrel Land Trust (2)
 - Mount Grace (2)
 - The Trustees (2)
 - North County Land Trust (2)
 - Brewster Conservation Trust (2)

Years of Experience

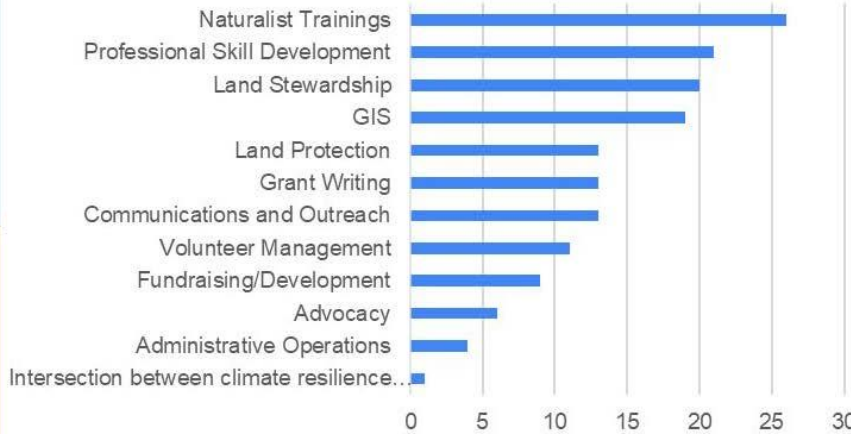


What do you hope to gain from participation with the ECCN group? Please rank your answers (1 is the highest and 5 is the lowest)



- Focused Training for Early Career in Land Conservation 136
- In-Person Regional Networking 145
- Online Workshops 147
- Combined Educational/Social Events 148
- One-on-One Mentorship 157

Interest in Trainings from ECCN



Training	Percent
Naturalist Trainings	54.2
Professional Skill Development	43.8
Land Stewardship	41.7
GIS	39.6
Communications and Outreach	27.1
Grant Writing	27.1
Land Protection	27.1
Volunteer Management	22.9
Fundraising/Development	18.8
Advocacy	12.5
Administrative Operations	8.3
Intersection between climate resilience and social resilience	2.1

Requests and Suggestions

Topics:

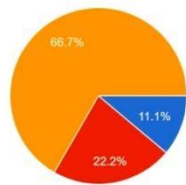
- Landowner communication and outreach
- Fundraising
- Land stewardship
- Career Support (see below)

Career Support:

- Workshops, peer to peer support, Resume help, Resource library, early career listserv, a resource for managers to send newer staff

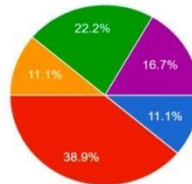


Which mentorship program approach appeals to you most?
18 responses



- One-on-one (You would be matched with a senior conservationist where you would have the opportunity to connect one-on-one)
- Regional (You would be placed in a county or region group where you would have the opportunity to connect with local peers and mentors)
- Both

How much interaction do you want with a mentor?
18 responses



- Highly encouraged once a month
- Highly encouraged once a quarter
- Casual email correspondence
- Casual quarterly meet ups in person
- Casual quarterly meet ups virtually

Interest in a Mentorship Program

Thank you!

Attachment E / Keynote Presentation: Katie Theoharides, the Trustees President and CEO



What We Protect
SPECIAL PLACES

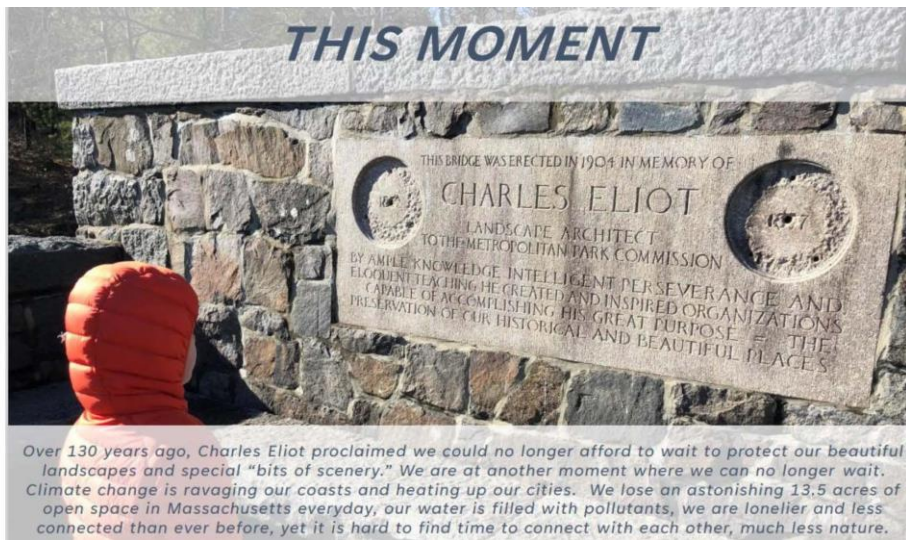
- Nation's oldest conservation organization (1891), largest in MA
- 27,000 acres (123 reservations) owned, managed, and permanently protected
- Committed to protecting places of scenic, historic, cultural or ecological significance
- All for public use and engagement
- 98,000 member households, 2,500 volunteers, 2+ million visitors

trustees **t**

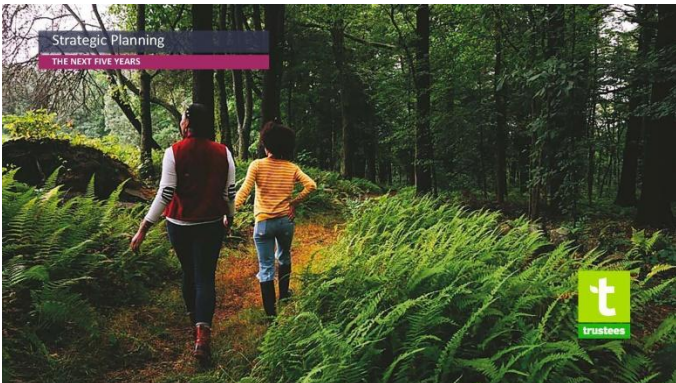


Challenges

THE FUTURE TRUSTEES



Over 130 years ago, Charles Eliot proclaimed we could no longer afford to wait to protect our beautiful landscapes and special "bits of scenery." We are at another moment where we can no longer wait. Climate change is ravaging our coasts and heating up our cities. We lose an astonishing 13.5 acres of open space in Massachusetts everyday, our water is filled with pollutants, we are lonelier and less connected than ever before, yet it is hard to find time to connect with each other, much less nature.



Strategic Planning

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



New Acquisitions

MORAIN FARM - BEVERLY, MASS.



