

July 29, 2025

The Honorable Senator Becca Rausch, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
State House, Room 215
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Representative Christine Barber, House Chair
Joint Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
State House, Room 167
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Support for S.2542 – An Act to build resilience for Massachusetts communities

Dear Chair Rausch, Chair Barber, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

We are a coalition of organizations supporting land and water conservation, climate action, and environmental justice writing to respectfully share our recommendations on the environment and climate bond legislation, or “Mass Ready Act.” Our members and supporters include hundreds of thousands of residents committed to addressing three critical challenges: impacts from climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequities in the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, especially related to equitable access to nature, working farmland, and open space for urban residents.

We want to express our sincere appreciation for the critical priorities already reflected in the bond legislation and urge they are preserved as the bill advances, including:

- Increased funding for the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program (2000-7088),
- Strong residential flood risk disclosure provisions that will bring Massachusetts in line with other states in our region and across the country (Section 61),
- Measures to streamline permitting for nature-based solutions projects,
- The inclusion of nonpublic entities as eligible grant recipients throughout the bill, recognizing the essential role of public-private partnerships in scaling up the pace and impact of conservation and climate resilience work,
- Investments in the Governor’s biodiversity Executive Order (2300-7034); and
- Continued support for farmland protection programs (2511-0125).

These are important and encouraging commitments. However, as currently written, the bill does not yet meet the scale of investment and bold policy action needed to achieve Massachusetts’ clean energy and land protection goals, including the Clean Energy and Climate Plan’s ambitious 30x30 and 40x50 conservation goals.

We see this bond bill as a blueprint— a critical pathway toward a more climate-resilient, equitable, and biodiverse Commonwealth. With thoughtful enhancements, this legislation has the potential to accelerate our progress toward long-term environmental and public health goals, while ensuring that all communities—urban, suburban, and rural—share in the benefits.

We are excited to work with the Committee to strengthen and refine this bill so that it delivers more fully for the environment and people of Massachusetts. The remainder of this letter outlines our coalition’s specific recommendations and funding priorities, as well as broader policy proposals to support effective implementation.

We look forward to continued collaboration in this effort and deeply appreciate your leadership and attention.

Line Item Recommendations to Meet the True Need On-the-Ground

Land Conservation funding – \$500 million request (across multiple lines):

Once lost to development, open space is gone forever. With aging landowners and development pressure high, the next five years will prove pivotal to meet the Commonwealth’s Clean Energy and Climate Goal to conserve 30% of its natural and working lands by 2030, and 40% by 2050. Funding to conserve farms, forests and urban open spaces that address critical conservation and recreation needs is provided for in multiple lines of the Mass Ready Act:

- Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) – request \$60 million, an increase from \$40 million (2800-1123)
- Department of Fish and Game (DFG) – request \$75 million, an increase from \$53.5 million to (2300-0422)
- Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) – request \$103 million, an increase from \$85 million (2000-7087)
- Mass. Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) – request \$62 million, an increase from \$42 million for farmland protection. The \$20 million increase is requested to capitalize MDAR’s recently-granted Buy-Protect-Sell authority (2511-0125)
- ENV Land, Water, Soil and Stewardship Grants – request that this line item be increased to \$200 million, from \$120 million, and dedicated exclusively to land, water, and soil conservation and restoration programs—including grants to municipalities, tribes, and non-profit organizations for the permanent protection and ecological restoration of natural and working lands. Within this funding, we request a \$5.5 million earmark for the Healthy Soils Program to support regenerative agriculture practices that build soil carbon, improve water retention, and increase climate resilience (2000-7082)
 - We also urge the Legislature to restore MassTrails as a standalone line item, as was done in the 2018 Environmental Bond. Trails funding serves distinct public access and recreation purposes and should be clearly distinguished from

conservation-focused funding to ensure transparency and consistency in implementation.

MassTrails – \$75 million request (new line item):

Trails are a vital part of Massachusetts' infrastructure —supporting conservation, active transportation, recreation, and community health. The MassTrails program provides essential funding for locally driven projects that enhance the Commonwealth's growing trail network by connecting municipalities, advocates, and trail users. However, the program is consistently oversubscribed, and demand continues to grow. Increasing investment in MassTrails will allow the state to make critical connections that serve regional and statewide needs, including progress on transformative corridors like the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and the Mass Central Rail Trail, which together help link communities across eastern, central, and western Massachusetts. We respectfully urge the Committee to establish MassTrails as a separate line item, as was done in the 2018 Environmental Bond, authorized at no less than \$75 million, to support this high-impact work and ensure safe, equitable trail access across the Commonwealth.

Coastal Resilience – \$300 million request (2000-7083):

As coastal communities face growing threats from sea level rise, erosion, and extreme weather, dedicated funding for shoreline protection and nature-based solutions is more important than ever. We respectfully request that the Office of Coastal Zone Management's Coastal Resilience line item be increased to \$300 million, an increase from \$200 million, to ensure Massachusetts can safeguard its natural and built infrastructure along the coast.

Flood Risk Protection Program – \$75 million request (new line item):

We urge the Committee to authorize, fully fund, and implement a statewide flood buyout program that addresses both coastal and inland areas, building on the outcomes of the buyout and elevation study currently being led by MEMA. As communities across the country have experienced devastating flood events this summer, from Vermont to Texas, Massachusetts must act now to prepare for the increasing risk of similar disasters fueled by climate change.

This program should be created as a separate line item under EEA to ensure it is adequately resourced and coordinated across the Commonwealth. A well-designed buyout program will allow the state to proactively reduce risk, protect lives and property, and restore natural floodplains and wetlands as climate buffers. To ensure equitable outcomes, the program must prioritize investments in Environmental Justice and economically disadvantaged communities, where residents are often the most vulnerable to flooding and the least resourced to recover. We also encourage the state to leverage unspent funds previously authorized in the 2014 and 2018 environmental bond bills for coastal property buyouts, in tandem with newly authorized funds that support a comprehensive, statewide approach.

Department of Conservation and Recreation – \$787 million request (2840-7028):

DCR manages more than 450,000 acres of public land across Massachusetts, offering critical

access to outdoor recreation while protecting forests, waterways, and other natural resources. However, years of chronic underfunding have resulted in a \$1 billion maintenance backlog that undermines the agency's ability to provide safe, well-maintained parks, trails, infrastructure, and facilities. The proposed \$587 million is insufficient to meet these needs. We urge the Committee to increase the bond authorization for DCR to \$787 million, an increase from \$587 million, to support overdue capital improvements and ensure the agency can meet growing demand for safe, accessible outdoor spaces.

DCR Parkways – \$400 million request (2890-7036):

DCR's historic parkways are a vital part of the state's recreational infrastructure, connecting residents to parks, trails, and open spaces. Yet these corridors have also suffered from deferred maintenance, accounting for \$400 million of DCR's \$1 billion deferred maintenance backlog, making them increasingly unsafe for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike. We respectfully request \$400 million, an increase from \$177 million, specifically for repair and redesign of DCR parkways, in line with the DCR Parkways Master Plan and to address risks identified in the DCR Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment. Addressing both park infrastructure and the roadways that connect them is essential to ensuring safe, equitable access to the Commonwealth's outdoor resources.

Investing in Air Quality Monitoring and Protection – \$75 million request (*new line item*):

Communities located near highways, industrial zones, and other high-emission corridors, particularly low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, face disproportionate exposure to harmful pollutants such as black carbon, ultrafine particulate matter, and nitrogen oxides. These exposures contribute to significant health disparities, including higher rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other respiratory illnesses.

We support the creation of a \$75 million bond-funded grant program to support the installation and maintenance of stationary air quality monitors in pollution hotspots across the Commonwealth. This investment would help local governments and community organizations collect critical data, identify risks, and take action to protect public health—especially in communities that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice.

In addition to these funding requests, our coalition strongly supports key policy provisions in the bond bill. We know that funding alone is not enough—policy changes are essential to ensure that these investments are implemented effectively, efficiently, and equitably.

Policy Recommendations to Maximize Impact

To ensure that proposed investments have maximum impact, our coalition strongly supports the inclusion of targeted policy provisions in the Mass Ready Act. These reforms are essential to

meet the Commonwealth's climate, land protection, and resilience goals, ensuring that bond authorizations translate into real-world impact for communities and ecosystems alike.

Section 12, 31, 50, 51 and 74 Regarding Permit Streamlining for Nature-Based Solutions Projects and permitting reforms:

Our organizations reject the false equivalency between projects that permanently convert natural lands to hardened development such as roads, bridges, and housing, and those that create or restore natural functions. We strongly support efforts to streamline permitting for ecological restoration, including for wetlands, and especially for salt marshes, as well as for dam removal and culvert replacement projects that restore wetlands, rivers and streams to their original condition. We also support the acceleration of development of affordable housing that keeps people, property and infrastructure out of harm's way from flooding due to sea level rise, storm surge, excessive rainfall and tidal flooding. Any acceleration of permitting processes must be carefully crafted to avoid weakening the environmental safeguards—particularly those associated with wetlands and aquatic systems, which protect our communities and natural ecosystem functions and are central to the climate resilience priorities of this legislation.

We want to ensure that statewide permitting reforms keep people and communities out of flood pathways and flood prone properties (e.g., those in flood plains and adjacent to wetlands, rivers, and oceans), especially Environmental Justice communities and those who are economically vulnerable. The new energy siting law provides a framework for site suitability that avoids, minimizes and mitigates impacts to sensitive resources that should be explored in this context. We urge the Committee to add language to ensure a transparent, public process to define “priority housing” projects, with the explicit aim of supporting deeply affordable housing that sustains both people and nature. Finally, any streamlining proposals must be aligned with Chapter 91 and existing environmental laws that safeguard our public trust resources. For full restoration where the site is returned to a natural condition that does not interfere with public access or navigation, exemption from Ch.91 is appropriate. However, permitting or licensing is still needed for non-restoration based projects proposed in wetlands, tidelands and waterways.

Dedicating Revenue to Protect Nature ([H.901/S.597](#)):

Massachusetts is not on track to meet its goal of protecting 30% of land by 2030 as established in the Clean Energy and Climate Plan. As detailed in [Mass Audubon's Pathway to 30x30^L](#) report, only 27% of land is currently conserved, and we're continuing to permanently lose 13 acres everyday to development. This threatens biodiversity, water quality, and our ability to meet climate targets, as natural lands are critical for carbon storage and sequestration.

To meet these goals, we need sustained, dedicated annual funding. We support the inclusion of policy language to dedicate revenue from the existing sporting goods tax to land conservation,

¹ Funding Nature's Future: A Pathway to 30x30 in Massachusetts. (2025). Mass Audubon. <https://www.massaudubon.org/our-work/publications-resources/a-pathway-to-30x30>

equitable outdoor access, and carbon sequestration. Leveraging this existing revenue stream is a fiscally responsible way to fund nature-based climate solutions and ensure Massachusetts delivers on its conservation and climate commitments.

Strengthening Drought Management [\(H.1003/S.586\)](#):

With droughts becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change, the Commonwealth needs stronger planning and response tools. We support language to establish a Drought Management Task Force to regularly update a statewide drought plan, and to grant the EEA Secretary the authority to enforce water conservation measures throughout regions, ensuring coordinated, science-based action across multiple communities interconnected by ground and surface water and drinking water supplies.

Reforming the Conservation Land Tax Credit Program [\(H.3147/S.2083\)](#):

The Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC) Program is a proven, high-impact tool for land protection, yet demand far exceeds current capacity—with a waitlist exceeding two years. We urge inclusion of language to incrementally raise the program’s annual cap from \$2 million to \$5 million over three years, to help meet the state’s 2030 and 2050 land and water conservation goals and meet the requirements to protect and restore Natural and Working Lands under the Next Generation Climate Law. We also support the need to broaden the eligibility definition of “public or private conservation agency” to include 501(c)(3) land trusts. These changes will make the program more accessible and responsive to current and critically important conservation needs.

Identifying Air Quality Risk [\(H.2369/S.1548\)](#):

To ensure air quality funding is deployed effectively and equitably, we urge the inclusion of policy language establishing a technical advisory committee in the bond bill. The technical air quality advisory committee would guide state strategy and ensure community-informed implementation. It would also require the installation of stationary monitors in identified pollution hotspots, helping to fill long-standing data gaps and better protect overburdened communities from chronic exposure to outdoor air pollution.

Investing in Natural and Working Lands [\(H.1005/S.549\)](#):

To unlock the full climate potential of natural and working lands, we support policy language that elevates their role as carbon sinks, as mandated by the Clean Energy and Climate Plan. Bond legislation should direct the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act Office to develop a method for assessing land conversion impacts, create a municipal opt-in Natural and Working Lands Friendly Communities Program, and require state agencies to avoid converting natural and working lands when feasible alternatives exist. Additionally, the Commonwealth should commit to a policy of no net loss of farmland or forestland, ensuring that any unavoidable conversion is offset by permanent protection elsewhere.

Establishing an MVP Plus Program ([H.1310/S.686](#)):

To build on the success of the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program, we recommend establishing an MVP Plus Program to provide communities with annual, formula-based funding for resilience implementation—including the ability to hire needed staff. Funded through the MVP Trust Fund, the program would use a formula considering population size, flood risk, and social vulnerability to ensure resources go where they are needed most.

Codifying the Division of Ecological Restoration ([H.986/S.73](#)):

To codify the Commonwealth’s commitment to the restoration of rivers, wetlands, and watersheds for the benefit of people and the environment, bond legislation should seek to codify the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) within the Department of Fish and Game (DFG). DER initiates restoration projects by partnering with nonprofits, towns, individuals, and groups to improve habitat for wildlife and provide a multitude of benefits to communities, including reduced flooding, improved water quality, and safer communities. Capacity and funding for these types of projects is essential, and policy reforms are needed to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness so the work can be scaled up. Bond legislation should also update the language for DFG’s Public Access Board, now the Division of Fishing and Boating Access.

We urge the Committee to support bold, forward-looking action in the Mass Ready Act to ensure that Massachusetts remains a leader in conservation, climate, and community well-being. We stand ready to work with you to advance these priorities and welcome any opportunity to provide additional information or support.

If you have questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Sam Anderson (sanderson@massaudubon.org), Rae Ettenger (rettenger@outdoors.org), or David Melly (dmelly@environmentalleague.org).

Thank you for your attention to these critical investments and policy recommendations. Together, they represent an opportunity to advance climate resilience, environmental justice, equitable access to the outdoors, and the long-term stewardship of our natural resources.

Sincerely,

The Environmental Bond Coalition

American Farmland Trust

Appalachian Mountain Club

Boston Harbor Now

Charles River Watershed Association

Mass Parks For All

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

Mass Audubon

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

Conservation Law Foundation

Mystic River Watershed Association

Environmental League of Massachusetts

Native Plant Trust

Friends of Middlesex Fells

Sierra Club

Massachusetts Association of Conservation
Commissions

The Nature Conservancy- Massachusetts

Massachusetts Food Systems Collaborative

The Trustees of Reservations

Massachusetts Forest Alliance

Trust for Public Land

Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition