

May 8, 2026

Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Chair
House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA, 02133

RE: Support for H.3064, An Act to build resilience for Massachusetts communities (Mass Ready Act)

Dear Chair Michlewitz and Honorable Members of the House Committee on Ways and Means,

We are a coalition of organizations supporting land and water conservation, climate action, and environmental justice writing to respectfully share our recommendations on H.3064 *An Act to build resilience for Massachusetts communities*, 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 in the House, including:

- Increased funding for the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program (2000-7088),
- Increased funding for coastal and inland resilience projects (2000-7083),
- Strong residential flood risk disclosure provisions that will bring Massachusetts in line with other states in our region and across the country (Section 81),
- Measures to streamline permitting for restoration and 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),
- Continued support for farmland protection programs (2511-0125),
- Formation of pilot program to identify and monitor indoor air pollution (2200-7027),
- Creation of a Drought Management Task Force to regularly update a statewide drought plan (Section 13).

These are important and encouraging commitments and we appreciate the House’s leadership in advancing this legislation. At the same time, because bond authorizations will shape environmental investments and infrastructure priorities for years to come, we urge this Committee to seize this opportunity to take bold action in both the scale of investment and the

strength of accompanying policy reforms. Strategic policy changes can help ensure these dollars move farther and faster, accelerating implementation, reducing barriers, and maximizing long-term benefits for communities, climate resilience, biodiversity, and economy across the Commonwealth.

We see this bond bill as a blueprint; a generational opportunity to build a more climate-resilient, equitable, and biodiverse Massachusetts while advancing the Commonwealth's ambitious 30x30 and 40x50 conservation and climate goals. With thoughtful enhancements, this legislation can better position the state to meet the urgency of the moment and ensure that communities across Massachusetts, urban, suburban, and rural alike, share in the environmental, economic, and public health benefits of these investments.

We look forward to working with the House Committee on Ways and Means to strengthen and refine this bill so that it fully realizes its transformative potential. The remainder of this letter outlines our coalition's specific recommendations and funding priorities, as well as broader policy proposals to support effective implementation and long-term impact.

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 (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), and
- Land, Water, Soil and Stewardship Grants – request that this line item be increased to \$200 million, from \$125 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 line item, we request that the \$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 be preserved (2000-7082).

MassTrails – \$75 million request (2000-7078):

Trails are a vital part of Massachusetts’ infrastructure, supporting conservation, active transportation, recreation, tourism, and community health. The MassTrails program provides essential funding for locally driven projects that strengthen and expand the Commonwealth’s trail network by connecting municipalities, advocates, and trail users. Demand for the program continues to far exceed available funding, reflecting both the popularity and statewide importance of these investments.

We strongly support preserving MassTrails as its own dedicated line item, consistent with the Senate’s bill, to ensure sustained and transparent support for trail development and connectivity projects across the Commonwealth. Given the scale of need and opportunity, we urge the House to increase the authorization to no less than \$75 million. Increased investment would allow the state to advance critical regional and statewide trail connections, including transformative corridors such as the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and the Mass Central Rail Trail, helping to better connect communities while expanding safe, equitable access to outdoor recreation and active transportation options.

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, to ensure Massachusetts can safeguard its natural and built infrastructure along the coast. In addition, we strongly support the addition of language and funding to clarify the need for a voluntary property buy out and elevation program for coastal and wetland properties in accordance with recommendations of the Massachusetts State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan, ResilientMass, the Resilient Coasts Plan and Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Statewide Voluntary Flood Buyout and Elevation Program Feasibility Study.

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 deferred maintenance backlog that undermines the agency’s ability to provide safe, well-maintained parks, trails, infrastructure, and facilities. The proposed \$638 million included in the Senate’s final bill is insufficient to meet these needs. We urge the Committee to increase the bond authorization for DCR to \$787 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 25, 50, 51, 105, and 107 Regarding Permit Streamlining for Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions Projects:

Our organizations strongly support efforts to streamline permitting for ecological restoration for both coastal and inland wetlands, including salt marshes, dam removals and culvert replacement projects that restore wetlands, rivers and streams to their natural flow conditions. We also support the deployment of responsibly sited, 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. It is important to distinguish between restoration projects that improve the environment, and development projects that are important, but still do have environmental impact.

Any acceleration of permitting processes must be carefully crafted to avoid weakening 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. Streamlining proposals must also remain 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 Chapter 91 is appropriate. However, permitting or licensing is still needed for non-restoration based projects proposed in wetlands, tidelands and waterways.

We want to ensure that statewide permitting reforms keep people out of flood pathways and flood prone properties (e.g., those in flood plains and adjacent to wetlands, rivers, and oceans), and that communities remain centered and empowered in environmental review processes. The new energy siting law provides a framework for site suitability that avoids, minimizes and mitigates impacts to sensitive resources that should be considered a promising model for further consideration. Should the Committee wish to further advance permitting reforms related to housing, it is essential that eligible “priority housing” be clearly and narrowly defined, as it is in Section 105 of S. 3064, to only accelerate projects that truly serve communities’ needs without exacerbating environmental concerns and risks to people, property, and infrastructure.

Dedicating Revenue to Protect Nature [\(H.901/S.2571\)](#):

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, 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.

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

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>

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.

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 include section 6 of the bill to direct EEA to 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.

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 Rae Ettenger at rettenger@massaudubon.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

Appalachian Mountain Club

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

Boston Harbor Now

Mass Audubon

Charles River Watershed Association

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

Conservation Law Foundation

Mystic River Watershed Association

Environmental League of Massachusetts

Native Plant Trust

Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation

Sierra Club Massachusetts

The Nature Conservancy- Massachusetts

Massachusetts Association of Conservation
Commissions

The Trustees of Reservations

Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

Trust for Public Land

Massachusetts Forest Alliance

Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition

Mass Parks for All