



MASSACHUSETTS
LAND TRUST
COALITION

State Public Policy Update

March 7, 2025

Under the guidance of our Policy Committee, the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC) focusses our administrative and legislative advocacy on increasing state investment in land conservation and the work of land trusts, and maximizing the integrity and natural resource value of protected lands as well as unprotected lands of significant conservation value.

2025-2026 Legislative Priorities

The 2025-2026 legislative session started on January 2, 2025. Over 6,500 bills were filed by the January 17th deadline. [Committee assignments](#) were announced on February 27, so committees will soon begin the process of setting up hearing schedules. Unlike in past years, legislators can sign on to co-sponsor a bill up until the date that a Committee acts on that bill.

MLTC invites you to consider reaching out to your state legislators to ask them to co-sponsor our highest priority bills for the current legislative session:

The Nature for All Bill ([HD.2707/ SD.2776](#), Rep Blais, Rep. Montaño & Sen. Feeney)

This bill would dedicate a portion of the existing state sales tax for conservation, restoration and improvement of lands and waters to benefit nature and people. See this [fact sheet](#) to learn more about the bill and its growing list of supporters.

An Act increasing the conservation land tax credit ([SD.203/ HD.1347](#), Sen Tarr and Rep. Jones)

This bill would expand the annual cap on the state's conservation land tax credit program, resolving a long-standing waitlist for landowners willing to permanently conserve their environmentally significant properties. For more information, see this [fact sheet](#) and [WBUR coverage](#) from Martha Bebinger on the importance of expanding the tax credit.

Find your legislators [here](#), and see this [message template](#) that you are welcome to use or personalize.

FY2026 State Operating Budget

Governor Healey filed [her version of the budget](#) on January 22, which proposes funding the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) at \$559.8 million. Among other things, this includes \$8.3 million for integrating environmental justice and equity into all EEA agency actions, and funding to significantly expand staffing at the Department of Energy Resources and Department of Public Utilities to implement “An Act promoting a Clean Energy Grid, Advancing Equity and Protecting Ratepayers” that passed late in 2024. In coming months, the House and Senate will pass their own versions of the budget, which will subsequently be reconciled in a version submitted to the Governor for approval this summer. MLTC recently joined [The Green Budget Coalition](#), which has begun meeting with legislative leaders to communicate our budget priorities.

Environmental Bond Bill

Once every five years or so, the legislature passes an Environmental Bond Bill, which sets capital spending caps for a wide range of state programs that are essential to land conservation and the environment. In addition, a variety of policy changes may be attached as "outside sections" of the Bond Bill and become law when the Bill passes. The Healey-Driscoll Administration is expected to file its version of the Bond Bill in Spring 2025. For the last several months, MLTC has been working closely with our conservation partners to advocate for the Administration's bill to authorize investments and include policy changes that align with our priorities. We will continue this advocacy in the Legislature as it debates and amends the bill in coming months.

Other Bills MLTC Supports

An Act investing in natural and working lands ([HD.2377/SD.1669](#), Rep. Meschino & Sen. Comerford) to promote acquisition and management of natural and working lands to reduce impacts from climate change.

An Act relative to uniform partition of heirs property ([HD.508/SD.813](#), Sen. Lovely) to increase protection for legal heirs of property owners who die without a will in place.

An Act accelerating wetlands restoration projects (HD.1619/[SD.1066](#), Sen. Crighton) to facilitate expanded wetlands restoration.

An Act to reimburse the George L. Darey Inland Fisheries and Game Fund ([SD.421](#)), Sen. Durant) to consistently reimburse MassWildlife for revenue lost from providing free hunting and fishing licenses.

MLTC's Priorities for Administrative Advocacy

Conservation Restriction Backlog

We will continue to advocate for resolution of the long-standing backlog in Conservation Restrictions under review by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA). Additionally, MLTC anticipates coordinating with EEA on a process to update the state's model Conservation Restriction.

Open Space Act ("PLPA") Implementation

MLTC will continue to monitor implementation of An Act Preserving Open Space in the Commonwealth (the "Open Space Act", formerly known as PLPA), which took effect in February 2023. On February 28, 2025, the state announced that it was reopening public comment on the draft regulations to implement the law. Though the [draft regulations](#) have not changed, the state is [interested in receiving additional comment](#) on public notice requirements and methods for evaluating the natural resource value of lands impacted under this law. Public comment is invited at a virtual hearing to be held at 4:00 PM on Wednesday, March 26, 2025. Registration is required to obtain access; registration is available prior to or during the meeting until it has ended. Register [here](#). Comments may also be submitted in writing, up until 5:00 PM on March 26, 2025. Email those to Michael.gendron2@mass.gov and reference 301 CMR 52 in the subject line.

During the original comment period, which closed on January 22, over 400 pages of public comment were received. Those are all [posted online](#). **MLTC coordinated submission of a group comment letter, which can be viewed at pages 86-91.** The state's [Open Space Act webpage](#) also includes a link to a table of the 22 bills that the legislature passed in 2023-2024 authorizing a change in use of Article 97 lands,

and the [first annual report on the status of funding-in-lieu transactions](#) authorized under terms of the new law. One such bill is addressed concerning land in Canton – for which follow-through on the funding-in-lieu commitment was still pending as of December 13, 2024.

Omnibus Climate Law

MLTC will work with the Administration to advocate for robust measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts on ecological and human communities in new energy-facility siting frameworks to be adopted under the 2024 omnibus climate law.

Other EEA Initiatives

We will also will represent land trusts on EEA-convened working groups, including those related to the Resilient Lands Coalition. We will also advocate for effective implementation of the Farmland Action Plan, Healthy Soils Action Plan and strategic actions to set and achieve statewide Biodiversity Goals.

Other Healey-Driscoll Administration Updates

Share your Input on Forest Reserves

The Healey-Driscoll Administration has identified the ambitious goal of designating 300,000 acres of forest reserves across Massachusetts by 2030. In support of this goal, EEA is seeking to understand how non-profit, municipal and private forest owners manage their lands, and learn more about how they might support forest owners seeking to implement passive management strategies. If you haven't already submitted a response, please consider assisting the EEA in gaining a better understanding of your forested lands by completing the [survey](#).

Uncertainty re: Federal Funding and Executive Orders

In this period of on-going uncertainty, MLTC has posted some [resources on our website](#) for federal grantees and others seeking to protect themselves. As things continue to evolve, we'll do our best to share relevant updates on that page.

Land Trust Alliance Federal Policy Updates

March 2025

PRESIDENT TRUMP AND THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The New Federal Landscape

Since his inauguration, President Donald Trump has issued an unprecedented number of executive orders and actions that, coupled with efforts to reduce the federal workforce, has created uncertainty for our community.

As the situation is evolving daily, the Land Trust Alliance is closely monitoring these orders and actions so that we can keep our members updated about their impact.

We have created a new webpage on our Resource Center, [“The new federal landscape”](#) that will provide the latest details about the administrative directives and actions and how they may affect land trusts. On the page, you’ll find advocacy resources, tools for assessing your organization’s strengths and vulnerabilities, and tools for helping review your financial forecasting. Our [“How you can help”](#) page provides steps that land trusts can take to educate decision makers. You’ll find a link to telling us how your work and community has been affected, key messages to share with local, state and federal officials and links to register to become an [Advocacy Ambassador](#) and attend [Advocacy Days 2025](#) in order to stay on top of the latest news and information.

Call to action: We urge all Massachusetts land trusts to reach out to your local, state and federal officials and share stories about the impacts of recent federal action – the funding freeze and staffing cuts – to families and your communities. It’s also important to share the positive stories about the work of land trusts. In addition, visit our new Resource Center website. Please also take the time to tell us how your land trust has been impacted by filling out our “share your story” form. Please join us in May for Advocacy Days 2025 – this year it is more important than ever that we show Congress the strength of the land trust community and highlight the many ways it helps communities thrive. Any questions, please email policy@lta.org.

119th CONGRESS

Republicans Advance Reconciliation Process

Republicans are focused on using the reconciliation process to pass the president’s top legislative priorities. Reconciliation is a tool for fast-tracking high-priority fiscal legislation. The first step in the reconciliation process is to pass a budget resolution that sets funding targets.

Last month, the House passed its version of a budget resolution on a 217-215 partisan vote. The resolution directs House committees to identify spending cuts totaling \$2 trillion to help pay for a legislative package. The Senate also passed its own budget resolution last month but differs from the House in that it has a lower price tag as it would not address the expiring provisions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

The Alliance will continue to monitor reconciliation negotiations and keep Massachusetts land trusts updated on any proposed cuts that would undermine the work of land trusts.

Funding the Federal Government and the next Farm Bill

Late last year, Congress passed a year-end continuing resolution that extended government funding through March 14. The resolution also contained a one-year extension of the Farm Bill. Unfortunately, that extension did not include the remaining Inflation Reduction Act funding for Farm Bill conservation programs that was previously discussed in our last update. It is uncertain at this time whether or not

Congress will be able to pass another CR to fund the federal government through the end of the fiscal year, September 30, 2025.

At this time, we do not expect to see considerable movement on the Farm Bill until Republicans pass a reconciliation bill and fund the federal government through the end of the fiscal year.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Confirmed

On Feb. 13, the Senate confirmed Brooke Rollins to serve as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture on a 72-28 bipartisan vote. Rollins formerly served as president and CEO of the America First Policy Institute and served during the first Trump administration in the Office of American Innovation. Rollins has stated her commitment to “serve the people of this country” and to “fight for American farmers, ranchers and the agriculture community.”

OTHER POLICY UPDATES

Agriculture Secretary Releases First Tranche of Federal Funding

On February 20, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced that the agency will release the first tranche of funding that was paused under President Trump’s executive order, “Unleashing American Energy.” According to a press release from the agency, \$20 million in contracts for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program will be honored and made available to farmers. It is expected that additional funding may be released once the agency has had an opportunity to review additional Inflation Reduction Act funding.

U.S. Forest Service Chief Named

On February 27, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins named Tom Schulz as the 21st chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Schultz, who was appointed chief of staff for Natural Resources and Environment at USDA in January, has previously served as the director of the Idaho Department of Lands and most recently served as vice president of resources and government affairs at the Idaho Forest Group. He replaces Chief Randy Moore, who announced his retirement from the service, after 45 years, in a message to staff late last month.

Land Trust Alliance Advocacy Days Registration Now Open

Registration for [2025 Land Trust Alliance Advocacy Days](#) is now open! This year, perhaps more than ever, our federal lawmakers need to hear from Massachusetts’ land trusts about the importance of voluntary private land conservation and the federal programs that support it. We’ll be hosting our annual virtual issue briefing and first-timers training on April 22, with in-person activities set to kick off two weeks later, on May 5.

As of March 3, two land trusts are signed up to attend but we need a much stronger presence from the state this year with 6 legislative targets. For additional questions, please email policy@lta.org.