



MASSACHUSETTS  
LAND TRUST  
COALITION

## State Public Policy Update

February 27, 2026

➡ Information that is new since the December 12<sup>th</sup> State Public Policy Update is shown in bold.

Under the guidance of our Policy Committee, MLTC focusses its 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 and unprotected lands of significant conservation value.

### 2025-2026 Legislative Priorities

The 2025-2026 legislative session started on January 2, 2025. MLTC's top priorities for the session are:

- **The Nature for All Bill** ([H.901/S.597](#), 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. The Joint Committee on the Environment held a hearing on the bill on July 1, 2025. MLTC submitted [written testimony](#) and also signed on to [The Nature for Massachusetts Coalition's joint written testimony](#) as well. Both House and Senate versions of the bill have attracted a very large number of co-sponsors. On August 11<sup>th</sup>, the Senate bill (redrafted as [S.2571](#)) was reported out favorably and sent to the Joint Committee on Rules, **which on October 23, 2025 recommended ought not to pass' and referred the bill to the Senate Ways and Means Committee.** Action on the House bill is pending with the Committee's reporting deadline extended, **for a second time, to March 18th.** While legislative action on the bill is pending, many members of the Coalition have mounted a parallel effort to place the matter before voters in November 2026 via initiative petition. Supporters submitted well over the required minimum of 75,000 certified signatures to the Secretary of State's office, allowing [the ballot petition](#) language to be filed with the Legislature, giving them a chance to pass it into law. If they fail to do so by the end of June, proponents must submit 12,429 additional certified signatures by July 1, 2026, to place the proposed law on the November 2026 ballot. To add your organization's name to the ballot coalition, fill out [this form](#). See [this page](#) to learn about ways to volunteer to help during the campaign. While not legal advice, [this article](#) offers a helpful primer on how your organization can advocate for issues like this while protecting your organization's non-profit status.
- **An Act increasing the conservation land tax credit** ([S.2083/H.3147](#), 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. A hearing before the Joint Committee on Revenue was held on July 1<sup>st</sup>. See MLTC's written testimony [here](#). **As of February 26th, action on both versions of the bill is pending.**
- **Environmental Bond Bill**  
On June 24, Governor Healey filed her long-awaited environmental bond bill as [S.2542](#), *An Act to build resilience for Massachusetts communities* (also known as the [Mass Ready Act](#).) Every five years or so, the legislature passes a bond bill to authorize future capital spending for a wide range of state programs essential to land conservation and other environmental programs. A variety of policy

changes are attached as 'outside sections' and become law when the bill passes. MLTC Executive Director Robb Johnson testified at a July 15<sup>th</sup> hearing on the bill, and subsequent written testimony was submitted by [MLTC](#) and also by a large [Coalition](#) of which MLTC is a part. On December 1, the bill was reported favorably – without amendments -- by the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and referred it to the Joint Committee on Bonding, Capital Expenditures, and State Assets, **which on January 27<sup>th</sup> recommended it for passage and referred it, without amendment, to the Senate Ways and Means Committee. The Committee is expected to revise the bill in coming weeks before moving it to the Senate floor, where debate is expected sometime this spring.** As the bill works its way through the legislature, MLTC will continue to work closely with coalition partners on potential amendments to strengthen it. **MLTC is specifically advocating for an amendment that would require municipalities to hold a public hearing before waiving their right of first refusal when notified that properties enrolled in Ch. 61, Ch. 61A or Ch. 61B are facing conversion to a non-conservation use.**

- **FY27 State Operating Budget**

On January 28<sup>th</sup>, Governor Healey released her \$63.4 billion operating budget proposal for the fiscal year that begins on July 1. While the budget as a whole is 3.8% higher than the current years', the Governor has proposed a cut of \$19 million (roughly 4%) for environmental programs. DCR Parks and Recreation would see the biggest single reduction (at \$9 million) and the Environmental Justice Office would also see significant cuts. As a member of the [Green Budget Coalition](#), MLTC will work with partners to advocate for increasing the budget for key programs (including the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the Department of Environmental Protection, DCR Parks and Recreation, and the Division of Ecological Restoration) as the House and Senate develop and debate their own versions of the budget between now and May. [Read more.](#)

- **FY27 State Capital Budget**

While the operating budget covers most staff and annual operating expenditures of state government, the capital budget is where most funding for land acquisition is set. Last year the Healey-Driscoll Administration issued a two-year capital investment plan covering both FY26 and FY27, so numbers for the coming year were actually set last year. FY26 and FY27 allocations can be seen [here](#). Toggling to "View by Plan Item" shows significant reductions in some lines, due in large part to a decrease in federal funding support. Funding for EEA Agency Land Protection Programs is budgeted to drop from \$23.3 million this year to \$11.4 million next year; EEA Community Investment Grant Programs (including LAND, PARC and Drinking Water Protection) are forecast to drop from \$28.3 million to \$25.75 million; and EEA Land Protection Grant Programs (available to both municipalities and nonprofits) are slated to drop from \$13.3 million to \$4.25 million. It should be noted that EEA has some discretion to adjust spending across these lines to respond to areas of greatest need

## **Other Bills MLTC Supports**

**An Act investing in natural and working lands** ([H.1005/S.549](#) Rep. Meschino & Sen. Comerford) to promote acquisition and management of natural and working lands to reduce impacts from climate change. A hearing date before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources A hearing before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources was held on October 7. **As of February 27<sup>th</sup>, action on both bills was pending, with the House Committee's reporting deadline extended to March 18<sup>th</sup>.** See testimony submitted by The Nature Conservancy [here](#). Read more about the bill [here](#).

**An Act relative to uniform partition of heirs property** ([H.1964/S.1239](#)), Rep. Roy, Rep. Worrell, Sen. Lovely) to increase protection for legal heirs of property owners who die without a will in place. This bill was heard on April 22 before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary. See a letter of testimony submitted by MLTC [here](#). The bill was reported favorably by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary on February 5<sup>th</sup> and is now pending before the Senate Ways and Means Committee. **As of February 27<sup>th</sup>, action on the House bill is pending.**

**An Act accelerating wetlands restoration projects** ([H.1052, S.557](#), Rep. Shand, Rep. Kassner, Sen. Crighton) to facilitate expanded wetlands restoration. This bill is the centerpiece of a Mass Audubon to Accelerate Wetland Restoration across Massachusetts. Learn more about the bill [here](#). The bill was reported favorably by the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources on November 24, and is now pending before the Senate Ways and Means Committee. **Action on the House bill is pending with the Committee’s reporting deadline extended, for a second time, to March 18<sup>th</sup>.** See a joint letter of testimony that MLTC supported [here](#). While Committee action on the bill is pending, aspects of this bill were included as an outside section in the Environmental Bond Bill ([S.2542](#), aka “The Mass Ready Act”) filed by the Governor and now under review by the Senate [Mass Audubon continues to lead a campaign to streamline permitting for wetland restoration projects which, ironically, can be hung up in lengthy and costly permitting despite their clear benefits to the environment.](#)

**An Act to reimburse the George L. Darey Inland Fisheries and Game Fund** ([S.579](#) Sen. Durant, [H.1066](#), Rep. Vieira) to consistently reimburse MassWildlife for revenue lost from providing free hunting and fishing licenses. A hearing date before the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources was held on July 1, 2025. **On December 18<sup>th</sup>, the Senate bill was reported favorably and referred to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. As of February 26<sup>th</sup>, action on the House bill was pending.**

**An Act relative to Urban Farmland**, ([S.61/H.121](#), Sen. Gómez, Rep. Duffy) to support conversion of vacant lots and underutilized land in environmental justice communities into urban farms, community gardens, and other agricultural enterprises. A hearing before the Joint Committee on Agriculture was held on September 16<sup>th</sup>. See written testimony submitted by MLTC [here](#). **On December 31<sup>st</sup>, the Senate bill was reported favorably and referred to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. On December 31<sup>st</sup>, the House bill was redrafted and reported favorably to the House Ways and Means Committee.**

**Proposal for a legislative amendment to the constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands** ([S.11/H.71](#), Sen. Comerford, Rep. Blais) to authorize lower tax rates for agricultural land regardless of the size of the agricultural parcel. A hearing on this bill was held before the Joint Committee on Revenue on March 25, 2025. See our written testimony in support [here](#). The Senate bill was reported out favorably on May 1, but on the same day, the House bill received an “ought not to pass” decision. Supporters are currently exploring next steps.

**An Act to report payments in lieu of taxes for state-owned land** ([S.1939/H.3032](#), Sen. Comerford, Rep. Blais) to improve equity in the distribution of state payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) to municipalities that host state land and facilities. The bill would revise payment formulas to provide additional reimbursement for the value of ecosystem services provided by state-owned land, such as drinking water protection, habitat for endangered or threatened species, outdoor recreation, carbon sequestration, and landscape connectivity. The bill was reported favorably by the Senate Committee on Revenue on November 20, and is now pending before the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. Action by the House Committee on Revenue is pending, **with the reporting deadline extended to February 20<sup>th</sup>.**

Meanwhile, on August 13<sup>th</sup> the Governor issued an [Executive Order](#) establishing a Commission on PILOT

for State-Owned Land. The Commonwealth owns over 500 million acres of land across the state, and makes PILOT payments to municipalities to help offset some of the revenue lost from having those properties on the tax rolls. Municipalities with the most state-owned land are primarily in Western Massachusetts, but under the current funding formula they receive lower payments than communities in eastern Massachusetts due to lower property values. The Commission will be charged with evaluating potential changes, with particular attention to geographic equity. **MLTC and leading land trusts conferred and have nominated a representative of the land trust community from the western part of the state to represent land trusts on this Commission.**

## Other State Policy Updates

- **Conservation Restriction Backlog**

MLTC continues to advocate for resolution of the long-standing backlog in Conservation Restrictions (CRs) under review by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA). EEA's Division of Conservation Services (DCS) reports progress on reviewing CRs more efficiently, with continued assistance from three auxiliary reviewers. Certain CRs that have been determined to be "on hold" and not proceeding at this time for reasons outside of DCS control have been removed from the list of active CRs the DCS is tracking. Any on-hold CR will re-enter the system immediately upon request of the original proponent. **As of December 12th, 2025, DCS was tracking a total of 202 active CRs, including 81 under review by EEA and 121 where EEA is waiting for documents, information or signatures of the parties.** The DCS team, with assistance from EEA's IT team, has developed a proprietary CR Tracking System, which will allow submission of CRs and document uploads, incorporate electronic messaging, and provide live status updates. This system will enable DCS to retain all information related to a specific CR in one place. Representatives from several land trusts are currently helping test the system, which DCS hopes to launch in **March 2026**. **MLTC is hosting an EEA webinar to introduce the system on March 3<sup>rd</sup> from noon – 1 pm. Register [here](#). Live assistance office hours will reportedly be made available once the system goes live.**

- **Updating the Model Conservation Restriction**

At the invitation of DCS, MLTC nominated a group of experienced conservation and legal practitioners to assist EEA with updating the state's model Conservation Restriction. **With added members selected by DCS, the committee began its work in January 2026, and is expected to meet throughout the coming year. The broader conservation community is invited to provide input by March 31<sup>st</sup> via [this survey](#).**

- **Open Space Act ("PLPA") Implementation**

MLTC continues to advocate for effective implementation of An Act Preserving Open Space in the Commonwealth (the "Open Space Act", formerly known as PLPA), which took effect in February 2023. Under the law implementing regulations were supposed to be promulgated by August 2024, but **as of February 26, 2026**, they have yet to be issued, despite EEA having wrapped up three rounds of public comment on [draft regulations](#) in spring 2025. MLTC coordinated a group comment letter in January 2025, which can be viewed [here](#). See our second comment letter from March 2025 [here](#). **MACC and MLTC collaborated in a February 2026 letter to EEA Secretary Rebecca Tepper requesting a meeting on the matter. This meeting has been scheduled for March 6<sup>th</sup>.** The state's [Open Space Act webpage](#) provides a variety of important resources on the Open Space Act, including a Tracker with information submitted about proposed Article 97 actions, and list of Article 97 change-of-use petitions that passed in the 2023-2024 legislative session.

- **Regulatory Changes for Energy Facilities Siting**

MLTC is supporting partners who are advocating 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 Climate Act, which aims to accelerate the development of clean energy facilities. State agencies are working fast to meet the law's spring 2026 deadline to finalize a complex set of implementing regulations. Comments on a series of guidance documents and draft regulations were collected in the fall of 2025, and additional hearings and comment windows continue. The array of proposed changes is significant and multi-faceted, and includes new provisions for assessing site suitability, providing community benefits, and offering grants to help under-resourced community groups get involved during the permitting process. See [this page](#) for a complete overview, including a schedule of in-person and hybrid information sessions and public hearings. Among MLTC's partners, detailed and thoughtful comments have been submitted by [Mass Audubon](#), [The Nature Conservancy](#) and the [Environmental League of Massachusetts](#).

Meanwhile, on September 12, 2025, updated regulations took effect for the SMART 3.0 program, which governs state incentives available for the development of certain solar energy facilities. The regulations include a new approach to scoring parcels hosting eligible ground-mount projects, using environmental/land use/electric grid criteria and a system for mitigation fees. A series of guidelines and materials released on a rolling basis since September provide details on program implementation. [Learn more](#).

- **Streamlined Permitting for Housing**

**Among several initiatives by the Healey-Driscoll Administration to streamline environmental permitting in order to speed housing development, new regulations took effect on January 30th that will significantly reduce Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) review for certain eligible housing projects. [Read more](#).**

- **Costs of Adapting to Climate Change**

**On February 12th, the Healey-Driscoll Administration published its ResilientMass Finance Strategy, a plan for investing in climate resilience that includes estimates of what adaptation measures will cost, and potential options for funding them. A key finding is that Massachusetts would need to spend \$90-130 billion in the next 25 years to bolster the state against threats from climate change. [Read more](#).**

## **Uncertainty re: Federal Funding and Executive Orders**

MLTC has posted some [resources on our website](#) for federal grantees and others seeking information about the impacts of federal actions. As things continue to evolve, we'll share relevant updates on that page.