



MASSACHUSETTS  
LAND TRUST  
COALITION

## State Public Policy Update

June 12, 2026

➡ Information shown in bold is new since the February 27th State Public Policy Update.

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 of lands of significant conservation value, including those that have been previously protected.

### 2025-2026 Legislative Priorities

The 2025-2026 legislative session started on January 2, 2025 and will conclude at the end of 2026. MLTC's top priorities for the session are:

- **Nature for Massachusetts / The Nature for All Bill ([H.901/S.597](#) (redrafted as [S.2571](#)), Rep Blais, Rep. Montaño & Sen. Feeney)**  
The Nature for All bill would have dedicated a portion of the existing state sales tax for conservation, restoration and improvement of lands and waters to benefit nature and people. **Despite attracting a large number of co-sponsors, neither House nor Senate bill is expected to advance. On March 30, 2026, the House sent its version of the bill to study, ending its chances this session.** Last summer while legislative action on the bill was pending, a large Coalition that includes MLTC mounted a parallel effort to place the matter before voters via initiative petition. In December 2025, supporters submitted well over the required number of certified signatures for the Secretary of State to file [language of the ballot measure](#) with the Legislature to give them a chance to pass it into law. **Because the legislature appeared unlikely to do so, this May and early June, supporters undertook the final round of signature collection needed to place the proposed law on the November 2026 ballot. Thank you to all who helped with this effort. Any outstanding signatures must be returned to a Mass Audubon hub by June 10<sup>th</sup> or the Field First office in downtown Boston (145 Tremont St, Suite 202) by Sunday June 14<sup>th</sup> at the latest in order to ensure appropriate processing. If a sufficient number of signatures are certified by the Secretary of State (anticipated by early July) the Ballot measure will be assigned a number and a "Yes on X" campaign will begin to earn voter support.** 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.
- **Environmental Bond Bill ([S.3064](#)), *An Act to Build Resilience for Massachusetts Communities*, aka **Mass Ready Act****  
For the first time since 2018, the state legislature is expected to pass an environmental bond bill that will define capital spending priorities. For the next several years, the state's annual capital budget for environmental programs will be driven largely by the bonding authority set in this bill. A number of policy provisions are likely to be attached and become law when the bill is signed. MLTC is part of a large Coalition advocating for key priorities to be included. **On April 15, the Senate passed its version of the bill, authorizing up to \$3.6 billion in potential future state spending on environmental projects, including land acquisition, restoration, and water supply protection. Among Coalition priorities adopted in the Senate version were key elements of a drought management bill that Mass Rivers has long championed, key elements of air quality task force legislation, wetland restoration permit streamlining, restrictions on use of rodenticides, and**

expanded funding for coastal resilience. As the House next takes up the bill in coming weeks, MLTC will work closely with our Coalition partners on potential amendments to further strengthen it. [Read more](#). Many of our partners are urging the House to strike a provision of the Senate bill that would apply a “preference modifier” for state grants to municipalities that have local zoning, wastewater and wetland rules that do not exceed state regulations. Under the guise of streamlining permitting for housing, this provision would disadvantage many communities that have thoughtfully adopted local regulations to protect sensitive wetlands and water resources. On June 10<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Beacon published a [thoughtful Op-Ed](#) by Dot McGlinchy on why this proposal is misguided.

MLTC led an unsuccessful effort to attach an amendment to the Senate version of the bill that would have required 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. **There are no plans to push that issue further during this session.**

- **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. See MLTC's written testimony from summer 2025 [here](#). **In spring 2026, the House sent its version of the bill to study, effectively ending its chances as a standalone bill this session. The Senate has extended the reporting deadline for its version of the bill to June 25, 2026. Legislative champions led efforts to pass this measure by attaching it to the Senate version of the Environmental Bond Bill and the House version of the FY27 State Operating Budget. Neither of those efforts were successful. Minority Leader Jones has indicated his intention to propose attaching it to the Environmental Bond bill when the House takes that up in coming weeks. For background on the need for this bill, see this [fact sheet](#) and [WBUR coverage](#) from Martha Bebinger.**
- **FY27 State Operating Budget**  
On January 28th, Governor Healey proposed a \$63.4 billion operating budget for the fiscal year that begins on July 1. While she proposed an increase of 3.8% overall, she proposed a cut of \$19 million (roughly 4%) for environmental programs. **This spring, evidencing concerns about federal Medicaid changes, economic volatility, and a pair of ballot questions that could reshape the state's revenue structure, the House and Senate passed versions of the budget that were even more fiscally cautious than that proposed by the Governor. A conference committee is now meeting to resolve differences between House and Senate versions in order to send it to the Governor for signature. As a member of the [Green Budget Coalition](#), MLTC is working with partners to advocate that the Conference Committee stick with the highest possible funding levels for key programs (including the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the Department of Environmental Protection, DCR State Parks, and the Division of Ecological Restoration, the Department of Fish and Game and The Office of Environmental Justice.). At best, we are facing significant reductions from FY26 in key environmental programs including a 7.1% cut for DCR State Parks, and a 3.8% cut for DEP Administration.**
- **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. EEA does have 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. **On March 19, the House bill was reportedly favorably by the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. The Senate extended the reporting deadline for its bill to June 30, 2026.** 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. See written 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. **On March 26<sup>th</sup>, the House sent its version of the bill to study, effectively ending its chances this session.**

**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 Campaign 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 last November, and is now pending before the Senate Ways and Means Committee. **On March 19, the House bill was reportedly favorably by the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.** See a joint letter of testimony that MLTC supported [here](#). While action on the bill is pending, aspects of this bill were included in outside sections in the Environmental Bond Bill **that is pending action in the House (S.3064)**. [Mass Audubon continues to lead a campaign](#) with more than 60 partners to streamline permitting for wetland restoration projects which can require lengthy and costly permitting despite their clear benefits to the environment.

**An Act to reimburse the George L. Darcy 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. **On March 30, the House bill was sent to study, effectively ending its consideration for this session.**

**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 last 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 as [H. 4855](#) 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 last November, and is now pending before the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. **On March 16<sup>th</sup>, the House sent its version of the bill to study, effectively ending its chances this session.**

Meanwhile, last August the Governor issued an [Executive Order](#) establishing a Commission on PILOT for State-Owned Land. **Commission members were sworn in on April 13<sup>th</sup>, and the first meeting was held May 20<sup>th</sup>. Wendy Ferris (The Trustees) is the appointed representative from “non-governmental organizations focused on public and private land conservation”.** The Commission is expected to meet monthly and is charged to:

- 1. analyze the history and structure of the state-owned land PILOT program and assess the fiscal, equity, and policy impacts of current reimbursement policies;**
- 2. assess the impact of state land ownership on host communities and benefits to non-host communities, especially in the context of municipal budgets, local services, housing, economic development, and ecosystem services;**
- 3. evaluate a range of potential policy adjustments;**
- 4. identify tradeoffs between proposals in terms of fiscal cost, land use policy goals, administrative complexity, and equity; and**
- 5. develop a set of short- and long-term recommendations to improve the state-owned land PILOT program, including proposals that identify innovative and feasible ways to cover associated costs, such as offsetting savings, programmatic efficiencies, public-private partnerships, or regional solutions, particularly in the context of constrained fiscal conditions.**

**A final report (date uncertain) with the Commissions' findings, analysis, and policy options.**

The Commonwealth owns over 500 thousand 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.

## State Administrative 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 February 27, 2026, DCS was tracking a total of 220 applications currently in review. Approximately 50% were with DCS review staff and the other 50% with**

applicants, awaiting applicant signatures or responses. Of these, 31 recent submissions were tied to 2026 grant programs, causing a temporary bottleneck. According to DCS staff, average time from submission to approval was at that time approximately 5 months, with the goal to drop it down to 3 months. The DCS team, with assistance from EEA's IT team, has developed a proprietary CR Tracking System (CRTS), 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 summer 2026. Training sessions will be announced, and live assistance office hours will be made available.

- **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 monthly throughout the coming year.

- **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 June 9, 2026** they have yet to be issued, despite EEA having wrapped up three rounds of public comment on [draft regulations](#) in spring 2025. MACC and MLTC collaborated in a February 2026 letter to EEA Secretary Rebecca Tepper requesting a meeting on the matter. **On March 6, Dot McGlinchy from MACC and Robb Johnson from MLTC were joined by Senator Jamie Eldridge in a meeting with Undersecretary Stephanie Cooper and other EEA staff, where we underlined the public interest in timely promulgation of the regulations. Though officials were unable to commit to a precise timeline, they assured us the regulations would be in full force before bill-filing for the next legislative session begins in December 2026.** MLTC coordinated a group comment letter on the draft regulations in January 2025, which can be viewed [here](#). See our second comment letter from March 2025 [here](#). 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 petitions that passed in the last legislative session.

- **Regulatory Changes for Energy Facilities Siting**

**The Commonwealth has established new siting and permitting processes for clean energy infrastructure, significantly changing the way that proposed solar and battery storage projects will be reviewed. From April to September, the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC) is holding a monthly series of free noontime information sessions on the new rules. Each session will be recorded and posted on MACC's website. [See details.](#)**

Meanwhile, in fall 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. [Learn more.](#) Refinements to regulations are anticipated in the future.

## **Federal Funding changes and Executive Orders**

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