

Conservation and our community

Caring
for communities,
conserving
our Commonwealth

American Farmland Trust
Appalachian Mountain Club
Conservation and Recreation Campaign
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Audubon Society
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Massachusetts League of Environmental Voters
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
The Trustees of Reservations



Public Support

Land conservation and quality of life in Massachusetts

The willingness to invest in land and water conservation is a growing local and national trend. Nationally, 85% of local and state wide environmental ballot initiatives to protect land and water resources were successful in 2005.

Conservation organizations across the Commonwealth stand ready to work in partnership with the State and maximize our collective resources. However, the ability of private nonprofits to leverage private investment depends on a strong, creative and consistent commitment by the State.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has the opportunity to build upon this public support and have a profound impact on the future of the Commonwealth, preserving our landscape for generations to come.

Whether we live in the heart of the Berkshires or the center of Boston, our communities and quality of life depend on healthy land and water.

Our organizations, representing a combined membership of more than 250,000 Massachusetts families, have united to advocate for new policies and comprehensive and consistent funding for the natural resources that are important to all of us.

With careful planning and strong, reliable investments by the Commonwealth, we can together create a sustainable and productive landscape of farms, forests, and protected natural areas while meeting the economic, housing, transportation and recreational needs of Massachusetts residents.



Strategic Actions for the Next Two Years

Everyone enjoys having a quiet and beautiful place of refuge, be it a beach, river or an overlook at the end of a hiking trail. What may be less obvious are the hidden ways that a healthy landscape is essential to our physical and economic wellbeing.

Water

Clean, plentiful drinking water depends on surrounding land to protect it from contamination and to allow rainfall to recharge wells and streams. For every 10% increase in intact forest cover, the costs to treat drinking water with chemicals decreases by 20%. *Land conservation enables the Commonwealth to better protect our water supplies.*

Working Farms

Massachusetts farmers rank first in the nation in direct sales per farm of healthy, locally grown food. Together, farmers manage more than half a million acres of agricultural land, which provide aquifer recharge, scenic views and wildlife habitat while contributing to a sustainable economy. However, escalating land prices and short-term economic conditions are pressuring many farmers to develop their land. *New policies and expanded investments in farmland conservation and agricultural economic development programs will keep farms and farmers working.*



Working Forests

Forests are key economic engines. The state's wood products industry employs hundreds of harvesters, foresters and manufacturing jobs and generates over \$700 million per year. Forests affordably maintain clean drinking water by filtering it through soils to rivers and streams. They also help clean our air of pollution, and remove car-

Protect Lands of Statewide Significance
In recent years, the state scaled back funding to protect critical natural resources of statewide significance, including wildlife habitat, working farms and forests, and state parks. We must act now to ensure that the integrity of our natural resources is protected before they are gone forever.

Utilize Open Space Bonds: Bond bills have long been the most reliable investment funding for state land protection programs. The 2002 Open Space Bond bill received unanimous approval by the Legislature and authorized \$70 million annually for land conservation. However, contrary to wide citizen support to protect land at the same rate of development, actual spending has been reduced to half that level. At least **\$50 million annually** of consistent funding is needed to efficiently leverage private, nonprofit, and federal investments.

Revise Statewide Conservation Plan: Update the statewide land conservation plan to identify priority areas for conservation. Use new and existing geographic and scientific data to plan strategic protection of outstanding agricultural, forestry, habitat, recreational, scenic, and water supply resources. The Plan should also reflect the critical need to enhance urban neighborhoods with accessible open space and greenways.

Ensure Adequate Agency Staffing: The Division of Conservation Services as well as the Departments of Agricultural Resources, Conservation and Recreation and Fish and Game must be adequately staffed to work with landowners, municipalities and land trusts to protect critical natural resources of statewide significance.

Encourage Statewide Land Protection Efforts: Expand land conservation efforts by the Departments of Agricultural Resources, Conservation and Recreation and Fish and Game to ensure that natural resources transcending municipal boundaries are protected, using criteria that appropriately addresses their importance.

Establish a Conservation Tax Credit: As it has done in several other states, a modest state income tax credit would provide a much-needed incentive to increase voluntary donations of important resource lands, including working farms and forests. Donations made to the state, towns, and qualifying nonprofits would leverage the existing federal tax deduction.

Improve our Public Parks
A clean, safe and well-run State Park system - which includes parks, forests and beaches in urban, suburban and rural settings - is integral to the state's well-being. Our State Park system is an economic engine that boosts tourism, stimulates investment in our communities, and attracts knowledgeable workers to our state. Today, the Commonwealth is desperate for leadership to save our parks. The Department of Conservation and Recreation is chronically under funded, leading to a \$1.1 billion backlog of crumbling facilities. We need a multi-tiered approach to maintain General Fund support for parks, to establish a dedicated source of operational funding and to allow new self-generated funds to be kept by DCR.

Maintain General Fund, Establish New "Retained Revenue" System and Utilize Bonds For Capital Backlog: Creating a sustainable funding system for our State Parks will require continuing strong support through the General Fund as well as allowing DCR to keep new revenues that it generates. In the short term, securing bond funding is essential to addressing the \$1.1 billion backlog.

Complete Resource Management Plans for State Parks: The Department of Conservation and Recreation is currently developing management plans for the park system. The completion of these plans - to include operating procedures that reflect best practices from other states and federal agencies - should be a top priority for agency staff.

Keep Our Working Lands Working
Development pressures pose an enormous threat to working farms and forests in Massachusetts, from dairy farms and sawmills in the Berkshires, to vegetable fields in the Connecticut River Valley and cranberry bogs in the southeast. **This is a now or never moment**, especially for the dairy farmers who control a quarter of the cropland in the Commonwealth and are in a severe economic crisis. Decisive action is needed to boost the funding for the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program and expand economic development incentives to ensure that working farms remain economically viable. Similarly, encouraging conservation of working forests and the expansion of sustainable forest-based businesses will utilize a previously untapped economic resource while responsibly managing our forests.

Invest in Working Farms: The state's APR program is nationally-recognized as a farmland protection leader, but it has limited funding and is highly competitive. A new Open Space Bond bill should provide increased funding for the conservation of working farms and forests.

Given the history of recent funding cuts and the constant pressure on farmers to sell their land for development, the state should seek an additional, "emergency" appropriation to purchase APRs on all qualifying wait-listed farms as soon as possible, before significant additional farm loss occurs.

Invest in Working Forests: Establish a new, separately-funded "working forest" program - modeled after APR - to fund permanent forest conservation and complement the federal Forest Legacy Program.

In addition, the Commonwealth should maintain the Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) Green Certification of State Forests. Becoming the first state in the nation to receive this third-party certification for management of all state-owned lands is a milestone for Massachusetts. This designation is critical to improving management of our state lands, permanently protecting ecological reserves and practicing sustainable forestry. FSC certification, which is considered the gold standard of sustainable forestry, can also be applied to private lands under the Chapter 61 program.

Help Communities Protect Local Lands
Healthy and vibrant communities are our foundation. The state works with local communities to protect drinking water supplies, create parks and natural areas and maintain local character and quality of life. The state's efforts to support local investments in community preservation - including Community Preservation Act, Self-Help and Urban Self-Help - are integral to keep our cities and towns vibrant and must be sustained.

Preserve Community Preservation Act Matching Funds: Due to the presence of 'dollar for dollar' matching funds from the state, CPA has enabled 118 cities and towns to balance affordable housing, open space protection and historic preservation. With the state's match likely to decline by 2008, cities and towns may opt out of CPA unless the CPA Trust Fund receives an increase in the deed recording fee that sustains it.

Sustain Self-Help and Urban Self-Help Programs: Established in 1961 and 1977 respectively, these state programs are an invaluable source of support for Commonwealth municipalities looking to acquire or restore land for conservation and recreation, or to build and repair recreational facilities.

Dispose of Surplus State Lands Appropriately: Historically, the Commonwealth has not regularly considered conservation as a primary objective when disposing of surplus state lands. Where appropriate, municipalities and land conservation organizations should be given the right of first refusal on these dispositions.

bon dioxide from the atmosphere, helping to slow the extent of global climate change. The value of these environmental services is over \$1 billion annually. *Encouraging the expansion of sustainable forest-based businesses will utilize a previously untapped economic resource while responsibly managing our forests and retaining their ecological value.*

Stable Communities

Land conservation helps manage demands on municipal services in cities and towns, and adds value to land that is developed. Smart growth combined with smart conservation reduces the costs of community services by directing development to areas related to existing infrastructure. *By incorporating natural resource protection into their planning, municipalities can encourage housing and employment opportunities while enhancing the health and beauty of their community.*



Recreation

Outdoor recreation helps maintain our physical and spiritual health. *Improved maintenance of state parks and other public lands - in both urban and rural areas - will make quality recreation opportunities accessible to all residents and attract more skilled professionals to our state.*

Economy

Quality of life for employees is an important factor for businesses deciding to relocate. The diverse natural beauty in Massachusetts contributes to its attractiveness. Travel and tourism is the Commonwealth's third largest industry, supporting 125,300 jobs and generating \$12.46 billion annually. *An expanded program of conservation will help to ensure that Massachusetts will continue to be a desirable place to live and visit.*