

**The Nature Conservancy  
in Massachusetts**

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## **Priority Legislation 2025-2026**

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to conserve the land and water on which all life depends. We are dedicated to creating a healthier world for all. We work locally and globally, using innovative science and scalable, long-lasting solutions to tackle our most complex environmental challenges. Massachusetts' leadership on climate change, biodiversity, and environmental justice will ensure resilient natural and human communities and a better future for people and planet.

We respectfully request your support for the following bills, which will provide support for climate change, biodiversity, and environmental justice funding, policies, and projects across the Commonwealth. We look forward to collaborating with you throughout the 2025-2026 legislative session on these bills, as well as others that will help us build a more equitable and resilient Commonwealth.

Thank you for your leadership, time, and consideration, and please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions to Steve Long, Director of Policy and Partnerships, at [slong@tnc.org](mailto:slong@tnc.org) or 617-312-5932.

### **Funding for Climate Adaptation and Mitigation and Conservation**

**SB.572 / HB.938, *An Act establishing sustainable and equitable funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation* (Sen. DiDomenico; Reps. Duffy and Blais):** While Massachusetts is a national leader in addressing the causes and impacts of climate change, we do not have sufficient funding dedicated to achieving our ambitious goals – and the sources and distribution of funding often amplify existing inequities. This legislation would establish the Climate and Community Resilience Trust Fund, supported by a fee on real estate property insurance and dedicated to equitably providing funding to support solutions for residents to reduce and manage climate change impacts. The Fund would focus support for community-identified planning and implementation strategies, particularly in environmental justice and low- to moderate-income communities disproportionately burdened by environmental injustices. The bill would also create an independent board to make transparent decisions on how to prioritize, allocate, and equitably administer the Fund, with two-thirds of members representing community-based organizations and with support from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) and Office of the Climate Chief.

**SB.597 / HB.901, *An Act providing nature for all* (Sen. Feeney; Reps. Blais and Montañó):** Massachusetts is facing the triple threat of impacts from climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequitable distribution of the benefits of nature. Massachusetts lacks a significant statewide funding mechanism for land conservation, and existing state-level programs are either underfunded or oversubscribed. As a result, Massachusetts lacks sustainable and reliable resources to meet the Commonwealth's goals of (1) protecting, managing, and restoring nature to reach net zero by 2050 and (2) protecting 30% of the state's lands and waters by 2030, and 40% by 2050.

## **Conserving and Increasing Natural and Working Lands Carbon**

**SB.2083 / HB.3147, *An Act increasing the conservation land tax credit* (Sen. Tarr; Rep. Jones):** Both the *Next Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy Law* and the *Clean Energy and Climate Plan* (CECP) recognize the role of our natural and working lands in addressing climate change and meeting our Net Zero goals. The 2050 CECP calls for 40% of lands and waters to be conserved by 2050, which would require 25,000 acres of land to be conserved each year – the state, municipalities, and conservation organizations will need every tool available to them to meet this ambitious goal.

The Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC) is an important and cost-effective tool to permanently protect land, thereby ensuring its ability to sequester and store carbon into the future, as well as to provide a suite of additional benefits. The program leverages \$4.20 of private investment for every \$1 of state contribution when landowners donate ecologically valuable land for public benefit. Over 15,400 acres have been conserved with this program; however, it has a more than two-year waitlist, which is causing deals to fall through and deterring landowners from participating. Consistent with recommendations in the CECP and the Resilient Lands Initiative Vision, this bill would gradually raise the program’s cap over three years, from \$2 million to \$5 million, and make a technical correction so that 501(c)(3) nonprofit trusts organized for conservation purposes can engage in this program.

**SB.549 / HB.1005, *An Act investing in natural and working lands* (Sen. Comerford; Rep. Meschino):** Massachusetts loses 13 acres of natural lands per day to development,<sup>1</sup> which is unsustainable if we are to meet the natural and working lands goals in the CECP and reach Net Zero by 2050. This bill would create a local opt-in program under EEA called “Natural and Working Lands Friendly Communities Program,” designed to incentivize municipalities to make land use and planning decisions and bylaws that further the state’s overall goal of preventing the loss of farmland, forests, and freshwater and coastal wetlands. These communities would receive technical and financial assistance, as well as increased payments in lieu of taxes on state-owned land. In addition, consistent with recommendations in the CECP, this bill would direct the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act office to determine a review threshold that would require projects engaging in a certain level of forest clearing or farmland conversion to undergo an environmental impact review.

**SB.67 / SB.579 / HB.1066 *An Act to reimburse the George L. Darey Inland Fisheries and Game Fund* (Sen. Moore and Sen. Durant; Rep. Vieira):** The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife), which works to conserve and restore critical fish and wildlife habitat and plant species and deliver education programs, is primarily funded through hunting and fishing license fees deposited in the Inland Fisheries and Game Fund. This legislation would create consistency and reimburse MassWildlife for the loss of revenue associated with providing both discounted (currently reimbursed) and free hunting and fishing licenses.

## **Accelerating Adaptation to Climate Change**

**SB.586 / HB.1003, *An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management* (Sen. Eldridge; Reps. Meschino and Rogers):** Massachusetts has experienced increasingly severe drought conditions over the last decade; however, the state does not have the authority to require water conservation until the Governor declares a drought emergency. Currently, each town decides their own water conservation measures, resulting in a patchwork of measures that have limited impact. Climate change will only increase the frequency and severity of droughts - our state needs to have a better, coordinated response. This bill would give the EEA Secretary the authority to require uniform nonessential outdoor watering restrictions across a

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.massaudubon.org/content/download/41477/1007612/file/Losing-Ground-VI\\_2020\\_final.pdf](https://www.massaudubon.org/content/download/41477/1007612/file/Losing-Ground-VI_2020_final.pdf)

drought region during severe droughts. It would also require cities and towns to enforce water conservation restrictions issued by the Secretary to the fullest extent permitted by law (agricultural water users would be exempt). This bill would lead to a much more impactful, coordinated, proactive, and consistent response across the Commonwealth.

**HB.1051, *An Act to create a commission to determine the feasibility of voluntary acquisition of flood risk properties and structures* (Reps. Shand and Armini):** Sea level rise and more frequent and intense storms are leading to increased flooding and other hazards across the Commonwealth. An estimated 162,798 residential properties and 12,918 miles of roads are currently at risk of flooding in Massachusetts,<sup>2</sup> and the state is ranked third in the nation for its number of affordable housing units threatened by coastal flooding.<sup>3</sup> This bill would launch a commission to bring together agency officials, legislative leaders, and expert stakeholders to study the feasibility of a statewide property buyout program to proactively eliminate the risk of catastrophic flood damage and help owners and renters move out of harm's way, while conserving land, creating parks, and restoring wetlands to provide climate resiliency functions. This ad hoc commission would be tasked with making concrete recommendations to lawmakers regarding how to address this pressing issue, especially for Massachusetts' most vulnerable residents and neighborhoods. We also support companion legislation that would create a statewide, voluntary acquisition program for properties subject to chronic flooding.

**SB.557 / HB.1052, *An Act accelerating wetlands restoration* (Sen. Crighton; Reps. Shand and Kassner):** Healthy inland and coastal wetlands provide many essential functions, including sequestering carbon, reducing wave and flood impacts caused by extreme weather, filtering water, and providing habitat for countless species. Unfortunately, Massachusetts has lost one-third of our wetlands, and more are degraded by development, pollution, sea level rise, and fragmentation from roads, culverts, and dams. With hundreds of millions of dollars in new federal and state funds available, we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to increase coastal and inland wetlands restoration to help prepare for the worsening impacts of climate change. However, regulations adopted decades ago to protect wetlands from development are not designed to support environmentally beneficial, nature-based restoration projects. This legislation would require the state to improve interagency coordination to expedite wetland restoration efforts by creating consistent and predictable permitting processes for nature-based solutions, in addition to accelerating, streamlining, and aligning multiple state agency permit requirements so that we can advance these important projects while there is ample funding available.

## **Tackling Climate Change**

**SB.2296 / HB.3559, *An Act to encourage solar development on built and disturbed land* (Sen. Mark; Reps. Sabadosa and Garballey):** Massachusetts has committed to deploying solar energy that maximizes clean energy generation, avoids impacts on humans and natural communities, and connects efficiently to the grid. This bill would help achieve these goals by encouraging installation of solar panels on buildings and disturbed sites, such as parking lot canopies, brownfields, and roadway cuts. It would require the Department of Energy Resources to make changes to existing policies and programs, such as net-metering and SMART, to increase incentives for generation and siting of solar projects in the built environment.

Updated: March 18, 2025

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<sup>2</sup> First Street Foundation, Third National Flood Risk Assessment, <https://bit.ly/3ASgz6u>

<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts Affordable Housing at Risk, <http://bit.ly/4ggIwLa>