



EXPANDING FOREST RESERVES ON STATE LANDS

Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Board and
Department of Conservation and Recreation Stewardship Council

Joint Meeting May 13, 2026





Forest Reserves Agenda

- Forests as Climate Solutions Recap
- Reserves Across the Commonwealth
 - Statewide Reserves Goals and Objectives
 - State Lands Approach
- Process & Next Steps

How We Got Here

June 2023

Launched Forests as Climate Solutions.

Summer – Fall 2023 Convened Climate Forestry Committee (CFC) of experts and held public process.

January 2024

CFC released recommendations. EEA announced \$50M in investments for implementation.

State Forestry operations modify forestry practices across DCR and DFW to embrace recommendations.

June 2024

State issued response to CFC recommendations and launched implementation plan.

Summer 2024

Forestry projects on state lands resume following new climate-oriented guidelines.

Spring 2026

Advance approach and strategy for State-Owned Reserves

Implementation - Agencies advance priority recommendations including: FRSTAC update, Monitoring network expansion, Forest Explorer dashboard, Reserves development, Canopy Innovation forum.

FOCUS AREAS & GOALS

GUIDE

Convene and receive guidance from the Climate Forestry Advisory Committee (CFC)

Develop climate-oriented forest management guidelines for state land managers

CONSERVE

Reduce forest land conversion

Increase the rate of permanent conservation for forested land

Align on state continuum approach to passive/active management

INCENTIVIZE

Partner with and sustain forest landowners to keep their forests as forests

Encourage climate-oriented management choices

Bring innovation to the forestry industry

MEASURE

Understand the latest science best practices and apply them to our practices and decision-making

Increase transparency of forestry management practices by collecting and sharing forest data

THE POWER OF NUMBERS.

10%

Massachusetts set a forest conservation goal to manage at least 10% of all forested lands as reserves for their climate, habitat, and other benefits.

Our Forests

Massachusetts: 5,175,349 acres
Forested Land: 2,984,347 acres or 57%

Private Land: 1,911,815 acres

Public Land: 1,072,532 acres

State Lands: 525,377 acres

DCR State Parks

DCR Water Supply Protection

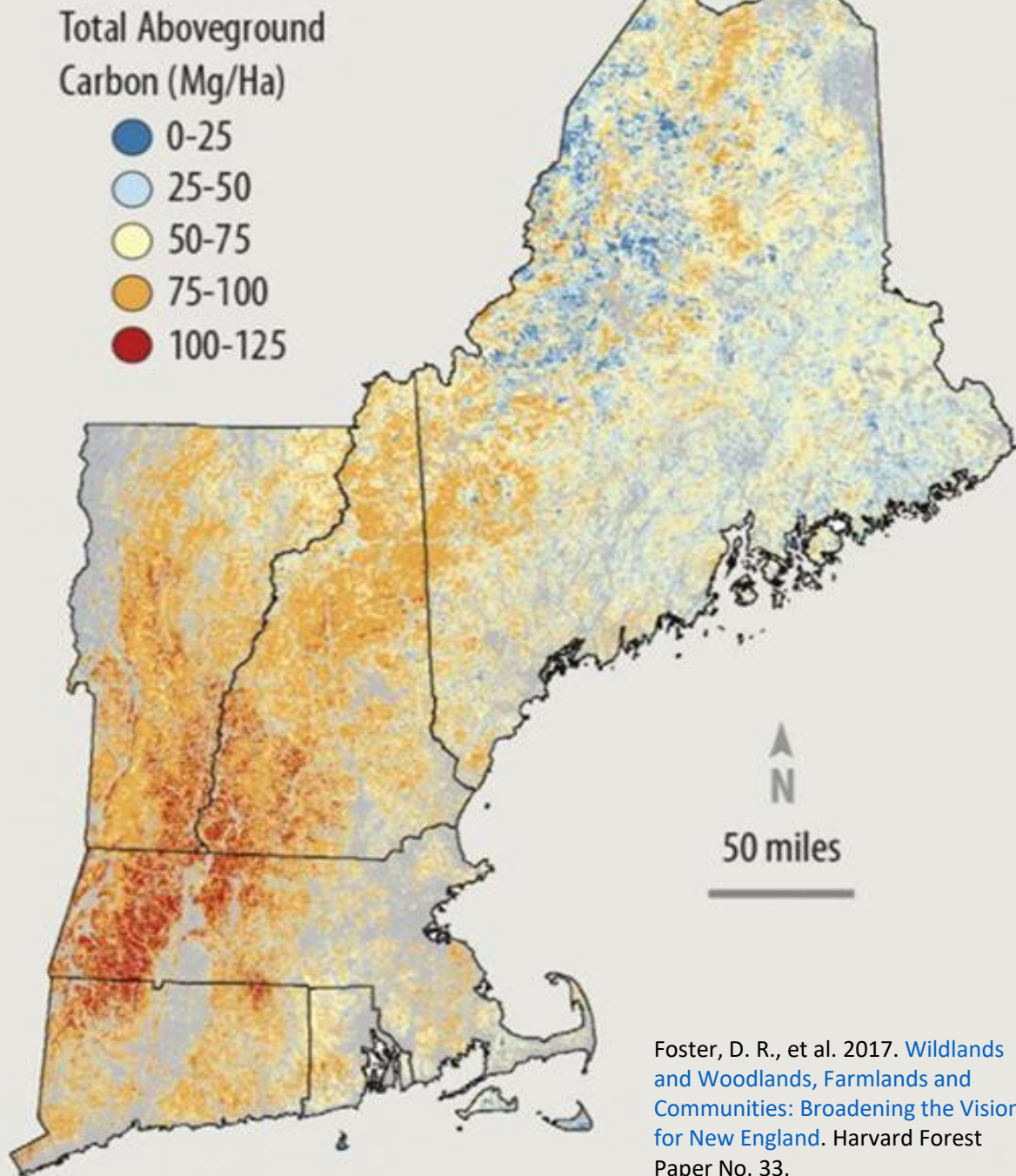
DFW Fisheries & Wildlife

Goal: 300,000 acres passively managed

Active Forest Management

Avg. 1,568 acres managed annually since 2006

or <1% of state forests



RESERVES ACQUISITION PROGRAM

Forest Reserves Grant program launched in FY25

- Has awarded \$4.75+M for 13 projects protecting 1,677 acres of municipal and private forest
- Projects span Cape Cod to the Berkshires
- Reserve management principles are codified under Conservation Restriction terms



State Owned Forest Reserves

Ken MacKenzie

DCR Division of Water Supply Protection
Director of Natural Resources

STATE LANDS FOREST RESERVES

- EEA guidance document contains goals, approach and criteria for forest reserves
 - ***“Strategy for the Establishment and Protection of the Ecological Integrity of Forest Reserves in Massachusetts”***
 - Informed by the Forest Reserves Science & Technical Advisory Committee discussions and feedback
- Legislation to codify designation process pending
- Balances reserves goals with agency missions and goals

FOREST RESERVES AND BIODIVERSITY

- One component of a larger, statewide climate resilience and biodiversity plan
- **Reserves are part of a living landscape:** A mix of forests, rivers, and wetlands all working together to provide clean water, wildlife habitat, and a healthy ecosystem.



FOREST RESERVES AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Forests provide a diverse suite of benefits

State-owned Forests in Massachusetts:

- Provide reliable, long-term public water supply
- Create habitat and natural communities
- Promote carbon sequestration and storage
- Support rural communities – wood production
- Facilitate wide ranging recreational opportunities



FOREST RESERVES IN MASSACHUSETTS

“Forest Reserves are formally designated landscapes where **natural processes**, including small and large-scale natural disturbances, such as wind and ice storms, **determine changes in the long-term structure, composition, function, and dynamics of the forest ecosystem** without deliberate human intervention, unless managers are confronted with a specific, unacceptable risk to human safety or forest health.”

*A Strategy for the Establishment and Protection of the Ecological Integrity
of Forest Reserves in Massachusetts
August 2025*

FOREST RESERVES GOALS

- Allow older forests to **mature and develop over time**, creating space for animals and plants that may struggle to survive in more active and developed areas
- Contribute to **carbon sequestration and storage** by keeping forests as forests
- Provide opportunities for **low-impact outdoor recreation** and other public enjoyment
- Serve as **reference sites for ecological research** to better understand how forests change and compare them to the woods we manage

FRSAC TO FOREST RESERVES SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FRSTAC)

- Expanding purview and expertise: The Climate Forest Committee recommended expanding the purview to include lands managed by all three state divisions
- Serve as subject matter expert advisors to support the:
 - Development of guidance materials and establish criteria for siting reserves
 - Approach to establishing reserves on private lands
 - Development of research and monitoring protocols to ensure reserves are achieving the goals intended

FOREST RESERVES SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Name	Organization	Title
Andy Finton	The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts	Senior Conservation Ecologist
Julie Richburg	The Trustees of Reservations	Director of Inland Ecology
Tony D'Amato	University of Vermont	Professor; Director of Forestry Program; Director of UVM Research Forest
Dave Crary Jr.	U.S. National Park Service	Fire Management Officer (retired)
John Scanlon	Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife	Habitat Program Supervisor (retired)
Dave King	USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station, Amherst	Adjunct Associate Professor, Research Wildlife Biologist (retired)
Dave Orwig	Harvard Forest	Senior Ecologist, Forest Ecologist
Paul Catanzaro	University of Massachusetts, Amherst	Professor; State Extension Forester
Timothy Randhir	University of Massachusetts Amherst	Professor, Dept. of Environmental Conservation Director, Massachusetts Water Resources Research Center

ACTIVITIES IN RESERVES

Standard Practices, Stewardship & Protections

- Low Impact Recreation
 - Hiking
 - Hunting, fishing, and trapping
 - Wildlife observation
 - Outdoor Education
- Maintenance for public safety and administrative access
- Public safety measures
- Control measures for unauthorized and illegal uses
- Preservation of historic and cultural resources
- Conversion and/or removal of non-native plantations
- Creation of new, low-intensity, non-motorized trails
- Invasive plant control

Activities Requiring Consultation

- Restore, maintain or enhance habitat for rare and endangered species and exemplary natural or rare communities per Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) recommendations
- Control forest pests or pathogens with regional or statewide risk
- Implement Prescribed fire to sustain natural communities
- Restore water and wetland resources and aquatic connectivity (dam removal)
- Implement long-term monitoring and research
- Address unanticipated declines in biodiversity, forest health or carbon

FOREST RESERVES CRITERIA

Criteria used to identify a Forest Reserve

- **Representativeness**
 - Reflects diverse forest types across different elevations, soils, and landforms
 - Includes redundancy in forest traits (composition, structure, ecological services)
- **Landscape Context**
 - Connected to larger, protected, and resilient landscapes
 - Supports a foundation for processes essential for biodiversity and ecosystem services
 - Located where recreational infrastructure is low-impact
- **Ecological Composition and Condition**
 - High forest integrity and contains unique natural features
 - Climate-resilient with limited potential barriers (invasive species, browse, pests)



CARBON AND FOREST RESERVES

- Forests contribute to carbon storage and sequestration
- Forests are an important part of the Commonwealth's strategy to offset GHG emissions.
- Carbon storage is a key outcome of a Forest Reserve.
- Reserves are essential to learning more about how forest health and forest management contribute to these natural processes
- A deeper, data-driven understanding creates opportunity to align landscape goals with management practices that support these processes in our forests

RESERVE DESIGNATION APPROACH

GIS informs, but field-based insight ensures decisions are accurate, practical, and ecologically sound.

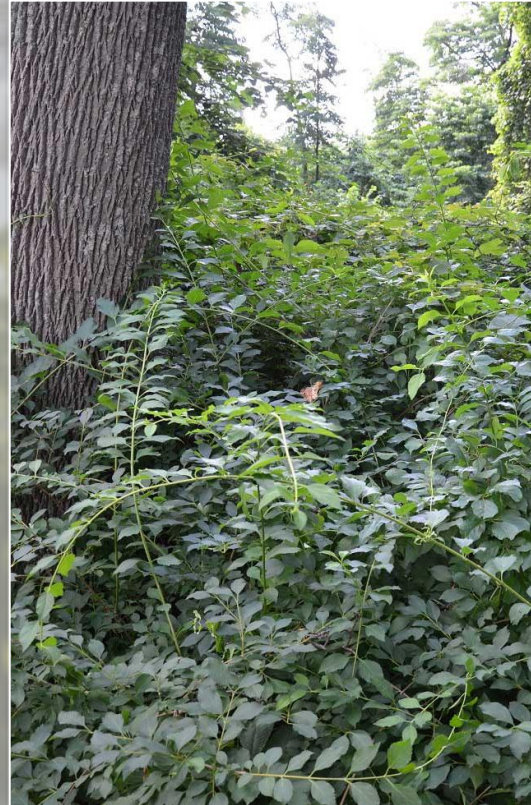
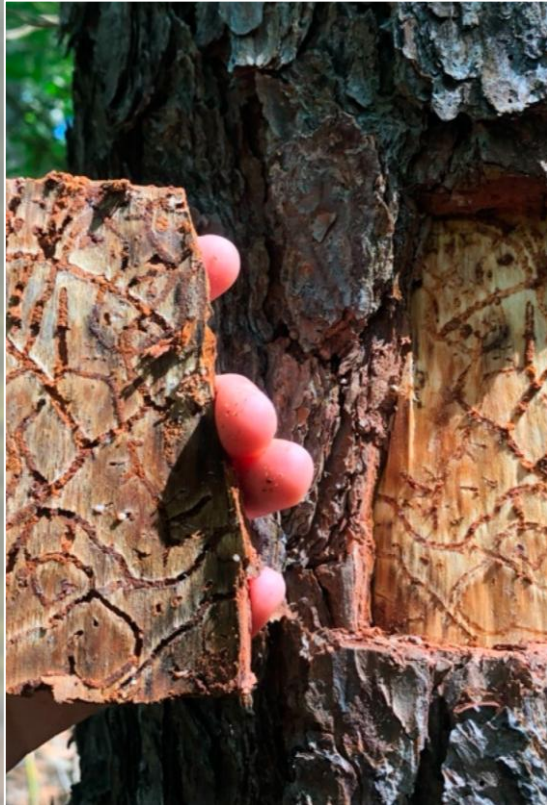
Habitat & Resource Condition

- BioMap
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC's)
- NHESP Priority Habitat & Natural Communities
- DEP Wetlands/Hydrology, Elevation, Soils, Geology
- Prime Forest Lands, MA DCR Forest Health Aerial Survey

Landscape Context

- Open Space Data (adjacent protected land)
- Roads
- DCR Landscape Designations
- Potential Carbon Storage (2070)

FIELD VISITS ON-THE-GROUND VERIFICATION



LOCATING FOREST RESERVES

Collaboration and Coordination

Forest reserves criteria emphasize that proximity to other protected lands- regardless of their designation- is important

Reserves within larger blocks of protected forest

- Strengthens ecological connectivity
- Buffers core areas from outside impacts
- Creates more resilient landscapes for biodiversity and long-term ecosystem functions

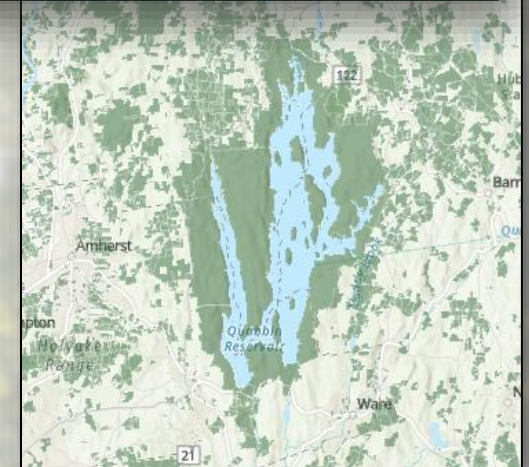
Quabbin Area

- Corridor of protected forest from Rt. 9 to the NH border (over 33-miles) under diverse management.
- Multiple landowners including three state agencies, MA Audubon, Mt. Grace, Kestrel LT, NEFF, municipal land, and countless CR and WPRs.
- Forest Reserves Grant program has supported the expansion of private forest reserves in Shutesbury, Wendell & Belchertown.



LOCATING FOREST RESERVES EXAMPLE

- **Representative & Resilient:** Reflects the diverse forests, soils, and landforms of the Quabbin region and central Massachusetts
- **Connected Landscape:** 1000's of acres linking state and private conserved lands to create large interior forest, support wildlife movement, and enable climate adaptation
- **Ecological Value:** Diverse upland forests, wetlands, and cool hemlock ravines; past management has accelerated old-forest characteristics and structural diversity
- **Water & Aquatic Protection:** Forested buffers along the Swift River maintain cool, shaded waters vital for drinking water, trout, and salmon spawning
- **Public Benefit:** Portion of the New England National Scenic Trail, hunting and fishing opportunities, and more





Reserve Designations Next Steps

Stephanie Cooper
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs
Undersecretary of Environment

CODIFICATION PROCESS

- Mass Ready Act includes a proposal for designation of Forests Reserves for Commonwealth owned forests
 - Bill is pending in the Legislature – House version anticipated soon
- Supports definition, goals, criteria, and management practices contained in reserves guidance documents
- Requires involvement of Agency Governance Boards to designate and de-designate a reserve
 - Designation requires nomination from DCR Commissioner/DFW Director with majority vote from Governance Board
 - De-designation requires support from EEA Secretary, DCR Commissioner/DFW Director plus super majority vote from Governance Board

RESERVES DESIGNATION PROCESS TIMELINE



← **Mass Ready Act moves through Legislature** →



THANK YOU



APPENDIX: FORESTS AS CLIMATE SOLUTIONS (FACS) BACKGROUND

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

Internal Engagement

- More than 50 agency staff from EEA, DFG, DFW, and DCR participated in various workstreams and meetings to advance parallel efforts
- Hosted three all hands meeting for all forest management-related staff at the launch of this initiative
- Opened an internal comment portal to collect input from staff

External Engagement

- Hosted three public input sessions resulting in more than 250 attendees, 49 oral commentors, and over 100 written comment submissions
- Maintained a webpage to share information, online public comment portal, email account to collect input
- Robust stakeholder engagement opportunities held including Forest Reserve Science and Technical Advisory Committee, Land Trusts, business community, municipal officials, RLI Coalition

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Collaboration, Consistency, and Transparency

- Update forestry pages on Mass.gov to provide **common landing page**.
- Developed and implemented **Climate Considerations Narrative Table** into all state forestry practices.
- Expanded information in **new project proposals** using the accepted guidance from the CFC recommendations.
- Provide forest cutting plans and post-project feedback for state forestry projects on Mass.gov
- Forest cutting plan inspection reports to be added to Mass.gov website on completion of projects
- Update key planning documents to reflect CFC guidance including Landscape Designation, Watershed Land Management Plan, Forest Action Plan, State Wildlife Action Plan, Forest Resource Management Plans
- Update **BMP manual** with expanded climate oriented best practices in review and expected Summer 2026
- Crafted and adopted an updated **salvage policy** to be utilized by all state forestry divisions
- Vendor secure to research, assess, and recommend **invasive species** approach and decision tree. In review.

Monitoring and Data

- Developed **expansion strategy for CFI plots** across all three divisions. Expansion work continues as resources allow.
- Expansion of **USFS FIA** data collection to customize landowner survey data
- Developed **strategy for monitoring in reserves**, under review with FRSTAC.

Dashboard

- Launched **Forest Explorer**, online educational tool that demonstrates the conditions of Massachusetts forests, climate change as well as human stressors that impact our forests. Updates to include disturbances, fire on the landscape and expanded carbon considerations to be finalized winter 2026.

FACS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Biodiversity

- DFW developed goals and objectives to support EO 618

Landowner incentives and forest business assistance

- Launched **Canopy Forestry Forum** annual conference, now in third year
- Rebranded Working Forest Initiative to **ForestsWork**
- Expanded ForestsWork funding and technical assistance
 - Climate Stewardship Incentive Program (**C-SIP**) provides incentives for 5 practices
- Launched cost share program for licensed harvesters to purchase mats for climate-oriented forestry

Expansion of forest reserves and land conservation

- Standardized **reserves** definitions, goals, objectives, and criteria across all forestry divisions
- Committed \$8 million in funding to expand reserves on state and private land
- Launched **grant program** to support reserves designations on non-state lands
- Pursued discussions with land trust partners to inform an approach to establish privately or municipally protected reserves
- Identified actions in the **Resilient Lands Initiative and Clean Energy & Climate Plan** that EEA could take measurable steps to promote and implement.
- Expanded Forest Reserve Science Advisory Committee (FRSAC) membership and charter to include DWSP and DFW missions and priorities, establishing the Forest Reserve Science and Technical Advisory Committee (**FRSTAC**).
- Informed the development of language for the Environmental Bond Bill to codify reserve designation process.

FUNDING OVERVIEW

Nearly **\$50M** in funding was programmed to support Forests as Climate Solutions implementation:

About half was directly budgeted, from ARPA allocation

- \$11.5 M tied directly to FCS Branches:
 - \$8 M for acquisition of forest reserves
 - \$3 M for incentives for market development and business and private landowner incentives
 - Remainder for targeted expansion of existing forest conservation grant programs:
 - Community Investment grants, including LAND, Municipal Drinking Water Protection
 - EEA and Agency land acquisition spending
 - Conservation Partnership and Landscape Partnerships grants
 - Tree planting, urban greening, land use planning, technical assistance

About half of this attributed funding comes from annual spending in service of conservation and protection of forests statewide

THE POWER OF ORGANIZATION.

