

Mass Ready Act – Protecting Nature and Water



Healey-Driscoll Administration

Massachusetts has long been a leader in environmental stewardship—but the challenges of today demand a renewed focus on protecting our waterways, restoring land and wildlife, and embracing nature-based solutions to brace for increasingly severe weather. As threats to our natural resources intensify, from toxic contaminants to biodiversity loss, Massachusetts must act decisively to protect the web of life that sustains our health, economy, and communities.

The Mass Ready Act is a strategic, forward-looking investment in environmental protection and resource management. With significant funding dedicated to clean water, including urgent action to address PFAS contamination, Massachusetts is prioritizing the safety of its communities. At the same time, land conservation efforts, recreational investments, and wildlife habitat stewardship programs will safeguard open space, protect forests, and expand access to nature and the outdoors.

The Mass Ready Act boosts both conservation efforts and environmental law enforcement. By advancing these initiatives, Massachusetts can reaffirm its environmental leadership and secure a healthier, safer future for all.

Water Infrastructure and PFAS Remediation

The Mass Ready Act commits to investing in clean and reliable water infrastructure that is essential for advancing public health equity by authorizing:

- **\$385 million to support clean and drinking water projects through the state's revolving funds, including matching federal grants, helping homeowners** comply with updated septic (Title 5) regulations.
- **\$120 million** to support Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) capital projects addressing PFAS contamination in public water supplies and private wells, including treatment systems, infrastructure upgrades, and site remediation to protect drinking water and public health.

- **\$98 million** for capital investments in environmental protection, climate adaptation, pollution cleanup, and waste reduction, including support for clean air and water, lab upgrades, local grants, and projects aligned with the state's climate and solid waste goals.

Land Conservation, Stewardship and Biodiversity

A core pillar of the Mass Ready Act is its alignment with the Massachusetts Biodiversity Goals, supporting large-scale, connected, and healthy natural areas that benefit both people and the variety of plants and animals upon which we survive. The Mass Ready Act ensures those spaces will be here for us and for future generations.

The Mass Ready Act also makes a historic investment in state land protection programs by authorizing **\$340.5 million** for land conservation and acquisition. Further, **\$20 million** is dedicated to the implementation of Biodiversity Executive Order 618, advancing the state's commitment to protect 30% of lands and waters by 2030, restore free-flowing rivers as wildlife corridors, and expand nature-based solutions across Massachusetts.

Forests and Climate Resilience

Massachusetts forests are vital ecosystems that store carbon, provide clean air and water, produce local wood products, support native wildlife, and host some of the region's highest biodiversity. They are foundational to our resilience to climate change and central to building healthy communities. The Mass Ready Act updates the state's Current Use tax program, which provides a vital tool to support landowners who commit to **retaining productive farms, forest lands, and outdoor recreation spaces**. Should a municipality not exercise its right of first refusal when a property is removed from this program, the state can ensure valuable agricultural, forest, recreation, and ecosystem services lands are sustained for the future. Additionally, the Mass Ready Act updates this program to include carbon sequestration and storage as an eligible forest management goal.

Mature forests provide essential benefits to our environment. The Act builds on the **Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative** by codifying a process to designate forest reserves on state land, ensuring these areas remain in their natural state

Public Access and Historic Preservation

The Mass Ready Act aims to improve safety and stewardship of Massachusetts' natural and historic resources. The **Historic Connecticut River Water Trail Fund** would address urgent safety needs for navigational markers for recreational boaters along a heavily used stretch of the river.

The Act updates the **DCR Historic Curatorship Program** by expanding the agency's ability to partner with private curators to rehabilitate and maintain historic properties. The expansion supports public benefit, enhances property stewardship, and enables more efficient use of state conservation and recreation resources.

Enhancing public access to nature also supports experiential environmental education and awareness, helping more residents understand, appreciate, and support the unique wildlife and habitats of Massachusetts.

Environmental Enforcement and Operations

The Massachusetts Environmental Police play a vital role in protecting critical habitats, ensuring public safety by enforcing environmental laws and regulations. The Mass Ready Act authorizes **\$9 million** to support environmental law enforcement facilities and equipment.

The Act also establishes a single set of standards for DCR's regulations and permitting, aligning DCR with the 2020 police reform law. With this change, DCR will be able to more **effectively manage state parkland** and address ongoing violations, such as unauthorized trespasses.

Together, these investments help ensure Massachusetts delivers on a future where ecosystems thrive, communities are resilient, and nature is a valued partner in solving our greatest environmental challenges.

Natural Restoration Projects

The Mass Ready Act will significantly reduce timelines for qualifying projects and provide enhanced regulatory certainty. Qualifying nature-based projects will include those that protect public safety and property, restore vital ecosystems, and meet standards and best practices established by the state.

- **For Chapter 91 Waterways** the General License provision will expedite projects like marsh restoration and dredging for activities like dam removal.
- **For Wetlands** the appeals streamlining will apply to nature-based resilience projects. The Wetlands Protection Act will include language to promote wetlands restoration, preservation, and resilience to changing climate conditions, creating a pathway for expedited approval for projects that offer substantial ecological and resilience benefits.