

Mass Ready Act – Supporting Western and Central Mass

Healey-Driscoll Administration



Western and Central Massachusetts face unique challenges that the Mass Ready Act is designed to address. Rural communities are on the front lines of protecting our natural, working, and resilient lands; but they often have fewer local resources, higher per-capita infrastructure costs, and limited staffing capacity. The Act will deliver critical investments to communities across the state, with a strong focus on supporting those in Western and Central Massachusetts, where the need is great.

Strengthening Our Infrastructure

Western and Central Massachusetts have steep hills and river valleys that increase the risk of flooding, especially in developed areas. The combination of steep slopes and thin soil allows water levels to rise quickly, which can lead to significant damage when extreme weather hits. The Mass Ready Act helps communities prepare with authorizations of **\$308 million** to manage high-risk state-owned or abandoned dams, inland flood control systems, and **\$93.5 million** to manage municipally and publicly owned dams, as well as inland flood control infrastructure and nature-based solutions that enhance climate resilience on public lands.

- **Dams:** Out of the 55 privately owned dams classified as poor or unsafe and designated as high or significant hazards, 38 percent are located in Central Massachusetts and 24 percent are located in Western Massachusetts. The Mass Ready Act prioritizes the most critical dams and flood control projects that pose significant risks to public health, safety, or the environment. Additionally, dam removals will enhance aquatic habitats by restoring natural riverine processes. The Mass Ready Act will support all dam owners.
- **Inland Flood Control Projects:** Mass Ready authorizes funding for constructing or improving infrastructure for systems designed to mitigate flood impacts and protect communities.
- **Bridges / Culverts:** Western and Central Massachusetts have steep landscapes and fast-moving streams, exacerbating the hazards associated with under-sized

culverts and aging water systems in need of investment. Towns like Becket and Charlemont have significantly more culverts and bridges per capita compared to municipalities in the eastern part of the state. To address these challenges, the Mass Ready Act allocates funding to improve infrastructure and support to these communities.

- The Mass Ready Act also authorizes **expedited permitting processes and timelines for municipal culvert replacements** that incorporate resilience standards. This provision decreases the time and therefore the costs of culvert upgrades that enhance community resilience against flood events, which will allow public investments in culvert projects to go further.
- Additionally, the Act supports the creation of a **Connecticut River Valley Resilience Commission**, which enables inter-municipal collaboration and the development of a regional strategy to mitigate flood risk and address aging infrastructure along the Connecticut River. The plan will identify priority regional resilience projects to reduce flood risk, provide estimated costs and timelines, and make recommendations for local and regional actions to align.

Protecting Water and Nature

The Mass Ready Act supports direct investments to ensure all residents have access to clean **water and air (\$218M)**, including developing tools to better strategically manage our public water supply for drinking water and rural firefighting; and to plan for stormwater infrastructure and monitor cumulative environmental impacts.

- **Mass Ready takes a historic step toward PFAS mitigation by investing in actions to identify and address contamination.** With \$250 million in new authorization, Mass Ready expands capacity of the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRF), which provide low-interest loans and grants to municipalities and water utilities to enhance water resources, ensure safe drinking water, and protect public health. This bill also authorizes new funding to treat PFAS contamination in private wells as part of DEP's hazardous waste site cleanup program and supports DEP's continued efforts to address PFAS in soils and wastewater.

- **Land Conservation, Stewardship and Biodiversity:** The Mass Ready Act makes a historic investment in state land acquisition by authorizing **\$340.5 million** for restoration and stewardship. Further, **\$20 million** is dedicated to the planning and implementation of projects and programs included in Executive Order 618, Biodiversity Conservation in Massachusetts.

Investing in Farms and Local Economies

For Western and Central Mass farms, forests, outdoor recreation, and rural character are a way of life. The Mass Ready Act invests in these priorities.

- **\$315 million** for EEA's flagship grant program, the **Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Grant Program (MVP)** that supports communities in identifying climate hazards, assessing vulnerabilities, and implementing action plans to improve resilience to climate change. MVP is committed to supporting rural and small towns in their efforts to implement climate resilience projects. Ninety-nine percent of Massachusetts' communities are currently enrolled in the program. In response to feedback, MVP has taken steps to make it easier for rural and small towns to apply. Mass Ready expands MVP eligibility to nonprofit and regional organizations, which is particularly useful for rural communities with limited staff capacity to apply for grants
- **Establishes a Resilience Revolving Fund** to provide low-interest loans to cities, towns, public water and wastewater districts and tribal governments to construct shovel-ready projects that will mitigate local and regional flooding and heat risks and avoid costly damages. Modeled on the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds, the Clean Water Trust will provide financial administration for the Resilience Revolving Fund and EEA will manage the program.
- **\$125 million** for **Food Security** programs that support equitable access to nutritious and local food, and funds about 150 projects per year.
- **\$68 million** for Massachusetts Department of Agriculture (MDAR) to **protect farmland**, foster agricultural economic and environmental sustainability.
- **\$30 million** for **forestry** and **tree planting** programs.

- **Trails and Greenways:** Development and upgrade of bike paths, accessible trails, woodland trails, and multi-use routes.