Presented by Kim Tilas, Manager, Mass Environmental Trust March 13, 2025

THE BEGINNING OF THE MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST (MET)

A 1985 U.S. District Court ruling on the federal government's civil lawsuit held the Metropolitan District Commission responsible for violating the federal Clean Water Act by dumping raw sewage into the harbor.

Massachusetts settled the lawsuit on April 14, 1988, fining the MDC $425,000 and establishing a $2 million trust fund to benefit the port and adjacent Massachusetts Bay.

The Legislature appropriated $2,000,000 of the settlement funds from the lawsuit and ordered that the funds be spent by 1992. The Trust directed the funds to scientific research, outreach, and restoration projects to increase understanding of Mass Bays and watershed resources.

The Trust's activities were recognized as a national model for directing lawsuit proceeds and leveraged national attention and over $5 million Federal National Estuaries Program to create Mass Bays Program/NEP.

The Trust received settlement funds until 2012.

The Trust is housed in the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs and operates without tax dollars or legislative appropriations with oversight from a non-paid Board of Trustees.

Projects from $2 million

- Belle Island Marsh Study and Restoration
- Post Island Marsh Restoration
- Thompson Island Outward Bound
- Characterization of Contaminants to Mass. Bay
- Physical Oceanographic Survey of Mass. Bay
- Property of Circulation Variability in Mass. & Cape Cod Bay
- Seasonal Evolution of Hydrographic State
- Seasonal Distribution of Nutrients/Solids in Mass. Bay
- Bioavailability & Biotransformation of PAHs in Harbor
- Survival & Deposition of Fecal Bacteria in Harbor Sediments
- Evaluation of Elemental Tracers for Transport of Sludge
- The Massachusetts Bay Management System
- Planners Collaborative Data Management for Mass. Bays Program

MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST NOW

MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST

- MET is a state trust that operates under the Water Policy Division of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
- It is established to receive funding from individuals, foundations, and corporations, as well as through wills and bequests
- Its main source of revenue is generated from the sales of four Specialty License Plates
- MET provides grants to support and empower groups dedicated to advancing our mission
- Seed grants from MET support projects with strong potential for impact or funding from federal, foundation, or industry sponsors

Mission Statement: It shall be the sole purpose of the Massachusetts Environmental Trust ("MET" or "the Trust") to fund and coordinate projects to restore, protect and improve the quality of all Commonwealth waterways, to increase understanding of them and the effect of human activities upon them, and to encourage public involvement in activities which promote them as living resources and public treasures for present and future citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In particular, the Trust supports projects that advance conservation measures and understanding of marine life and of aquatic ecosystems.

HOW ARE THE GRANTS FUNDED?

These 4 license plates fund most of MET's Activities

THANK YOU, MET PLATE HOLDERS!

RIGHT WHALE PLATE

The ‘Whale Plate’ features the **fluke of a North Atlantic right whale (RW) and two roseate terns (RT).** The North Atlantic right whale is the state marine mammal and the world’s most endangered large whale. Roseate terns are native to Massachusetts and are also endangered. Introduced to Mass drivers in 1994 the whale plate largely funds the Trust’s marine conservation projects.

LEAPING BROOK TROUT PLATE

The Brook Trout (FW) license plate was introduced in 1998. Native to the state's western streams and serves as a symbol of both the pristine water in which it thrives, and the recreational benefits of a healthy environment. Proceeds from the **Brook Trout plate** are used to protect and restore rivers, streams, and coastal waters of Massachusetts.

Since 2022, the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) and MET are working together to fund programs to restore habitats for trout and other coldwater species.

BLACKSTONE VALLEY MILL PLATE

The Blackstone Valley, which runs through the central part of the state, was the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. The **Blackstone Valley plate** signifies the importance of restoring our urban rivers and streams to enhance their ecology and to improve the health of our riverfront communities.

STRIPED BASS CONSERVATION PLATE

The **Striped Bass plate** funds projects and activities for the conservation of saltwater fish, with a focus on striped bass, for ecosystem sustainability, habitat conservation, and angler education. The Mass Environmental Trust (MET) and the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) developed the Striped Bass Conservation plate in 2019 to support studies of striped bass populations, stock structure, movements, and local ecology to help ensure that future generations of anglers will have the opportunity to experience the unmatched thrill of fishing for this iconic species.

MET's GRANT PROGRAM

MET annually funds projects that protect endangered marine animals and activities that restore and improve critical aquatic ecosystems.

MET grants average $600,000 annually ranging from $500 to $200,000 and has awarded more than $28 million to 800 projects and more than 340 organizations.

The upcoming Grant RFR will focus on:

- Environmental Advocacy and Educational and Conservation Activities Related to Aquatic Habitat Improvements
- Threatened & Endangered Marine Life Protection & Conservation

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED MARINE LIFE PROTECTION & CONSERVATION

MET has and continues to invest millions of dollars to organizations working to protect marine life. Efforts include:

- Surface and aerial surveillance to find whales and report their presence to resource managers and shipping interests
- Vessel-based habitat & behavioral studies
- Plankton monitoring (a primary food source for whales)
- Whale beaching investigations as well as rescue and rehabilitation
- Ship strike avoidance techniques
- Research and development for the design and implementation of harmless fishing gear
- and so much more...

Threatened and Endangered Marine Life Protection & Conservation

MET annually supports the **Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) and Center for Coastal Studies (CCS) Large Whale and Sea Turtle Conservation Program**, an intensive effort to protect, restore and manage large whale and sea turtle species found in surrounding Massachusetts state waters.

It combines **monitoring and analysis of the population and habitat of North Atlantic right whales, with readiness and response year-round at-sea rescues of right, humpback, fin whales, and leatherback sea turtles** in waters from New Hampshire to Rhode Island.

The program began in 1997 and continues as a partnership between MET, DMF, CCS, and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to protect, monitor and rescue whales and sea turtles.

Examples of Threatened and Endangered Marine Life Protection & Conservation Grants

Associated Scientists of Woods Hole – Publication and distribution of Right Whale News since 1994.

Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation – Right Whale Booth in a Box with interactive tools to demonstrate whale identification and the complexities of the issues of vessel strikes and entanglement.

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) - Expanding large whale response capacity by incorporating necropsies and refining sedation techniques in stranding/entanglement situations.

Ocean Alliance - Collaborative long-term collection of photogrammetry, respiratory and bioacoustics data from large whales using drones.

Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) – New England Whale Festival to increase public awareness about whales and the threats they face.

University of Mass Foundation – Harbor and gray seal habitat use and residency study using photo-identification.

Whale Center of New England – Marine mammal response activities as a vehicle for teaching science and math principles.

More Examples of Threatened and Endangered Marine Life Protection & Conservation Grants

Center for Coastal Studies – Assessing humpback entanglement rates through sampling and image analysis and Identification of locations frequented by NA right whales to target management actions.

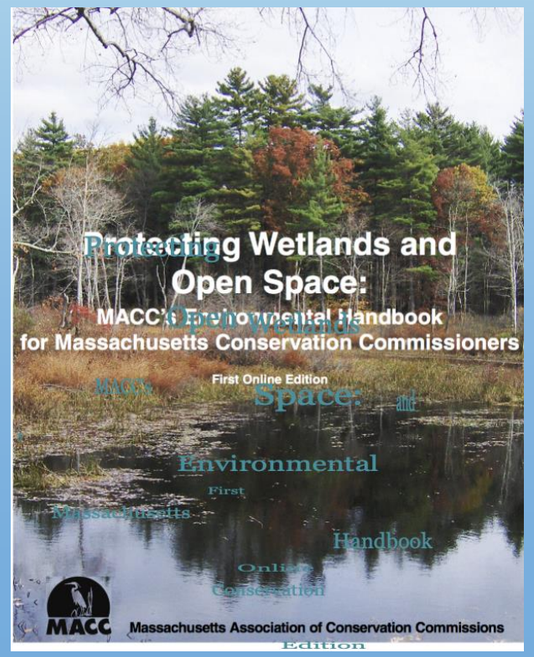
Coonamessett Farm Foundation – Conducting eDNA tests to determine sea turtle presence and range and to identify regions of heavy metal contaminants.

Lobster Foundation of Massachusetts – Training lobstermen about gear restrictions and free gear to protect endangered right whales in collaboration with the **Mass Lobstermen's Association, Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance the and the Division of Marine Fisheries.**

New England Aquarium - Survival prospects of leatherback turtles after disentanglement, part of the first-responder network for sea turtles that get snagged by fishing lines with collaborators at the **Center for Coastal Studies.**

South Shore Lobsterman's Association & the New England Aquarium – Development of solutions using weaker-strength rope to mitigate the frequency and severity of North Atlantic right whale entanglements in an environment where both the commercial lobster fishery and the right whale may co-exist.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION & AWARENESS



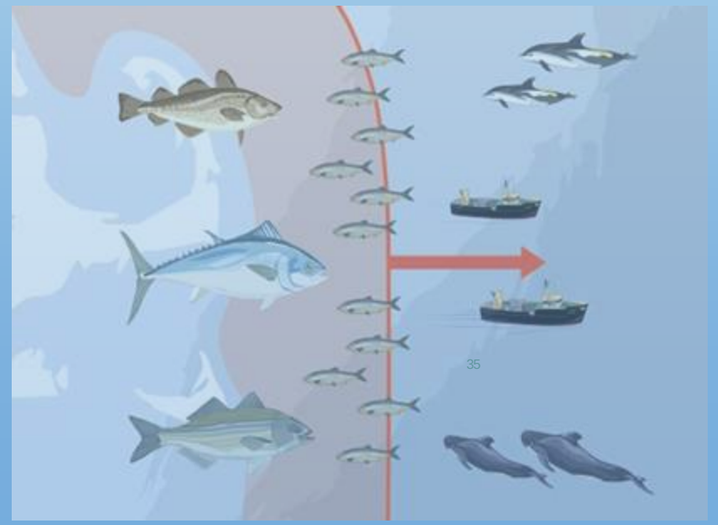
MET supports efforts that serve to create an informed and proactive citizenry with the knowledge, appreciation and skills to act as responsible environmental stewards. Projects involve:

- Community educational campaigns designed to build awareness and influence Conferences, symposia, or publications
- Public outreach efforts such as workshops, festivals, cleanups
- Support for conservation commissions, watershed alliances, marine fisheries and habitat associations

Examples of Environmental Education & Awareness

Boston Harbor Islands Discovery Camp - In 2016, MET helped form the Boston Harbor Island Alliance, a merger with The **Boston Harbor Association & Save the Harbor Save the Day** to form Boston Harbor Now.

Pier Project - Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Alliance's public awareness campaign about ocean ecosystems to prepare the next generation of Environmental stewards.



RIVER RESTORATION & AQUATIC HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS

MET grants have funded:

- Natural cranberry bog restoration
- Removal of dams and harmful aquatic debris
- Stream crossing inventories & identification of culverts and other structures that are barriers to fish and wildlife
- Volunteer monitoring programs
- and so much more....

Examples of River Restoration & Aquatic Habitat Improvements

Blackstone River Coalition - Restoring the Blackstone River and its tributaries and protecting several coldwater streams and their fisheries.

Clean River Project - Merrimack River vehicle and debris recovery project.

Connecticut River Conservancy - Restore the endangered brook floater mussel to the Connecticut River watershed.

Friends of Herring River - Herring River in Wellfleet/Truro salt marsh restoration.

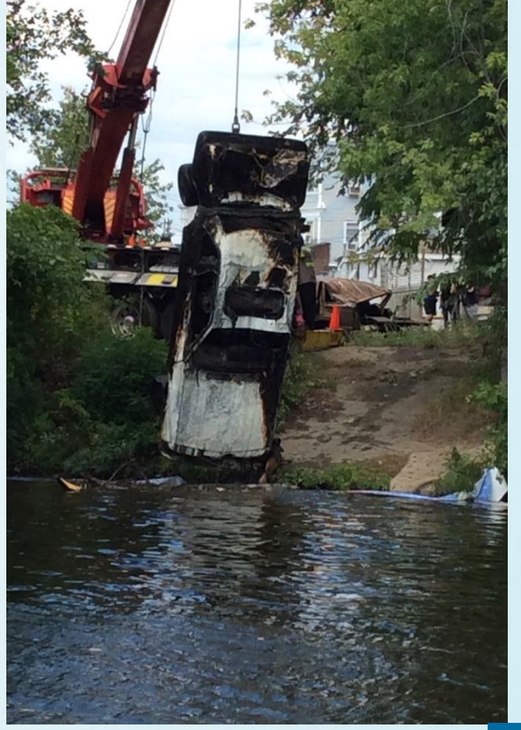
Mystic River Watershed Association (MYRWA) - Water quality monitoring & improvement, water condition alert flagging system.

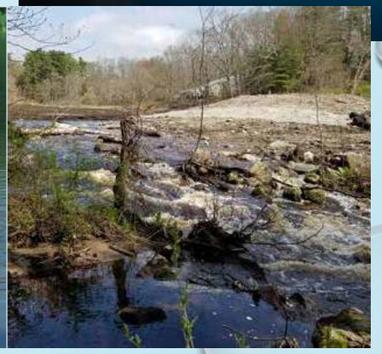
The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) - Environmental monitoring program for volunteer monitoring of Lake Onota and its tributaries

The Friends of the Malden River (FOMR) - Trash-free Malden River uses trash booms to restrain the trash from flowing into stormwater systems.

The Parker River Clean Water Association (PRCWA) - Increased awareness of the importance of the rare turtle habitat in our watershed.

Westport River Watershed Alliance - Assessing nitrogen and bacteria pollution sources and sinks for the Westport River.





Examples of Dam Removal
River Restoration & Aquatic Habitat Improvements

American Rivers - Hamant Brook Dam river restoration and removal of three dams creating a mile of restored river to coldwater stream condition and reconnection of Hamant Brook with the Quinebaug River.

Buzzards Bay Coalition - Restoration of the Weweantic River to improve passage and habitat for migratory fish and other aquatic species to allow coastal habitats to adapt to rising sea levels, threatening to the important rainbow smelt spawning riffle just below the dam.

Center for Ecosystem Restoration - Shawsheen River Restoration, a collaborative effort to remove the Balmoral Dam and the Marland Place Dam in Andover on the Shawsheen River, a tributary of the Merrimack river that flows through 12 northeastern communities.

The Nature Conservancy - Removal of the Whittenton, Hopewell Mills, and West Britannia dams and rebuilding of the Morey's Dam on the Mill River in Taunton, opening over 50 miles of mainstem and tributary habitat and 400 acres of pond habitat for river herring, American eel, and other migratory and resident fish. **Partners:** Division of Ecological Restoration (DER), Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District, American Rivers, Save the Bay, NOAA Restoration Center, US Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, MA Department of Mental Health, MA Department of Transportation, Mass Audubon, Taunton River Watershed Alliance, Corporate Wetlands Restoration Program and dam owners**.**

Trout Unlimited (TU) - Reconnection and improvement of over 6 miles of high-quality coldwater brook trout habitat as well as to continue monitoring dam removal sites across MA to ensure that we're facilitating positive ecological change.

Examples of Collaborative/Key Funding for River Restoration & Aquatic Habitat Improvements

American Rivers - Tidmarsh Farms Restoration – Restoration of critical habitat in approximately 3.5 miles of stream and 250 acres of degraded freshwater wetlands in the beaver dam brook watershed involving six dam removals and the addition of 3,000 large wood pieces and thousands of plants on this 192 acres of former commercial cranberry bogs.

Town of Falmouth/Conservation Commission - Coonamessett River Greenway - Restoration of 56 acres of former cranberry bog to natural wetlands and a healthy, self-sustaining river and wetland ecosystem with improved coastal resiliency. Two dams were removed, providing full access to 2.2 miles of free-flowing river creating access for river herring to 158 acres of spawning habitat in Coonamessett Pond.

The Falmouth Rod & Gun Club & Sporting, Safety, Conservation and Education Fund – Restoration of the abandoned cranberry bogs of the **Upper Childs River** to wetlands habitat for waterfowl, brook trout and other fish and wildlife. This $3 million project is the second river and bog restoration of its kind on Cape Cod.

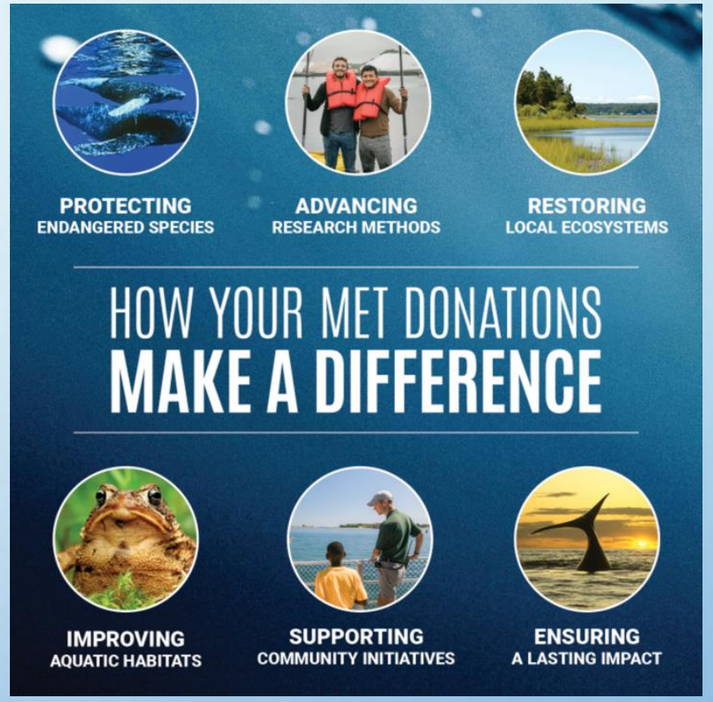
CELEBRATING MET'S FUTURE

In 2022 and 2023, MET implemented a "strategic pause" in our annual grantmaking cycle, which involved suspending the competitive Request for Proposals/Response (RFR) for fiscal years 2023 and 2024. The fluctuating nature of our economy over the past decade, combined with the disruption and uncertainty caused by the pandemic and an increase in new Specialty License Plates, has led to a steady decline in the Trust's revenue stream, the four license plates.

Today, under the leadership of the Water Policy Director, Vandana Rao, MET is re-energized. Fundraising efforts have begun and the Grant Program RFR will be posted very soon. Our goal is to raise $1,000,000 over the next 2 years!

The year 2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the whale plate and to commemorate this milestone we began to auction our low-number whale plates (RW and RT plates 1-999). Over the next 2-3 years, we will auction sets of whale plates every 3-6 months. Soon, we will auction low-number Striped Bass plates (1-99), and in the future, we will auction low-number plates 1-999 for the Trout and Blackstone Valley plates.

LOW-NUMBER PLATE AUCTIONS AND FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN



HOW MUCH DO MET PLATES COST?

A passenger registration in Massachusetts is $60 every two-years

The special plate fee is an additional tax-deductible donation of $40

The total cost is $100 every two years

An easy and affordable way to help whales and aquatic wildlife and they make great gifts too!

MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST

1988

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET/Trust), originally called the Boston and Lynn Harbors and Massachusetts, Buzzards and Cape Cod Bays Environment Trust Fund, was established by the Massachusetts State Legislature to disburse $2 million in settlement proceeds for violations of the Clean Water Act

MET allocates $1.6 million of the settlement to the establishment of the Massachusetts Bays Program to address the mounting environmental threats to the health of Massachusetts and Cape Cod Bays

1994

The Trust is first in the state to partner with the RMV to introduce non-profit affinity license plates: the Right Whale Tail/Roseate Terns environmental plates

1995

Updated legislation allows the Trust to award grants in order to expand funding to Central and Western Mass

1996

Community Foundation Partnership program established to amplify environmental grantmaking at the local level

MET awards MASSBAYS significant grant to seed creation of Massachusetts Bay Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. The CCMP serves as the blueprint for coordinated action among government and partners to restore and protect the diverse natural resources of the Bays

Grants issued to support Conservation Commission Training in support of the Rivers Protection Act

1997

Threatened & Endangered Species Grant Program funds six water bird projects

Major focus on water quality monitoring grants

Trout plate introduced to represent the rivers, streams, and lakes of Central & Western Mass

1998

Threatened & Endangered Species Grant Program funds the Whale Conservation Working Partnership between MET, the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) and several marine mammal groups to develop an emergency right whale surveillance program

2001

The Trust funds the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium (NARWC), a collaborative data sharing group from various research and conservation organizations, shipping and fishing industries, technical experts, US and Canadian government agencies; all of whom are dedicated to the conservation and recovery of the right whale

1999

Blackstone Valley Mill plate is issued symbolizing the need to restore our state's urban waterways and riverfront communities

2003

MET provides seed funding to the Executive Office of Environmental Affair's Coastal Zone Management (CZM) for the development of the Massachusetts Ocean Plan with importance placed on marine protected species, the right whale in particular

2002

The Trust establishes new grant programs: Environmental Education, Youth in Environmental Philanthropy, Environmental Monitoring and the Biodiversity Grant Program

2009

The Trust charged with distributing monies from U.S. vs. Exxon settlement, $1 million awarded to Mystic River Watershed water quality and wetland restoration projects

2008

The Trust celebrates its 20th Anniversary

Established Secretary's Excellence in Energy and Environmental Education Annual Awards

2006

MET hosts landmark environmental briefing at the Massachusetts State House to honor legislators and highlight grantee successes

"BCB", is created as the Trust's spokesperson to spread awareness about the programs funded by MET license plate holders

Major $685,000 settlement disbursed to Town Line Brook Pilot Project, The Household Hazardous Waste Handling and Disposal Project and The Greater Boston Water Quality Improvement Project

2005

2016

MET Trustees direct funds to establish the Boston Harbor Island Alliance to preserve, protect, and enhance public understanding and enjoyment of the Boston Harbor Islands

2015

Surpassed 50,000 residents who have one of the trust's three environmental plates!

2012

MET vigorously invests in river restoration projects and monitoring the physical and biological benefits of dam removal

2011

MET commits to continuing long-term support of the North Atlantic Large Whale and Sea Turtle Disentanglement Response Program

2024 AND BEYOND

Division of Marine Fisheries and the Trust are excited to introduce the new Striped Bass and Herring conservation license plate

For 30 years and beyond your contributions have made it possible to continue our mission.

30+ Years of Success

Please read our 30 Years & Beyond Anniversary Report (www.mass.gov/eea/met)

THANK YOU!

Read our 30 Years and Beyond Anniversary Report

MASS.GOV/EEA/MET

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