

MASS WILDLIFE  
**2025** ANNUAL  
REPORT



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# About MassWildlife

## WHAT WE DO

### Monitoring, Management, and Restoration

Highly-trained biologists, ecologists, and habitat specialists at MassWildlife collect and analyze data, map habitats, and utilize the best conservation science available to determine how to most effectively manage wildlife and their habitats. MassWildlife's long history of partnerships with universities and other organizations has resulted in the restoration of unique habitats and wildlife, including the wild turkey, American shad, northern red-bellied cooter, and bald eagle.

### Outdoor Recreation

Through the effective management of fish and wildlife, coupled with MassWildlife's popular pheasant and trout stocking programs, MassWildlife ensures abundant hunting and fishing opportunities in Massachusetts. Birders, naturalists, hikers, and others can pursue outdoor recreation on the extensive variety of wildlife lands managed by MassWildlife.

### Land Protection and Habitat Management

With over 6.5 million people living on 5 million acres in Massachusetts, space for both wildlife and people is at a premium. MassWildlife manages an extraordinarily diverse system of wildlife lands to ensure the survival, health, and viability of our fish and wildlife and to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for the public.

### Education and Outreach

Outdoor skills clinics, wildlife education workshops, conservation presentations, and publications provide residents and visitors with experiences that lead to greater understanding, appreciation, and support of Massachusetts wildlife conservation.

### Regulations and Permitting

Science-based regulations on hunting, fishing, and trapping ensure there are natural resources for all to enjoy, now and into the future. MassWildlife's environmental review of development projects under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, and other environmental laws prevents and minimizes impacts to wildlife and ensures responsible development.

## OUR MISSION

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) is responsible for the conservation—including restoration, protection, and management—of fish and wildlife resources in Massachusetts for the benefit and enjoyment of the public.

## BY THE NUMBERS



**156**  
Employees



**239,000**  
Acres Protected & Managed



**5**  
Wildlife District Offices



**238**  
Wildlife Management Areas



**5**  
Fish Hatcheries



**132**  
Wildlife Conservation Easements

**About this report:** This report includes highlights from Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025).

To learn more about the full scope of MassWildlife's programs and services, please visit [mass.gov/masswildlife](https://mass.gov/masswildlife)

# Table of Contents



**P.8** OUTDOOR RECREATION

**P.4** YEAR IN REVIEW

**P.6** A WILDLIFE CONSERVATION MODEL AT WORK

**P.25** REGULATION CHANGES

**P.14** CONSERVING OUR MOST VULNERABLE SPECIES

**P.12** FISHERIES MANAGEMENT & RESEARCH

**P.10** WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT & RESEARCH

**P.18** CARING FOR WILDLIFE LANDS

**P.16** LAND PROTECTION

**P.22** FINANCIAL REPORTS

**P.20** PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Guided by science and grounded in our mission to conserve the Commonwealth's native fish and wildlife and their habitats, MassWildlife advanced critical conservation work this year, supported safe and responsible outdoor recreation, and strengthened partnerships across the state. From on-the-ground habitat

management to research, outreach, and regulatory efforts, our staff worked diligently to balance the needs of wildlife and people in a changing landscape. Explore the table of contents to learn more about FY 2025's accomplishments.

# Year in Review



## 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

**State Wildlife Action Plan:** With input from a broad network of conservation partners and the public, MassWildlife submitted the 2025 Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—a requirement for states to receive federal State Wildlife Grants. Now fully available online ([mass.gov/swap](http://mass.gov/swap)), the plan features interactive dashboards and fact sheets covering 620 Species of Greatest Conservation Need and 35 habitat types. The updated SWAP outlines priority actions to conserve and restore vulnerable plants, animals, and habitats throughout Massachusetts.

Conserving biodiversity in the Commonwealth means ensuring healthy and robust populations of our native plants and animals. Due to a variety of threats, many species are in decline. MassWildlife biologists, in collaboration with species experts, developed criteria for designating Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) based on factors such as risk of extirpation in Massachusetts, population trends, regional conservation priorities, emerging threats, and vulnerability to climate change. Fact sheets containing species' description, life history, associated habitat, and range, as well as threats and conservation actions, were created for each SGCN.

Habitat protection and restoration are essential as well. Our nearly 3 million acres of forest, 1,500 miles of coastline, over 2,000 miles of rivers and streams, and expansive wetlands provide habitat for a variety of plants and animals, as well as ecosystem services that benefit people. The SWAP provides detailed descriptions of habitats and natural communities, the unique suite of species they support, and the conservation actions and management options that can keep them healthy.

MassWildlife is grateful to all who contributed to the SWAP. This comprehensive effort establishes a strong foundation for conserving the Commonwealth's rich biodiversity, shaping priorities, and advancing conservation for the next decade.

**Wildlife Health:** In January 2025, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) killed over 60 geese and other birds in Plymouth and smaller outbreaks occurred across the state. MassWildlife led a coordinated response to protect wildlife and human health. Staff collected birds, conducted testing, evaluated thousands of disease and mortality reports, and effectively communicated guidance to the public. MassWildlife's HPAI response demonstrated the importance of its new Zoonotic Disease Initiative, which focuses on wildlife disease prevention and preparedness. To support this initiative, MassWildlife hired its first Wildlife Health Biologist this year, responsible for developing an interagency wildlife health task force, establishing a regional network of diagnostic and pathology labs, and creating a wildlife health communication plan.

**Added Capacity:** In 2025, MassWildlife hired its first-ever Assistant Director of Land and Habitat Conservation, solidifying the agency's ongoing commitment to conserving Massachusetts' landscapes and ensuring the health of the Commonwealth's diverse habitats for wildlife and outdoor recreation. This position provides leadership to a dedicated team of land stewards, foresters, ecologists, and habitat biologists. MassWildlife's habitat program reached a new milestone this year, with over 50 staff trained in prescribed fire and 26 trained in herbicide applications.

## WORKFORCE TRANSITIONS

MassWildlife acknowledges the dedicated service of employees who retired this year and welcomes new team members whose work will support ongoing priorities and initiatives.

### Retirements:

**Steve Foster**  
*Hunter Education  
Logistics*

**Serena B. Hawthorne**  
*Habitat Program  
Manager*

**H. Heusmann**  
*Waterfowl Project Leader*

**Steve Hurley**  
*Aquatic Biologist*

**Yunus Khalifa**  
*Program Coordinator*

**Susan Langlois**  
*Hunter Education  
Program Administrator*

**Deb Lipa**  
*Clerk*

**Kurt Palmateer**  
*Hatchery Manager*

**Kathleen Plett**  
*Program Coordinator*

### New Hires:

**Raymond Bressette**  
*Wildlife Technician*

**Erin Carpenter**  
*Wildlife Technician*

**Leah Derleth**  
*Hatchery Technician*

**Joseph Facendola**  
*Aquatic Biologist*

**Devon Harrington**  
*Endangered Species  
Review Biologist*

**Austyn Morin**  
*Hatchery Technician*

**Michelle Morrison**  
*Federal Aid and Compliance  
Manager Assistant*

**Emily Myron**  
*Assistant Director of Land  
and Habitat Conservation*

**Thornton Ritz**  
*Stream Biologist  
Project Leader*

**Rachel Shepardson**  
*Clerk*

**Sarah Van de Berg**  
*Wildlife Health Biologist*

## EXCELLENCE RECOGNIZED

Staff whose dedication makes a real impact in the agency and the communities served are recognized here.

**Massachusetts  
Environmental Police  
Director's Commendation**  
Dave Fuller  
Nicole McSweeney  
Joe Rogers  
Dave Wattles

**Sportswoman of the year,  
Berkshire County League  
of Sportsmen's Clubs**  
Leanda Fontaine

**Youth Mentor of the Year,  
Worcester County League  
of Sportsmen's Clubs**  
Jim Lagacy

**R3 Champion, Council to  
Advance Hunting and the  
Shooting Sports**  
Astrid Huseby

**Massachusetts  
Performance  
Recognition Award**  
NEAFWA Conference  
Planning Committee  
Jim Lagacy  
Emily Stolarski  
Dave Wattles



# A Wildlife Conservation Model at Work

MassWildlife restores and protects wildlife and their habitats using the best available science and management tools. Regulated hunting and fishing help maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations, fund conservation, connect people with nature, and provide food to many families in Massachusetts.



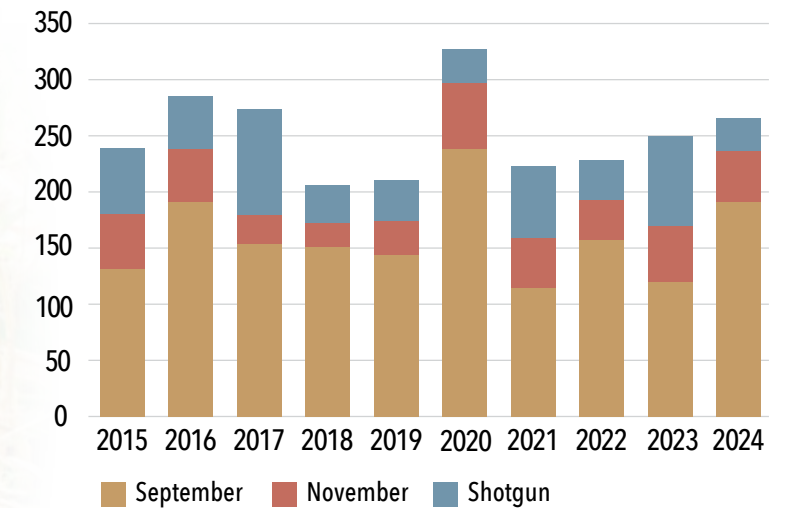
## LICENSES AND PERMITS

<b>166,094</b> Freshwater Fishing Licenses	<b>22,137</b> Hunting Licenses	<b>37,497</b> Sporting Licenses	<b>845</b> Trapping Licenses
<b>10,731</b> Pheasant and Quail Permits	<b>8,063</b> Waterfowl Stamps	<b>62</b> Falconry Permits	

## BLACK BEAR HUNTING



### Bear Harvested by Season



**12,097**  
Bear Permits

**262**  
Bears Harvested

## WHITE-TAILED DEER HUNTING

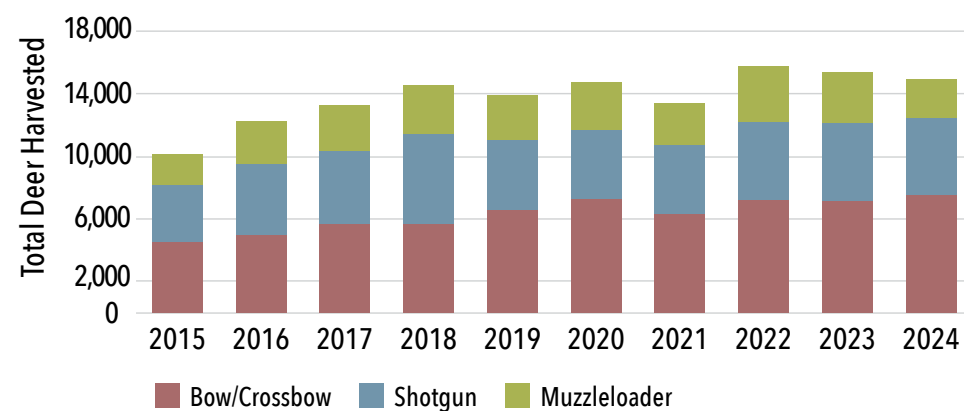
**49,280**  
Antlerless Deer Permits

**810**  
Youth Deer Hunting Permits

**7,801**  
Antlered Deer Harvested

**7,262**  
Antlerless Deer Harvested

### Deer Harvested by Implement



★ **A shift in implements:** The majority of deer harvested in Massachusetts were taken using archery equipment for the first time in CY 2024.

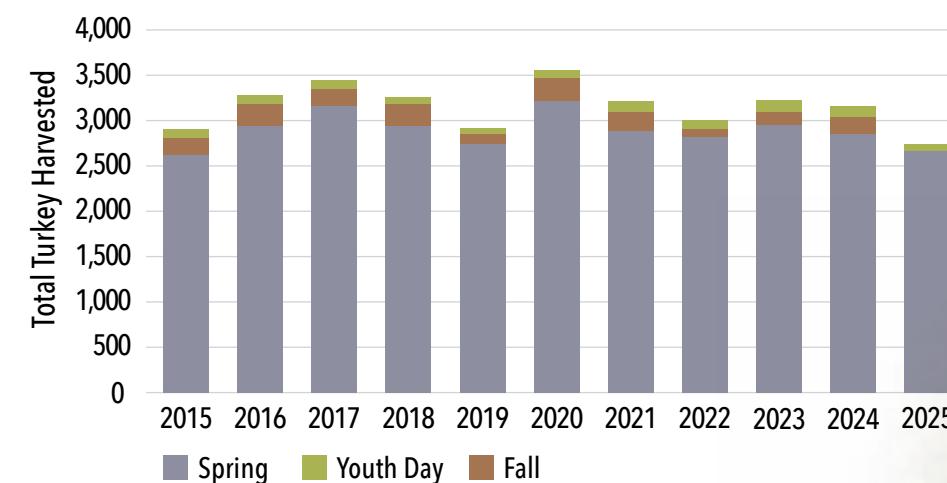
## HUNTERS SHARE THE HARVEST PROGRAM

MassWildlife's *Hunters Share the Harvest Program* provides an outlet for hunters and farmers to donate venison to Massachusetts residents facing food insecurity. Thanks to hunters, farmers, deer processors, food distribution partners, and financial supporters, over 30,000 nutritious meals were distributed to families in need in FY 2025.



## WILD TURKEY HUNTING

### Turkey Harvested by Season



**3,444**  
Fall Turkey Permits

**200**  
Turkeys Harvested (2024 fall season)

**230**  
Youth Eligible for Youth Turkey Hunt Day

**14,389**  
Spring Turkey Permits

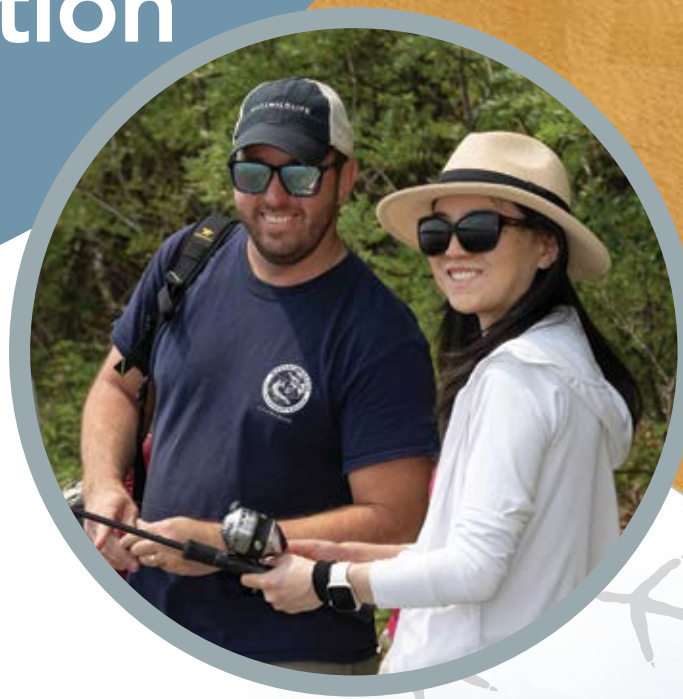
**2,759**  
Turkeys Harvested (2025 spring season)

★ **Hunting in Massachusetts:** Hunting regulations are set by MassWildlife and hunters must obtain a license every year to hunt in Massachusetts. MassWildlife biologists monitor harvest trends over time to keep wildlife populations healthy and balanced.



# Outdoor Recreation

MassWildlife provides hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation opportunities through science-based management, popular stocking programs, hands-on education classes, and public access to lands and waters.



*“Thank you so much for this opportunity to hunt! It was an amazing, life-changing, best-ever experience! It is one thing to read about hunting, but it is completely another to have someone show you the practice of how it is actually done and especially being successful in the process!”*

— 2025 Mentored Turkey Hunt Participant



## STOCKING

**500,000**

Nearly half a million trout stocked in over 450 lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams in over 260 towns across Massachusetts

**40,000**

Pheasants stocked in 40 towns on 41 Wildlife Management Areas and 83 other public and private lands open to hunting

## OUTDOOR EDUCATION

**10,763**

Students participated in the National Archery in the Schools Program and 147 total schools are now trained

**4,100**

Students attended family fishing festivals and clinics

**2,121**

Students completed Basic Hunter Education

**338**

New hunters participated in Learn to Hunt seminars and mentored hunts

**249**

Students completed Bowhunter Education

**76**

Students completed Trapper Education

**62**

Women participated in Becoming an Outdoors Woman mentored hunts, seminars, and fishing clinics

**219,400**

Visits to MassWildlife hunting and fishing instructional web pages

## SPORTFISH AWARDS

**3,682**

Bronze pins were awarded to adult and youth anglers

MassWildlife’s Freshwater Sportfishing Awards program has been celebrating the joy of fishing since 1963!



## THANK YOU!

**326**

Volunteers gave their time and expertise to support the Hunter Education, Learn to Hunt, and Angler Education programs.

**6,000+**

Licensed hunters and trappers responded to MassWildlife’s surveys last year. These surveys provide critical information to help our biologists better understand wildlife populations, as well as hunting and trapping activity and effort.



## ARCHERY RANGES

This summer, MassWildlife opened public archery ranges on six Wildlife Management Areas. These temporary ranges gave archers and bowhunters of all ages and abilities safe, legal places to practice archery and enjoy the outdoors. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with more than 1,200 free range passes issued and hundreds of students joining MassWildlife at archery clinics at the ranges.

# Wildlife Management & Research

Research, monitoring, collaboration, regulated hunting and trapping, and permitting are just some of the tools MassWildlife biologists use to manage the state's common mammals and birds.



## NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL COLLABORATIVE

MassWildlife works with partners to conserve New England's only native rabbit by conducting research and maintaining the young forest habitats that New England cottontail rely on. Biologists survey for New England cottontails using DNA from pellets, since native New England and non-native Eastern cottontails cannot be distinguished by sight alone.

**42**

Sites were surveyed; New England cottontails were detected at 10 sites in Berkshire and Barnstable counties

**439**

Pellet samples were collected

★ **Rabbit relocation:** MassWildlife Southeast District staff worked with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and New Hampshire Fish and Game to live trap rabbits on Noman's Island in September. After biological data collection and a quarantine period, 15 New England cottontails were released to bolster restoration efforts at two refuge sites in New Hampshire and Maine.

## RUFFED GROUSE DRUMMING SURVEY

Every spring, biologists survey ruffed grouse by counting drumming males on roadside survey routes. This year, the drumming activity was higher than in recent years. Overall, ruffed grouse populations are stable across central and western Massachusetts, while numbers are low in the northeast and southeast.

## CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE SURVEILLANCE

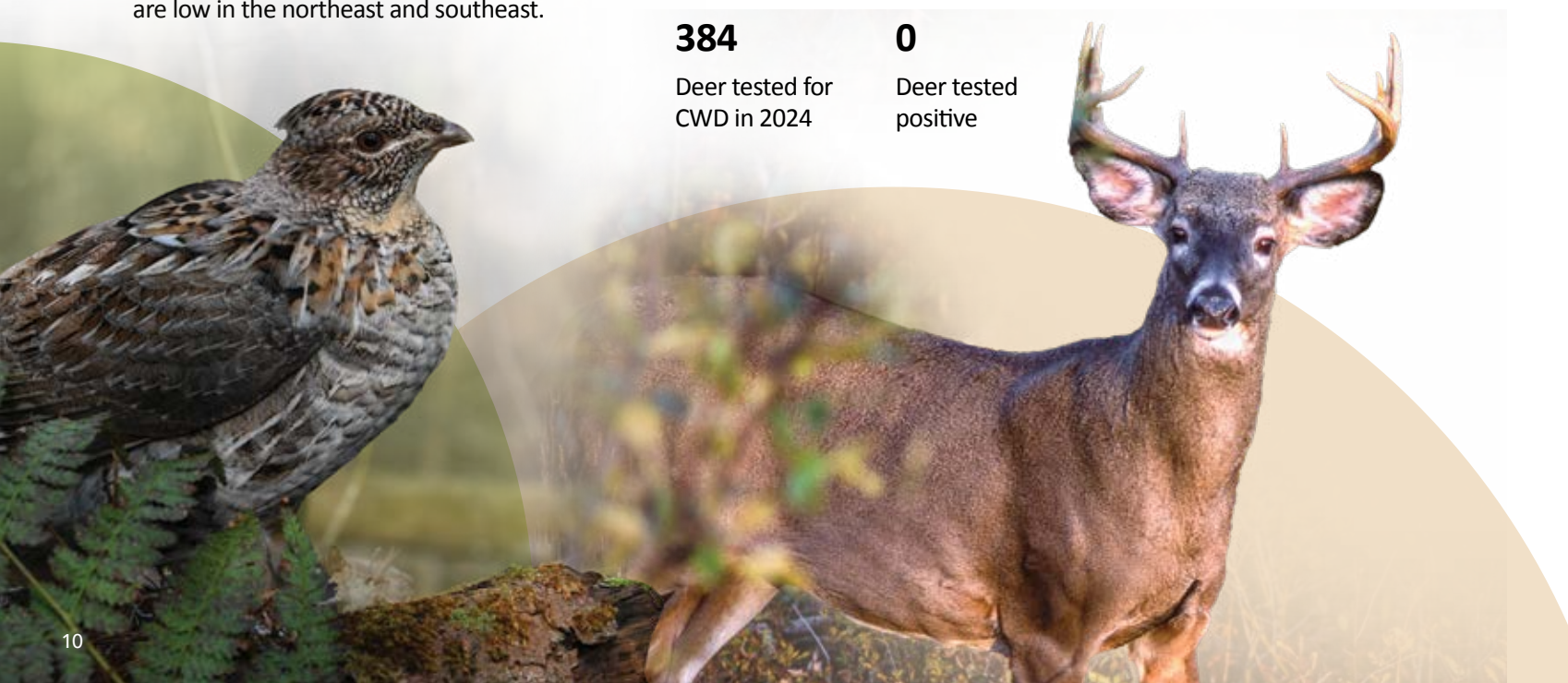
Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an incurable and fatal disease that infects members of the deer family. CWD has never been detected in Massachusetts but was recently redetected in New York, in October 2024. MassWildlife biologists collect lymph node samples for testing from hunter-harvested deer for ongoing surveillance and conduct outreach to prevent CWD from entering the state.

**384**

Deer tested for CWD in 2024

**0**

Deer tested positive



## BLACK BEAR COLLARING STUDY

MassWildlife has monitored the state's black bear population for over 40 years to gather data on survival, reproductive rates, and habitat use and movement. To place ear tags and radio-tracking collars on the bears, MassWildlife live-traps bears in the spring and visits dens in the winter.

**44**

Bears, 34 of which were previously unmarked, live-trapped in the spring

**10**

New female bears added to collaring study

**39**

Collared female bears statewide

★ **Population growth:** In spring, Connecticut Valley District staff trapped 25 previously unmarked bears (15 males, 10 females). Capturing this many unmarked bears in an area that has been studied for over 10 years shows the rapid growth of the bear population in that region.



## TRACKING WOOD THRUSH

MassWildlife collaborates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other conservation partners on a range-wide project that collects data on wood thrush yearly cycles, movement patterns, and survival rates across their breeding grounds. This project relies on the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, an automated radio telemetry system that can track small flying animals over large spatial scales.

**50**

Motus stations deployed in the region, 10 are in Massachusetts

**50**

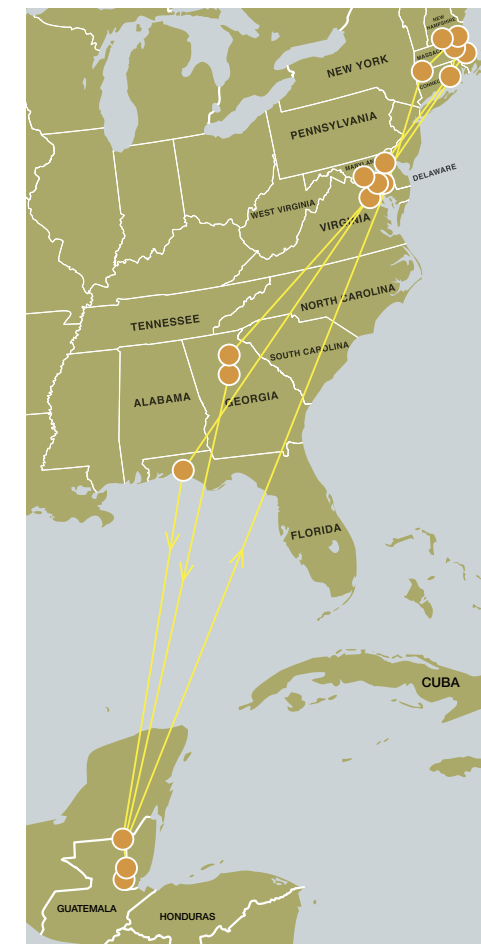
Adult wood thrushes fitted with Motus transmitters

**24**

Fall migration paths documented as birds moved to wintering grounds in Central America

**16**

Spring migration paths documented as birds returned to northern nesting grounds



This map shows the detections and migratory pathway of a single wood thrush. The middle pathway is its 2024 fall migration, the right is its 2025 spring migration, and the left is its 2025 fall migration. In total, the wood thrush has been detected by 22 Motus receivers.

## MINIMIZING HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT

**1,445** Human-wildlife interaction calls or emails from the public were logged by MassWildlife staff who provided education, technical advice, or assistance

**25+** Educational programs were led by MassWildlife wildlife biologists for land trusts, clubs, libraries, towns and more about wildlife biology, behavior, and ways to coexist with wild animals

## CONNECTING WITH AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

MassWildlife engages with agricultural associations and farmers to better understand damage to crops from deer, bear, and other wildlife. By attending listening sessions, presenting at conferences, meeting with committees and legislators, and expanding online resources, MassWildlife is helping farmers identify solutions to reduce wildlife damage.

## PROTECTING PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

In rare situations when large animals like moose, bear, and deer pose a potential threat to people, the Large Animal Response Team, made up of trained MassWildlife biologists and Massachusetts Environmental Police officers, collaborates to determine if the animal needs to be monitored, hazed, immobilized and relocated, or euthanized to ensure human health and safety.

This year, 3 deer, 1 moose, and 2 black bears were chemically immobilized and safely relocated to nearby areas by the Large Animal Response Team.

# Fisheries Management & Research

MassWildlife manages and protects freshwater fisheries in lakes, ponds, streams, and rivers throughout the Commonwealth. Our staff monitor fish populations, develop regulations to protect fisheries resources, and provide input to state and federal agencies on regulations outside our jurisdiction. MassWildlife also shares data and practical guidance with the public, all while supporting outstanding fishing opportunities for Massachusetts residents and visitors, including trout stocking.

## WILD TROUT CONSERVATION PLAN

In early December, MassWildlife released the Wild Trout Conservation Plan, which serves as a roadmap for managing, conserving, and restoring wild trout and their habitats. This plan outlines strategic approaches for conserving coldwater habitats through land acquisition, public outreach, and regulations, while addressing ongoing threats such as climate change, water withdrawal, pollution, and habitat alteration.

## RESEARCH AND MONITORING

With support from partner organizations, MassWildlife leads several long-term studies of wild trout populations. Fisheries biologists and district staff also collect data on fish and habitat conditions each year to assess species composition, fish health, and how fish communities are impacted by human activities. In 2025, 317 fisheries samples were conducted in streams, rivers, and lakes throughout the Commonwealth.

## CONNECTIVITY

MassWildlife conducted 15 site visits at hydropower projects throughout the state to inspect fish passage and evaluate studies used in Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing efforts. These projects were located on the Connecticut, Concord, Merrimack, Nashua, and Westfield rivers.

## HATCHERIES

MassWildlife operates five fish hatcheries that raise trout that are stocked in over 450 lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams throughout the Commonwealth to provide recreational fishing opportunities. In FY 2025, hatchery staff worked around the clock to raise a total of 497,315 brook trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, and tiger trout with a combined weight of 448,227 pounds.

★ **Deerfield River Research:** MassWildlife and partners are conducting an ongoing study to estimate the wild brown trout population in the Deerfield River. Fisheries biologists tag and release wild brown trout, then resurvey to see how many are tagged. The 2025 estimates of brown trout abundance were lower than the last couple of years and also slightly lower than the longer-term average. Estimated abundances based on these mark-recapture surveys fluctuate from year to year.



★ **Lake Trout Monitoring:** Each fall, MassWildlife samples lake trout in Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs by setting nets in spawning areas. Biologists collect data from the captured lake trout to assess the health and status of lake trout populations. In FY 2025:

<b>241</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>125</b>
Total Lake Trout Captured	Within Quabbin Reservoir	Within Wachusett Reservoir

★ **Swift River Research:** In summer 2023, MassWildlife launched a large-scale study of wild brook trout in the Swift River using small PIT tags that track individual fish as they swim past antenna arrays that are installed at different locations within the river. As the tagged trout swim by, biologists can track movement patterns and habitat use. So far, 600 brook trout have been tagged and the antennas have been recording data since January 2025.

**Dam Removals:**  
**\$2,192,501** was spent in FY 2025 to begin the removal of 13 dams on MassWildlife properties that have outlived their original purpose. These dam removal projects will improve aquatic habitats, support biodiversity, and increase climate resilience.



# Vulnerable Species

Due to a variety of threats—including habitat loss, impacts from climate change, invasive species, and disease—many of our native plants and animals are in decline. Worthy of protection just because they exist, rare species are valuable indicators of intact, complex, functioning natural communities.

Through a wide range of efforts, MassWildlife works to bolster healthy habitats and robust populations of our most vulnerable native plants and animals. By protecting rare species and their habitats, the Commonwealth’s rich biodiversity can also be secured.



## RESEARCH

By gathering data and conducting research on the number, distribution, and conservation needs of rare species and exemplary natural communities, MassWildlife’s Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) supports the conservation of plants and animals listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA).

**Tracking terrapins.** From 2024 to 2025, MassWildlife conducted an intensive study of the northern diamond-back terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) population in Buzzards Bay, with support from the Sarah K. de Coizart Foundation and in partnership with Zoo New England, University of South Florida, New England Coastal Wildlife Alliance, and others. The study focused on the distribution, status, movement, and demography of terrapins in the estuary. MassWildlife equipped 54 adult female terrapins with acoustic tags and maintained an array of receivers throughout the Wareham River estuary. MassWildlife staff also worked with partners to reduce roadkill, improve nesting habitat, and remove derelict crab traps, which can cause terrapins to drown.

**Aquatic biodiversity.** Now in its third year, the Regional Aquatic Biodiversity project integrates climate change research with strategies for conserving fish and freshwater mussel species under various land protection and restoration scenarios. In FY 2025, MassWildlife staff, in collaboration with the MA Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, identified management actions, such as reforestation and dam removal, that mitigate climate impacts to freshwater fishes. Watershed-scale reforestation, coupled with localized aquatic habitat restoration, showed the greatest benefit to the long-term viability of native fishes. The team also modeled the distribution of nine freshwater mussel species to guide reintroductions and prioritize surveys. Findings will be shared through a scientific publication and a public web tool to support conservation planning across New England.



## DATA

Quality biological data is foundational for guiding MassWildlife’s conservation work. Data for MESA-listed species and natural communities are collected by agency staff, conservation partners, and the public, and carefully catalogued.

**United in conservation.** The Nantucket Conservation Foundation (NCF) is one of many conservation partners that help support rare species through habitat protection and species monitoring. NCF conserves over 9,000 acres (roughly a third of the island), including habitats for over 150 MESA-listed species. The group has submitted well over 500 observation records to the NHESP database.

**387**

Vernal pools certified

**1,618**

Rare species records processed

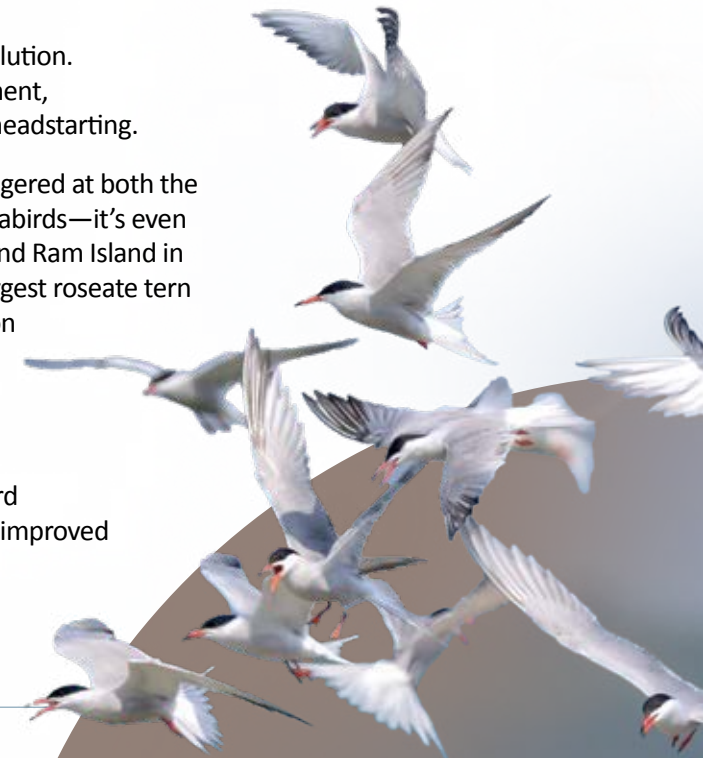


Photo by Kelly Oman

## RARE SPECIES RECOVERY

When it comes to rare species recovery, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. MassWildlife uses a variety of techniques, including habitat management, reintroduction, invasive species control, population monitoring, and headstarting.

**Colony comeback.** The roseate tern (*Sterna dougallii*), listed as endangered at both the state and federal levels, is one of the Commonwealth’s most iconic seabirds—it’s even featured on one of the state conservation license plates! Bird Island and Ram Island in Buzzards Bay, both managed by MassWildlife, are two of the three largest roseate tern colonies in North America, supporting nearly 60% of the population on only five acres. MassWildlife’s targeted conservation activities over the past decade have yielded meaningful results for these island colonies. In 2025, a record 4,010 pairs of roseate terns nested on the two islands. Each year, agency staff work to protect and manage the tern colonies. A major stabilization and nourishment project at Bird Island from 2015 to 2018 doubled the amount of nesting habitat and improved resiliency of the island in the face of climate change. Tern restoration efforts continue and work is now underway to repair eroding and degraded habitat on Ram Island.



## REGULATORY REVIEW

MassWildlife staff review project proposals to ensure compliance with environmental laws. Reviewers assess potential impacts on state-protected species and their habitats, and require measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate those impacts where necessary.

Environmental reviews conducted in FY 2025, listed by pertinent law	
Wetlands Protection Act	495
MA Endangered Species Act	741
MA Environmental Policy Act	84
Forest Cutting Practices Act	95
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,415</b>



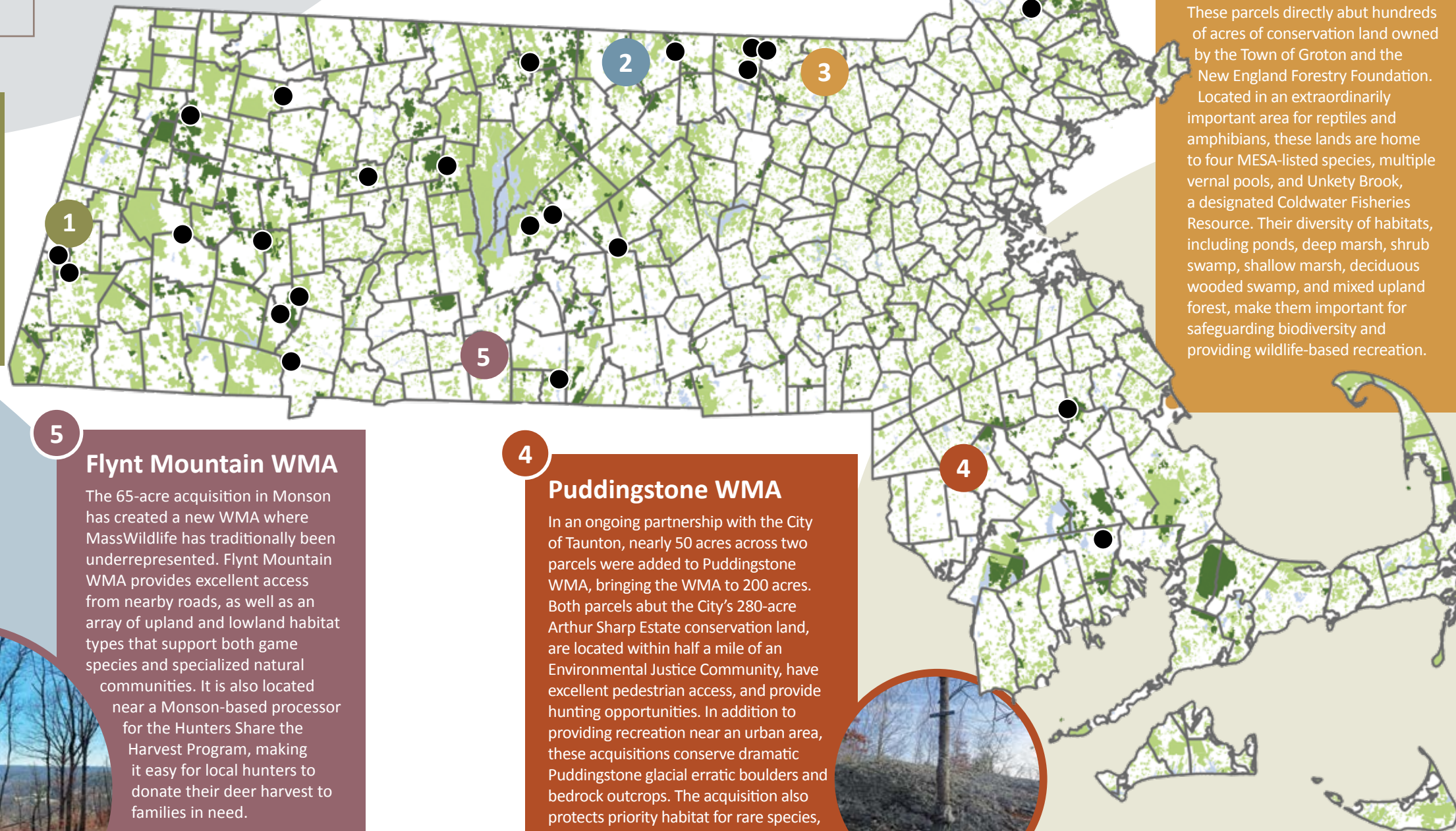
# Land Protection

MassWildlife works with the Department of Fish and Game to protect the most important fish and wildlife habitats and to expand public access for wildlife-related outdoor recreation. To connect habitats and allow plants and animals to adapt to changing climate conditions, acquisitions build upon existing Wildlife Management Areas and other protected lands as well as create new strongholds that can be built on in the future. Protecting forests and wetlands also helps improve climate resiliency by storing carbon and absorbing floodwaters during extreme weather events.

★ **Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)** are owned by MassWildlife. **Wildlife Conservation Easements (WCEs)** are subject to a conservation restriction granting MassWildlife recreational access rights. Both types of properties are open to the public for hunting, fishing, trapping, nature observation, hiking, and other passive recreation.

## LEGEND

- MassWildlife lands
- Other protected land
- New acquisitions for FY 2025



## 1 Flat Brook WMA

In West Stockbridge, 73 acres were added to Flat Brook WMA to enhance the site's recreation opportunities. Already a beloved pheasant hunting location, Flat Brook has been the site of recent grassland restoration efforts. The new parcel will allow MassWildlife to maintain quality pheasant hunting through the season while grassland restoration is conducted on the original WMA acreage. Eventually, fields in this new parcel will also be restored, providing even more grassland habitat, alongside the WMA's wetlands complex comprised of Flat Brook, Cranberry Pond, and Crane Lake, to support rare and game species alike and all those who enjoy them.

**31**  
Projects

**3,200+**  
Acres protected

**\$11.4M**  
Total invested

**\$1.37M**  
Invested from the  
Wildland Fund

**239,000**  
Total acres under  
MassWildlife's care  
and control

In addition to the partners mentioned on this page, special thanks go to the Buzzards Bay Coalition, East Quabbin Land Trust, Kestrel Land Trust, Nashua River Watershed Association, Stockbridge Land Trust, and the Town of Pepperell for their significant contributions to projects completed in FY 2025.



## 2 Winchendon Springs WMA

With the voice of the local people and a tremendous partnership effort, DFG/MassWildlife, Department of Conservation and Recreation, Mass Audubon, and Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust conserved 1,325 acres of forests, fields, and wetlands in Winchendon and Ashburnham. Through this project, nearly 890 acres were added to the 1,500-acre Winchendon Springs WMA, conserving priority habitat for five MESA-listed species, frontage on the Millers River and Estees Brook—both designated Coldwater Fisheries Resources with high fish diversity—and a healthy, diverse forest that supports American woodcock and ruffed grouse. The land connects to DCR's nearly 3,000-acre Ashburnham State Forest, creating a continuous forest corridor that stretches north to Lake Monomonac and other protected lands in New Hampshire.



## 3 Unkety Brook WMA

Over 94 acres in Groton were added to the ever-growing Unkety Brook WMA—which is now over 900 acres. These parcels directly abut hundreds of acres of conservation land owned by the Town of Groton and the New England Forestry Foundation. Located in an extraordinarily important area for reptiles and amphibians, these lands are home to four MESA-listed species, multiple vernal pools, and Unkety Brook, a designated Coldwater Fisheries Resource. Their diversity of habitats, including ponds, deep marsh, shrub swamp, shallow marsh, deciduous wooded swamp, and mixed upland forest, make them important for safeguarding biodiversity and providing wildlife-based recreation.

## 5 Flynt Mountain WMA

The 65-acre acquisition in Monson has created a new WMA where MassWildlife has traditionally been underrepresented. Flynt Mountain WMA provides excellent access from nearby roads, as well as an array of upland and lowland habitat types that support both game species and specialized natural communities. It is also located near a Monson-based processor for the Hunters Share the Harvest Program, making it easy for local hunters to donate their deer harvest to families in need.

## 4 Puddingstone WMA

In an ongoing partnership with the City of Taunton, nearly 50 acres across two parcels were added to Puddingstone WMA, bringing the WMA to 200 acres. Both parcels abut the City's 280-acre Arthur Sharp Estate conservation land, are located within half a mile of an Environmental Justice Community, have excellent pedestrian access, and provide hunting opportunities. In addition to providing recreation near an urban area, these acquisitions conserve dramatic Puddingstone glacial erratic boulders and bedrock outcrops. The acquisition also protects priority habitat for rare species, uplands, wetlands, and streams.



# Caring for Wildlife Lands

Once land is protected, MassWildlife is responsible for caring for it, with the ultimate goal of conserving biodiversity and creating healthy, resilient landscapes.

## LAND STEWARDSHIP

Land stewardship efforts ensure MassWildlife lands remain protected, accessible, and well cared for over time. This work includes marking boundaries, arranging land surveys, maintaining records, installing signs, and improving parking areas and public access points. MassWildlife works closely with neighbors, landowners, and other partners to closely monitor lands and address issues like encroachment. In FY 2025:

**43** miles of boundaries across 22 WMAs were marked to show the public where wildlife lands are located and to help prevent encroachments and other improper uses of properties.

**2,480** feet of boundaries were surveyed to clarify boundary lines, explore potential for future public parking areas, safeguard against encroachments, and resolve questions about riverfront access.

**3** baseline reports were completed for new WCEs, which document existing property conditions and provide a baseline for all future monitoring.



## HABITAT RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT

MassWildlife works to support healthy and diverse habitats across the Commonwealth. This could look like restoring conditions required for rare or threatened species, or controlling invasive species threatening the native plant community. Human development and suppression of natural disturbance has decreased open habitat types, like grasslands, shrublands, and young forests, in Massachusetts; wildlife that rely on these habitats will continue to decline without focused habitat restoration and maintenance. To improve and restore these sites, trained staff use a variety of techniques, including selective tree removal or thinning, mowing or mulching, prescribed fires, and targeted herbicide applications.

In FY 2025, the habitat team carried out restoration and habitat management activities on over 2,800 acres. Additionally, district staff supported habitat management goals by completing 1,056 acres of vegetation management in fields and open areas and 196 acres of field seeding operations.



Monitoring and surveying efforts provide critical information about species and natural communities to help guide actions and incorporate into our adaptive management approach. Some FY 2025 highlights include surveying whip-poor-will at 30 sites across the state, completing a LiDAR analysis of forest structure in eastern Massachusetts, and vegetation monitoring at Wills Hill at Montague Plains WMA.



MassWildlife's Habitat Management Grant Program supports private and municipal owners of conserved lands in improving habitat for wildlife, protecting biodiversity, enhancing climate resiliency, and promoting outdoor recreation. In 2025, MassWildlife awarded \$325,000 in grants to six organizations to restore approximately 520 acres of wildlife habitat across Massachusetts.



MassWildlife gave technical assistance and support, ranging from restoration partnerships to prescribed fire trainings, to 40 partners, including federal and state agencies, municipalities, NGOs, and tribal nations.



Habitat staff worked with our EEA and DCR colleagues to develop guidelines, implement strategies, and initiate conservation efforts that protect and manage forest lands while prioritizing efforts to address climate change impacts under the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



### GRASSLAND RESTORATION AT WILLIAM FORWARD WMA

MassWildlife restored grasslands and heathlands on Kent's Island through a multifaceted approach: selective tree removal, vegetation control through herbicide application, and the use of prescribed fire. Removal of conifer plantations and selective tree thinning promotes the growth of blueberry heathlands, enhances native warm-season grasslands, and creates structural diversity in oak-hickory forests. These habitats provide cover, food, and nesting sites for declining wildlife, including eastern whip-poor-will, eastern towhee, and black duck.



### BARRENS RESTORATION AT SOUTHEAST PINE BARRENS WMA

This project is part of a 10-year pine barrens restoration plan in the Myles Standish Complex. Tree thinning created an open woodland canopy dominated by pitch pine overstory that supports a dense understory of scrub oak, blueberry, and huckleberry, while allowing the regeneration of pitch pine and tree oak. This natural community provides habitat for over 40 MESA-listed species, including buck moth and eastern whip-poor-will.



### SNAKE HIBERNACULUM AT MUDDY BROOK WMA

MassWildlife built a hibernaculum for snakes by excavating soil below the frost line and constructing a large, layered rock structure. Snake populations have been in decline due to habitat loss and human conflict. Increasing snake populations will have broad impacts on the natural community, primarily driven by their control of rodent populations. This will create safe, suitable overwintering conditions for snakes and help increase native snake populations, including the North American racer.



### FEN RESTORATION AT STAFFORD HILL WMA

Calcareous fens are a priority wetland natural community that supports a suite of uncommon species, including two MESA-listed plant species. MassWildlife restored this calcareous fen site through the removal of undesirable trees and shrubs. The project builds upon previous management activities at the site, including invasive species control, and complements adjacent young forest restoration, creating a mosaic of habitats across the WMA.

Management Activity	# Acres	# Sites
Invasive Species Treatment	1,089	25
Prescribed Fire	1,270	14
Selective Tree Removal, Mulching, and Mowing	461	9
Native Planting and Seeding	70	1
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>2,890</b>	<b>31</b>

# Public Engagement & Education

Public engagement and education are essential to successful wildlife conservation. Through workshops, presentations, publications, and a strong digital presence, MassWildlife provides residents and visitors of all ages with accessible, engaging opportunities to learn about the Commonwealth's fish and wildlife. MassWildlife aims to build understanding and trust in wildlife management, strengthen public support for conservation, and foster appreciation for wildlife while reducing human-wildlife conflicts.

## ENGAGING OUR ONLINE COMMUNITY

Connecting, informing, and inspiring through digital channels

### MassWildlife Monthly E-newsletter

**220,598**

Subscribers  
(+30,330 from 2024)

**50.4%**

Average  
open rate

**4%**

Average click  
through rate

### Fan favorite:

Created in response to overwhelming public interest in a rattlesnake video on social media, our Rattlesnake FAQs article received 6,511 clicks and helped demystify these often misunderstood reptiles.

### Social Media

**78,158**

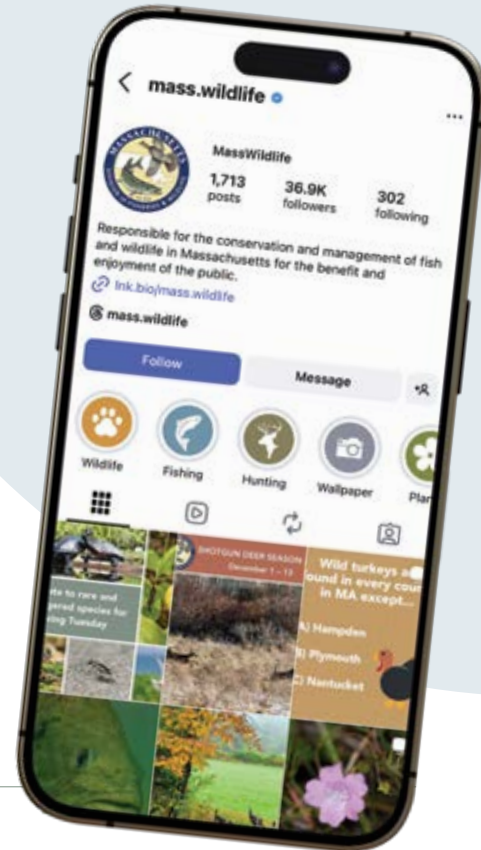
Facebook followers  
(+13,879 from 2024)

**32,312**

Instagram followers  
(+7,111 from 2024)

### Most-viewed post:

Video announcing the start of spring trout stocking was viewed over 2.2M times across platforms.



## Website

MassWildlife web pages were viewed 4.93M times by 2.96M unique visitors. Trout stocking information consistently receives the most traffic annually. Other popular content includes snakes of Massachusetts, firearms guidelines for hunters, and wildlife rehabilitation information.

**Inclusive by design.** By implementing best practices across our website and social media channels, MassWildlife makes digital content more accessible to all audiences. These improvements help screen readers accurately interpret content for visually-impaired users and enable language translation tools for constituents with limited English proficiency.

**Angler access upgrade.** MassWildlife has upgraded the Go Fish MA! digital fishing map, adding hundreds of new public cartop boat launches. The map makes it easy to find places to launch kayaks and canoes and provides waterbody descriptions, fisheries info, depth maps, launch photos, directions, and more.

**Species spotlights.** As part of the 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan update, biologists revised over 600 fact sheets that describe vulnerable plant and animal species, including their habitats, threats, and conservation actions. These new web pages are in a more accessible format and feature vibrant photos, making it easier for everyone to explore the Commonwealth's rich biodiversity.



## MAKING HEADLINES

**Media relations.** MassWildlife communicates with media outlets throughout the year, providing timely information, expert perspectives, and updates on agency activities and priorities. This year, MassWildlife fielded a total of 260 media inquiries. Popular topics of media interest included avian influenza, hunting and fishing, and a wide range of wildlife-related issues. At least 440 news stories covered MassWildlife and wildlife-related topics in FY 2025.

**Magazine.** With about 15,000 subscribers and a print run of roughly 23,000 copies, *Massachusetts Wildlife* magazine educates and inspires readers by highlighting habitat protection projects, following wildlife professionals in action, and sharing stories from the fields and forests of Massachusetts.

## CONNECTING WITH CLASSROOMS

**Science and art connect youth with nature.** Each year, K-12 students submit original artwork to the Massachusetts Junior Duck Stamp (JDS) Program, a multidisciplinary arts and science curriculum that teaches waterfowl and habitat conservation through creative expression and provides resources to inspire youth interest in conservation.

**Teaching with Trout.** Brook trout are used as a hands-on model to teach students about ecology, population biology, water quality, and conservation by raising trout from eggs during the winter months. During the 2024-2025 school year, the Teaching with Trout program included 66 schools in 47 towns, engaging approximately 5,400 students.

The colored pencil and pastel drawing of an American wigeon, by Annabelle Xu of Boxborough, was selected as Best of Show from 133 entries and represented Massachusetts in the 2025 National Junior Duck Stamp competition.



After rearing and learning about trout in their classroom, students release young fish through the Teaching with Trout Program.

# Financial Report

## GEORGE L. DAREY INLAND FISH AND GAME FUND (IFGF)

### FY 2025 Summary Revenue and Fund Equity

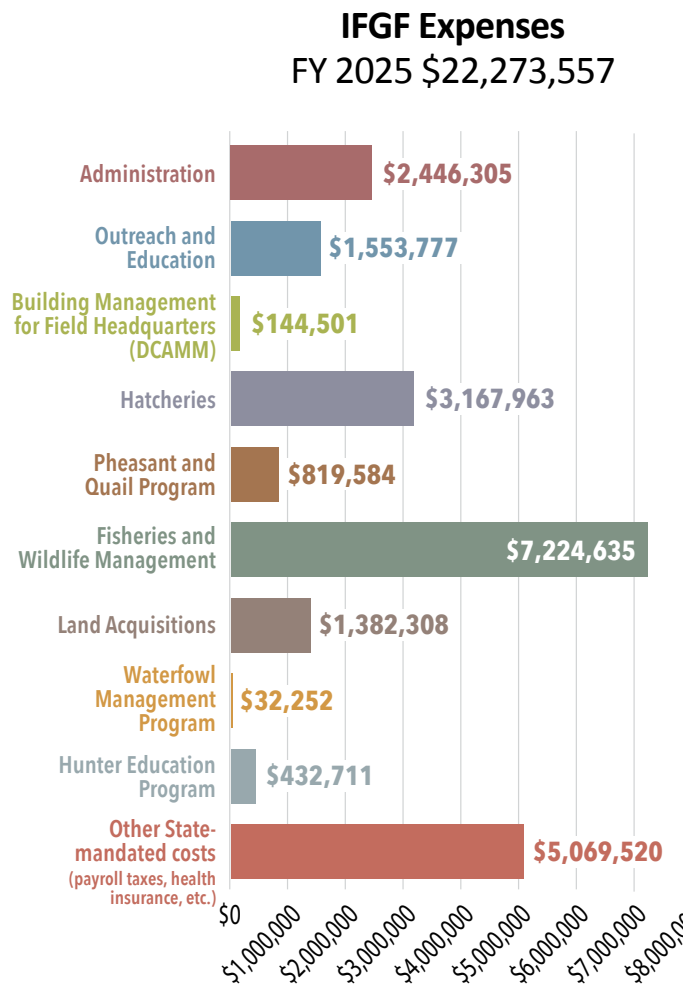
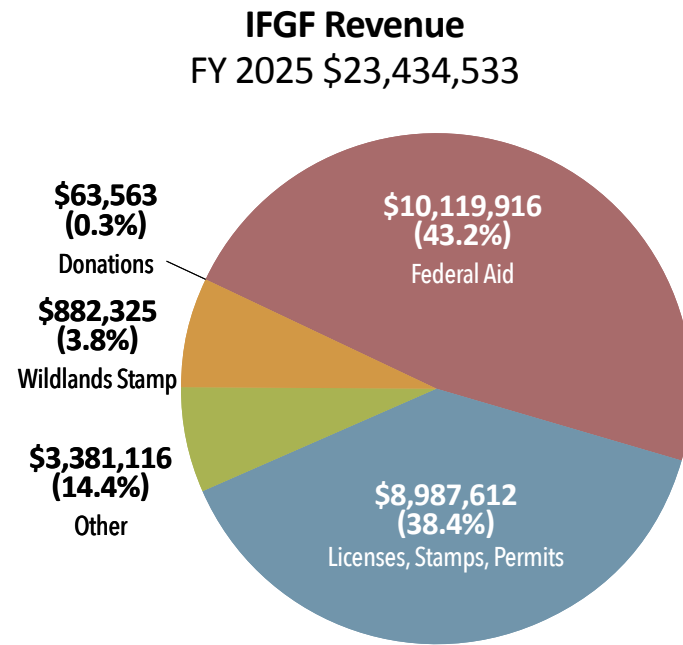
Departmental Revenues	
Fishing licenses	\$4,558,001.55
Hunting licenses, permits, and stamps	\$4,346,217.70
Trapping licenses and registrations	\$44,228.00
Wildlands stamps	\$882,325.00
Special permits	\$39,165.00
Magazine subscriptions	\$94,964.14
Land licenses	\$82,519.62
Donations	\$63,563.47
Problem Animal Control Agent permits	\$25,626.00
Miscellaneous income	\$9,043.01

Federal Aid Reimbursements	
Dingell-Johnson (Fisheries)	\$1,953,021.06
Pittman-Robertson (Wildlife)	\$8,158,915.97
Other federal aid reimbursements & adjustments	\$7,979.15

Other Sources	
Gasoline tax apportionment	\$914,307.99
Reimbursement for half-price licenses	\$351,756.50
Reimbursement for free licenses	\$1,841,216.50
Investment earnings	\$61,682.64

<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$23,434,533.30</b>
<b>IFGF Equity as of June 30, 2025</b>	<b>\$16,287,780.34</b>

## IFGF REVENUE AND EXPENSES



## HOW MASSWILDLIFE IS FUNDED

MassWildlife's activities are mainly supported by revenue from the sale of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses, stamps and permits, and a portion of federal taxes on hunting and fishing equipment. These funds go into the George L. Darey Inland Fish and Game Fund (IFGF), which is a dedicated state fund that can only be used by MassWildlife for wildlife conservation. In addition to the IFGF, MassWildlife also receives funding through bond initiatives, state general funds, donations, and other federal assistance programs.

## NATURAL HERITAGE AND ENDANGERED SPECIES FUND

### FY 2025 Summary Revenue and Fund Equity

Revenues	
Donations from State Income Tax Check-off and Interest	\$272,791.44
Direct Donations	\$47,338.93
Publication Sales	\$2,987.00
NHESP Fees/Contracts	\$658,580.00
NHESP Federal Aid	\$1,037,146.96
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$2,018,844.33</b>
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$2,200,371.43</b>
<b>Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Fund Equity as of June 30, 2025</b>	<b>\$1,932,720.95</b>

## SUPPORT RARE SPECIES CONSERVATION!

The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Fund helps advance MassWildlife's work to conserve the Commonwealth's most at-risk plants and animals. Your donation makes a difference—visit [mass.gov/supportnhesp](https://mass.gov/supportnhesp) to learn more. Thank you to all who donated this year.



## FY 2025 License, Permit, and Stamp Sales

Code	Product	CY 24 Quantity	CY 25 Quantity	FY 25 Revenue
F1	Resident Fishing	22,368	79,109	\$3,625,622.50
F2	Resident Citizen Minor Fishing	2,927	6,583	\$0.00
F3	Resident Citizen Fishing (age 65–69)	1,483	9,439	\$196,731.25
F4	Resident Citizen Fishing (over 70)	2,818	18,035	\$0.00
F4	Resident Citizen Fishing (disabled)	26	171	\$0.00
F6	Non-Res. Fishing	3,407	8,990	\$564,536.00
F7	Non-Res. Fishing (3-day)	2,502	1,269	\$99,960.30
F8	Resident Fishing (3-day)	1,826	1,319	\$50,472.50
F9	Non-Resident (Citizen) Minor Fishing	359	262	\$4,674.00
F10	Quabbin 1-Day Fishing	781	2,420	\$16,005.00
T1	Resident Citizen Trapping	128	573	\$26,382.00
T2	Resident Citizen Minor Trapping	5	11	\$104.00
T3	Resident Citizen Trapping (age 65–69)	15	73	\$1,657.00
T3	Non-Resident Trapping	4	36	\$8,468.00
H1	Resident Citizen Hunting	10,300	4,284	\$496,266.00
H2	Resident Citizen Hunting (age 65–69)	763	561	\$22,827.75
H3	Resident Citizen Hunting (paraplegic)	2	4	\$0.00
H4	Resident Non-Citizen Hunting	93	50	\$4,894.00
H5	Non-Res. Hunting (big game)	2,306	1,521	\$407,158.50
H6	Non-Res. Hunting (small game)	624	629	\$91,164.50
H8	Resident (Citizen) Minor Hunting	514	486	\$6,500.00
S1	Resident Citizen Sporting	4,172	18,278	\$1,497,396.00
S2	Resident Citizen Sporting (age 65–69)	501	3,390	\$130,540.50
S3	Resident Citizen Sporting (over 70)	1,826	9,293	\$0.00
S4	Resident Sporting (paraplegic)	9	28	\$0.00
M1	Archery Stamp	11,655	17,715	\$311,070.00
M2	Waterfowl Stamp	2,904	5,159	\$94,455.00
M3	Primitive Firearms Stamp	11,329	16,155	\$293,635.00
P1	Pheasant and Quail Permit	4,612	6,119	\$156,552.00
W1	Wildland Stamp	48,824	127,641	\$882,325.00

## REGULATORY CHANGES IN FY 2025

MassWildlife has regulatory authority to conserve fish and wildlife in Massachusetts. All MassWildlife regulations go through a public hearing process and receive administrative approval before promulgation. Science-based regulations ensure there are natural resources for all to enjoy, now and into the future.

### Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA) List

321 CMR 10.90 List of Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species

- MassWildlife’s NHESP proposed to update the list of plants and animals officially protected by MESA.
- After an analysis of scientific data and a review of proposals for listing, 22 plants and animals were added to the MESA list, 1 plant was delisted, and the status of 2 plants changed.

The hearing was held on April 9, 2024. The Fisheries and Wildlife Board voted to approve the changes as proposed on May 15, 2024. The regulations were promulgated on August 16, 2024. There are now 453 native animals and plants listed under MESA. All listed species receive the same protection, but they are categorized as endangered, threatened, or of special concern, depending on their status and the threats they face.

### Bear Hunting

321 CMR 3.02(1) Hunting of Bear Regulations in Massachusetts

- Create a continuous black bear hunting season from Labor Day until the end of deer shotgun season.
- Create a free Youth Bear Hunting Permit.

Two hearings were held on January 27, 2025. The Board voted to approve the changes as proposed on May 14, 2025. The final regulations were not promulgated by the close of the fiscal year.

### Wildlife Sanctuaries

321 CMR 7.01 Wildlife Sanctuary boundary marking and posting

- The regulations were changed to comply with the amended language of M.G.L. Ch. 131, §10, which requires the posting of all wildlife sanctuaries at an interval not greater than 300 feet. Any entry way shall also be posted.

The hearing was held March 20, 2025. The Board voted to approve the changes as proposed on April 16, 2025. The final regulations were not promulgated by the close of the fiscal year.

### Deer Hunting

321 CMR 2.12 and 2.15 Artificial Propagation of Birds, Mammals, Reptiles, and Amphibians

321 CMR 3.02(4) Hunting and Tagging of Deer

- The changes to 321 CMR 2.12 and 2.15 provide protections against the importation of Chronic Wasting Disease into Massachusetts.
- The addition of 321 CMR 3.02(4)(b)(6) created a winter primitive firearms season, and a corresponding permit, for the month of January on Martha’s Vineyard, Elizabeth Island, and Nantucket.
- Other changes to sections in 321 CMR 3.02(4):
  - clarified the use of food plots for hunting, 321 CMR 3.02(4)(a)
  - legalized the use of decoys during archery season for attracting deer, 321 CMR 3.02(4)(f)
  - expanded hunting opportunities for youth hunters, 321 CMR 3.02(4)(b)(5)
  - removed the deer possession limit, 321 CMR 3.02(4)(h)
- Other changes eliminated gendered and outdated language.

Two hearings were held on January 23, 2025. The Board voted to approve the changes as proposed on February 27, 2025. The changes were promulgated on May 9, 2025.

### Migratory Game Bird Hunting

321 CMR 3.02(2) Migratory Game Bird Regulations in Massachusetts

- The proposed amendments set the dates and bag limits for the 2025–2026 migratory game bird seasons.

A draft version of the 2025–2026 migratory bird hunting seasons was proposed on February 27, 2025. The hearing was held on April 29, 2025. On the same date, the Board voted to approve the regulations as proposed. The final regulations were not promulgated by the close of the fiscal year.



**CONNECT WITH  
MASSWILDLIFE**

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