



# R3 PLAN

Recruitment, Retention, and  
Reactivation for Fishing, Hunting,  
and Shooting Sports

*A Strategic Plan for Massachusetts*



## Message from the Director

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When I was growing up in central Massachusetts, fishing, hunting, trapping, and shooting were a way of life. Outdoor skills were passed from generation to generation, and plenty of neighbors were willing to share their knowledge if you didn't have a mentor in your family. I started by learning from my grandfather, and he bought me my first gun. There were three dairy farms right down the road from where I lived, and the farmers used to let us milk the cows, fish the cow ponds, and hunt the farms. The more time I spent on the water and in the woods, the greater my love and appreciation grew for nature, open spaces, and wildlife conservation. So much so, I made it my lifelong career.

Things have sure changed since my childhood. Increased urbanization and decreased time spent outdoors have led to significant declines in hunting and fishing participation over the last 40 years, not only in our state but across the country. These shifting societal trends have profound implications for the future of wildlife conservation. Hunters, anglers, and shooting sports participants provide critical financial support for state fish and wildlife agencies nationwide through license fees and associated federal excise taxes on fishing tackle, firearms, and ammunition.

Under its statutory authority, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) is responsible for conserving all wildlife in trust for all citizens in the Commonwealth. We protect and manage more than 500 species of plants and animals, including endangered species and their habitats. Providing opportunities for the public to enjoy nature through wildlife-based recreation like fishing and hunting is an integral part of our mandate and mission at MassWildlife. While all Massachusetts residents and visitors benefit from our work to conserve wildlife, protect open space, and preserve clean air and water, we rely heavily on funds generated by hunters, anglers, and target shooters. If we do not take action now to increase participation, MassWildlife's ability to fulfill its conservation mission and serve future generations will be severely impacted.

When I was appointed Director by the Fisheries and Wildlife Board, I identified R3 as one of our agency's top priorities. Hunters, anglers, and target shooters have long been concerned about our declining ranks because they understand the profound impacts it will have on the future of wildlife conservation unless something is done to reverse this trend. I am enthusiastic to continue tackling this challenge together with this plan, which is focused entirely on ways to increase the recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) of hunters, anglers, and target shooters in Massachusetts. I am optimistic that we can restore the public's interest in hunting, fishing, and target shooting, especially now. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we all experienced firsthand just how important spending time outdoors is to our health and well-being. Many of us found relief by seeking refuge in nature. The more our citizens become invested through their appreciation of wildlife and participation in wildlife-based recreation, the stronger the support for wildlife conservation will be in our state. With the public's renewed enthusiasm for the great outdoors, the time is now.

Everyone reading this message understands the importance of this R3 initiative and what it means for preserving the outdoor traditions so many of us grew up with. But we can't do it alone. No single organization can provide all the resources needed to recruit, retain, and reactivate participants, and diversity in perspective is especially important if we hope to reach the broadest audience possible. To succeed, and I know we can, we must all step up as equal partners now to implement this plan, because each partner has unique expertise and resources to bring to the table. Ultimately, partnerships are the key to successful R3 programs, and we are counting on you. I look forward to intensifying our collective efforts to increase participation in hunting, fishing, and shooting sports in the Commonwealth.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark S. Tisa".

**Mark S. Tisa, Ph.D., M.B.A.**  
**Director**



# Introduction

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) is responsible for the conservation and management of freshwater fish and wildlife in the Commonwealth for the benefit and enjoyment of the public. MassWildlife manages over 230,000 acres of conserved lands and waters for wildlife to thrive and for the public to experience through fishing, hunting, trapping, and other wildlife-dependent recreation. Through science-based management, MassWildlife ensures healthy fish and wildlife populations, abundant natural resources, and scenic landscapes that contribute to a strong outdoor economy and improve the quality of life for all residents and visitors. MassWildlife’s strong and varied educational programs enrich wildlife-related recreation in Massachusetts, which generates about \$2 billion in retail sales annually and supports about 35,000 jobs.

Participating in hunting, freshwater fishing, and shooting sports are great ways to connect with nature, friends, and family. Outdoor experiences foster a strong conservation ethic and participants have a long track record of supporting conservation. MassWildlife shares the concerns of many in the hunting, fishing, and shooting sports community that much will be lost if long-term declines in participation continue. Of immediate concern is the fact that MassWildlife is primarily funded through the sale of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses, in addition to federal excise taxes on hunting, shooting, and fishing equipment sales. Therefore, any decline in participation has a direct negative impact on MassWildlife’s budget, and, consequently, its ability to continue important conservation work and provide high-quality recreational opportunities. This is why MassWildlife has prioritized efforts to increase participation in hunting, fishing, and shooting sports.



## What is R3?

R3 is a national movement to increase participation in hunting, fishing, and the shooting sports through Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3).

- **Recruitment** gets new participants to try hunting, fishing, or shooting sports.
- **Retention** engages current participants to continue the activity and participate more frequently.
- **Reactivation** motivates lapsed participants to return to these activities.

MassWildlife has already made great progress towards increasing participation in outdoor recreation through targeted marketing, improved website resources, and numerous hunting and fishing programs for both youth and adults. While many R3 efforts have been implemented, strategic planning is needed to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and coordination. MassWildlife has created this R3 Plan to identify priority activities for R3 in Massachusetts and provide a framework to align resources for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of these activities. With this R3 Plan, MassWildlife joins countless other organizations, government agencies, and industry members in a coordinated nationwide effort to increase participation in and support for hunting, fishing, shooting sports, and boating. Shooting sports refers to a collective group of competitive and recreational activities, including target shooting with a firearm or archery equipment, and sport shooting (sport/clays or trap/skeet).

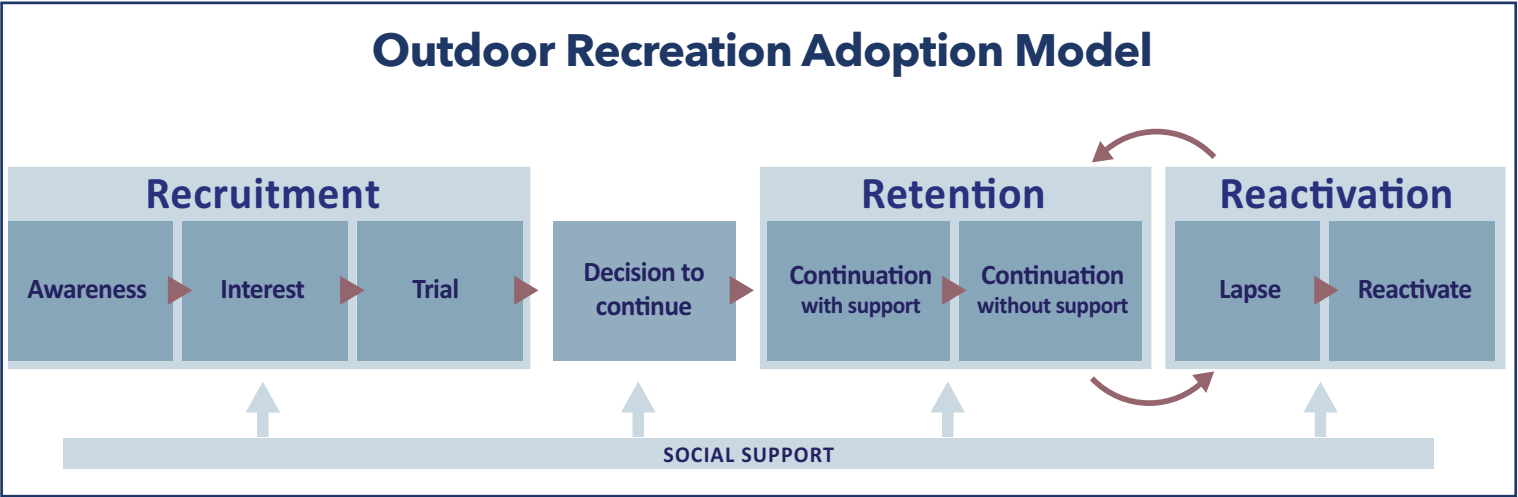
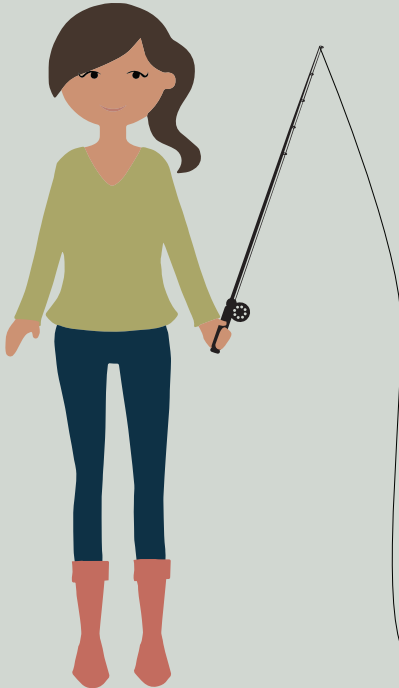


Figure 1. Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model (ORAM), as proposed by Byrne and Dunfee, 2016.

The Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model (ORAM) describes the steps involved in recruiting, retaining, and reactivating participants in hunting, fishing, or target shooting. For R3 initiatives to succeed, the focus must shift from one-time events to a targeted approach that considers the participant’s complete journey and meets each participant where they are along the ORAM pathway. By understanding the resources available to participants at each stage along this journey, individual R3 efforts can be linked together to address gaps and barriers to continued participation. Some participants may require a lot of assistance through hands-on programs, while others may just need online tutorials. Ongoing social support, which can be family, friends, or even other participants, is critical at all stages. While it’s difficult for one single organization to offer all of the resources that individuals need to become lifelong participants, using a partnership-based approach can provide all resources along the pathway. For R3 efforts to be successful, it’s important to connect participants to multiple opportunities offered by a variety of partners over time to ensure they are always provided next steps.



### Engagement along the ORAM

Meet Kim. Kim is a young professional living outside Boston. As a millennial, Kim is always looking for new experiences. After seeing an ad on Facebook about fishing (*awareness*), Kim goes online to do some research (*interest*). She finds MassWildlife’s website and decides to attend an Angler Education class that teaches her skills and provides an opportunity to go fishing (*trial*). Kim has a lot of fun learning to fish, so she buys a license and fishes a couple of times with the help of her friend John (*continuation with support*). When John moves away the next year, Kim does not have anyone to go fishing with and does not renew her license (*lapse*). A few months later, Kim sees an ad in her town for a local women’s fishing club and joins (*reactivation*). After learning some skills from her new club friends, Kim now feels confident fishing alone (*continuation without support*).

Massachusetts R3 Goal

The goal of the Massachusetts R3 Plan is to increase participation in and support for hunting, fishing, and shooting sports. To achieve this goal, MassWildlife must work with partners to engage traditional constituents, reach new audiences, and ensure that conservation and recreational programs are relevant to people with diverse lifestyles, attitudes, passions, and experiences.

MassWildlife staff from all sections of the agency contributed to the development of this Plan and helped to identify five foundational strategies (Figure 2). R3 is not a single program, but rather a philosophy that must be incorporated into all activities and initiatives. Partnerships are of fundamental importance to the success of R3. It will take a coordinated effort from industry partners, local and regional organizations, and MassWildlife to make progress toward the R3 goal. Therefore, the strategy of improving Coordination and Partnerships is the primary pillar of this Plan and integral to the implementation of the other four R3 strategies.



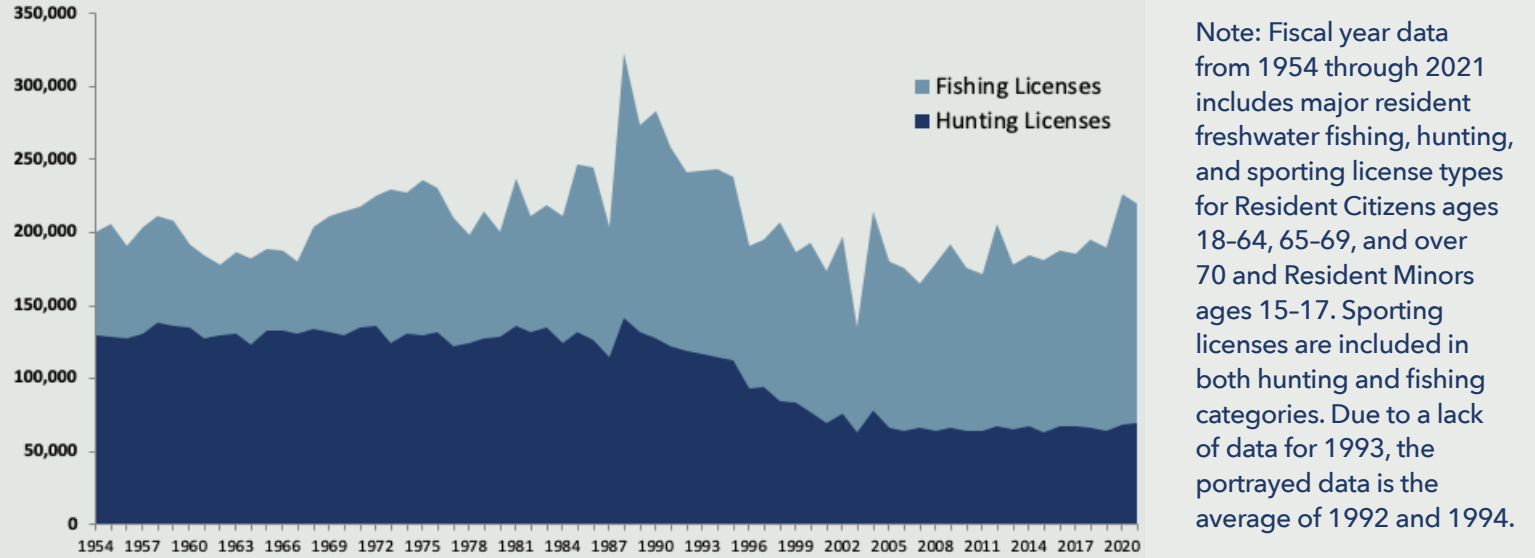
Figure 2. Massachusetts R3 Plan Goal and Strategies.

Understanding the Trends

For Massachusetts to increase participation in freshwater fishing, hunting, and shooting sports, it’s critical to evaluate participation and population trends over time, to better understand both current and future participants. By identifying growing audience segments, MassWildlife and its partners can capitalize on these opportunities and coordinate efforts to engage with those target audiences.

Historical data shows that license sales for hunting and fishing peaked in the mid- to late-1980s in Massachusetts, followed by a 32% decline in fishing and 51% decline in hunting license sales over the last 33 years. While fishing license sales have stabilized over the past five years, hunting license sales continue to decline (Figure 3). Nationally, approximately 22.2% of American adults participate in target shooting,<sup>1</sup> and shooting sports participation is growing in the Northeast.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 3. Massachusetts Resident Hunting and Fishing License Trends (1954-2021)



Although there has been an overall decline in hunting and fishing license sales over the past 30 years, growth has been documented recently for certain audience segments. While the COVID-19 pandemic inspired more people to get outdoors, work is needed to sustain this increased participation. R3 efforts should prioritize engagement with growing audiences, including women, urban and suburban residents, and adults, while also continuing to retain existing customers.

**Women:** Since 2012, there has been a 45% increase in resident female hunters and a 29% increase in resident female anglers. Twenty-five years ago, only 4% of Massachusetts Hunter Education students were female; now, 20% are female. While women are purchasing their first fishing and hunting licenses at a growing rate, they also drop out at a higher rate than men. Because these women have already demonstrated interest and completed a first trial, it’s critical to focus on retention efforts to keep them engaged.

**Urban and suburban residents:** While most existing hunters and anglers live in rural areas, license sales in these locations have stayed relatively stable. Much of the growth in license sales has been observed in urban and suburban areas, so it’s important to ensure urban and suburban residents have quality opportunities and access to areas for hunting and fishing.

**Millennials and Gen Z:** Historically, many participants learned how to hunt or fish at an early age from their family. An increasing number of hunters and anglers are starting later in life, including millennials and members of Gen Z, who are in their late teens to early 40s. This growing interest has been documented in Hunter Education graduates, where the average age is 30. While many R3 programs have been developed for youth, few resources have been designed to recruit and retain adults.

**Families:** Young people often do not have the means or ability to pursue fishing, hunting, or target shooting on their own. Engaging the entire family in R3 efforts rather than directing efforts solely at youth gives the family unit a much higher likelihood of continued participation. Participating together provides social support for both young and adult family members, which is key for recruitment, retention, and reactivation.

White males have been the predominant audience participating in hunting, fishing, and shooting sports.<sup>3</sup> While it’s important for R3 efforts to keep traditional audiences engaged, a gap remains between the diversity of outdoor participants and the diversity of the general population.<sup>3,4</sup> It’s critical to make outdoor spaces more inviting to underserved, nontraditional audiences including women, racial and ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQ+ community. R3 efforts must intentionally address diversity, equity, and inclusion so everyone can participate in outdoor activities and enjoy nature.



Massachusetts R3 Plan Structure

The purpose of the R3 Plan is to identify priority activities for R3 in Massachusetts within the five main strategies: coordination and partnerships; learning resources and R3 skills programs; access and opportunity; outreach and customer experience; and, acceptance of hunting, fishing, and shooting sports. This Plan provides a framework for partners to align resources for planning, implementing, and evaluating these activities. The R3 Plan is not intended to be exhaustive of all MassWildlife and partner R3 efforts, but rather focuses on priority activities that MassWildlife intends to complete with the help of partners. This Plan was developed with partner input, and partners will continue to play a critical role in the prioritization and implementation process. Cooperation will improve current efforts and implement new R3 initiatives. This is a living document; as R3 efforts evolve and activities are initiated and evaluated, new recommendations and opportunities may emerge and new partners may be engaged. Additional information about plan implementation, including a formal biannual planning process, can be found on page 18.

Power of Partnerships Example

Success in R3 requires the coordination of many partners. MassWildlife facilitates R3 efforts in Massachusetts by bringing together diverse partners and communicating our shared interests. From local rod and gun clubs to national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), each partner offers unique assets and resources to advance R3. This example demonstrates how partners play different roles, with the common goal of increasing participation in outdoor recreation.

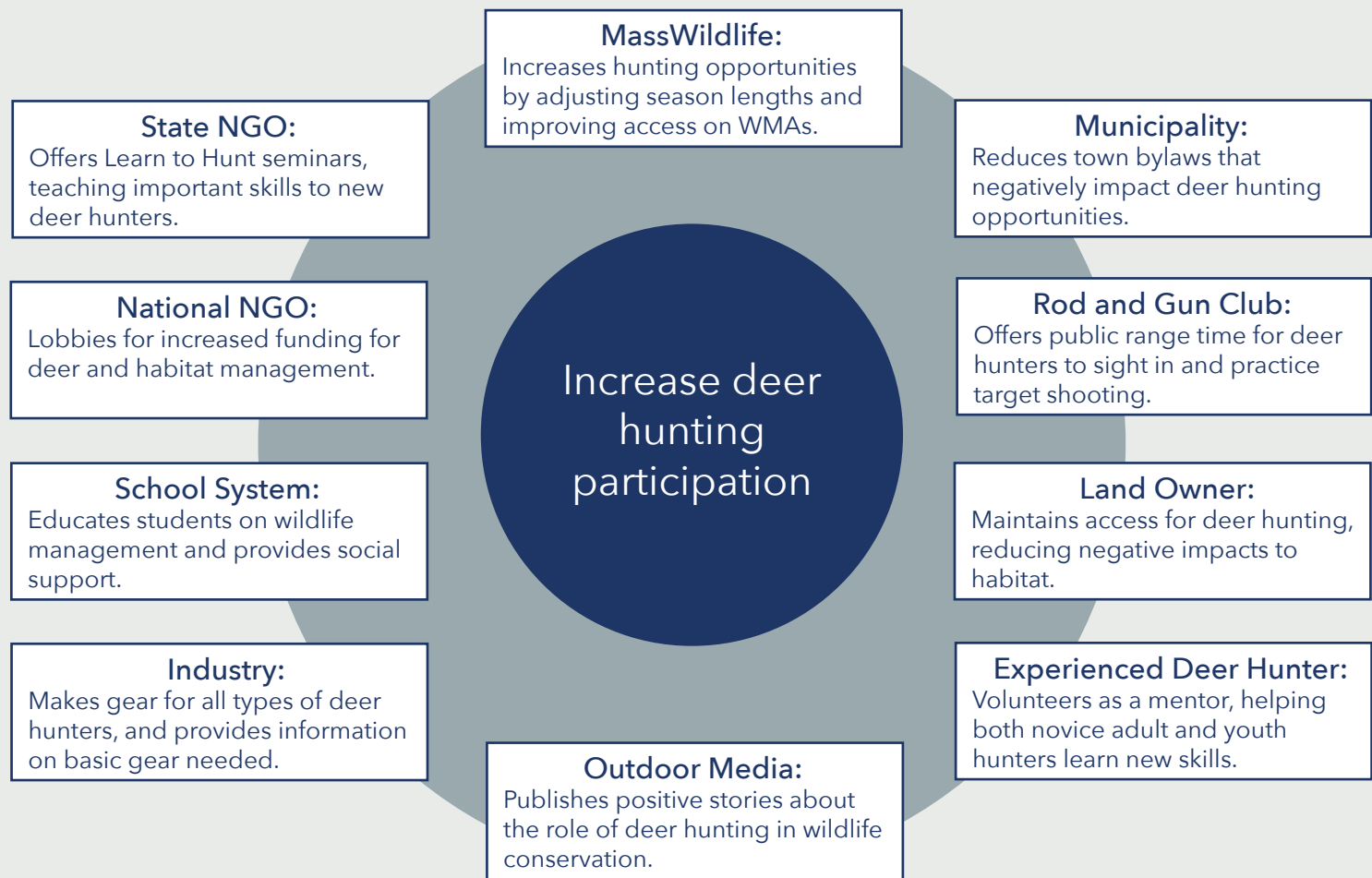


Figure 4. Power of Partnerships Example.



Core Principles

For R3 implementation to be successful, these core principles must be considered and applied to all strategies:

- **Objectives:** Establishing clear, measurable objectives will guide program development, improve decision-making, and provide indicators of success for evaluation.
- **Target Audience:** Specific target audiences must be identified for each R3 effort based on customer data and research. With a target audience in mind, program design and resources can be tailored to those most in need of support.
- **Communications:** It’s essential that effective communications are used to inform participants about R3 resources and program offerings that are relevant to them. Targeted communications play an important role in moving participants along the customer adoption pathway.
- **Evaluations:** To measure the effectiveness of R3 efforts and ensure that objectives are accomplished, evaluation metrics should be regularly assessed. Thorough evaluations allow R3 practitioners to change and improve R3 efforts over time.
- **Resources:** To effectively implement an R3 project, it’s critical to identify and efficiently use limited resources, including financial support, adequate staffing, and partners.

Incorporating these core principles when implementing the priority activities listed in this Plan will enable our small state to make a big impact on R3.



# Strategy #1: Coordination and Partnerships

It is impractical for one agency or organization to cover the full spectrum of necessary R3 efforts on its own. It will take many entities—state and federal agencies, industry professionals, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—working together to build pathways that successfully recruit, retain, and reactivate participants in fishing, hunting, and the shooting sports. Volunteering and mentoring are critical to R3 efforts, including the donation of time or resources. MassWildlife must increase coordination with external partners at many scales to meet the state’s R3 goals, from large-scale national collaborations to local volunteers and mentors. To build a strong R3 partner coalition that is representative of the diversity of outdoor participants in Massachusetts, MassWildlife must engage a

broad set of organizations and individuals with varied interests and perspectives.

In addition to facilitating external partnerships, MassWildlife must improve internal coordination to increase staff involvement and efficiency within the agency. Adopting an integrated, targeted approach to R3 that is supported by the best available research will help MassWildlife and its partners use their limited resources most effectively. To implement effective state-specific R3 efforts, MassWildlife must ensure all R3 efforts have specific measurable objectives and the support needed for planning, implementation, and evaluation. Effective communication, both within MassWildlife and with partners, will be critical to successful R3 Plan implementation.

## MassWildlife Coordination

- Integrate R3 into the mission and culture of MassWildlife and increase staff involvement in R3 efforts
- Develop an agency-wide, coordinated planning and implementation process for R3
- Create an internal communication process to provide relevant customer information that helps guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of R3 initiatives
- Ensure R3 actions are connected to create complete learning and adoption pathways

## Partnerships

- Build new and strengthen existing coordination between MassWildlife and state, regional, and national partners
- Encourage partners and constituents to recruit, retain, and reactivate mentors
- Work with partners and volunteers to increase the number and variety of programs offered

## PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

- Improve coordination of R3 efforts amongst all state partners to raise participant awareness of available R3 resources and programs, improve and increase offerings, and identify ways to evaluate participant engagement.
- Hold a Massachusetts R3 Partner Summit with state partners representing government agencies, NGOs, and industry. Following the Summit, establish an R3 Task Force to implement best practices identified at the Summit and maximize collaboration across partners.
- Engage all MassWildlife staff in R3 through workshops, trainings, communications, and annual work planning.
- Maintain MassWildlife R3 Coordinator position and ensure adequate engagement by other agency staff for R3 efforts to be implemented.
- Implement an efficient project management process and tools to coordinate R3 efforts. Employ R3 effective program design by applying the five core principles for R3 implementation (see page 7).
- Draw upon national research and best practices to efficiently develop and improve R3 offerings and mentoring capabilities.
- Complete an assessment of current R3 efforts across the Commonwealth to identify gaps in the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model (ORAM; Figure 1). Develop R3 strategies to address deficiencies and provide assistance at critical stages along the adoption pathway.
- Facilitate adoption of best practices and generate new ideas by participating in regional and national R3 efforts, including relevant committees, workgroups, and task forces.





# Strategy #2: Learning Resources and R3 Skills Programs

Traditional pathways for participating in an activity often include starting at a young age, initial experiences through family or friends, and continued involvement through social interactions. Because the number of participants who are introduced into hunting, fishing, and the shooting sports through traditional pathways is dwindling, many interested adults need additional resources to participate. Effective R3 resources and programs that incorporate multiple learning styles, including both hands-on skills and self-learning options, should be available to interested participants of all ages. R3 skills and training programs that offer a hands-on component give participants the opportunity to learn new skills in a unique, immersive way and to build relationships with other peers, MassWildlife, and partner organizations.

However, research demonstrates that successful R3 programs must go beyond providing a simple hands-on, one-time learning experience and should rather be linked to other programs and self-learning tools to present participants with

an array of next steps through experiences, information, and contacts over time. Linking efforts allows participants to move along the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model, which are the steps someone takes to become an active participant in hunting, fishing, or target shooting (Figure 1). Providing information that is easy to access and understand is a key component to generating more participants in hunting, fishing, and the shooting sports. While in-person instruction can be an effective tool for teaching R3 skills, these programs are very resource-intensive. For some participants, face-to-face interaction is necessary, while other participants may be willing to self-direct their learning with minimal or virtual assistance from instructors. To improve program scalability and increase reach, many classes that were traditionally held in-person are being modified for online delivery through virtual live learning and self-learning options. Offering resources both in-person and online allows participants to control how they learn, increasing participant satisfaction and the effectiveness and efficiency of R3 efforts.

## Hands-on Skills Programs

- Evaluate all R3 skills and training programs and use evaluations to continually improve offerings
- Develop targeted, customer-tailored skills programs in cooperation with partners
- Direct program participants to next steps along the Outdoor Recreation Adoption Model

## Self-Learning Resources

- Identify, create, and promote targeted, effective, and comprehensive self-learning tools
- Ensure participants can access interactive maps and information about lands and waters open to hunting, fishing, and shooting sports
- Evaluate self-learning resources to continually improve offerings

## PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

- Ensure all learning opportunities have a clearly defined target audience, objective, and evaluation metrics. Evaluate current MassWildlife R3 skills and training programs, and, if needed, alter programs to improve learning opportunities and increase effectiveness.
- Coordinate resources with partners to increase the number, quality, and variety of programs and self-learning resources offered.
- Utilize an event management system to improve program registration and evaluation and enable targeted communications to move program participants along the adoption pathway.
- Encourage participants to take the next step of purchasing a license after introductory hands-on programs through incentives, additional instruction, and targeted outreach.
- Use best available data and research to develop, offer, and promote skills programs and resources in locations and formats that are effective and convenient for both new and traditional audiences.
- Maintain an inventory of hunting, fishing, and shooting programs that are available in Massachusetts. Provide all program graduates with next step opportunities including additional trainings and resources.
- Improve the recruitment, engagement, and training of volunteer instructors and mentors. Seek volunteers with diverse backgrounds and develop a centralized database of instructors, mentors, and training facilities.
- Develop a system for connecting potential mentors and mentees with the help of partners.
- Assess existing self-learning resources provided by MassWildlife and partners. As needed, develop and promote new self-learning tools that are identified by constituents as desirable.
- Provide mapping resources to help constituents easily find locations to hunt, fish, and target shoot.



# Strategy #3: Access and Opportunity

Nationally, lack of access to areas for hunting, fishing, and the shooting sports is often cited as a primary barrier to participation.<sup>1</sup> Access limitations may be real, due to restricted land availability or accessibility, or perceived, due to a lack of awareness or assumptions about access. MassWildlife manages over 230,000 acres that are open to the public for hunting and fishing, yet access is still a major concern for constituents. In addition to lands directly under MassWildlife’s care and control, it’s critical to build partnerships with private and public landowners, including state and federal agencies, organizations, towns, and individuals, to open more areas for hunting, fishing, and shooting sports. MassWildlife must analyze spatial, behavioral, and temporal trends, such as where our constituents live in relation to their

recreation pursuits, to prioritize important areas for access. While open space limitations, discharge setbacks, land closures, permission requirements, and town bylaws tend to hinder participation in densely populated areas, recent trends indicate that hunting participation is growing among residents of these areas.<sup>5</sup> Ranges, which include archery and firearm ranges, are important for both shooting sports participants and hunters looking to increase their skills, yet access to public shooting facilities is limited in Massachusetts. While there are many ranges in Massachusetts, very few shooting facilities are open to the public. Additionally, the cost of joining a range is often prohibitive for those who only want to shoot occasionally. Increasing public access to private ranges would increase the opportunity for new sport shooters.<sup>1,6</sup>

## Land Acquisition and Management of MassWildlife Properties

- Improve public access and wildlife habitat
- Consider customer preferences when acquiring and improving public access

## Public and Private Land Access of Non-MassWildlife Properties

- Advocate to increase the acreage of public lands currently open to hunting and fishing
- Increase opportunities to hunt and fish on private land

## Range Access

- Increase public access to shooting and archery ranges
- Inventory current shooting ranges and create a structured range access plan

## PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

- Continue to prioritize locations for land acquisition, habitat management, and access improvement projects based on wildlife management needs and customer needs.
- Ensure information about all MassWildlife properties is accurate and easy to find. Identify and promote areas open for hunting and fishing through boundary marking, signage, digital maps, and communications.
- Identify public lands managed by municipalities, NGOs, and other government agencies that provide opportunities for increased hunting or fishing access. Collaborate with landowners and managers to expand opportunities and address physical or perceived barriers to accessibility, game species availability, and habitat quality.
- Work with partners who own land in Massachusetts to ensure hunting and fishing rules are simple and easy to understand. When possible, seek to align rules and local bylaws on private property or other protected open space with MassWildlife statewide regulations, season dates, and bag limits.
- Expand hunting and fishing opportunities on land held in private ownership. Encourage landowners to allow access by working with partners from different backgrounds to develop resources that encourage opening lands to hunting and fishing.
- Identify shooting sports participants in Massachusetts and their level of participation, facility needs, and preferences to establish baseline data from which to evaluate changes and improvements over time.
- Coordinate with range owners and operators to improve customer engagement and satisfaction based on participant needs.
- Identify ranges that are open to the public and maintain one centralized resource with accurate information to help publicize shooting opportunities.
- Locate geographic gaps in shooting range availability and work with partners to implement strategies to address those gaps.





# Strategy #4: Outreach and Customer Experience

MassWildlife must use a customer-focused, data-driven, and adaptive approach to engage participants and ensure their satisfaction. Strategic communications play an important role in maintaining engagement throughout the many steps someone takes to become an active participant in hunting, fishing, or target shooting. To effectively communicate, MassWildlife needs to gain a deeper understanding of our current and potential customers, what they need, and how best to reach them. Generating new participants and engaging current audiences will require outreach efforts and business practices that provide customer-centric resources, straightforward rules and regulations, and convenient licensing structures and sales

processes. To improve customer satisfaction, it's important to understand those factors that most motivate people to participate in hunting, fishing, and the shooting sports, including fun and enjoyment, spending quality time with family and friends, spending time in nature, and obtaining food. It's equally important to address and minimize those barriers, both factual and perceived, that cause participants to feel dissatisfied, including poor access and crowding, overall costs, confusing or restrictive regulations, and a lack of fish or game.<sup>1</sup> Providing high quality hunting and fishing opportunities through sound fisheries and wildlife management, in addition to popular stocking programs, is also critical for customer satisfaction and engagement.

## Communications and Licensing

- Incorporate R3 into MassWildlife's overall communications strategy
- Recruit, retain and reactivate customers with strategic communications
- Improve the license buying experience while strengthening customer relationships

## Policies and Regulations

- Improve customer satisfaction and increase clarity of laws and regulations
- Consider constituent locations and preferences regarding stocking and wildlife management

### PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

- Update the MassFishHunt online licensing system to improve customer service and the license buying experience with special emphasis on mobile purchasing, auto-renewal, harvest reporting, data visualization, and communications.
- Train and empower all MassWildlife staff to adopt a customer centric approach and act as ambassadors for the R3 message. Provide staff with talking points about the agency and the importance of R3 to use when interacting with the public.
- Ensure MassWildlife's direct access to license data is maintained and incorporated into an effective customer relationship management system (CRM). MassWildlife will use the CRM to improve customer service and streamline customer data collection.
- Implement targeted marketing campaigns that are adaptive, data-driven, evaluated, and customer-focused to recruit, retain, and reactivate participants.
- Build customer research capabilities through the collection of primary and secondary data; use this data to better understand target customers, including their interests, preferences, and behaviors.
- Conduct a review to identify confusing regulations, and then simplify and clarify regulations without adversely impacting resource management. Ensure new regulations are easy to understand, especially for novice participants.
- Create outreach materials to help participants understand which licenses and permits are required for hunting, fishing, and shooting, and how to obtain them.
- Research expectations, motivations, satisfactions, and dissatisfactions of Massachusetts hunters, anglers, and shooting sports participants of different experience levels.
- Evaluate constituents' satisfaction with stocking programs and map where target audiences live in relation to stocking opportunities. Implement stocking procedures that increase participation and satisfaction.





# Strategy #5: Acceptance of Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Sports

According to a recent analysis by Southwick Associates, only 3.4% of Massachusetts residents purchase a fishing license and only 1.2% purchase hunting licenses.<sup>5</sup> While state-level shooting sports data is not currently available, only about 22.2% of U.S. adults currently participate in shooting sports.<sup>1</sup> While there has been some growth documented in Massachusetts, hunting, fishing, and target shooting are still enjoyed by only a minority of residents.<sup>6</sup> The lack of demographic diversity among the current population of participants further increases the perception that these activities are only relevant to niche segments of the population. Effective R3 efforts not only maintain and increase participation, but also maintain and increase acceptance among members of the public that do not actively participate.

Broad public awareness and acceptance helps to maintain hunting, fishing, and shooting opportunities. If hunting, angling, and recreational shooting are seen as safe and legitimate activities by the public at large, new and nontraditional audiences may be more willing to accept and even participate in these activities. It is also important for the public to understand the longstanding role of hunters, anglers, and shooting sport participants in supporting and helping to fund conservation. MassWildlife will need current hunters, anglers, and shooting sports participants to act as ambassadors and improve the public's perception of these activities. We will also need to gain a deeper understanding of the public's

values, opinions, perceptions, and preferences. With this information, MassWildlife can implement communications that are data-driven and targeted to segments of the general public to improve understanding and address questions or concerns.

More broadly, MassWildlife's land protection, wildlife management and conservation activities benefit all citizens, and the agency depends on public support to fulfill its mission and public trust responsibilities. As such, it is important to not just engage and serve hunters, anglers, and target shooters but also those residents who may never hunt, fish, or shoot. In response to declining participation in hunting, fishing, and shooting sports, increasing the relevance of fish and wildlife agencies to a broader constituency has recently emerged as a national priority.



## Broad Public Engagement and Acceptance

- Research public opinion of hunting, fishing, and the shooting sports in Massachusetts
- Increase support through engagement with the general public, key decision makers, and the media

## Hunters, Anglers, and Target Shooters as R3 Ambassadors

- Enlist current hunters, anglers, and target shooters as ambassadors to improve public perception
- Develop a more welcoming environment for nontraditional audiences

### PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

- Use the National Fish and Wildlife Relevancy Roadmap<sup>7</sup> and incorporate national best practices to increase agency relevancy and engage and serve broad constituencies.
- Conduct a public attitudes survey to understand the public's perceptions of MassWildlife, their participation in and attitudes toward outdoor recreation, and their opinions of wildlife conservation.
- Use research to develop audience-specific communications and improve public opinion of hunting, fishing, and shooting sports.
- Incorporate messaging about the value of hunting, fishing, and shooting sports into conservation education outreach programs.
- Coordinate with the R3 Partners Task Force to develop key R3 messages and determine how best to deliver those messages to current hunters, anglers, and shooting sports participants. Messaging should help participants understand their role in advancing R3 and increasing public support.
- Work with partners to increase the traditional hunting, angling, and shooting community's acceptance and understanding of nontraditional audiences to create a more inclusive culture.
- Develop messages and self-learning educational tools that help to promote a culture that values safety, conservation, and ethics among hunting, fishing, and shooting sports participants.
- Develop and implement a strategy to improve the media's and the public's understanding of hunting, fishing, and shooting sports, and the role these activities play in conservation.
- Work with local decision makers to increase outdoor recreation opportunities and minimize policies that directly or indirectly reduce opportunities for hunting, fishing, and shooting sports.



## Implementing the Plan

MassWildlife looks forward to working with partners to implement the priority R3 activities identified in this Plan. MassWildlife considers this Plan to be a living document. As activities are implemented and evaluated, new priorities may emerge over time. Although this Plan and the priority activities provide an important framework, coordination with partners and biannual work planning will be key to effective implementation.

**Massachusetts R3 Task Force:** A statewide R3 Task Force with representatives from partner organizations throughout Massachusetts will be created to help build relationships across the state and better connect R3 efforts. The Massachusetts R3 Task Force will be responsible for identifying opportunities for R3 collaboration within the Commonwealth.

**Biannual Work Plans:** Many of the activities in this Plan are broad in nature to allow for flexibility in implementation. This Plan will be coupled with the development of detailed Biannual R3 Work Plans that contain key implementation steps, team members, timelines, and evaluation metrics for each priority activity addressed in a given year. MassWildlife's R3 Coordinator will work closely with partners, agency personnel, and MassWildlife senior management to develop the Biannual Work Plans and their evaluation.

## Get Involved

As emphasized throughout this Plan, it will take a strong coalition of diverse partners to meet our common R3 goals. Although there are many challenges, there are also tremendous opportunities to engage new audiences; re-energize existing participants; and connect the next generation of hunters, anglers, and shooting sports participants with nature and the great outdoors. Please contact MassWildlife R3 Coordinator Astrid Huseby at [astrid.huseby@mass.gov](mailto:astrid.huseby@mass.gov) for more information on how to get involved in R3.



## Sources

- <sup>1</sup> Responsive Management, NSSF, Hunting, Fishing, Sport Shooting, Archery Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation: A Practitioner's Guide, 2017.
- <sup>2</sup> National Shooting Sports Foundation, NSSF Report: Sport Shooting Participation in the US, 2019.
- <sup>3</sup> Outdoor Foundation, Outdoor Participation Report, 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, Early Benchmarks Show 'Post-Millennials' on Track to Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet, 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> Southwick Associates, Inc., Profiles of Massachusetts Fishing and Hunting License Customers 2012-2015, 2016.
- <sup>6</sup> Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports and WMI, National Hunting & Shooting Sports Action Plan, 2016.
- <sup>7</sup> Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Wildlife Management Institute. Fish and Wildlife Relevancy Roadmap (v1.0), 2019.