



Resilient Lands Initiative



January 4, 2023

A LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY:

Dear Partners,

Massachusetts is a special place to live, work, and recreate because of its unique historic cities, towns, and villages, and their close connection to green spaces – parks, forests, farms, rivers, lakes, coasts, and wetlands. Massachusetts has an abundance of trees throughout our neighborhoods, cities, and towns, and we are proud of our productive farmland. Collectively, we have protected over 25% of our land for future generations to enjoy, and our partnerships to protect and care for the land are a model for others.

In the past, our land conservation vision has focused on protecting more of the 13 unique ecosystems that make our state such a diverse environment. After all, these ecosystems provide many benefits to people, such as unrivaled drinking water, unique outdoor recreation, and productive forests and farms. Today this goal remains as important as ever. Ongoing fragmentation of ecosystems means we need to continue to act quickly in order to protect the unique biodiversity that exists here in Massachusetts.

The 2020s is the decade where we must work to conserve, manage, and restore our natural lands to help our residents with the real and increasing impacts of climate change. Over the next 10 years, we will focus our land conservation and restoration programs to help residents who are most vulnerable to heat islands, flooding, and other climate impacts. The Resilient Lands Initiative (RLI) strives to make significant progress toward our interconnected equity, climate, and biodiversity goals. The inclusive process over the past three years that created this vision was a great way to start an initiative that has these objectives in mind. Going forward, every effort will be made to build on the process that created the RLI by effectively communicating the importance of land conservation to those not typically involved in it, and working with them to implement recommended actions.

In late 2020 our office released the *Decarbonization Roadmap* – a guide to reaching “Net Zero” carbon emissions across the Commonwealth – and in 2022 we issued the *Clean Energy and Climate Plans for 2025/2030 and 2050*, which detail how we will ensure that our 2030 and 2050 emissions limits will be met. These documents show how we will meet the additional requirements of the amendments to the Global Warming Solutions Act passed in early 2021.

The RLI is an important companion to the *Decarbonization Roadmap*. In fact, it is a “Roadmap for Resilience” using green infrastructure. Because the RLI is a slate of potential actions to reduce the amount and the impacts of the climate change that will occur even in the short term, especially in the

natural and working lands sector, it has been incorporated into the *Clean Energy and Climate Plans for 2025/2030 and 2050*.

While we cannot eliminate the impacts of climate change on our residents by 2050, we can fully utilize our land and natural resources to protect our residents, especially those in Environmental Justice neighborhoods. Where we see more pavement and impervious surfaces, we know the climate impacts will be greatest and our efforts to restore the land are most pressing. For example, the percentage of impervious surface in our Environmental Justice census tracts is more than three times the state average. By following the climate strategies outlined in this plan, we will also bring greater equity to residents who lack access to freshly grown food, shade-covered walkways, parks and greenspaces, clean air and water, and the quiet that even small natural areas provide.

In addition to our traditional stakeholders, our office is committed to work with a more diverse group of partners in Environmental Justice and Indigenous Peoples communities and beyond to implement the strategies of the Resilient Lands Initiative. It is an ambitious vision, but one that we must work towards. The RLI offers a variety of policies and programs that we can begin to use now, one pilot project at a time, so that we are ready to implement the vision of fully using our natural lands to protect our residents from climate impacts, improve their access to food and greenspace, and enhance their health and quality of life. Fortunately, while implementing these actions to address climate change, we will also be conserving the fantastic diversity of ecosystems that will define Massachusetts for future generations.

I look forward to working together to implement this vision.

Sincerely,

Bethany A. Card
Secretary