



DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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WILDLIFE LANDS

POLICY OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS DIVISION OF FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

Approved by the Fisheries & Wildlife Board

August 23, 2016

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) is charged by statute with the biological protection and management of all inland fish, wildlife, and rare species in the Commonwealth. MassWildlife is also directed by statute to manage and provide wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for the public, including hunting, fishing, and trapping. In pursuit of these statutory mandates, more than 150,000 acres have been purchased in fee using bond capital and Land Stamp funds as of the date of this policy. These areas are managed by MassWildlife as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and Access Areas. This management requires a careful balance between the protection of wildlife resources and public access. It is against the backdrop of these statutory mandates that this Wildlife Lands Policy has been developed.

MassWildlife's mission is unique among government agencies, municipalities, and private conservation organizations. No other level of government or private organization bears the statutory responsibilities of protecting the Commonwealth's biodiversity as well as providing opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation. Although the total acreage held in fee and managed by MassWildlife is substantial, it is only a small fraction of the land area of the Commonwealth. The 150,000 acres presently conserved as WMAs and Access Areas is a tiny percentage of the roughly 5.2 million acres of land in the state. Given the relatively small number of acres of these conserved areas in comparison to the total area of the state, MassWildlife needs to be very careful about how it manages and protects these areas. In particular, it means these areas should be managed so that biodiversity and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities are not compromised. Practically, it also means that MassWildlife's management of its WMAs should guard against the rapidly growing public demand for outdoor recreational activities that may adversely affect biological stewardship, alter wildlife dynamics, and interrupt wildlife-dependent recreation.

Accordingly, MassWildlife hereby establishes this Wildlife Lands Policy, which sets out the agency's essential perspective on permissible land uses on its WMAs and Access Areas. Henceforth, management decisions regarding proposed activities and uses on WMAs and Access Areas shall be measured in terms of consistency with the statutory mandates of protecting wildlife resources as well as managing and providing wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, and trapping. Under this Wildlife Lands Policy, MassWildlife shall also seek to: (1) maintain its WMAs and Access Areas by prioritizing fish, wildlife, and rare species consistent with the wildlife and habitat management goals established by the Fisheries and Wildlife Board; (2) encourage stewardship that advances this standard; and (3) discourage activities that compromise this standard.