THE SEARCH

The Massachusetts Audubon Society (Mass Audubon), a vibrant regional nonprofit and leader in science-based conservation, advocacy, and environmental education, seeks a President. Founded in 1896, Mass Audubon is the largest nature conservation organization in New England. Today, through the support of 135,000 members, Mass Audubon protects more than 38,000 acres of some of Massachusetts’ most ecologically significant land, from barrier beaches to wetlands to northern hardwood forests. The organization welcomes half a million yearly visitors to its diverse network of more than 100 wildlife sanctuaries and nature centers stretching across the state from rural to urban areas. Widely recognized as an environmental education leader, Mass Audubon offers thousands of camp, school, and adult programs each year, both at its sites and throughout local communities. It plays a leading advocacy role in the state, working with other conservation organizations, the Governor’s office, legislators, and citizen groups to draft, shape, and strengthen environmental laws and regulations. With an increasingly critical strategic emphasis on climate action, and a Board and staff primed for a new level of influence, impact, and inclusive outreach to new constituents, Mass Audubon is poised to play an even more significant leadership role on behalf of nature and the public in the years ahead.

Reporting to a 27-member Board of Directors, the President oversees a year-round staff of 260, an annual operating budget of more than $30 million, and an endowment of $154 million. With more than half of its revenues from program income and membership, the organization is highly mission-driven but at the same time a complex business operation requiring careful management. The position calls for a decisive, bold, and strategic leader and spokesperson with a demonstrated passion for nature and a sense of urgency about its protection. Leadership experience in a complex organization is preferred, as is experience leading through growth and change. Strengths in communication and fundraising, collaboration and partnerships, and dynamic staff leadership are essential, as is a proven commitment to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A five-member Board committee has been established to conduct this search. The search committee will be assisted by the national executive search firm of Isaacson, Miller. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.
BACKGROUND

Mass Audubon was founded in 1896 through the efforts of a spirited group of Boston women led by Harriet Lawrence Hemenway and Minna Hall. These two cousins, deeply moved by the slaughter of birds for plumes used to adorn fashionable ladies’ hats, recruited others to join them in an effort to halt the practice. The group quickly grew to some 900 individuals who vowed to work to discourage the buying and wearing of feathers and to otherwise further the protection of birds. The group, which included prominent ornithologists and biologists, officially formed as the Massachusetts Audubon Society, named after the great bird artist John James Audubon.

Mass Audubon quickly garnered national attention and resolved to establish similar societies in other U.S. states. Within a year, Pennsylvania, New York, Maine, Colorado, and the District of Columbia had formed groups with Mass Audubon’s assistance, and by 1905 – through the continued involvement of the Boston founding mothers – a national association of Audubon societies was established, which eventually became known as the National Audubon Society. Mass Audubon, however, preserved its independent status and remains to this day a separate organization from National Audubon.

In 1916, Mass Audubon established its first bird sanctuary at a 225-acre estate in Sharon, Massachusetts. The site soon became a mecca for birders as well as a popular education center, with visitors from all around the United States and from overseas. This was the first of what would become one of Mass Audubon’s distinctive, and to this day, most precious assets – a statewide network of wildlife sanctuaries of preserved open spaces where flora and fauna are conserved and where community members and other visitors can benefit both from the experience of being in the sanctuaries and from the educational, research, and volunteer opportunities that they offer. Throughout the 1950s, as Mass Audubon steadily acquired and protected parcels of land, its programs were largely directed at the birding community. In the 1960s and 1970s, the organization began to broaden its activities to include scientific research as well as reinvigorated advocacy – in the spirit of the founding mothers – on behalf of a range of pressing environmental issues. It became a leader in working with the U.S. Congress to pass and enact conservation laws designed to protect birds and their habitats, leading to international treaties to do the same.

Beginning in the 1980s and continuing to the present, Mass Audubon has undergone tremendous expansion. It has more than tripled its protected acreage, significantly increased annual visitation and membership, spearheaded critical environmental protection legislation, and initiated scientific partnerships. Its place-based educational programs set a national standard, and the sanctuaries have built deep and lasting connections to their local communities where residents participate in programs, volunteer, and provide critical financial support.

MASS AUDUBON TODAY

Today, Mass Audubon is a sizable, complex institution. Its work is guided by its aspirations for:

* A Massachusetts in which nature—whether found in a city park, deep inside the forests of western Massachusetts, within an urban greenway, or along the 1,500 miles of Massachusetts
coastline—is valued as essential to quality of life in the Commonwealth, and people live with appreciation and respect for the complex ecological systems that sustain life on Earth, working together to ensure that they are protected.

Wildlife Sanctuaries

Most of Mass Audubon’s current activities are tied directly or indirectly to its vast statewide wildlife sanctuary system, including more than 100 properties stretching over 38,000 acres from the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts to the Cape and Islands in the eastern part of the state. These include 60 wildlife sanctuaries open to the public encompassing 20 staffed nature centers. A typical staffed sanctuary has a nature center, walking trails, a nationally accredited camp program, and various youth, family, adult, and school programs (including state licensed nature pre-schools at five of the sanctuaries), and citizen science volunteer programs to monitor wildlife and support land stewardship. Throughout the sanctuary system, Mass Audubon pursues a high level of environmental stewardship and sustainability, and the sanctuaries serve as outdoor classrooms and laboratories devoted to the appreciation and interpretation of the natural world. The sanctuary system is also a place where Mass Audubon can test new ideas to further its broader conservation goals, including leading by example with sustainable building design and renewable energy use, all-person trails, community meeting centers, nature play areas, and other innovations.

For example, in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Mass Audubon operates the Blue Hills Trailside Museum, an interpretive center for the state-owned Blue Hills Reservation, itself a major and biologically diverse nature area within a few miles of downtown Boston. Mass Audubon also owns and operates Drumlin Farm, a full working farm, a cherished family and school destination, and one of the organization’s largest and most innovative program centers. Mass Audubon’s collection and exhibitions at its Museum of American Bird Art offers another example of the diverse mix of program centers that the organization has developed and utilizes to connect people with nature.

Conservation Science and Land Protection

Conservation science underlies nearly every aspect of Mass Audubon’s work. While the organization’s roots revolved around the protection of birds, it quickly became influential as a science-based voice for conservation more broadly, applying scientific research and knowledge to the protection of critical terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The organization today is the largest private landowner in Massachusetts, reflecting its long commitment to protecting the biodiversity of the Commonwealth. A nationally accredited land trust, Mass Audubon manages its growing acreage in perpetuity, protecting critical habitat for imperiled species and mitigating the effects of climate change. Mass Audubon conserves land through: receiving land and conservation restrictions (CRs) as gifts and bequests; raising money to buy land and CRs, often achieving substantial discounts from market value; partnering with other conservation organizations and government agencies to protect areas of mutual importance; and providing technical expertise to other conservation organizations. Mass Audubon’s protected land base provides opportunity for collaborative long-term ecological research with colleges and universities and is a showcase for innovative habitat management and restoration. Educating and engaging the public to learn more about wildlife through citizen, or community, science is also a hallmark of conservation at Mass Audubon.
**Education**

Mass Audubon is the largest statewide provider of environmental education programming in New England and enjoys a national reputation for the quality and impact of its programming. Each year, approximately 235,000 youth, families, and adults attend its education programs, which take place across the Commonwealth, in sanctuaries and through partnerships with schools and community-based organizations. Its education programs enable the organization to engage and inspire members and visitors from diverse communities, and to foster children’s connections with nature through Pre-K-12 school programs. Mass Audubon offers programs serving schoolchildren in 62 percent of Massachusetts’ cities and towns and operates camps, both day and overnight (at its large waterfront property in Rindge, NH), that reach over 11,000 children from 76 percent of Massachusetts’ cities and towns. All of Mass Audubon’s camp programs are accredited by the American Camping Association. At its urban sanctuaries in Boston, Attleboro, and Worcester, and through outreach programs offered by other sanctuaries, Mass Audubon’s school programs across the state serve diverse constituents from under-resourced communities who might not otherwise have access to nature and environmental programming. In addition, through the employment of college-aged and early career interns, camp staff, seasonal farm staff, coastal water bird monitors, and ecological management seasonal staff, Mass Audubon is intentionally building career pathways for future conservation leaders from all backgrounds and ethnicities.

**Advocacy**

Mass Audubon’s members and program participants are key constituents in building momentum and support for conservation action in their own communities. The Mass Audubon Advocacy Department works with members, Mass Audubon scientists, other conservation organizations, the Governor’s office, legislators, and local government officials to help shape, strengthen, and defend environmental policy at the local, state, and federal levels of government. The organization’s Legislative Office on Beacon Hill lobbies at the State House and coordinates the Mass Audubon Environmental Alert Network of active members and other individuals who participate in advocacy efforts. The Department also operates three regional policy offices. A key initiative of the Advocacy Department is the “Shaping the Future of Your Community” program, which works closely with municipalities, land trusts, and watershed associations in promoting land use planning with a focus on conservation and enhancing climate resilience. And due in large part to Mass Audubon’s advocacy, Massachusetts recently became the first state in the country to have a Climate Change Adaptation program codified into law.

**Organization, Governance, and Finance**

Mass Audubon is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with a headquarters based in Lincoln, MA and a decentralized statewide network of nature centers and field offices. Individual sanctuaries are entrepreneurial management units with unique identities and positions in their local communities, and with especially strong local supporters and donors. Sanctuary economies vary a great deal based on their location, donor base, maturity, and level of endowment. Sanctuaries and field offices are supported by regional directors, regional scientists, regional property management staff, and development staff that provide technical and management support and accountability, facilitate collaboration and communication, and
lead strategic initiatives. Within headquarters, there are approximately 30 staff focused on mission-related strategic goals – climate change, education, diversity, land protection, conservation science, and advocacy – working to drive forward the work of the organization at a statewide level. Headquarters also includes critical shared supports and statewide resources comprising approximately 60 individuals in administration and finance, marketing, philanthropy, capital assets and planning, and human resources.

Mass Audubon’s full-time staff of 260, most of whom are in the wildlife sanctuaries, are joined by more than 900 seasonal and part-time employees. Staff numbers swell in the summer months when more than half of these seasonal employees arrive to support a large and growing network of sanctuary-based summer camps. Mass Audubon staff are also supported by approximately 15,000 volunteers annually – the most of any New England nonprofit organization.

The President currently has seven direct reports, including Vice Presidents for Marketing and Communications, Operations, Philanthropy, and Wildlife Sanctuaries and Programs; Directors of Conservation Science and of Public Policy & Government Relations; and the Executive Assistant/Corporate Secretary.

Mass Audubon is governed by an active 27-member Board of Directors, which meets six times a year, as well as at the Annual Meeting. The Board is supported by a large statewide Advisory Council, which meets two times a year, including at the Annual Meeting.

Financial stability has been a hallmark of Mass Audubon for decades, having carefully managed its budgeting year upon year. Total giving to Mass Audubon – including membership, operating, special projects, endowment, and capital gifts – has ranged from approximately $23 million in FY 2015 to $30 million in FY 2019. Mass Audubon’s FY 2020 operating budget is $30.6 million, and as of June 30, 2019, its endowment totaled $154 million.

2015-2020 Strategic Plan

In 2015, Mass Audubon adopted Strategic Plan – 2020. Propelled by a sense of urgency about engaging diverse communities, inspiring the next generation of conservation leaders, advancing land and wildlife conservation, and mitigating the impacts of climate change, the organization defined three strategic goals under which a series of actions and outcomes were outlined:

- Connect people and nature for the benefit of both.
- Protect and care for land and habitats of significance.
- Address the challenges of climate change in Massachusetts.

In pursuit of these goals, Mass Audubon is working to reach and engage younger, more diverse visitors, members, and supporters in the care and enjoyment of its extraordinary open spaces. Its presence in urban communities includes efforts to enhance community gardens, greenways, and urban wilds and engage residents in learning opportunities and community-based activism. In addition, Mass Audubon has prioritized the development of universally designed trails and interpretation services at its most visited sanctuaries, helping to make them more inclusive and accessible to a broad range of audiences and individuals of all abilities. It has also partnered with the University of Massachusetts Boston, the only university in New England with a
majority-minority student population, to provide environmental career exploration and opportunities for its students. While Mass Audubon has made great strides, there is still much progress to be made to increase access and build bridges and networks, particularly for people of color and other individuals of diverse backgrounds.

The issue of climate change has emerged as an overriding concern for Mass Audubon, given the organization’s mission to protect the nature of Massachusetts and the threat that climate change poses. It is currently finalizing an ambitious and comprehensive Climate Action Plan to frame the organization’s best and most impactful response to this profound challenge. Through its tens of thousands of acres of protected land, 70,000 bipartisan member households, statewide network of wildlife sanctuaries engaging nearly half a million visitors, and organizational expertise in both education and advocacy, Mass Audubon is poised to play a significant role in further addressing and mitigating climate impacts. These efforts are also deeply interconnected with its organizational priority to engage younger, more diverse audiences. Young adults are especially attracted to Mass Audubon’s activities related to climate change. This is evidenced by the organization’s successful Climate Cafés and Youth Climate Summits which provide insight on how climate change will impact a surrounding community and which help bring the vast, global problem to a local and more manageable scale.

Leadership Transition

In the spring of 2019, Mass Audubon’s President, Gary Clayton, announced his intention to retire in May of 2020. A leader within the organization since 1989, Clayton has served as President since 2015, bringing exceptionally deep institutional knowledge and steadfast commitment to Mass Audubon’s mission and role. As President, he led successful capital campaigns to protect more than 3,000 acres of land, including Tidmarsh, an ecologically restored 481-acre former cranberry bog in Plymouth. He also stewarded the donation of Brewster’s Woods, a 141-acre gift along the federally designated Wild and Scenic Concord River, which represents the single largest gift of land, facilities, and endowment in Massachusetts conservation history. He championed Mass Audubon’s participation in the carbon offset market, enrolling 10,000 acres of Mass Audubon land in the California Air Resources Board Improved Forest Management Project, the first of its kind in Massachusetts. He has also helped Mass Audubon increase its gifts, grants, membership, media outreach, and programming to all-time highs, while presiding over important legislative victories and engagement with the Massachusetts Congressional delegation. He leaves Mass Audubon an exceptionally strong, well-respected organization ready for its next level of success.

Looking Ahead

In a spring 2019 “blue sky” retreat, the Mass Audubon Board rallied around a set of bold ten-year aspirations for the organization focused on climate change action, education, land conservation, and expanding the reach of the organization to include more diverse constituents. Although there were more ideas than could possibly be pursued, the Board’s overall sense was that Mass Audubon is primed to take greater risks on behalf of its vital mission. It seeks to reinforce its strong membership base and sanctuary network while also strengthening its work on center-based, statewide initiatives. It also seeks to heighten public awareness on what Mass Audubon is already accomplishing and become significantly more vocal and visible on such issues as climate change, biodiversity loss, access to nature, threats to
environmental laws and regulations, and other pressing concerns. The Board hopes to intensify the organization’s focus on impacts; grow, diversify, and galvanize its constituents; and raise considerably more financial support for its important work. It is with this spirit of ambition and innovation that Mass Audubon embarks on the search for its next President.

PRESIDENT

The President of Mass Audubon reports to its Board of Directors and works most closely with the Board Chair. The key objectives for the new President include:

Vision and Strategy

• Coalesce staff and Board around a bold, clear, and achievable vision for Mass Audubon in its next chapter. Building upon the Strategic Plan – 2020 and the new Climate Action Plan, translate that vision into a limited set of focused priorities and strategies, with defined outcomes and impacts. Lead the organization in making tough choices among many important and deeply held goals and aspirations.
• Communicate the vision widely and persuasively. Inspire and galvanize internal and external partners and stakeholders in its support.
• Ensure that Mass Audubon’s science and advocacy work informs and is well integrated into its community engagement, educational, and conservation activities.
• Capitalize on Mass Audubon’s unique role as both an impactful statewide leader and a collection of innovative, distinctive place-based wildlife sanctuaries, with loyal local constituents. Identify and reinforce synergies across programs and sanctuaries.
• Reinforce and extend the organization’s focus on climate change as an existential threat to the nature of Massachusetts.
• Infuse organizational decisions, policies, and programs with values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Identify barriers to becoming an organization more fully representative of its diverse stakeholders and population statewide.

Public Recognition and Visibility

• Enhance the profile, awareness, and understanding of Mass Audubon, including among broader and more diverse audiences. Convey the depth, breadth, and extraordinary quality of its multi-faceted work in conservation, land protection, education, and advocacy. Help to reinforce that it is far more than an organization for birders alone, and that its reach extends throughout the state across landscapes and demographics.
• Hone Mass Audubon’s messaging and position the organization to communicate broadly and inclusively in a media-savvy and technology-centric world.
• Build and activate a younger, more diverse constituency for Mass Audubon.

Fundraising and External Relations

• Build and steward key relationships, including with Board and Council members, donors and funders, policymakers, media, thought leaders, and partners.
• Spearhead fundraising through strategic outreach and cultivation and intensive personal involvement; through volunteer engagement; through enhanced major gift capacity; and through a strong and well-supported philanthropy team.
• Significantly increase funding for Mass Audubon’s statewide strategic priorities and assist individual or groups of sanctuaries in their major fundraising efforts that align with the organization’s strategic goals.
• Deepen and strengthen Mass Audubon’s relationships with current individual and institutional donors and identify new sources of significant funding.
• Continue to grow the membership base.

Staff Leadership
• Serve as a unifying, communicative, and decisive staff leader. Set the overall leadership tone and preserve the best of the workplace culture of commitment, entrepreneurship, and mutual respect while fostering even greater collaboration and unity of purpose throughout the dispersed statewide enterprise.
• Delegate effectively to a high-performing senior team in order to concentrate as much as possible on strategy and external relations. If necessary, reorganize the leadership team structure to support this external focus and other organizational priorities.
• Respond enthusiastically and adaptively to the generational shift underway in the organization.

Operations and Management
• Strategically assess Mass Audubon’s organizational structure and business model and make changes as appropriate. Strike the right balance of centralization and decentralization in decision-making, staffing, and resource allocation.
• Work to simplify and streamline budgeting and financial processes and to build shared incentives and more efficient coordination across all parts of the organization.
• Strengthen operational support for statewide initiatives.
• Evaluate the economic model for sanctuaries to ensure they can maximize their mission-centric impact and community engagement, help support organization-wide priorities, and contribute financially.
• Strengthen channels of organization-wide communication, promote transparency, and reduce duplication of effort.
• Understand and effectively respond to persistent staff compensation issues and the anticipated impact of changes to minimum wage and pay equity laws.
• Invest in and further improve Mass Audubon’s technology capabilities in support of enhanced member and visitor experience and greater staff efficiency and communication.

Partnerships and Strategic Alliances
• Deepen collaborations with public and private partners and forge new alliances in pursuit of Mass Audubon’s mission and in collective response to the challenges of climate change. Work with local, state, and national partners to protect more land and biodiversity; educate, inspire, and activate more residents; and make the case for the critical links of nature protection to economic prosperity, equity, human health and wellbeing, and other major societal concerns.
• Serve as a catalyst for greater regional collaboration and coordinated action throughout the Northeast and seek strategic opportunities to participate in national and/or international initiatives.

Advocacy
• Reinforce and extend Mass Audubon’s longstanding non-partisan leadership role in effectively advocating for relevant local, state, and federal public policies. Engage
forcefully in those public policy matters that threaten its mission and core values, with particular attention to the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss and the associated need for land protection.

• Develop strategies to move Mass Audubon membership to action, taking advantage of the 70,000 household members across every part of the state whose influence and voices can and should be amplified.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

For this pivotal role, Mass Audubon seeks a leader and spokesperson who is passionate about the organization’s mission and legacy, is committed to its deep-rooted standards of excellence, and is farsighted about its future potential. Mass Audubon will welcome a President who is prepared to take calculated risks, lead by example, and make hard choices. At the same time, the organization requires a skilled and inspirational internal leader who will motivate, support, and coalesce staff and will ensure a well-managed, operationally high-performing, and fiscally strong organization.

The greater a candidate’s knowledge of conservation, education, and advocacy the better, but overall leadership skills are most critical. The President must be sufficiently knowledgeable about conservation issues and climate change to be a highly credible representative of Mass Audubon in the public sphere. There is an especially strong call for a President who can nurture engagement with new constituents and partners while continuing to inspire the organization’s longstanding supporters and volunteers.

An ideal candidate for the President position at Mass Audubon will bring many of the following professional experiences and personal attributes:

• Senior-level leadership experience in a complex, operationally intensive (ideally conservation or environmental) organization. A keen sense of organizational strategy and structure. Proven business acumen, including discipline and focus in setting priorities and meeting or exceeding goals. Experience leading through organizational change preferred.
• The ability to trust and hold the allegiance of a dispersed group of professionals and to maintain a climate in which these individuals can flourish. Strengths in team-building, effective delegation, and consultative management.
• Public presence. Very strong communication skills and the experience and inclination to be an effective, outgoing spokesperson for Mass Audubon in its communities of interest.
• Fundraising skills. Significant experience raising funds from a variety of sources strongly preferred. Without question, an enthusiasm for fundraising and a ready willingness to be actively involved in development.
• Excellent advocacy skills. Tenacity, grace, and resilience in the face of political pressure, media scrutiny, and bureaucratic resistance. Strong negotiation skills.
• Demonstrated personal and professional commitment to and experience in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.
• Openness to new and innovative models of outreach, collaboration, and movement building. Experience with new technologies and social media would be a distinct advantage. Keen sense of marketing.
• An outgoing, open personality. Authenticity and approachability. The ability to connect genuinely with people at all levels and from diverse communities. High integrity, gracious self-confidence, and good humor. Tenacity, flexibility, desire to learn, and high energy.

• An advanced degree in science, law, policy, education, or business would be an asset but is not required.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO APPLY

Inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and 1-3-page letters of interest responding to the objectives outlined above) should be sent electronically to:

Karen Wilcox, Leslie McCarthy, and Tatiana Oberkoetter
Isaacson, Miller
263 Summer Street
Boston, MA 02210
1-888-873-6989
www.imsearch.com/7072

Applications will be held in strict confidence. Material received by January 1, 2020 will be assured full consideration.

Mass Audubon is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination and equal opportunity. We welcome and encourage a diverse pool of candidates in this search.

September 2019