

# go wild

Mass Audubon's  
Action Agenda  
2021-2026



 Mass Audubon



## Mass Audubon is entering an era of bold and urgent action.

These are not ordinary times. Massachusetts faces significant challenges—including the rapid loss of wildlife habitat, inequitable access to nature, and the threat of climate change—that deeply affect the health and well-being of our environment and our communities. And yet, as we emerge from a global pandemic during which more people than ever found sanctuary in nature, signs of hope and optimism abound.

We are determined to meet these challenges and capitalize on people’s emergent connection to nature with transformational actions that will ensure future generations have the chance to “go wild.” Our new Action Agenda sets an ambitious five-year plan that signals a dynamic new era for the organization. This groundbreaking effort represents months of spirited collaboration among Mass Audubon staff, Board of Directors, Council, and partners; we thank everyone who contributed their thoughts, perspectives, and ingenuity to this

landmark strategy. We’re equally grateful to our nature heroes—the members, donors, volunteers, and partners who help bring our mission to life each day; your wisdom and dedication motivated us to aim high and dream big.

Our high-level goals for the Action Agenda capitalize on what we do best—promoting profound engagement between people and wildlife—while taking our work into a new dimension of visibility, impact, and consequence. Both audacious and timely, it reflects the gravity of the challenges confronting the environment and society; with the collective engagement of our entire organization and our valued partners, it is also eminently achievable. We hope the Action Agenda will inspire you to go wild in ways that engage and delight you and yours. Thanks for joining us on this exciting journey toward an even brighter future for Mass Audubon and the nature of Massachusetts.

**Beth Kressley Goldstein**  
Chair, Board of Directors

**David J. O'Neill**  
President

# Action Agenda Goals

## GOAL 1: PROTECT + STEWARD



### Resilient Landscapes

Lead a public/private sector coalition to protect **30%** of Massachusetts by 2026 by conserving an additional 150,000 acres

Of that total, Mass Audubon will protect **10,000** acres of new natural lands and sanctuaries—a fourfold increase in the pace of our land protection efforts

Enhance the management of **200,000** acres of public and private forestlands

Restore, protect, and manage at least **2,500** acres of critical coastal ecosystems

## GOAL 2: LISTEN + ENGAGE



### Inclusive and Equitable Access to Nature

Protect **20** new urban green spaces and wildlife sanctuaries by 2026

Grow the number of children from low-income families and communities of color who participate in our nature-based educational programs from 35,000 to **90,000**

Double the total number of children who benefit from our educational, preschool, and camp programs from 150,000 to **300,000**

Increase low-income families' access to our programs by growing our scholarship fund to **\$2 million**

## GOAL 3: MOBILIZE + ADVOCATE



### Climate Change

Achieve full implementation of the state's ambitious carbon emissions goals for **2030** and **2050**

Mobilize our **135,000** members to advance policies and funding for nature-based climate solutions

Train more than **1,000** adults, college students, and youth to become champions for climate and conservation policy

Advance policies that reverse the negative health impacts of climate change for low-income residents and communities of color

## Our core goals build on our powerful legacy of connecting people with the land.

The Action Agenda draws its strength from our spectacular network of wildlife sanctuaries and the thousands of volunteers who inspire others to explore, experience, and protect the nature of Massachusetts. To meet the Action Agenda's goals, we will engage a diverse set of partners—both those who know us well and those we hope to connect with.

For 125 years, the heart and soul of Mass Audubon has been a powerful connection between the people of Massachusetts and the land. The Action Agenda will strengthen the organization on both sides of that equation—expanding our land conservation efforts while fostering deeper engagement with current members and new audiences, so that we can address the common threats facing all of us.

The core goals of the Action Agenda are linked and interdependent. Protecting land in urban places improves the quality of life for local residents while also building climate resilience. Conserving large tracts of the natural landscape saves wildlife and protects clean water and air while providing a critical resource for sequestering carbon and storing flood waters. When we mobilize existing members and new supporters to advocate for climate action, our stronger collective voice better positions us to advance Mass Audubon's entire nature-based agenda.

The Least Tern is listed as a Species of Special Concern and favors nesting on beaches that are threatened by climate change.





Volunteers help keep the habitats at our wildlife sanctuaries healthy.

## We're tackling several of the biggest challenges of our time.

Climate change and the loss of biodiversity pose an immediate, unprecedented threat. Too many Massachusetts residents, particularly those from low-income families and communities of color, lack convenient access to nature and wildlife. The Action Agenda calls for innovative solutions that link policy, on-the-ground conservation, and sustained engagement with community partners. The actions we undertake will require us to work as a unified organization, keep our sights high, and inspire our members to help us drive significant change as quickly as possible.

## Are we up for the task? Absolutely.

Mass Audubon's assets, brand, and track record of achievement prepare us to take our conservation leadership even further. Much of that success stems from the fact that we don't go it alone. As we pursue our Action Agenda goals, we will enlist the assistance and counsel of our members, partner organizations, and community leaders at every step of the way.

Over the course of our history, we've protected some of the Commonwealth's most cherished landscapes, and the wildlife that relies on them, while providing generations of residents with life-changing experiences and enduring memories. The Action Agenda represents a new chapter for Mass Audubon full of hope, energy, urgency, and enthusiasm. We need your passion and commitment to help us write it. Please join us.



GOAL 1:

# Protect and Steward Resilient Landscapes

**Mass Audubon has fostered a spirit of profound engagement between people, the land, and wildlife for well over a century.**

The natural resources of Massachusetts face daunting challenges from development, climate change, and other factors. The Action Agenda will dramatically expand our efforts to protect, restore, and steward the state’s most important natural lands.

Our Resilient Landscapes goal focuses on working in close partnership with others to conserve an additional 150,000 acres of the Commonwealth’s most important and biodiverse habitats, bringing the percentage of protected land in the state to 30%. By focusing on forests, coastal watersheds, and river corridors, we can deliver maximum ecological benefit. Building on President Biden’s

30 by 30 nationwide goal of protecting 30% of U.S. lands by 2030, we will work with our partners to double the pace of land conservation in Massachusetts. And, as we conserve more natural lands, we will work with private landowners to implement land management methods that produce positive economic and ecological outcomes.

To that end, we will shape a land conservation strategy that complements existing federal, state, and partner plans, and establish a capacity-building team of experts to provide assistance in support of our partners’ land protection efforts. We will also amplify the impact of our collective actions by advocating for increased funding focused on land conservation and resilient landscapes.

**Resilient landscapes are large, connected landscapes that provide:**



Healthy, diverse habitats and migratory corridors for wildlife



Clean air, clean water, recreation, and health benefits for people



Adaptation to climate change for wildlife and people



**CASE STUDY**

**Tidmarsh: Conserving and Restoring Southeastern Massachusetts**

According to Mass Audubon's 2020 *Losing Ground* report, Southeastern Massachusetts is one of the most threatened landscapes in the Commonwealth. It is also one of the most biologically diverse; the region is home to many rare and specialized plant and animal species, along with one of the Northeast U.S.'s largest last remaining pine barrens. The innovative work at Tidmarsh Wildlife Sanctuary in Plymouth, which involved close collaboration with local, state, and federal partners, led to the permanent protection and restoration of more than 600 acres on the site of a former cranberry bog.

This transformation demonstrates the healing power of nature. The historic restoration at Tidmarsh has created a vibrant landscape that attracts migratory fish and birds, cleanses its water, and contributes to the resilience of the landscape in the face of sea level rise and flooding. Mass Audubon continues to advance this work today by restoring additional wetlands and uplands and facilitating the return of globally rare ecosystems on the property. We are also expanding our efforts to protect the region's coastal and pine barren ecosystems—working with landowners and partners to protect more cranberry bogs, generate more public and private funding, and help local governments shape development patterns that preserve biological integrity.



Eastern Kingbird © Matt Filosa

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GOAL 2:

# Advance Inclusive and Equitable Access to Nature

**Everyone deserves to enjoy nature's benefits—from clean air and water to shade and recreation.**

Yet many families face barriers that make it difficult for them to access green spaces: few community parks, limited transportation options, and a lack of available nature education programs.

Mass Audubon is committed to promoting inclusive and equitable access to nature by creating new sanctuaries in urban environments. Working with community members and listening

closely to their needs, we will build on our successful track record at the Boston Nature Center—both in Boston and in Gateway Cities across the state. Expanding and deepening our environmental and career programs will bring us closer to the time when every child and adult in Massachusetts has the opportunity to engage profoundly with nature. In our training, recruitment, and board development activities, Mass Audubon will also advance the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice throughout our organization.





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## CASE STUDY

### Youth Leaders Program: A Different World

For Adrian Oller, the Willow Tree Youth Leaders program at Mass Audubon's Boston Nature Center in Mattapan is about both teaching and learning. "While I've been giving young campers lessons about nature and wildlife, I've also learned a huge amount about professionalism—from writing work-related emails to organizing and running a meeting."

Participants in the three-year, paid internship program work part time during the academic year and full time during school and summer vacations. "Coming to the BNC is like walking into a different world," explains Adrian, a senior at Cristo Rey Boston High School. "There are wetlands, meadows, and deer. Many of the kids don't have backyards—the sanctuary is a place where they can explore, be safe, and put away their phones."

"Programs like Youth Leaders—and young people like Adrian—embody the Action Agenda's focus on promoting equitable access to nature," explains Boston Wildlife Sanctuaries Director Julie Brandlen. "With additional resources, Mass Audubon could replicate the success of the program in other Boston neighborhoods and Gateway Cities across Massachusetts."

In the fall, Adrian will attend Framingham State University—a college he discovered during a tour organized through the Youth Leaders program—where he'll study criminology. "Once, after a snowfall, I took some young campers out to look for animal tracks. Doing that kind of observation is great training for detective work."



GOAL 3:

# Mobilize to Fight Climate Change

**The world desperately needs immediate, decisive action to respond to the climate crisis.** Climate change threatens every aspect of Mass Audubon’s mission: the wildlife we protect, the land we steward, the biodiversity we treasure, and the communities we serve. Yet we see reason for hope. Our state, which is at the forefront of climate legislation, has set goals to reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2030 and to net zero by 2050; Mass Audubon will play a leading role in reaching these targets.

Much of the Action Agenda’s climate work centers on nature-based climate solutions—for example, protecting ecosystems that sequester millions of metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. By aggressively supporting these solutions, we address the threats of climate change while advancing our long-standing mission to protect our air, water, and wildlife habitat. Together with our partners, we will advocate for the rapid adoption of renewable energy while simultaneously safeguarding wildlife and environmentally sensitive lands.

**Nature-based climate solutions** use the power of nature to increase the storage of carbon, reduce flooding and extreme heat, and avoid greenhouse gas emissions through the protection, restoration, and management of our forestlands, grasslands, wetlands, and soils.

We will also mobilize our members and sanctuary visitors to grow the ranks of climate advocates. As the state’s largest conservation organization—one that engages hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors annually—we have an opportunity, and an obligation, to harness these voices to advocate passionately on behalf of nature.



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## CASE STUDY

### Climate-Smart Forestry: A Natural Solution

The carbon storage capabilities of forests represent a key tool in the fight against climate change. Protecting forests for wildlife habitat also supports the growth of trees that can store a high volume of carbon. Mass Audubon is collaborating with conservation organizations and government agencies to develop best practices in climate-smart forestry (CSF) to help landowners, foresters, and harvesters protect the carbon currently in our forests while increasing the resiliency of the future forest to both climate and non-climate threats. CSF practices cover a range of activities depending on the forest condition, such as designating forest reserves, planting climate-adapted trees, and harvesting trees in a deliberate way to increase the health of the forest.



# Going wild is about...

to join a bird census



Stepping from a



Using your senses to explore an All

to swap their screens for binoculars



Taking a child to a sanctuary like Drumlin

your first owl



Connecting to nature



Successfully tackling a ropes course

plants from a riverbank



Working to

Happening upon a breathtaking view during

beaver dam from a canoe



Writing a

Rescuing a sea turtle



Rising at dawn

busy city street into a tranquil urban sanctuary

Persons Trail



Inspiring young birders

Spotting a rare Eastern Meadowlark



Farm for the first time



Encountering

with art at the Museum of American Bird Art

at summer camp



Clearing invasive

protect open spaces in your hometown



a hike



Taking an up-close look at a

postcard to support climate legislation



# Sanctuaries bring Mass Audubon's mission to life.

They provide trails for exploring nature, vistas that inspire, and spaces for dynamic learning and contemplation. Sanctuaries are a refuge for wildlife, a living laboratory for research, a hands-on classroom, a place for community celebration, and an integral part of the fabric of Massachusetts. They are the engine for the implementation of the Action Agenda—vital points of contact for conducting on-the-ground conservation, implementing natural climate change solutions, and engaging both current members and new audiences. Through the Action Agenda, we will:



Solidify our sanctuaries' stature as centers of excellence in conservation practice



Expand their capacity to advance nature-based climate solutions and restoration



Celebrate them as outdoor classrooms where people of all ages and backgrounds discover (or rediscover) a love of nature, and become inspired to protect it



Unlock their potential as convening spaces for training a new generation of conservationists and advocates

Stony Brook  
Wildlife Sanctuary  
in Norfolk, MA



Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary  
in Belmont, MA



Ipswich River  
Wildlife Sanctuary  
in Topsfield, MA



Red Fox © Jenny Zhao



Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary  
in Easthampton, MA  
© Phil Doyle



A Mass Audubon staff member demonstrates how milkweed disperses its seeds.



Kids at the Boston Nature Center

# Equity and justice will underscore all we do.

To fulfill our mission, we must engage people of all backgrounds—meaningfully and respectfully—throughout our organization. For Mass Audubon, advancing the principles of DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice) is both a moral imperative and a necessity for our success. Protecting wildlife and increasing access to nature fosters healthy communities. That's why we're increasing our emphasis on building strong partnerships with local organizations; taking the time needed to listen and understand the needs of community members; and working to bring nature and nature-based education to under-resourced areas. To that end, the Action Agenda will pursue initiatives that reflect a commitment to:

- ▶ Listen to communities of color and low-income communities and work together to create equitable access to our wildlife sanctuaries and programs
- ▶ Continue to foster an internal culture that supports all aspects of diversity
- ▶ Increase the diversity of our board of directors and staff
- ▶ Highlight the voices and experiences of indigenous peoples and people of color throughout our work

Our highly successful All Persons Trails make the beauty of our sanctuaries accessible to visitors of all abilities.



# Lifelong engagement

The Action Agenda significantly advances our efforts to give every Massachusetts resident and visitor access to experiences that enhance their appreciation of nature and awareness of environmental issues, including a combination of new and enhanced programs that strengthen these points of connection for participants of all ages.



## EARLY CHILDHOOD

Establish a connection to nature for young children and families

- Nature-based preschools and nature play



## MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Build on the foundation of environmental literacy

- Gateway to Nature afterschool program
- Rivers to the Sea community watershed education\*



## YOUTH & TEENS

Foster agency for civic and environmental leadership

- Youth Climate Leadership Program
- Environmental Leadership Program



## YOUNG ADULTS

Provide pathways to careers and civic engagement

- College Climate Advocates\*
- Environmental Fellows\*



## ADULTS

Galvanize individual and community action

- Adult education programs
- Climate Ambassadors\*



# Let's go.

**With 14,000 volunteers, 135,000 members, 225,000 yearly program participants, and hundreds of thousands of sanctuary visitors annually,** Mass Audubon is a conservation powerhouse. Achieving our goals for land conservation, inclusive access to nature, and climate solutions will require us to think unconventionally and take calculated risks. We will also need to expand the circle of friends, partners, and funders who join with us to accomplish our aims.

The Action Agenda embodies Mass Audubon's enduring commitment to ensuring that our precious wildlife habitat is protected; that our lands become more resilient; and that more people experience the magic of nature in every corner of our state. Please join us in advancing this essential work.

