



# Resilient Lands Conservation Partnership Center







Tidmarsh Wildlife Sanctuary, Plymouth, MA

## Protect and Steward Resilient Landscapes

One of three goals of Mass Audubon's new Action Agenda is to protect and steward resilient landscapes. The four priorities of this Action Agenda goal are the following:

1. Protect 30% of Massachusetts (vs. 27% now) by 2026 through a public/private coalition
2. Increase the pace of Mass Audubon's land protection fourfold (10,000 new acres)
3. Enhance the management of 200,000 acres of working forestlands
4. Restore, protect, and manage 2,500 coastal acres

These are big goals, and we are up to the challenge. To achieve them we need to work quickly, with diligent purpose and laser focus. We will also take a somewhat novel approach: that protecting land in a shared collaborative way for the greater good of our Commonwealth is more important than a "race" where each vested nonprofit is amassing land individually.

There is a solid and mounting commitment among a growing group of invested conservationists that land protection and restoration are two of the most important things we can do now to ensure the good health of people and wildlife. Mass Audubon is a leader in these areas, and is the largest owner of land of any private nonprofit in the Commonwealth and a leader in restoration and adaptation science.

We are acting now, both independently and as a convener of conservation organizations and government agencies, to target the lands most critical to biodiversity, wildlife protection, and climate change. We will strengthen the

ecological resilience of our existing sanctuaries by protecting key parcels adjacent to and nearby them. We also are focused on protecting large blocks of land that act as migratory corridors for wildlife and that protect biodiversity. And we are committed to working with our partners to support their efforts to protect ecologically important lands, and collectively advocate for policies that benefit land protection and adaptation.

While land protection is a major focus of our work, we are equally devoted to working with other landowners to support their efforts to manage and restore land for ecological and wildlife benefits. We are committed to expanding our partnership with federal and state agencies to manage public lands for wildlife benefits. This includes expanding our work to manage shorebirds along our coastal ecosystems.

We are also committed to working with private landowners to support their personal efforts to manage the land for both ecological and economic outcomes. To achieve this, we are expanding our bird-friendly forestry program, which helps landowners manage forests for wildlife while achieving their economic objectives; and we are deepening our climate-smart forestry program to help landowners manage forests that better adapt to climate change. In southeastern Massachusetts, we are working with cranberry growers to restore and manage cranberry bogs back to wetland, stream, and grassland ecosystems. And, we are working with owners of pasture and grasslands to shape management plans that protect birds and other wildlife. Keeping working lands working is a principal we hold close and we will double down in this area.



Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Wellfleet, MA

# Creating the Mass Audubon Resilient Lands Conservation Partnership Center

In order to accomplish the overarching and ambitious objectives of our Resilient Lands goal, we are growing our capacity, adding new tools, and building new partnerships. To organize and illuminate this work, we are creating the Mass Audubon Resilient Lands Conservation Center, the organization's first-ever center focused on the protection, management, and adaptation of land across Massachusetts and, ultimately, with partners throughout New England. The Resilient Lands Conservation Center has four pillars.

## 1. Land Protection Capacity Team

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In creating the Action Agenda, we were repeatedly told by our state and federal agency partners that they simply do not have the staff or resources necessary to protect land more rapidly and to take advantage of growing federal land conservation funds (Land and Watershed Conservation Fund). In addition, many smaller land trusts across the state do not have the technical capacity or funds to proactively protect targeted lands.

The new Resilient Lands Conservation Center will house an expanded roster of land protection professionals—acquisition, legal, stewardship, fundraising—who will work with partners to protect land. Others have tried to provide such technical services using a fee-for-service system, however, this can be challenging for small land trusts or

complicated for government agencies. We will provide this service free to our partners so that we can collectively meet our shared and ambitious goals. Mass Audubon will annually invest in the technical assistance team to provide the level of expertise and the capacity necessary for it to work as we intend.

## 2. Revolving Loan Fund

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Mass Audubon is creating a revolving loan fund that serves as gap financing to hold land until a partner organization or government agency has the resources to repay the loan. The fund is self-replenishing—as funds are returned from a partner, they will be used again to support the next land protection need. As recent as a month ago we saw the need for such a fund when important land was available for protection, but funding for it was not immediately available.

The revolving loan fund is also an important tool when working with our federal and state agency partners who may have funds appropriated, but have difficulty allocating those funds in a timely fashion. In some cases, it could take a year before some agency funds are released and, during that time, important land could be lost to development or other uses. We suspect that the revolving loan will be used at least 10 times over the next five years.



### 3. Land Purchase Matching Gift Fund

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Mass Audubon has an emerging pipeline of large resilient landscapes primed for protecting and restoring. For instance, on the Cape we are working with a town to protect the largest undeveloped and unprotected privately-owned tract remaining on Cape Cod. Half the parcel is located within a Zone 2 groundwater protection area and the other half is designated as Rare Species habitat. In the Berkshires we are exploring the protection of a 1,000+ acre parcel that sits between two protected parcels of land. If successfully protected, it would establish an extraordinary connected landscape for generations to come.

For Mass Audubon to act quickly and decisively on these opportunities, we need to create a land purchase matching gift fund. The fund will help us secure control over critically important lands, while serving as a tool to attract other capital to protect the land in perpetuity. We anticipate the fund being used for four priority projects over the next two years and leveraging other public and private funding. This fund will allow Mass Audubon to move swiftly and nimbly to secure lands of the highest priority. Different than the Revolving Loan Fund, this is “first in” funding that will be purposely used as match to attract and leverage other public and private funding.

### 4. Restoration and Adaptation Fund

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Mass Audubon has a team of scientists that are experts in land management, restoration, and adaptation techniques and methods. Their effort has resulted in tens of thousands of acres of managed working forests and grasslands, restored coastal marsh and shoreline ecosystems, and stewarded hundreds of sites on beaches and islands for the benefit of shorebirds. Over the coming years, our restoration and adaptation team will expand so we can offer additional tools, resources, and expertise to government, private landowner, and nonprofit partners to achieve our goal for 200,000 acres of managed forest and 2,500 acres of restored coastal ecosystems.

There is no other organization in the Commonwealth with this extensive knowledge and network. We are establishing a restoration and adaptation fund to be used exclusively to leverage considerable public sector funds that require private matching funds.



Chestnut-sided Warbler

#### Promoting Healthy Forests

In the last six years, the Foresters for the Birds program, which trains foresters and educates landowners in bird-friendly management practices, has resulted in over 51,000 acres of privately-owned forestland with a bird-friendly forest management plan. The success of this project has resulted in the creation of the new Climate-Smart Forestry program, which promotes forest management that helps forests be resilient to climate change and sequester carbon more efficiently. Over the next five years, the Restoration and Adaptation Fund will help us grow the impact of both of these programs to influence bird-friendly and climate-smart management on 200,000 acres of private and public lands.



Least Tern © Jeff Blanchard

#### Restoring Vulnerable Coastal Habitats

Mass Audubon's coastal resiliency efforts will focus on four priority habitats to implement climate adaptation and restoration projects. These habitats include salt marshes, coastal uplands, coastal islands, and beaches. Through climate adaptation initiatives, our goal is to help these habitats cope with, respond to, and prepare for current and future climate change impacts to preserve these environments and ecosystem services for both wildlife and people. This will be an interdisciplinary effort to conserve new land, manage and restore our coastal properties, assist partners in coastal restoration efforts on non-Mass Audubon land, and create outreach initiatives to communicate our efforts and educate the public on the necessity of coastal resiliency projects.