



A Better Balance Between Responsible Solar and Nature Is Within Reach



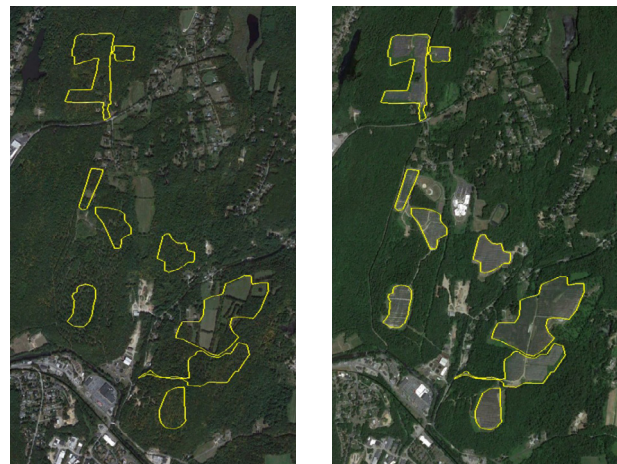
Ground mount solar at Mass Audubon's Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in Lenox, Massachusetts.

Mass Audubon recognizes climate change as the single greatest threat to our wildlife, ecosystems, economy, and public health. Meeting Massachusetts' ambitious goals to protect the climate through massive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will require significantly more clean energy production. We therefore strongly support a rapid acceleration of solar and other clean energy resources from current levels. This effort will require all types of solar, including ground-mount systems, solar on rooftops of thousands of homes and businesses, and solar canopies over parking lots. This is why we've installed over 600 kilowatts of solar—including 16 ground-mount systems—at 22 of our sanctuaries and properties.

Building the Solar We Need While Protecting the Nature We Have

Unfortunately, recent patterns of large-scale solar development in Massachusetts have caused unnecessary harm to nature. Since 2010, over 5,000 acres of forests and other natural and working lands in the state have been converted for solar development, resulting in significant carbon emissions, loss of wildlife habitat, and in some cases, erosion and other damage to local ecosystems.

If the current siting practices continue unabated, tens of thousands of additional acres of forests, farms, and other carbon- and wildlife-rich landscapes may be converted to host large-scale solar and other energy resources in the coming decades.



Examples of valuable forests that were cleared for solar installations in Southbridge, MA.

Mass Audubon believes that a better approach to energy planning and siting that balances nature, biodiversity, and clean energy goals is within reach.

What we need from the state now are:

- Incentives that prioritize new solar development on rooftops, commercial buildings, parking lots, landfills, and already-developed sites.
- Strong environmental guidelines and criteria to define sites and conditions for eligible clean energy projects.
- Requirements that developers pay to mitigate project impacts on nature and biodiversity.

State Proposes Changes in Key Policies for Energy Siting

Our 2023 [Growing Solar, Protecting Nature](#) analysis showed that Massachusetts can meet ambitious goals for clean electricity and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 while protecting our most valuable forests and farmlands.

We need key policy decisions on energy siting very soon to secure better outcomes for nature. State energy leaders just proposed two changes that have the potential to improve protection of forests, farmlands, and wildlife habitat areas, while allowing more clean energy to be sited and developed quickly:

- **New energy siting and permitting provisions.** In 2024, Governor Healey signed the 2024 Climate Act. This law adopted many recommendations from the Commission on Energy Infrastructure Siting and Permitting (CEISP), which was charged with making recommendations to accelerate permitting for clean energy projects in the state, develop stricter criteria to reduce impacts on natural areas, and improve the role of towns and cities in local permitting. The law requires developing new siting guidance and environmental criteria for solar and other energy projects. Mass Audubon is advocating for project conditions and siting criteria that are highly protective of nature, and that encourage more solar development on low-impact parcels. We will also push for developers to pay to mitigate any project impacts on natural areas.
- **Revisions to state solar incentives.** In 2024, the state's Department of Energy Resources proposed revisions to the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) program. SMART is a ratepayer-funded incentive program that supports thousands of solar energy projects in Massachusetts. We're concerned by the number of SMART-funded community solar projects that have been built on converted forests in the last five years. Our view is that the state's funding of solar should strongly encourage projects located on rooftops, parking lot canopies, and low-impact sites for ground-mount projects. Conversely, public dollars should not support conversion of the state's best forests, farms, and ecosystems by private developers. Responsible solar development is instrumental to fighting the climate and biodiversity crises.

How Can You Help?

Mass Audubon and our partners plan to advocate for strong protections for high-value natural and working lands during the state's public comment windows for the 2024 Climate Act guidance and criteria, as well as revisions to the SMART incentive program. Our recommendations to the state will begin in May and continue into the fall.

Your voice makes a difference! We hope that you will join us by weighing in with state decision-makers. Thousands of your voices from across the Commonwealth will help get our recommendations in place.

Here are actions you can take over the next month to help us advance strong protections for nature through these critical energy siting processes:

- 1. Join us and other stakeholders on May 5th and attend the state's public listening session to advocate for strong environmental criteria for siting solar and other energy projects under the 2024 Climate Act.** You can register for the meeting at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/2024-climate-act-stakeholder-sessions>.
- 2. Sign up at <https://www.massaudubon.org/take-action/advocate/a-campaign-to-grow-solar-and-protect-nature> to join us in submitting feedback on the state's proposed revisions to the SMART program** during the public comment period.

