

**Wildlands are lands that are permanently protected from development, in which management is explicitly intended to allow natural processes to prevail with “free will” and minimal human interference. Humans have been part of nature for millennia and can coexist within and with Wildlands without intentionally altering their structure, composition, or function.**

**A**lthough it is the nation’s third-most densely populated state, Massachusetts remains 64 percent forested. Long a leader in wilderness thinking, from Henry Thoreau at Walden and in the Maine Woods to Benton MacKaye and the Appalachian Trail, Massachusetts has also been a leader in conservation, protecting nearly a third of its land. Nonetheless, little more than 2 percent of the state is Wildlands and most of that is weakly protected state lands designated administratively as “reserves.” With so much forest and conserved land so close to so many people, the need, and the opportunity to designate more Wildlands on public and private lands is great.

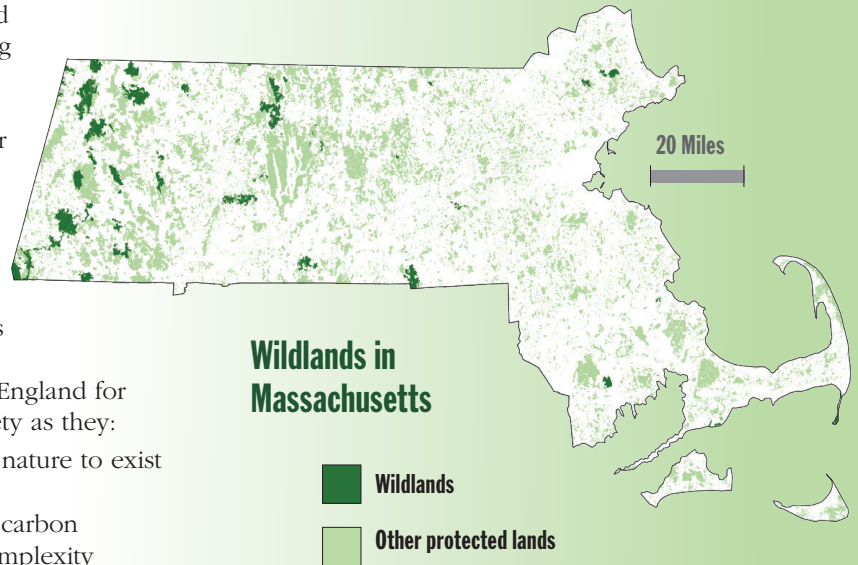
**Wildlands** covered most of Massachusetts and New England for thousands of years. Wildlands are vital for nature and society as they:

- **Acknowledge and support** the intrinsic value of wild nature to exist
- **Preserve** wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- **Mitigate climate change** by sequestering and storing carbon
- **Enhance landscape resilience** through ecological complexity
- **Offer quiet space** for spiritual and physical renewal
- **Serve as references** for science, management, and conservation
- **Support 30x30**, the global effort to protect biodiversity

*Wildlands in New England* is the first regional study in the United States to characterize all “forever wild lands” that are protected so that natural processes can prevail, with minimal to no active management. These lands—designated wilderness areas and diverse public and private natural areas and reserves—provide critical support to nature and society. In Massachusetts, the **Resilient Lands Initiative** takes an integrated, sustainable, and equitable approach to land protection, proposing a “No Net Loss of Farms and Forests” strategy that includes Wildlands.

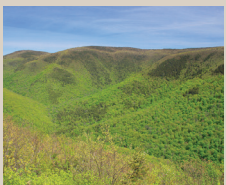
To reach the goals for Wildlands and improve the landscape resilience of the region, *Wildlands in New England 2023* makes the following recommendations:

- **Center Wildlands** in an integrated approach to land planning and conservation that includes actively managed forests and farms.
- **Strengthen existing Wildlands** through permanent legally and legislatively binding protection and landscape buffering.
- **Create more Wildlands**, thoughtfully and strategically, with a diversity of partners, through private and public action.



**Only 2.3%**  
of Massachusetts  
is considered  
**Wildlands**  
today.

## Three Massachusetts Wildlands



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**Mount Greylock State Reservation** was the first public land designated for forest preservation in 1898 and the largest Wildland in Massachusetts at

10,342 acres. Incorporating the state’s tallest mountain, the reservation also supports an 11-mile stretch of the Appalachian Trail. Like other state reserves, Greylock is the focus for calls for permanent protection through state legislative designation.

**Whetstone Wood Wildlife Sanctuary**, the product of the vision and Wildland conservation effort of Mason and Ina Phelps, is a nearly 3,000-acre area in north-central Massachusetts protected by Mass Audubon.

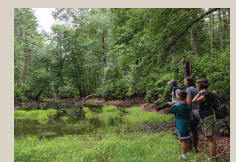
The Sanctuary connects with Wildlands on adjoining Wendell and Orange State Forests to form a nearly 11,000-acre block of forever wild landscape.



© Mass Audubon

**Muddy Pond Wilderness Preserve** lies in the suburbs of Kingston in southeastern Massachusetts

about half an hour from Boston, New Bedford, and Cape Cod. Northeast Wilderness Trust is rewilding the landscape of Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens dotted with over two dozen vernal pools while connecting local students, residents, and visitors with wild nature and Wildland conservation.



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## State, Regional, and Global Support for Wildlands

The following initiatives make strong cases for Wildlands and emphasize the need for increased permanent protection with measurable targets.

**Three state initiatives** are highly relevant to advancing Wildland conservation and the broader initiative of WWF&C: (i) the review and revision of the **Landscape Designations for State Parklands, Reserves, and Woodlands** provides an opportunity to expand, secure, and make permanent the Wildland status of state ecological reserves; (ii) the **Resilient Lands Initiative** seeks to expand nature and its benefits through strategies including No Net Loss of Forests and Farms, Landscape Conservation and Restoration, Natural Carbon Storage and Climate Resilience, and a Focus on Food Systems, Urban Greenspaces, and Community Health; and (iii) the **2050 Decarbonization Roadmap** embraces the conservation and management of forests in the Commonwealth and across the region as the largest and most locally impactful means of carbon sequestration in achieving Net Zero. Massachusetts could also revive its dormant Wildlands Program or advance legislation to increase the extent of public lands permanently managed through passive management.

**Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities** (WWF&C) provides a regional vision and state-specific land protection goals that call for at least 70 percent of New England to be protected as forest—at least 10 percent protected as Wildland and 60 percent protected as Woodland (managed forest)—and all existing farmland to be permanently conserved. This vision intentionally values wild and managed forests, farmlands, and communities and relies on the collaboration of conservation efforts across the region.

### 30x30

Wildlands form a central component of “30x30,” the national and international goal to protect 30 percent of Earth’s land and waters by 2030, addressing the looming challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and threats to human health and welfare.

## What You Can Do:

- Visit **Wildlands in New England** to read the report and access related resources.
- Contact **Northeast Wilderness Trust** to learn about their Wildlands Partnership Program.
- Contact other Wildlands Conservation Partners to learn about their efforts and available programs.
- Support local, statewide, and regional conservation efforts and legislation advancing Wildland conservation, rewilding, and the integrated goals of Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities.

## Massachusetts’s Wildland Conservation Partners:

### Public

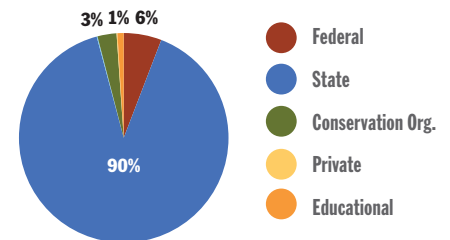
- **State:** Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife, Massachusetts Legislature
- **Federal:** U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service—Appalachian Trail lands
- **Regional and Municipal:** Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, Massachusetts Community Preservation Coalition, all municipalities

### Private

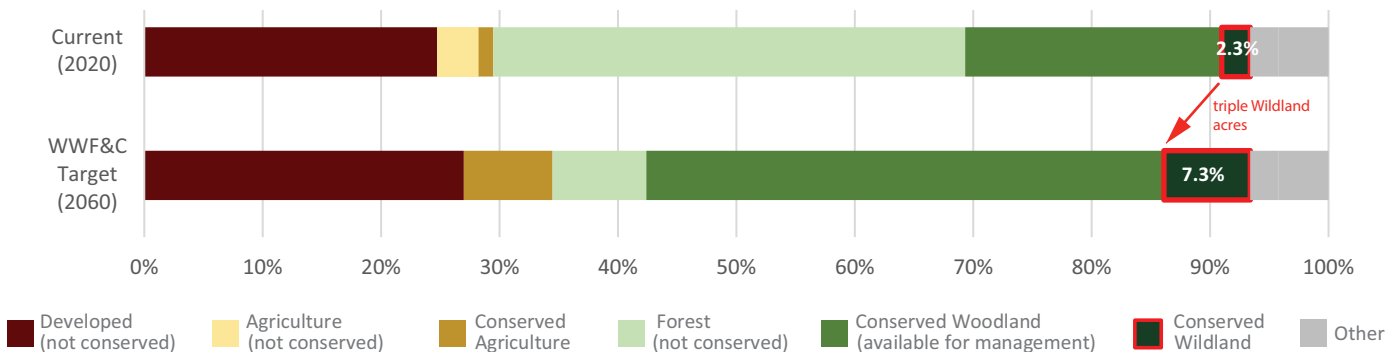
- Conservation organizations, including The Nature Conservancy, Northeast Wilderness Trust, Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, Mass Audubon, Trust for Public Land, New England Forestry Foundation, Kestrel Land Trust, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, and RESTORE
- Regional and local land trusts
- Local municipalities
- University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Harvard University, other colleges, universities and public and private schools

## Wildland Ownership in Massachusetts

116,274 acres



## Land Cover in Massachusetts: Current and WWF&C Target



Copies of the full report, the Wildlands web map, and additional information are available on the website of Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities: [wildlandsandwoodlands.org/resources/wildlands-in-new-england/](http://wildlandsandwoodlands.org/resources/wildlands-in-new-england/)

To learn more about ways to directly support Wildlands conservation throughout New England, visit [newildernesstrust.org/](http://newildernesstrust.org/)

