

Valuing our Forests in a Changing Climate

Forests define the landscape of Massachusetts and are an important component to solving the climate crisis. The choices we make can have a huge impact on the communities and landscapes where forests surround us in Massachusetts.

Forests interact with climate in three key ways:

- They store carbon in living trees, forest soils, and decaying leaves and branches. Every year Massachusetts forests draw carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and convert it to wood. The amount of carbon dioxide removed by Massachusetts forests each year is equivalent to about 14% of all emissions in Massachusetts.
- They produce sustainable, renewable products that can be used to meet societal needs. Wood, which is one half carbon by weight, represents a climate-friendly alternative to steel and concrete, which both take many times more energy to produce than wood.
- Forests also support resilience and reduce our vulnerability to climate impacts by absorbing precipitation, filtering water, providing shade and windbreaks, providing community health benefits from cooler neighborhoods and cleaner air, and supporting a wide range of interconnected habitats for fish, wildlife and other organisms.

The participants in the Forest Forum call for a science-based approach to optimize the climate benefits derived from Massachusetts forests, while also ensuring that our forests continue to deliver these other ecosystem services that benefit society. To achieve this goal, we support initiatives that enhance and expand the long-term storage of carbon in trees, soil and wood products.

When thinking of the important role forests play, **the top priority must be conserving the forests that surround us and cover 60% of Massachusetts.** Forest conservation involves both supporting land protection efforts and reducing the pressure to build on our forests by using developed land more efficiently and creating value for the forests as forests. Supporting landowners, municipalities, and conservation

organizations that strive to permanently conserve our forests must be our top priority. Instead of losing forest cover and the valuable functions it provides, we should aim to increase forest cover to enhance all the benefits that forests provide for communities and the environment.

An integrated approach to conserve, and where feasible, expand forest cover and judiciously build more with wood can be a critical component of Massachusetts' climate policy. We support the following steps as a balanced, pro-active approach to improving the climate resilience of our forests, increasing carbon storage of our forests and communities, and reducing the vulnerability of our communities to the impacts of climate change.

1. Expand tree cover, especially in our cities and towns where trees cool and filter the air to improve community health, reduce heat islands, reduce summer and winter energy use, reduce and filter storm runoff, create jobs and store carbon. Planting one million trees, in our neighborhoods lacking tree cover, would create the equivalent of 20,000 acres of new urban forest that would mature by the middle of the century, adding more than 10% to our urban tree cover and significantly improve the lives of tens of thousands of residents.
2. Support the thousands of thoughtful private forest owners to manage their woodlands to be more diverse and resilient to climate impacts and store more carbon over the next 100 years. Develop a balance of incentives to improve forest soil health; improve our forests' resilience to drought, wind, ice and flood damage and invasive outbreaks; continue to increase carbon storage; and restore and reinvigorate those of our forests that were poorly managed in the past.
3. Develop local and regional markets for harvested and storm- and insect-damaged trees that store wood in long-term products like cross-laminated timber and building insulation and wood for new buildings and repairs. Forest management policy needs a balanced approach to maintain adequate dead and downed wood in the forest for carbon storage, soil health, and habitat, while also using clean and efficient wood heat to help improve forest resilience through

thoughtful silviculture and to help communities burdened with cleaning up dead and dying trees after increasing storms and invasive outbreaks. Local and regional markets reduce life cycle costs associated with wood products and fossil fuels brought in from other regions or countries, that we commonly now use.

4. Maintain wild forest reserves on diverse and productive sites where forests can continue to increase carbon storage, provide inspiration to communities and provide a living laboratory for researchers. Forest reserves develop structures and habitat types that are largely missing from our landscape except in a few small old-growth patches. A balance of working forests and reserves will provide the best combination of forest diversity and resilience for both people and wildlife in a changing climate.

The participants of the Forest Forum and other organizations listed below support the above statement. As participants in the Forest Forum, we also work toward five shared goals: 1) Educate key groups about forest values; 2) conserve our forests; 3) sustain the economic viability of our forests; 4) strike a balance between working forests and forest reserves; and 5) protect the health of our forests. This consensus statement grew out of our regular meetings, and discussions and debates with each other about the value of forests and how we can best use forests to fight climate change. We all agree that our forests are an enormously valuable resource, worth protecting and using wisely.

This statement is supported by:

- Massachusetts Woodlands Institute
- The Nature Conservancy – MA Chapter
- Mass Audubon
- Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
- Jack Lochhead, Forest Landowner
- Massachusetts Rivers Alliance
- Mass Conn
- New England Forestry Foundation
- T.S. Mann Lumber Co.
- Massachusetts Forest Alliance
- Mystic River Watershed Association



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- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Environmental Studies Department
- Neponset River Watershed Association
- River Merrimack
- Ocean River Institute
- Jones River Watershed Association
- Association to Preserve Cape Cod
- Hoosic River Watershed Association
- Muddy Water Initiative
- Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust
- Friends of the Ten Mile
- Merrimack River Watershed Council
- Groundworks Lawrence



- League of Women Voters of Massachusetts



- Kestrel Land Trust



- Friends of the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge



- Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions



- Friends of the Malden River



- Conservation Law Foundation



- The Trust for Public Land

