



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMITTEE ON HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS FISCAL YEAR 2012 BUDGET

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The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC) builds support for community conservation by working with state agencies, legislators, the courts, partner nonprofits and the general public. MACC advocates for strong, science-based laws, regulations and policies; and we assist relevant state agencies in their outreach efforts and serve as mentor for other conservation groups. MACC depends on the efficiencies of public-private partnerships to accomplish our mutual goals.

Environmental programs contribute to the long-term sustainability of natural communities, protect wetlands and other water resources, including drinking water supplies and manage critical habitat. A clean, safe environment attracts businesses which stimulates our economy. Unfortunately, sustained and severe cuts in environmental budgets hinder agency ability to protect critical natural resources.

Today, our state invests a mere 0.64% of its budget for all environmental agencies combined. While the state's total state operating budget increased from \$22.4 billion in FY01 to \$28.2 billion in FY11, during the same years, the environmental budget shrank from \$225 million to \$175 million. MACC urges the House of Representatives to restore spending to at least 1% of the total operating budget. We specifically support increased funding in FY12 for the following agencies and programs:

**Department of Environmental Protection
Administrative Line Item 2200-0100
FY12 Recommendation: \$33,696,524**

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) staffing has been reduced by nearly 40% since FY08. Just this past year, DEP experienced two rounds of layoffs and subsequent furloughs. Repeated budget cuts continue to result in decreased enforcement and diminished protection of critical natural resources. That translates into risk – risk that our families and children, the elderly and other sensitive members of our population may be exposed to dangerous pollutants, putting increased pressure on our health care system and detrimentally affecting Massachusetts families and communities.



MACC urges House Ways and Means to increase DEP's budget so agency experts can do their jobs to protect clean air, water and other resources. DEP cannot possibly meet the increased demands put it on by new statutory mandates passed in recent years without a corresponding increase in its operating budget. A clean, safe environment should never be compromised by the leaders of the state, even in a tight budget atmosphere.

MACC also urges House Ways and Means to pass the Bottle Bill in the FY12 budget. The Governor proposes to earmark over six million dollars bottle bill income to support DEP. Without that earmark, DEP will have to lay off nearly 100 additional staff, further crippling an already impaired agency which translates into major risks to the health of Massachusetts' families and future generations.

Department of Environmental Protection

Wetlands Program Line Item 2200-0102

FY12 Recommendation: Maintain \$1.2 million Retained Revenue Account

DEP's Wetlands Program works to protect Massachusetts' inland and coastal wetlands, tidelands, great ponds, rivers and floodplains. The Wetlands Protection Act is a national model for protection of water quality, drinking water, groundwater, wildlife habitat, fisheries, shellfish, and prevention of flooding and storm damage. Conservation Commissions, which provide thousands of hours of volunteer service annually, rely on DEP staff to provide direct training and technical assistance, hear appeals and ensure consistency in the application of the Wetlands Protection Act in all 351 cities and towns. DEP's wetlands program has suffered inequitable and drastic cuts – more than 75% of the wetlands program is unstaffed. Unfortunately, the more personnel lost, the harder it is to respond to the call to process applications, which puts more pressure on volunteer Commissioners, business and serves as a drag on the economy. Increasing DEP's wetlands budget and preserving its retained revenue account is essential to enforce the Wetlands Protection Act and for Massachusetts' communities to reap associated benefits.

DEP's highly successful Circuit Rider program provides crucial technical support to volunteer Commissioners who need training and assistance in implementing complex wetlands rules and regulations. We urge the House Ways and Means Committee to fund all seven Circuit Riders to assist Commissioners who are legally responsible for implementing the Wetlands Act.



Department of Fish and Game
Division of Ecological Restoration Line Item 2300-0101
FY12 Recommendation: \$450,000

Dedicated staff in the Department of Fish and Game's Division of Ecological Restoration protect rivers and streams, ensure stream flow and preserve watersheds. Agency experts offer training, scientific and technical assistance, educational opportunities and funding to leverage local and partner investments. Riverways continues to be a key partner to Conservation Commissions whether through their Priority Project Program, which funds community-based activities, such as dam removal and culvert replacement to the restoration of rivers, riparian corridors and salt marshes; Urban Rivers Program, which revitalizes urban riverfronts and promotes neighborhood participation in rediscovering rivers flowing through the Commonwealth's cities; River Instream Flow Stewards program, which coordinates local group efforts to collect high quality stream flow data; and the Adopt-a-Stream Program, which assists over 100 local groups in generating baseline data and monitoring the conditions of local streams and brooks.

The Division of Ecological Restoration leverages \$2-\$3 dollars in federal and local funds for every \$1 in state funds spent, and just brought in about \$11 million for over eighty active restoration projects. These projects put people to work and stimulate local economies. The Committee on House Ways and Means should place a priority on the important work and partnerships represented by the Division of Ecological Restoration by adequately funding this important agency.

Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program Line Item 2310-0300
FY12 Recommendation: \$250,000

The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species staff collects, manages, and distributes scientific data about rare and endangered species and habitats. This data guides developers through environmental impact review processes and makes possible the implementation of the Wetlands Protection Act by volunteer Conservation Commissioners across the state. Heritage protects natural resources of interest to Conservation Commissions including certified vernal pools and ephemeral wetlands which are home to a unique assemblage of species, including salamanders, frogs, dragonflies and damselflies.

In 2004, the Heritage line item was struck from the state budget, leaving Heritage funded by project-specific bond monies; federal aid (which covers wildlife but not natural communities or plants); a small number of contributions on state income tax forms which



are deposited into the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Fund; and Environmental Review fees under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. General funds were restored in FY09, but were lost again the subsequent year. Heritage remains in a tenuous position, leaving rare plant and natural community protection poorly supported and with uncertain and limited funds for rare species research and restoration.

MACC also urges House Ways and Means to permanently waive indirect overhead charges of 33% for expenditures from the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Fund. By treating this Fund like other sources of funding for environmental programs, Heritage would gain approximately \$500,000 a year. Moreover, donors who decide to donate extra tax dollars to the Heritage program could be assured their donations are going toward their intended purpose and not into the state's general operating budget.

Most importantly, MACC urges the Committee to reinstate the Heritage line item allowing Heritage to receive support from the General Fund. Protection of the state's rare and endangered species and habitats should be the responsibility of all citizens of the Commonwealth, and not just those taxpayers who volunteer to donate money to a small dedicated fund.