

OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

New survey results find that Massachusetts residents across demographics and from every part of the state overwhelmingly support public funding for land conservation and outdoor recreation. **More than two-thirds of residents surveyed think we need to do more to conserve land, water, and wildlife habitat.** Protecting water, air, and endangered species; ensuring all communities can access the outdoors; and using nature to reduce climate risk are ranked as the most important priorities for investment.



A survey of Massachusetts residents was conducted in March 2022 by Responsive Management, an independent non-partisan survey organization. It was funded by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Mass Audubon, The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts, Trout Unlimited, and The Trustees of Reservations.

A Critical Moment for Conservation

Massachusetts has a strong track record of protecting land, water, and habitat for people to enjoy and for fish and wildlife to thrive. This progress is threatened as habitat loss, invasive species, and other stressors are compounded by climate change, making the conservation of the Commonwealth's native plants and animals and rich natural heritage more important than ever.

There has been a resurgence of interest in outdoor activities during the recent pandemic, so it is critical for conservation practitioners and decision makers to understand the preferences, attitudes, interests, and concerns of Massachusetts residents. If we do not meet the challenge of providing opportunities for all people to engage with nature throughout the state, we risk a decline in our residents' health and well-being, as the health benefits of outdoor activities are well documented.



Summary of Findings

This document summarizes results from a scientific survey of the general population of Massachusetts. The survey results provide important information about residents' attitudes regarding conservation and outdoor activities and provide a basis for tracking changes in

attitudes and opinions over time. The survey of 850 Massachusetts residents was conducted in March 2022 by both landline and cell phones. For most of the survey questions, the sampling error is +/- 3.36 percentage points at the 95% confidence interval.

INVESTING IN CONSERVATION

Public investment in a variety of conservation activities is very important to most Massachusetts residents.

When asked how important it should be for the state to invest in a variety of areas on a scale of 1–10, where 10 is “extremely important,” Massachusetts residents rated protection of water quality highest (average=9.8), followed by protecting air quality (9.2), protecting endangered species (9.1), providing all communities access to natural areas for outdoor recreation (9.1), using nature to reduce climate risk (9.1), and conserving and restoring fish and wildlife habitat (9.0). Addressing conflicts between people and wildlife (8.5) and providing access to various outdoor recreational and educational opportunities were also very important (range 8.5–7.9).

Natural areas, habitat, and fish and wildlife conservation are very important to most Massachusetts residents.

The existence of natural open spaces for experiencing nature was extremely important to Massachusetts residents, on par with the importance of safe and well-protected water resources (both received average ratings of 9.4 in importance on a 10-point scale). Healthy fish and wildlife populations (9.2) and protection of ecologically important habitats (9.1) also scored very high, followed by opportunities to view wildlife (8.9), fish (8.1), and hunt (6.1).

More than two thirds of respondents think we need to do more for conservation. Support is strong for increased funding from a variety of sources.

Residents were asked about their support for or opposition to seven potential additional funding sources for conservation of land, water, and wildlife. All sources had majorities in support; the most support was expressed for lottery funds (79% strongly or moderately support), a portion of the existing state sales tax on sporting goods and outdoor recreation equipment (77%), and federal tax revenue (73%). Respondents were informed that MassWildlife receives about 9% of its budget from general state taxes. A majority (56%) think that amount is too low, while 18% think it is about right and only 2% think it is too much; 24% did not know.

GETTING OUTDOORS

Getting outdoors into nature is very important to the health and well-being of Massachusetts residents.

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of four potential benefits of getting outdoors—increasing happiness, improving physical health, improving emotional outlook, and reducing stress—on a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 is “extremely important”. Each benefit received a mean rating of 8.8 or 8.9; ratings were consistent across regions and demographic groups.

Interest in outdoor activities is high with significant opportunities to grow participation.

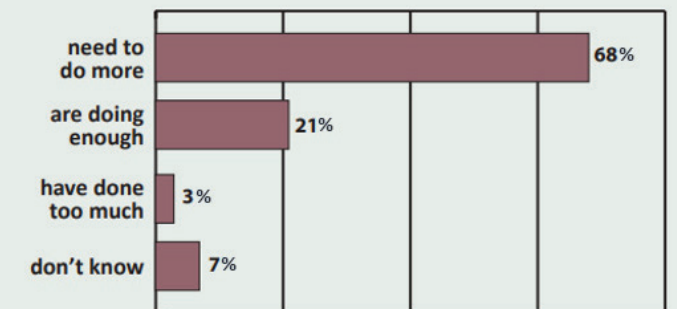
Interest in outdoor recreational activities is generally high, with three quarters of respondents very interested in walking, jogging, or running on nature trails, two thirds very interested in taking a trip to view wildlife, over half very interested bird/wildlife viewing near home and hiking, and slightly less than half very interested in swimming in natural waters and canoeing/kayaking.

LEARNING INTERESTS

Residents are interested in learning about conservation and outdoor recreation.

When asked if they would be interested to learn more about a series of topics, respondents were most interested in learning about locations for outdoor recreation other than hunting or fishing (77% are very interested); current threats to fish and wildlife (74%); fish, wildlife, and native plant conservation projects (73%); helping injured wildlife or wildlife rehabilitation (69%); fish, wildlife, native plants, and their habitats (69%); and how to identify wildlife, fish, and plants (66%).

**Here in Massachusetts, we _____
to conserve land, water, and wildlife.**



There are significant opportunities to increase participation in all 12 outdoor recreational activities included in the study, with particularly large population segments interested, but not currently participating in, canoeing/kayaking, freshwater fishing, camping, and recreational saltwater fishing.



Residents were also asked about the credibility of six sources of information on fish and wildlife and outdoor recreation, all of which had large majorities considering them very or somewhat credible. The top-rated source is a biologist from MassWildlife (73% think this is a very credible source), followed by a biologist from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (69%) and a professor of environmental science or biology at the University of Massachusetts (65%). Awareness of specific MassWildlife programs and activities was generally low.

Recommendations

Provide opportunities for regular, routine, and recurrent engagement with nature close to home.

Massachusetts residents strongly support providing all communities access to natural areas but, due to a variety of barriers, interest in outdoor activities often lags participation and not all communities have access to natural parks and areas. By listening to and working with communities, and identifying opportunities to provide more access, we can help bridge the gap and bring people closer to nature to promote our collective well-being and quality of life. Increased investment in open space access improvements, learning resources, and programming in partnership with municipalities and community-based organizations is critical.

Conserve land to ensure a good quality of life for Massachusetts residents, now and into the future.

Massachusetts is blessed with an abundance of natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities. Residents care deeply about clean water, clean air, climate change, and healthy fish and wildlife populations. Massachusetts must continue to invest in land conservation to provide these critical services.

Provide ample opportunities to get involved with conservation, locally, with volunteer opportunities, stewardship, and advocacy.

Taking action to complement outdoor experiences and recreation forges stronger connections and will help us build a better, more sustainable, and resilient Commonwealth, now and into the future.

Make an investment to meet the challenge.

The Commonwealth, our communities, and non-profit organizations have a tremendous track record of investing in conservation and climate resilience. As shown by this survey, Massachusetts residents recognize that more must be done to meet conservation challenges, while ensuring access to natural areas for all—and residents support additional investment. Massachusetts should consider joining other states, including Arkansas, Georgia, Missouri, Texas, and Virginia, that have committed sources of long-term dedicated funding for land and water conservation and outdoor recreation.

