

Save Massachusetts Forests

H.904 – AN ACT TO INCREASE PROTECTION OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

Background

The proposed *Act Relative to Increased Protection of Wildlife Management Areas (H.904)* would expand and make permanent the nature reserve system on public Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) under Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) control. The bill directs the designation of at least 30% of agency lands as nature reserves by 2030, consistent with the latest biological and climate science.

- **What are reserves?** In 2006, DFW established 15,500 acres of forest reserves, encompassing about 9% of the state's 167,000 acres of WMAs. The purpose of these reserves is to exclude forest management and other development "to the greatest degree possible [and] natural disturbance processes will determine the structure and composition of the forest ecosystem."
- **Why reserves are important.** Forests protected from logging and development are superior to managed forests in: sustaining native species and biodiversity; maximizing carbon sequestration and storage; buffering climate change impacts; and benefiting public health and well-being. When the Massachusetts reserve system was being created, the comments received were overwhelmingly positive. Like national parks, reserves are very popular.
- **Why 30% by 2030?** Climate scientists and biodiversity experts agree that we need to protect at least 30% of the Earth by 2030 if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change and species extinctions. This goal has been embraced by the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, by the Biden administration, and in a resolution introduced in the U.S. Senate and House. Less than 2% of Massachusetts lands and waters now have this level of protection.
- **30% by 2030 is consistent with goals for DFW reserves.** The target for DFW reserves was set in 2006 at between 10% and 15% of agency lands. Since then, new scientific research shows that this percentage should be much higher. The mandate of H.904 would be a serious contribution to the global and national goals for expanded natural area protection.
- **30% by 2030 is consistent with the goals of the United States Climate Alliance.** In June 2017, then-Governor Baker joined with 16 other governors in the United States Climate Alliance to promote the goals of the U.N. Paris climate agreement. This included actions to "increase carbon stored in forest ecosystems and reduce losses of already-stored carbon." Expanding reserves on DFW lands would be a significant step toward these goals.
- **All Massachusetts residents would benefit from climate mitigation,** including environmental justice communities, which are more vulnerable to climate change impacts, coastal areas facing sea-level rise, and urban centers that depend on intact watersheds for their drinking water supply. This action would help call attention to the importance of addressing these issues.
- **Massachusetts can lead.** Massachusetts is the third most densely populated state, but it is also one of the most forested. We can be a model for other states by expanding reserves to optimize carbon storage, biodiversity, and human benefits provided by natural lands.
- **H.904 is available here:** <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H904>