

Save Massachusetts Forests

H.894 — AN ACT RELATIVE TO FOREST MANAGEMENT AND PRACTICES GUIDELINES

Background

Environmental and community leaders around the globe are calling for more land and water protection in the face of the dual threats of climate crisis and biodiversity loss. They are urging the permanent protection 30% of all lands by 2030. Less than 2% of land in Massachusetts has this kind of protection. Our state-owned lands can play a role in helping to mitigate these imminent threats.

The *Act relative to forest management and practices guidelines* (H.894) would mandate an independent, science-based review of Massachusetts public land laws and policies. These laws are decades to over a century old, so contemporary issues of climate change, biodiversity loss, and population growth are not considered. The review would assess management practices and guidelines for all Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) properties, comprising 615,000 acres of forests, fields, and watersheds — 11% of the state's land base.

What this law would do:

1. Place a moratorium on most forest management on DCR state forest and watershed lands and DFW wildlife management areas, ending on or before June 30, 2025. Until then, “the timber thereon [shall not] be sold, removed or destroyed, except as a response to a known forest management emergency.”

2. Create an independent Advisory Council to oversee an evaluation of state lands every five years, with robust public participation, in order to:

- assess the efficacy of existing forest management practices to protect and preserve the Commonwealth's natural resources;
- assess opportunities to increase the acreage of public forest reserves, areas that conserve intact ecosystems that are influenced primarily by natural processes;
- assess how to mitigate climate change impacts on public and private forest land;
- assess how our forests and forest management practices can help to mitigate climate change;
- make recommendations on how the agencies can improve operations, increase transparency, and expand public participation;
- make recommendations on changes in laws to improve public and private forest management.

3. Set a goal of designating a minimum of 30% of DCR watershed lands and 30% of DFW publicly owned wildlife management areas as reserves by December 31, 2030.

4. Conduct an ongoing science-based review and evaluation of the impacts of land management policies and practices on biodiversity, with a goal of protecting and restoring native species to their long-term historic ranges and population levels.

What this law would *not* do:

- Reduce jobs in the private or public sectors.
- Affect how private landowners, municipalities, or counties use their land.
- Restrict how private foresters or loggers do business.
- Limit the Massachusetts wood products industry.
- Change DCR private forest management programs.

H.894 can be found here: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H894>