

Save Massachusetts Forests

FACTS ABOUT H.952:

AN ACT RELATIVE TO WATERSHED FOREST PROTECTION

“The Division [of Water Supply Protection] acknowledged to the Committee that active forest management is not necessary to maintain an abundant and clean water supply.”

— Report of the Massachusetts Climate Forestry Committee, December 28, 2023

An Act Relative to Watershed Forest Protection (H.952) would update century-old public land policies written before recognition of global climate change and biodiversity loss. This bill would address these concerns by designating state-owned watershed forest lands under the Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP) of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) as parks or reserves, consistent with the latest climate and biological science.

What this law would do:

- **Permanently protect 100,000 acres of intact ecosystems** influenced primarily by natural processes, similar to national parks — protection that now exists for only 1% of the state’s land base.
- **Safeguard the Boston public drinking water supply**, including the Quabbin Reservation, 80,000 acres of which is in the North Quabbin Bioserve designated in 2002.
- **Fight climate change** by allowing forests to grow back and keeping them standing so they can maximize carbon removal from the atmosphere and optimize long-term carbon storage.
- **Prevent forest carbon loss from logging.** Only 18% of carbon in a logged tree is stored in long-lived wood products. Most becomes short-lived products or is burned for energy.
- **Sustain native biodiversity** by preserving about 2% of the state’s land base — an important step toward the international goal of protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030.
- **Mitigate climate change impacts for all Massachusetts residents**, including environmental justice communities which are especially vulnerable to climate change impacts, coastal communities facing sea-level rise, and every resident, as we all depend on intact forests for physical and mental health.
- **Provide direct benefits to people**, including clean air and water, scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and natural forest environments that contribute to public health and well-being.
- **Allow vegetation management only in park areas**, for purposes such as ensuring public health and safety, removing invasive species, and maintaining recreation sites, roads, and trails.
- **Prohibit the Commissioner from approving or providing for harmful uses**, such as land sales or exchanges, new gas pipelines, commercial solar or wind facilities, early-successional habitat creation, all cutting of wood for biomass, and most pesticide and herbicide use.
- **Safeguard sacred and historic sites** by prohibiting resource extraction and development.
- **Take immediate action to fulfill the commitment by the Governor** to employ forest ecosystems to mitigate global warming by increasing reserves on public and private land.

What this law would not do:

- Require additional funding.
- 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.

Bill H.952 is available here: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H952>