

INVESTING IN CLIMATE RESILIENCE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE MASS READY ACT

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On June 24, 2025, the Healey-Driscoll administration announced the filing of *An Act to Build Resilience for Massachusetts Communities* ([S.2542](#); the “[Mass Ready Act](#)” or “Act”), an environmental bond bill that authorizes \$2.9 billion in funding over five years to strengthen infrastructure, enhance climate resilience, and support local economies through significant investments and streamlined permitting processes. This represents the largest ever investment in climate readiness and environmental protection by Massachusetts. But some environmental groups believe the streamlining of pre-construction permitting for housing and infrastructure projects is inconsistent with the Mass Ready Act’s purpose and could result in negative environmental impacts.

The Mass Ready Act seeks to address five main objectives:

- 1) infrastructure improvements;
- 2) protecting water and nature;
- 3) supporting Western and Central Massachusetts;
- 4) investing in farms and local economies; and
- 5) housing and environmental permitting.

These objectives are discussed below.

Infrastructure Improvements

To mitigate the impacts of extreme weather now and in the future, the Mass Ready Act seeks to utilize targeted funding to strengthen critical infrastructure such as flood control systems, upgrading dams and seawalls, and revitalizing waterways. Amongst other things, it allocates:

- Over \$600 million to protect communities from flooding and coastal erosion including over \$400 million to manage state-owned, municipally-owned, and abandoned dams, inland flood control systems and infrastructure, and coastal and marine infrastructure as well as \$200 million to implement the [ResilientCoasts Initiative](#), a 50-year plan involving various actions and strategies to address sea level rise, storm surge, and erosion;
- \$764 million to support publicly owned properties including \$587 million to invest in parks, trails, beaches, and historic sites and \$177 million to support transportation infrastructure (*e.g.*, bike lanes, greenways, pedestrian bridges, *etc.*); and

- \$73 million to improve infrastructure and facilities that support the 2023 [ResilientMass Plan](#), Massachusetts’ comprehensive hazard mitigation and climate adaptation plan.

The Mass Ready Act also authorizes the Board of Building Regulations and Standards to advance climate resilience and housing production through the [Massachusetts State Building Code](#) and requires disclosures of flood risk and past damages during home sales and residential lease signings.

Protecting Water and Nature

The Mass Ready Act includes significant funding dedicated to clean water, land conservation efforts, and recreational investments. This includes \$385 million to match federal grants for clean water and drinking water projects which will help homeowners comply with updated septic ([Title 5](#)) regulations. It also includes \$120 million to support MassDEP capital projects addressing PFAS contamination in public water supplies and private wells and \$340.5 million for land conservation and acquisition to bolster biodiversity and preserve vital ecosystems.

Supporting Western and Central Massachusetts

While not clearly articulated in the language of the Act itself, the Healey-Driscoll Administration’s media on the Mass Ready Act has expressed an intent to direct a significant portion of those funds allocated to address flood control systems and infrastructure towards smaller, rural communities in Western and Central Massachusetts. To assist in that objective, it supports the creation of a Connecticut River Valley Resilience Commission, which empowers communities to collaborate and develop a regional strategy for tackling flood risk and updating aging flood infrastructure along the Connecticut River.

Investing in Farms and Local Economies

The Mass Ready Act establishes a Resilience Revolving Fund to offer low-interest loans to municipalities to improve stormwater systems, reduce flood risk, and strengthen other critical infrastructure. It also allocates \$315 million to the [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness](#) (“MVP”) Grant Program,

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\$125 million to the [Food Security Infrastructure Grant](#) (“FSIG”) Program, and \$68 million for the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture to protect farmland, foster food security, and sustain agricultural economic viability.

Housing and Environmental Permitting

The Mass Ready Act proposes a series of substantive and procedural changes to several environmental laws including the Wetlands Protection Act (“WPA”), the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (“MEPA”), and the Massachusetts Public Waterfront Act (*i.e.*, Chapter 91). The Healey-Driscoll administration believes these changes are necessary to address a shortage of housing stock and increase climate resiliency.

Of note, the [Mass Ready Act](#) adds a ninth protected interest to the WPA, “Resilience for Changing Climate Conditions,” to address impacts due to flooding, sea level rise, and severe storm events. It also seeks to implement some commonsense procedural changes to the WPA by allowing for the electronic filing of a Notice of Intent and allowing public notification of projects through municipal websites in addition to newspaper legal notice. The Act also authorizes MassDEP to pass regulations allowing for approval of certain projects with insignificant impacts on wetlands without the filing of a Notice of Intent or a public hearing and creates a general permit to streamline approval of nature-based solutions, ecological restoration, wetlands resilience, and priority housing projects.

The Mass Ready Act also seeks to transfer certain wetland permitting appeals from MassDEP directly to Superior Court. Presently, a person aggrieved by a conservation commission’s decision under the WPA must file an appeal with MassDEP which will determine if the at-issue project is compliant with the WPA. That Superseding Determination or Order is then appealable to Superior Court. This proposed change would remove Administrative/Adjudicatory Hearings entirely from certain appeals.

The Mass Ready Act also authorizes MassDEP to issue a new Chapter 91 Waterways general permit/license system intended to allow priority housing and natural restoration projects to receive a Chapter 91 license within 60 days, a significant reduction from the current timeline. Additionally, the Mass Ready Act exempts priority housing and nature-based solutions projects, regardless of their location, from requiring a MEPA Environmental Impact Report (“EIR”), which is intended to cut MEPA review of these projects from one year to 30 days.

Criticism of the Mass Ready Act

In general, public input on the Mass Ready Act relative to the proposed investment in infrastructure and environmental

programs has been positive. However, some environmental groups, including the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (“MACC”) and Environmental Bond Coalition, have expressed concern that absent the adoption of site suitability criteria, the streamlining of pre-construction permitting for priority housing and infrastructure projects could result in negative impacts to the environment and Environmental Justice communities. See [MACC Comments](#) (July 29, 2025) and [Environmental Bond Coalition Comments](#) (July 29, 2025) on the Mass Ready Act to the Joint Committee on Environmental and Natural Resources (“ENR Committee”). Environmental groups have also stressed the need for public input in the development of a definition for “priority housing” and guidelines regarding “priority housing types” and “nature-based solutions projects” to ensure any streamlining proposals protect wetland resources and support climate resiliency.

Next Steps

On July 15, 2025, the ENR Committee held a hybrid public hearing to accept written and oral testimony on the Mass Ready Act. On November 25, 2025, the ENR Committee made a favorable vote on the Act and on December 1, 2025, referred it to the committee on Bonding, Capital Expenditures and State Assets. After review by the latter committee, both the House and Senate will have a chance to review and revise the Act as they deem necessary before it is presented to Governor Healey for review and signing into law. It remains to be seen whether the concerns raised by environmental groups will be addressed in the final version of the Mass Ready Act.

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Editor's Note: This article by Tyler Franklin, Esq. and the following article by E. Heidi Ricci of MassAudubon are companion articles. This article addresses the major objectives and funding proposed by the Mass Ready Act, criticism of the Act, and the steps necessary for its approval by the legislature and signature by the Governor. The following article provides MassAudubon’s commentary on the Mass Ready Act with particular emphasis on historic impacts to wetland resources and active restoration of cranberry facilities, and the need to reform the permitting process to more readily facilitate wetland and stream restoration projects.