

Metrowest Conservation Alliance
Action Plan 2025-2035
SECOND DRAFT

Pre-review Message:

Since our April meeting—where our partners shared thoughtful feedback on the first draft—the Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA) Advisory Committee has been hard at work revising the MCA Action Plan. We're excited to share the second draft with you!

What's New?

In this updated version, you'll find:

- New groupings of priority topics
- Introductory paragraphs added for each topic
- Refined goals and objectives based on your input

Comments and edits will be accepted through August 1st. Please send your input to Mike Perrin at mperrin@svtweb.org.

Please note:

This draft includes most of the plan's content, but it does not reflect the final formatting or design. As you review, please focus on the content, particularly the goals and objectives, rather than the layout or style.

Thank you again for your continued support and participation throughout this process!

MCA Partnership Functions

Throughout the Action Planning Process, partners expressed the need for the Plan to define the functions of the Metrowest Conservation Alliance. As a partnership with a broad scope, these functions guided the formation of actionable objectives throughout the Plan. Below lists the overarching functions of the partnership.

Function 1: Regional Capacity-Building → Support capacity-building for regional conservation by facilitating conversations, organizing committees, applying for and administering grants, and conducting outreach.

Function 2: Partner Support → Provide training opportunities and share relevant information and resources with SuAsCo conservation practitioners through online educational resources, workshops and webinars, and sharing examples of successful projects.

Function 3: Networking → Fostering community and connections among the SuAsCo land conservation community, center peer-to-peer learning and sharing, and strengthen connections with professional services (foresters, realtors, attorneys) and audiences beyond current MCA membership (public health agencies, affordable housing commissions, sustainability coordinators)

Function 4: Tool Development → Create and publish useful tools to further regional land and water protection and management in the SuAsCo area.

Function 5: Advocacy → Share opportunities for partners to support legislation that would support conservation and land management on a regional level.

Function 6: Committee Coordination → Facilitate committee organization to work on specific goals and objectives under priority issues, and encourage the formation of new committees and recruitment of new members.

Function 7: Public Education → Educate the public about the importance of regional conservation and land management in a uniform message for SuAsCo partners.

Priority Topic: Protection of Critical Landscapes

INTRODUCTION

Land Protection is an important part of building a healthy and thriving Metrowest. However, conservation projects can be complex and expensive, and often require many years of effort.

Over time, the conservation community has found great success working through partnerships to protect many special places. By bringing together individuals from various organization types (municipalities, volunteer and staffed land trusts, state agencies, etc.) who can exchange ideas and learn from one another, the Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA) creates a nexus for cooperative action. Together, our partners can make a greater impact, raise more funds, and protect more priority land.

COMMON THEMES

Identify key projects; cooperative grant applications; wildlife corridors; recreation corridors; coordinated outreach to priority landowners; utility easements; creation of maps; cooperative plans; ecosystem/natural services; Chapter 61 & Article 97 land; Healthy Soils Plan

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Convene partners around MCA SuAsCo Conservation Prioritization Tool to encourage cross-boundary projects.

Objectives

1. Connect partners from abutting communities to identify high integrity, cross-boundary land protection projects.
2. Identify cross-town areas with high numbers of priority parcels for potential 'aggregation projects'.
3. Organize proactive outreach campaigns to reach private landowners, especially in aggregation areas.
4. Share information from Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition *The Value of Land Conservation* with the general public.

Goal 2: Prioritize land protection projects creating key linkages for wildlife and recreation corridors.

Objectives

1. Complete a strategic conservation map identifying key projects for habitat connectivity with partners throughout the region using MassGIS data and SuAsCo Conservation Prioritization Tool.
2. Partner with Regional Planning Agencies to further their efforts to create strategic maps identifying key projects for recreation connections.

Goal 3: Protect land around waterways and water bodies.

Objectives

1. Support OARS' analysis of river and tributary corridors to identify projects to enhance riparian habitat.
2. Forge partnerships between municipalities to strengthen coordination for protection and management of water supplies, waterways, and water bodies.
3. Collaborate with partner organizations to identify and advance projects for recreation, restoration, and aquatic habitat connectivity.

Goal 4: Expand funding opportunities for land protection by applying for grants beyond municipal bounds.

Objectives

1. Maintain a list of collaborative land protection projects within the SuAsCo that received funding through non-municipal grants to highlight alternative funding sources.
2. Apply for and manage grants for cross-town land acquisition and land management projects leveraging applicant eligibility.

Priority Topic: Habitat Restoration & Management

INTRODUCTION

Habitat restoration and management projects are often completed by MCA partners. However, these efforts rarely cross municipal boundaries. Successful restoration and management requires coordinated projects across the region. Coordinated projects expand habitat availability for wildlife across the region, create refuges for vulnerable species, and improve functionality of natural services. The MCA aims to promote these coordinated efforts.

While there are many opportunities for habitat restoration and management across the region, partners expressed interest in three main themes: forest management, grassland management, and native pollination systems. Partners were especially keen to connect with others about past successes that can be used as case studies.

COMMON THEMES

Cooperative forest management plans, public communications about forest management practices, deer management, wildlife corridors & protection of forest blocks, grassland management, grassland bird conservation, dog management, native plants, threatened pollinators, regionally-appropriate seed mixes, public education

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Encourage partners to prepare forest management plans for healthy forest habitats.

Objectives

1. Partnering with state entities and contracted foresters to share information about the elements and process of Forest Management Plans.
2. Using MassGIS data, assess protected forest habitat blocks and initiate cross-boundary Forest Management Plans.
3. Publish a list of successful forest management projects conducted by partners on the MCA Habitat Restoration & Management webpage.

Goal 2: Coordinate regional deer management efforts to address overbrowsing concerns.

Objectives

1. Convene the Deer Management Committee biannually to discuss results of community deer management efforts and current information, including hunting studies, updated policy and regulations, and strategies for deer management.
2. Share information with partners and the general public about the impacts of the overabundant deer population.
3. Continue engaging MassWildlife biologists to inform partners on regulations, policies, best practices, and updated information.

Goal 3: Promote the conservation of native pollination systems through the Bumblebee Project.

Objectives

1. Continue to support public education programs to guide community members to create pollination systems that support declining species of native pollinators through annual summer garden tours, winter sow programs, and other public education programs.
2. Continue to support the establishment of gardens and meadows/habitats in all 36 communities that provide host plants, pollen, nectar to support threatened pollinator species.
3. Continue to provide a region-wide, interactive map showing each pollination system garden and/or meadow in the SuAsCo.
4. Continue to provide a plant list aligned with criteria in point 2 and guided by best practices, informed by Dr. Gegear's research.
5. Compile a list of bylaws and ordinances requiring native plants in landscaping plans.

Goal 4: Promote Best Management Practices for vulnerable grassland habitats and species.

Objectives

1. Facilitate conversations between partners managing grassland habitat.
2. Share information and highlight local examples of Best Management Practices on the MCA Habitat Restoration & Management webpage.
3. Complete strategic conservation map leading to outreach to landowners with known breeding populations of threatened grassland bird species.

Priority Topic: Agricultural Land Protection & Access

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural lands continue to be a cornerstone of communities across Metrowest, but these lands are vulnerable to increasing development pressures. Not only do farms add to the rural character of the area, but they provide fresh and healthy foods to local residents. The protection of farmland and availability of local food is more important than ever, which is why the Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA) believes in enhancing and supporting our local farms.

Conserving farmland can be a complex process that must be tailored to the farmer's vision and business structure. Common protection strategies include Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs) and Farm-friendly Conservation Restrictions (CRs), as well as farm succession planning. Access to farmland for new farmers is another challenge in the area, due to the high price of land, lack of high-quality soils, and cost of housing.

Many MCA partners protect farms and/or provide access to viable farmland at conserved areas. The wide variety of experiences within the MCA allows members to come together to find appropriate solutions to conserve important agricultural lands and support our remaining agricultural businesses.

COMMON THEMES

Mechanisms for protecting farms; farmland succession planning; funding for purchase/protection of agricultural land; farmer access to land; farm-friendly CRs

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Increase the rate of farmland permanently protected in the SuAsCo.

Objectives

1. Communicate findings from the SuAsCo Conservation Prioritization Tool to identify priority farmland protection projects.
2. Conduct strategic outreach to farmers with farmland protection organizations such as Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) and the American Farmland Trust (AFT).

Goal 2: Support new farmers requiring access to agricultural land.

Objectives:

1. Coordinate with New Entry to connect new farmers with land and the conservation community.
2. Facilitate peer-learning workshops highlighting successful efforts connecting farmers to conservation land.
3. Share resources that facilitate allowing farmers to access protected land on the MCA Agricultural Land Protection & Access webpage (ex. Farm lease agreements).

Goal 3: Educate partners on farmland protection options.

Objectives:

1. Host workshops highlighting relevant topics (farmland succession planning, farmland protection tools, etc.) with farmland-specific partners such as AFT and MDAR.
2. Provide materials and resources for partners to further educate farmers about options and opportunities to help maintain their farms and plan for succession.
3. Share current information with partners about state and federal grant programs supporting farmland conservation.

Priority Topic: Climate & Ecological Resilience

INTRODUCTION

The Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA) believes that adaptation and resilience to climate change must be addressed. By working together, MCA partners can create a more resilient region, leveraging shared knowledge and resources to tackle climate change impacts more effectively. Because aspects of climate resilience fall into a number of the topics identified in this plan, the goals and objectives identified under this priority topic are primarily focused on planning and permitting opportunities for increasing climate resilience.

During the Action Planning Process, partners expressed interest in sharing examples of strong climate-focused bylaws and ordinances and bolstering existing municipal plans such as Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plans. Partner sharing about bylaws and ordinances could lead to the adoption of similar efforts on a regional level. These include wetland bylaws, tree removal bylaws, and others. Also, analyzing existing plans and identifying overlapping objectives can spark regional projects. Plans of note include Hazard Mitigation Plans, Community Resilience Plans, Net Zero Plans, Municipal Vulnerability Plans, and Open Space and Recreation Plans.

One of the central climate concerns for partners is how to address impacts of climate change, such as 'heat island effect.' Collaborative action on this issue could include increasing tree canopy coverage, implementing cool roofing policies, and designing more green infrastructure. It is important to highlight the co-benefits of these types of projects and their benefits for overall ecological resilience in communities.

COMMON THEMES

Integration of regenerative sustainability into ordinances & bylaws, flood mitigation and storage; carbon sequestration, MVP Plans, stormwater management, tree canopy, extreme heat, energy efficiency in buildings

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Highlight existing ordinances and bylaws in SuAsCo towns advancing climate resiliency. We will coordinate with Regional Planning Agencies and the Massachusetts Conservation Professionals (MSMCP).

Objectives

1. Promote the MAPC [Climate Resilient Land Use Strategies](#) resource and compile a list of exemplary bylaws and ordinances in the SuAsCo that address climate change concerns, including Wetlands and Stormwater Bylaws, and post on the MCA Climate & Ecological Resilience webpage.
2. Collaborate with MSMCP to share climate bylaw resources with our partners.

3. Support communities in adopting local bylaws and ordinances that support protections for healthy canopy, improvements to soil health, and ecological restoration.

Goal 2: Leverage existing climate-related plans and resources to inspire regional projects and expand regional impacts of local climate projects.

Objectives

1. Promote strong climate-focused goals and actions to be replicated in relevant plan development and/or updates to expand available funding sources for implementation.
2. Support and facilitate regional meetings to identify and collaborate on shared goals at a regional level (flood mitigation, water quality, etc.).
3. Collaborate with Regional Planning Agencies and state-wide organizations to collect data on the results of climate projects, such as culvert repairs, tree planting, etc.

Goal 3: Improve ecological resilience through the implementation of regional programs to address climate challenges.

1. Leverage findings from existing urban heat island studies to develop targeted regional actions that mitigate adverse effects.
2. Use the MCA SuAsCo Conservation Prioritization Tool to prioritize critically important lands for preservation to preserve and maintain natural services (flood control, carbon sequestration, cooling etc).
3. Partner with communities on regional grant projects on the education of project stakeholders and the general public on the role ecological resilience plays in overall climate resilience.

Priority Topic: Community Development

INTRODUCTION

The Metrowest Conservation Alliance appreciates the importance of integrating community with conservation work. Thoughtful consideration for community within conservation projects can lead to balanced land use, healthier residents, and improved access for groups historically excluded from conservation and recreation.

While there are many possible avenues to merge community development and conservation, partners expressed interest in discussing integrating housing and conservation projects and advancing land access for historically excluded groups, such as Indigenous communities, residents with mobility impairments, and people of color. These conversations can help shape more inclusive and equitable conservation strategies that reflect the needs of all community members.

By prioritizing community conservation efforts, MCA and its partners can foster more sustainable and socially just outcomes across the region.

COMMON THEMES

Affordable housing, environmental justice, trail accessibility, indigenous communities, diversifying partner representation, low-impact development

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Improve communication with local and regional housing entities to balance housing needs and land conservation.

Objectives

1. Compile examples, plans, and testimonies from projects combining conservation and housing to be added to the MCA Community Development webpage.
2. Connect housing authorities to conservation practitioners through networking sessions.
3. Provide a workshop to share tools used to plan housing and land conservation projects.

Goal 2: Improve access and accessibility for historically excluded groups in the SuAsCo.

Objectives

1. Partner with groups specializing on accessibility within the recreation space to host workshops highlighting accessible outdoor programs.
2. Add information for each community to existing databases of accessible trails, such as the Birdability map.
3. Promote and support projects addressing language barriers in natural areas by creating one multi-language trail map for each community.

Goal 3: Expand access and land use opportunities for indigenous communities.

Objectives

1. Provide learning opportunities for partners to understand the history and current statuses of indigenous communities in the region.
2. Facilitate conversations between partners and indigenous communities to understand regional land use needs and opportunities for the communities.
3. Collaborate with indigenous partners and/or organizations to host workshops about land access pathways for indigenous communities (Cultural Respect Easements, important legislation, etc.).
4. Coordinate with communities to implement indigenous land stewardship knowledge in culturally significant landscapes in partnership with indigenous communities.