Accordingly, we are actively working to ensure that renewable energy infrastructure development avoids conversion where possible, and that the next iteration of solar development incentives do not encourage conversion of forested land. [p. 3]

Forest Land Conservation

The CFC emphasized the importance of keeping forests as forests, and the Commonwealth concurs. Retaining forests is foundational to effective management and to meeting our climate goals. Significant time, attention, and resources are being devoted to realizing land conservation goals and avoiding conversion of unprotected forest land to a non-forest use, such as development. Funding is being secured, grant programs created, agency conservation criteria modified, a holistic land use plan developed, landowner incentives offered, a coalition of allies convened, and many other actions pursued to increase the number of permanently protected forested acres – both privately held, and state owned. [p. 4-5]

Forest Land Management

To realize the carbon, habitat, and other benefits forest reserves provide, the Commonwealth, in collaboration with other forest landowners, will seek to establish reserves on 10% of all the forested land in Massachusetts, about 300,000 acres across all ownerships, as recommended by the CFC. This represents more than a doubling of the amount of land currently held in reserves. The Commonwealth will pursue a more formal codification of those on state land to enhance their level of protection beyond what is today an agency-level administrative decision.

A key question regarding forest land management, whether the objective is a more resilient forest, protection of a public water supply, or carbon sequestration, is to what degree approaches from both the active and passive ends of the spectrum of management techniques are employed. As to this question, the CFC was split with some recommending passive management in most circumstances, and others endorsing active management as the best way to manage forests with climate change in mind. Similarly, cited research and other
data reviewed by the Commonwealth support both active and passive management and public comment on this topic was evenly split.

**Given divergent opinion and science regarding the best forest management approach, the Commonwealth will employ a mix of active and passive techniques**, with preference for passive management techniques, which the CFC agreed would confer greater increases in carbon stocks compared with active management. The Commonwealth will determine annually where and how to manage land outside reserves to achieve land management objectives, **with active management projected to occur on very limited acreage, less than 1% of state forest land holdings**, and passive management on the balance. This means careful consideration of the circumstances and locations in which active management is advanced and enhancing prior practice by **utilizing climate forestry techniques** recommended by the Committee.

Regarding management for habitat purposes, the CFC recommended reducing goals for early successional habitat on DFG land. Revised goals for specific habitat types are presently being considered via implementation of Executive Order 618 “Biodiversity Conservation in Massachusetts”. Recognizing the carbon implications, **the Commonwealth will employ active management to sustain biodiversity for at-risk and Species of Greatest Conservation Need in selectively sited ecological landscapes**. As with active management for other purposes, **the full range of options to provide early successional habitat and the specific forestry prescriptions the CFC recommended will be considered** to address climate change mitigation and resilience. [p. 5]

**Application of New Forest Management Guidelines**

Thus, **of the 66 paused projects 47 will proceed to bid (18 with modifications), 10 await further policy development, and 9 will not be pursued**. Many of the projects that are proceeding will be bid without further process (having completed the approval process previously), others did not complete the project approval process prior to the pause and will resume review from the appropriate stage in the process. [p. 6]

**Biodiversity & Early Successional Habitat**

Recognizing the carbon sequestration and storage implications, when necessary to meet habitat goals **the Commonwealth will manage land to sustain biodiversity for at-risk species and Species of Greatest Conservation Need in selectively sited ecological landscapes**.

Several suggested **alternatives to cutting mature forest** to create early successional habitat are viable and being considered in certain locations. However, **they are expensive, and a budget is being developed and funding must be secured before it will be feasible to implement them**. [p. 9]

**Invasive Plants/Pests & Pathogens**

**Pre-salvage harvest** (the removal of vulnerable healthy or recently affected trees to improve stand resilience by stopping or reducing the actual or anticipated impact of insects and/or
disease) will be **avoided except where necessary** to protect public safety and where there is clear evidence that it can significantly alter the rate of spread or mitigate the impacts of a pest or pathogen. [p. 11]

**Reserves**

The Commonwealth will expand the number and size of reserves to reach 10% of forested land of all ownerships (about 300,000 acres) as recommended by the CFC.

- To achieve 10% the Commonwealth will work to designate more state land as reserves, acquire land to expand existing or create new reserves, and engage with other landowners to pursue the designation of additional federal, municipal, and private land.

- To inform its response to the occurrence of pests, pathogens, and invasive plants in forest reserves across land held for more diverse purposes than was previously the case (i.e., the addition of wildlife management areas) the Commonwealth will broaden the charge and expand the membership of the Forest Reserves Science Advisory Committee (FRSAC) to incorporate additional expertise (e.g., a wildlife biologist). The Committee was created to advise the Division of State Parks and Recreation regarding management issues in Reserves; the expanded Committee will advise all three divisions.

- Work is ongoing in regard to establishing:
  - Allowable activities within reserves (e.g., prescribed burns occur on a small proportion of reserves currently) and on the process for and degree of intervention that would be allowed to address disturbances.
  - The best approach to codification of reserves on state land and the drafting and pursuit of legislation to implement it.
  - The specifics of a monitoring protocol to compare reserve outcomes to actively managed areas.

- Issue a solicitation in the summer of 2024 for grants to support new reserves and begin agency acquisitions to expand reserves in FY25.
  - $8 million in one-time federal funding has been set aside to acquire additional reserve land. As with all land conservation efforts additional permanent funding is needed to meet conservation goals.

- Achieve the **10% of forest land managed as a reserve objective by 2030**, with interim goals.

- **Have a monitoring protocol in place by the end of 2025.** [p. 12]
Ecological Disturbance/Salvage Logging

The Commonwealth agrees with the CFC that salvage harvesting—the removal of trees that are dead, dying, toppled or damaged as a result of an extensive disturbance such as a disease or insect infestation, windstorm, ice storm, or fire—should be limited and guided by criteria for when it is appropriate to balance the carbon, soil, and habitat benefits of leaving dead wood in the forest. Draft conditions under which salvage harvesting will be considered have been developed. Work is underway to finalize and determine how policies and plans are best updated to apply them. [p. 13]

Private Forest Lands

As to development of new incentives for passive management and land conservation, data is being gathered (e.g., confirming estimates of the amount needed to achieve parity with harvest proceeds) and options explored (e.g., enhancements to the current use tax incentive, ecosystem services compensation, use of grants to encourage climate friendly actions, carbon credit acquisition, etc.) to inform the provision of additional incentives for passive management and land conservation.

In regard to Ch. 61 review and enhancement EEA will examine Chapter 61 current use programs and otherwise explore incentives, including those for passive management. [p. 14]

Sequestration

The CFC strongly agreed that MA forests can continue to store carbon for many decades, that it is not practical to manage forests to optimize tree age in an effort to maximize the sequestration rate, and that passive management intended to allow more trees to mature into old age generally confers greater increases in carbon stocks than active management.

To address sequestration recommendations the Commonwealth will:

- Seek to realize 10% of forest land (of all ownerships) held as reserves by 2030.
- Employ passive approaches for almost all state forest land management and use active land management techniques on limited acreage, selected annually, projected to be less than 1% of state forest land.
- Expand, over the course of FY25, efforts to get more harvested wood into long-lived wood products.
- Work to reduce overall consumption and produce more wood consumed in MA on non-state forest holdings through research and other efforts funded in FY25 and beyond. [p. 15]

Resilience
Consistent with the recommendations of some CFC members, the Commonwealth will augment natural disturbances with judicious active forest management focused on enhancing ecological integrity and function, that in turn increase forest resilience to climate change and other stressors. Active management that enhances the complexity of forest structure and diversifies species composition will help forests transition to future conditions that sustain societal ecosystem services expectations and reduce the potential for large swings in carbon stocks from disturbances. Managing actively may also help address data that shows carbon loss from tree death exceeding storage from growth in some stands. [p. 16]

Water Supply Protection

The CFC did not reach consensus as to whether active forestry is necessary on watershed lands to support water quality. Credible science was cited both supporting and opposing active management.

Given this circumstance, and that to date active management has contributed to maintaining a healthy forest filter that protects the water supply, the Division of Water Supply Protection will continue to utilize a broad range of forest management strategies across a spectrum from passive to active, with an emphasis on passive, to manage watershed forests.

The Division will demonstrate and expand the use of passive management, including the designation of Forest Reserves on Water Supply lands. [p. 17]

Wood Production

The Commonwealth will continue to fund and otherwise support research, development, production, and use of innovative long-lived wood products, especially those that provide a market for those tree species that lack commercial value. [p. 18]

Permanent Conservation & Avoided Conversion of Forest Land

Conserve 40% of the lands and waters in the Commonwealth by 2050 (the current commitment, rather than an increase to 50% as the CFC suggested) in order to permanently preclude conversion and ensure the benefits of natural land including sequestration and storage of carbon and provision of clean air and water. [p. 19]
The CFC and the Commonwealth are generally aligned in regard to **permanent conservation and other efforts to keep forests as forests.** To achieve these objectives the Commonwealth will:

- **Conserve 40% of the lands and waters in the Commonwealth by 2050** (the current commitment, rather than an increase to 50% as the CFC suggested) in order to permanently preclude conversion and ensure the benefits of natural land including sequestration and storage of carbon and provision of clean air and water.

- **Establish goals for increased conservation and reduced conversion of forest land.**

**Goals for land conservation at time-steps through 2050 are being established to ensure the Commonwealth stays on track to meet the 40% goal, and simultaneously achieves specific land conservation objectives, such as draft forest land acreage conservation goals for 2030 and 2050 (under review) and those to be established pursuant to the Biodiversity Executive Order.**

**The Commonwealth will establish goals for reduced forest conversion by early 2025 as part of developing the Holistic Land Use Plan.**

**Enhancements to land conservation criteria to better consider carbon sequestration, ecological integrity, and other Initiative goals will occur as spending plans are developed and criteria for state grant programs reconsidered at the outset of each fiscal year.**

[p. 20]

*****

Massachusetts Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)
Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-species-of-greatest-conservation-need-sgcn

Five hundred and seventy species were determined to be Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in Massachusetts as presented in the 2015 update to the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

[NOTE: At least 20 birds, all of which favor grasslands or young forests to some degree, are on the list. All but 2 are classified as “G5 Secure,” the lowest global category of threat. Two are classified as “G4 Apparently Secure,” which is still a very low threat level. None are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. It is likely that all of these birds were rare or not present in 1600. These birds should not be classified as SGCN.]

Grasshopper Sparrow
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.100347/Ammodramus_savannar um
Not on ESA list

Eastern Whip-poor-will
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.871696/Antrostomus_vociferus
Not on ESA list

Upland Sandpiper
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.102059/Bartramia_longicauda
Not on ESA list

Ruffed Grouse
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.102687/Bonasa_umbellus
Not on ESA list

Northern Bobwhite
G4 Apparently Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.106280/Colinus_virginianus
Not on ESA list

Bobolink
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.102736/Dolichonyx_oryzivorus
Not on ESA list

American Kestrel
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.101079/Falco_sparverius
Not on ESA list

Mourning Warbler
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.102326/Geothlypis_philadelphia
Not on ESA list

Nashville Warbler
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.105118/Leiothlypis_ruficapilla
Not on ESA list

Eastern Towhee
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.105602/Pipilo_erythrophthalmus
Not on ESA list

Vesper Sparrow
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.103115/Pooecetes_gramineus
Not on ESA list

American Woodcock
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.105226/Scolopax_minor
Not on ESA list

Prairie Warbler
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.103980/Setophaga_discolor
Not on ESA list

Chestnut-sided Warbler
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.104815/Setophaga_pensylvanica
Not on ESA list

Field Sparrow
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.102535/Spizella_pusilla
Not on ESA list

Eastern Meadowlark
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.1253407/Sturnella_magna
Not on ESA list

Brown Thrasher
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.103922/Toxostoma_rufum
Not on ESA list

Golden-winged Warbler
G4 Apparently Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.102068/Vermivora_chrysoptera
Not on ESA list

Blue-winged Warbler
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.105701/Vermivora_cyanoptera
Not on ESA list
White-throated Sparrow
G5 Secure
https://explorer.natureserve.org/Taxon/ELEMENT_GLOBAL.2.102710/Zonotrichia_albicollis
Not on ESA list