

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife awards over \$200,000 in grants to fund habitat projects

“The Climate Change Resilience Grant Opportunity (CCRGO) provides financial assistance to private and municipal landowners of conserved lands to enhance climate-vulnerable wildlife habitats. The grant supports projects that improve resiliency in ecological communities disproportionately susceptible to climate change, including, but not limited to:

- Fire adapted natural communities; and,
- Riparian communities and floodplains along cold water streams and other climate-vulnerable wetland/aquatic systems.

In its first year, the CCRGO has awarded \$216,078 to five conservation organizations and municipalities. Funds will support habitat improvement projects totaling 237 acres in seven Massachusetts communities. Projects will reduce stressors that impact ecological integrity, which will enhance climate resilience in those areas. For example, projects in fire-adapted communities that improve habitat quality and native species diversity, remove invasive species, and mitigate risk of extreme wildfire behavior reduce climate vulnerability. Similarly, projects along the banks of coldwater streams that maintain or enhance tree canopy coverage, reduce erosion, or control invasive species may enhance climate resilience.

Partnering with municipalities and conservation organizations allows MassWildlife to achieve wildlife habitat management goals on conserved lands across the Commonwealth. “Improving ecological biodiversity can only take place where certain

environmental conditions exist,” said MassWildlife Director Mark Tisa. “The MassWildlife Climate Change Resilience Grant allows us to focus conservation efforts on habitat management activities in those special places which over time, benefit both common and rare wildlife living in our communities.”

The following projects will receive MassWildlife Climate Change Resilience Grants:

- **Falmouth** – The Town of Falmouth has been awarded \$28,000 to conduct a prescribed burn at Coonamessett Fields, a site within an Environmental Justice Community, to improve grassland habitat. New England cottontail, northern harriers, eastern meadowlarks, grasshopper sparrows, and endangered pollinators like moths, native bees, and tiger beetles are just some of the species that will benefit from this management action.

- **Great Barrington** – The Berkshire Natural Resources Council will receive \$37,495 to improve floodplain forests by removing invasives along the Housatonic River and Rising Pond, sites within Environmental Justice Communities. As one of the few major rivers designated as a coldwater fishery resource (CFR), removing invasive trees, plants and shrubs will enhance floodplain growth conditions of large-canopy trees in the Housatonic River. Trees create shaded microclimates (pockets) of cool water benefiting fish species that depend on coldwater habitats, such as native brook trout and the state-listed longnose sucker. Additionally, when large dead trees fall into the riverbed, it will provide valuable sheltering structure for young fish.

- **Marlborough/Sudbury** – The City of Marlborough and Sudbury Valley Trustees have been awarded \$26,667 to improve pitch pine – oak forest at the Desert Natural Area in Marlborough and Memorial Forest in Sudbury. Mowing and timber harvest of trees will support ongoing habitat maintenance and create safer conditions for future planned prescribed fires. Whip-

poor-wills, brown thrashers, wild lupine, state-listed moths and an endangered reptile will be the beneficiaries of a multi-phase management plan. Common species such as white-tailed deer and ruffed grouse will benefit as well.

- **Monson/Wales** – The Norcross Wildlife Foundation was awarded \$45,450 to improve grasslands and fields by removing invasive plants such as bittersweet, autumn olive, and multiflora rose at Chapin Meadow. Tree mowing and timber harvest of white pines that dominated the former pitch pine – oak forest is also part of the habitat restoration plan. Common animals like American woodcock and white-tailed deer, as well as native bees and less common birds such as eastern towhees, field sparrows and brown thrashers will benefit from these activities.

- **North Andover** – The Trustees of Reservations will receive \$49,050 to restore oak – hickory barrens at the Weir Hill Reservation. Tree mowing and timber harvesting will prepare the site for a future prescribed fire. These actions will allow yellow indigo plants to thrive and serve as a critical host plant for endangered pollinators such as the frosted elfin butterfly and the scrub oak feeder moth. Open, exposed areas will quickly revegetate with native plants and create habitat for wild turkey and other common wildlife. Exposed bare mineral soil from these management actions will also benefit a highly specialized state-listed plant.

- **Sheffield** – The Trustees of Reservations have been awarded \$28,512 to improve habitat on Bartholomew's Cobble's Ashley Pasture by removing invasive plants and woody species such as multi-flora rose, mugwort, Asian bush honeysuckle, and oriental bittersweet. The restoration goal is to benefit birds such as bobolink and American kestrel, and a state-listed plant, while increasing the ecological resiliency of the Pasture's grassland habitat.