

Baker-Polito Administration Announces Grants for Marine Animal Conservation and Restoration Projects

Funding Provided Through Environmental-Themed Specialty License Plates

BOSTON - The Baker-Polito Administration today announced \$579,253 in grants to 16 projects across Massachusetts that will restore and improve aquatic habitat, rivers, and watersheds and that protect endangered marine animals, including at-risk sea turtles and the rarest large whale, the North Atlantic right whale. The funding was provided by the Massachusetts Environmental Trust through funds collected through its environmental-themed specialty license plates.

“Massachusetts’ natural resources, including coasts, rivers, and wetlands are part of what makes the Commonwealth a unique place to live and visit,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “The projects supported by residents who purchase special environmental license plates will help local programs that protect the Commonwealth’s water resources, critical habitats, and wildlife.”

“These projects will help Massachusetts continue to be a good steward of its environmental resources and protect aquatic habitats and watersheds in communities across the Commonwealth,” **said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito**. “Our administration is proud to support the work being done to conserve clean water and natural resources throughout Massachusetts.”

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET), housed within the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), was established in 1988 as part of the Boston Harbor cleanup. MET operates as an independent entity without tax dollars or legislative appropriations and is governed by a board of trustees appointed by the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs. MET is funded by the sales of the state’s three environmentally themed specialty license plates: the Right Whale & Roseate Terns Plate, the Leaping Brook Trout Plate and the Blackstone Valley Mill Plate.

“The grants provided by the Massachusetts Environmental Trust will help restore the health of our wetlands, strengthen aquatic ecosystems, protect wildlife and help us take a proactive approach to prepare for the impacts of climate change,” **said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides**. “I would encourage residents across Massachusetts to consider buying a special environmental-themed license plate from the RMV, which is a terrific way to support this important work and help protect the Commonwealth’s vital and unique natural resources.”

MET has invested more than \$20 million in environmental grants for more than three decades and was the original philanthropic organization in the state to partner with the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles when it introduced the Right Whale & Roseate Terns license plates in 1995. The Right Whale & Roseate Terns plates have been one of the top selling license plates for 25 years. This is a momentous milestone for MET and all of the drivers that take an active role in saving endangered whales, restoring our fragile rivers and fish populations, and maintaining the life-sustaining link between our waterways by purchasing one of the Trust’s specialty license plates.

“The Registry is proud to contribute to the preservation of the Commonwealth’s natural resources through the Environmental Trust License Plates Program,” **said Massachusetts Department of Transportation Registrar Jamey Tesler**. “Over the last 5 years \$2.9 million has been contributed through this program and we are pleased to support efforts which increase an awareness of conservation efforts.”

In total, the Administration awarded grants to 16 projects, including 11 projects for aquatic ecosystem restoration and enhancement totaling \$250,822, and five projects for marine mammal and sea turtle conservation totaling \$328,431.

The grants awarded by the Baker-Polito Administration include:

Associated Scientists (Woods Hole) - \$5,000 was awarded for the publication of Right Whale News, a quarterly newsletter distributed electronically to enhance informed participation in efforts to conserve and recover the North Atlantic right whale and its habitats.

Association to Preserve Cape Cod - \$49,812 was awarded for evaluating and monitoring the effects of harmful cyanobacteria blooms that threaten the health of aquatic ecosystems and at-risk fish (river herring) and public health and to motivate action to address the causes of water quality degradation and resulting cyanoHABs.

Center for Coastal Studies - \$34,431 was awarded for assessing humpback whale entanglement rates through long-term systematic sampling and image analysis protocols to reliably detect and study entanglement injuries on humpback whales and to analyze data collected since 2011 to evaluate change in entanglement rates in relation to recent management actions and to create a formal observer network to track such injuries in the future. This project is a collaborative effort with other NGOs and commercial whale watch companies that collect data off the coast of Massachusetts and in the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary.

Charles River Watershed Association - \$11,120 was awarded to restore the wetland health of the Charles River and improve water quality in a critical coldwater fishery resource waterway in the area of the North Valley Storage Area, including assessment of riparian vegetation to ensure a high quality streamflow in Dix Brook for improved climate resilience.

Clean River Project - \$25,000 was awarded to remove hazardous materials from the Merrimack and Neponset Rivers including floating trees, abandoned homeless encampments and abandoned vehicles.

Connecticut River Conservancy - \$11,250 was awarded for a pilot community science sampling and analysis program to begin to understand the issue of microplastics in our waters. The project will have multiple opportunities for public outreach and engagement, as well as expansion within the watershed and to other watersheds in Massachusetts. Plastic debris in aquatic environments is a contaminant of emerging concern and this study will help to understand the presence, composition, or sources of microplastics in Massachusetts rivers. The Trust is excited to partner with the Conservation Law Foundation to provide support for this project.

Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF)/Center for Coastal Studies - \$200,000 was awarded for continued support of the Massachusetts Large Whale and Sea Turtle Conservation Program, an intensive effort to protect, restore and manage large whale and sea turtle species found in surrounding Massachusetts state waters. The program's integrated approach combines monitoring and analysis of the population and habitat of approximately 400 surviving North Atlantic right whales, with hands-on, at-sea rescues of right whales, as well as other endangered marine species, among them humpback whales, fin whales, and leatherback sea turtles. MET has and continues to invest millions of dollars to organizations working to protect marine life for emergency surface and aerial surveillance of Cape Cod Bay, vessel-based habitat studies, plankton monitoring (a primary food source for whales), whale beaching investigations as well as rescue and rehabilitation, marine debris removal, ship strike avoidance techniques and for research and development programs for the design and implementation of harmless fishing gear.

International Fund for Animal Welfare - \$49,000 was awarded to expand large whale response capacity and to perform exams and necropsies on dead, stranded large whales and for further refinement of remote sedation techniques to understand how entanglements are threatening North Atlantic right whales and other large whales and how we may address the issue of entanglement to save a species. Additionally, this project will support the safety of expert responders working tirelessly to ensure large whales survive and thrive in Massachusetts' waters.

Mass Audubon Society - \$30,000 was awarded to restore native wetland and floodplain forest vegetation along a 0.4-mile reach of West Beaver Dam Brook to provide coldwater stream habitat for Eastern Brook Trout on Mass Audubon's Tidmarsh Wildlife Sanctuary in Plymouth, and to share the knowledge and expertise gained from this project with professional and public audiences and engage and educate the community through media outlets and advocacy, outreach, and volunteer programs.

Nashua River Watershed Association - \$16,000 was awarded to improve coldwater stream climate change refugia mapping and protection and exchange of data and ideas in the Nashua River Watershed and to collect necessary water temperature data to assess temperature variation in Coldwater Fish Resource (CFR) headwater streams in the Squannacook River subwatershed and other CFR streams directly adjacent to the Nashua River.

Nashoba Conservation Trust - \$4,000 was awarded to conduct a preliminary evaluation for the removal of a concrete dam and replacement of two failing culverts on Gulf Brook, a coldwater fishery. The study will provide the foundation of knowledge needed to move the project forward, with a goal to protect and restore habitat for fish and other coldwater species, improve water quality, and enhance the ecosystem of Gulf Brook.

New England Aquarium - \$40,000 was awarded for continuation of a pilot project to increase its sample size of disentangled turtles and to capture a representative spectrum of leatherback injuries associated with vertical line entanglements to build the sample size that is necessary for accurate post-release mortality determinations and improved veterinary assessment and management of injured turtles. This work is done collaboratively with members of the Atlantic Large Whale and Sea Turtle Disentanglement Network to collect health data from entangled turtles off Massachusetts.

The Nature Conservancy - \$17,320 was awarded for initial tasks necessary for removal of a failing dam and restoration of aquatic and hydrologic connectivity at Becker Pond towards restoring coldwater stream habitat on its 1643-acre Mt. Plantain Preserve in Mt. Washington. MassWildlife has recorded over 70 brook trout of multiple age classes within a 100-meter stretch of the brook but the dam blocks access to upstream habitat. The site is part of the Schenob Brook Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Town of Marshfield - \$10,000 was awarded for final design, permitting and construction bid documents as part of the Veterans Memorial Park and South River Improvement Project to reconnect the South River and improve fish passage by removing the existing dam and enhance public awareness of the South River and its wildlife. The South River is home to multiple species with special status and significance and has been documented as spawning and nursery habitat for seven diadromous fish species including Alewife, Blueback herring, American shad, American eel and Sea lamprey. The removal of the dam is a Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) priority project.

Town of Wellfleet - \$38,320 was awarded to design two improved stream crossings on the upper Herring River that currently limit estuarine habitat continuity for river herring and many other aquatic animals between Cape Cod Bay, the river main stem, and its headwater freshwater ponds. The project is complementary to the larger effort to restore tidal flow to the 1000-acre lower Herring River estuary and marshes.

Trout Unlimited - \$38,000 was awarded for the final year of this three-year project to model the collective ecological benefits of dam removal statewide to promote future dam removal and to increase the quality and resilience of stream ecosystems. The project involves extensive pre-removal data on temperature, dissolved oxygen, and macroinvertebrates at 12 dam removal sites across Massachusetts to quantify water quality, macroinvertebrate, and fish responses to dam removal. This is a collaborative project with UMass, the Division of Ecological Restoration, and MassWildlife to add additional sites for a broader assessment of fish responses.

MET will soon offer Striped Bass Conservation license plate in partnership with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries. The Striped Bass Conservation license plate will support programs to research, protect, and preserve striped bass populations.

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust's specialty environmental license plates can be purchased from the RMV online via www.whaleplate.org. More information on the Massachusetts Environmental Trust can be found online [here](#).

###

Craig Gilvarg

Press Secretary

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900, Boston, MA 02114

Office: 617-626-1126 / Mobile: 617-372-6704