



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
In Support of S.2014 An act to sustain natural and working lands carbon in communities
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA), which represents 47 local Leagues across the state, urges your support of S.2014, An Act to sustain natural and working lands carbon in communities, also known as the Natural Climate Solutions bill. The League of Women Voters in Massachusetts and nationally has a long history of supporting wise natural resource and climate change actions. We believe that this legislation addresses both the wise use of natural resources for the people of the Commonwealth while promoting a reduction of release of carbon into the atmosphere. Furthermore, we recognize the importance of working with leaders in like-minded states in the U.S. Climate Alliance who are also concerned about the threat and impact of climate change.

As the impacts of climate change continue to intensify, safeguarding and enhancing the carbon stored in natural and working lands is essential to meet the Commonwealth's greenhouse gas reductions goals under the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) – and net zero goals. Natural and working lands are the only tool we have today that works at scale to draw carbon out of the atmosphere and store it. Land-based resources turn our carbon pollution into wood, soils, peat and other forms that have use and value. Enacting the Natural Climate Solutions bill would be a critical step forward and continue Massachusetts' tradition of leadership on climate action. Timely enactment of this bill will show the rest of the United States that the U.S. Climate Alliance's Natural and Working Lands Challenge is not a hollow promise, but rather something with real potential.

The U.S. Climate Alliance is a bipartisan coalition of 24 governors committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement. These states are coordinating efforts to address climate change mitigation, adaptation and resiliency. Massachusetts is a founding member of this group.

Natural climate solutions – particularly forest protection and improved forest management, are ways to protect and manage lands (forests, wetlands, and farms) to avoid emitting carbon into the air and to remove carbon pollution already there.

The Natural Climate Solutions bill would authorize the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to:

- Accurately measure the carbon stored by and released from the land statewide
- Set a numeric goal for how to reduce carbon emissions from lands (e.g. loss of forests and wetlands) and how to increase the size of the carbon sink on our lands (e.g. improve the management of farm soils and forest lands)
- Create a plan to reach that natural carbon goal

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- Develop the policy and funding changes to realize the goal, including creating a Communities for a Sustainable Climate municipal technical assistance program.

This proposed Natural Climate Solutions bill is both bold and practical. The bill seeks to better protect and manage our natural and working lands to help achieve the goals of the GWSA – either the existing 80 per cent reduction goal from 1990 levels by 2050 or strengthened to net zero.

We understand that strengths of this bill include its flexibility and support for a diversity of approaches. For example, there is a role for forest reserves in this bill, where trees are left to age and sequester more and more carbon over time. There is a role for forestry and wood products. There is a role for helping farmers plant cover crops to improve the health and yield of their land and to add carbon to the soil over time. And there is a role for management of nutrient pollution in cities, because this pollution kills eelgrass beds in coastal waters, releasing decades to centuries of stored carbon. Each acre, from a western Massachusetts forest to a salt marsh outside Boston, has a role to play.

The Natural Climate Solutions bill is needed to make sure Massachusetts is using all the tools at its disposal to address the climate change emergency.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges this Committee to provide a favorable report on the Natural Climate Solutions bill. We look forward to working for its passage in the legislature.