



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Revenue
In Support of S.1986 and H.2960, An Act increasing the conservation land tax credit
By Carolyn Lee, LWVMA Specialist on Natural Resources
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This bill would raise the annual cap of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' (EEA) Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC) program from \$2 million to \$5 million per year over a 3-year period and amend the definition of "public or private conservation agency" to include realty trusts {501(c) 3's} organized for conservation purposes pursuant to Chapter 203. This category includes many land trusts operating in the Commonwealth.

The current program has an unacceptable backlog, with pending requests of over \$ 8 million in tax credits. That means that the program is already beyond 2024 in committed funds, longer than any reasonable expectation for a landowner. Many landowners cannot wait this long since they are land rich and cash poor, ageing and have financial needs. The CLTC ends up out of sync with other land protection programs seeking to protect these lands, which hinders leveraging among programs for the maximum benefit to the protected environment.

Our new climate law and the 2030 Clean Energy and Climate Plan note that natural and working lands play an important role in mitigating climate change. Protected land will be able to sequester and store carbon, helping to reduce our CO2 emissions over a prolonged period. Land conserved under the CLTC program helps generate revenue from private sector activity in forestry and agriculture and saves public revenues in water supply protection. For every \$1 invested in land conservation, \$4 in natural resource goods and services is returned to the Massachusetts economy (between 1998 and 2011) per a 2013 report by the Trust for Public Land. This value has likely increased since the report was generated due to increased recreational land use by the public and increasing property values.

The Commonwealth has protected about half of the high-priority conservation land identified in collaboration between the environmental agencies and conservation community. Statewide conservation plans recommend ultimate protection of about 1 million acres of those remaining acres. Assuming these remaining "top-priority conservation" lands of the state are owned by about 100,000 owners, the potential applicant pool for this program is huge. Most of the lands waiting to be protected are in the western part of the state and on Cape Cod.

The LWVMA, with 47 local Leagues from Capes Cod and Ann to the Berkshires, supports this bill and asks that you favorably report this bill out of committee, as was done last session.

Thank you for your consideration.