

Baker-Polito Administration Announces \$300,000 in Wildlife Habitat Improvement Grants

SOUTHWICK – September 22, 2016 – The Baker-Polito Administration today announced \$300,000 in funding for private and municipal efforts to manage conservation lands to benefit native wildlife at a public site walk showcasing wildlife habitat improvements at the Southwick Wildlife Management Area.

“We are pleased to provide funding for the second year to this program which gives municipalities and private conservation organizations the resources to improve wildlife habitats across the state,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “These grants help species of greatest conservation need and enhance recreational opportunities for people who enjoy hunting, bird watching and other outdoor recreation.”

“This funding will greatly enhance forward-thinking municipal and private wildlife conservation efforts throughout the Commonwealth,” **said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito**. “Working together with municipal and private partners is essential to our goal of conserving all types of wildlife.”

The Habitat Management Grant Program, created in 2015 and managed by the Department of Fish and Game’s Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife), provides financial assistance to private and municipal landowners of conserved lands to improve and manage habitat for wildlife deemed in greatest conservation need and for game species. The projects receiving funding will also expand opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, and other outdoor recreation, and complement the ongoing habitat management efforts on state lands.

“The Baker-Polito Administration has made acquiring and conserving open spaces a priority,” **said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton**. “However, it is equally important to build on that investment by improving habitat management for native wildlife on state, municipal and private conservation lands.”

“Wildlife in special need of conservation as well as game species will benefit directly from these habitat management activities,” **said Department of Fish and Game Commissioner George Peterson**, who announced the commitment of funds for the grant program in Southwick today. “In addition, the habitat management projects will provide better recreational opportunities for the sporting community, birders, and other wildlife enthusiasts.”

“Though the Division is responsible for the conservation of wildlife and the habitat upon which it depends, the reality is that 80 percent of Massachusetts’ lands where wildlife lives is held in private ownership,” **said DFW Director Jack Buckley**. “It makes sense as an agency to apply science-based habitat management activities with committed private landowners, thereby protecting their investment in wildlife and habitat.”

In the inaugural year of the Habitat Management Grant Program, MassWildlife awarded funds for eighteen projects conducted by fourteen municipalities and organizations. Some of the successful projects include treatment of invasive species and improvement of field and young forest habitat by the Town of Wilbraham at their Thayer Brook and Twelve Mile Brook Conservation Areas; creation of grassland habitat at Franklin Land Trust’s Crowningshield Farm in Heath; and prescribed burning being conducted by The Nature Conservancy on its Katama Plains Conservation area in Edgartown to help maintain regionally significant sandplain grassland habitats. Grant applications will be available in early October and will be available [here](#).

“The Habitat Management Grant Program has done a great job of wildlife preservation for both at-risk species and those that are essential to sportsmen activities,” **said State Senator Anne Gobi (D-Spencer), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture**. “As chair of both the Environment Committee and the Sportsmen’s Caucus, I have advocated for exactly what this program aims to accomplish and I commend the Baker-Polito Administration for its success.”

“This grant program provides important, necessary funding in order to appropriately manage and improve habitats for wildlife species throughout the Commonwealth’s landscape,” **said State Representative Paul Schmid III (D-Westport), House Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.** “I am very appreciative of the Baker-Polito Administration’s commitment to land conservation and wildlife management.”

Following the grant announcement, MassWildlife foresters and ecologists led visitors on a site walk at the Southwick Wildlife Management Area, one of the premier grassland habitats in the state. Staff showed off the results of grassland habitat management activities, including mowing and tree clearing that benefit game birds such as the American woodcock and ruffed grouse, a vernal pool enhancement project for the rare Eastern Spadefoot toad, as well as declining songbirds like the Eastern towhee and brown thrasher.

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