

Massachusetts Endangered Species Act Celebrates 30 years

Over the past three decades biologists have made tremendous strides in applying science to the conservation of our most imperiled plants and animals.

Massachusetts is home to a wide variety of plants and animals. Some species have their most stable populations here, and some are relatively common. Other species are unique to Massachusetts and occur naturally in the state. There are 173 species of animals and 259 species of plants that are protected under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. These 432 native species are listed as Endangered (E), Threatened (T), or of Special Concern (SC) and are tracked in a database. These species are either at risk, or may become at risk, of extinction. Rarity in the state, population trend, and overall threat are the main criteria used to determine extinction risk. For a complete list visit Mass.gov list of endangered, threatened and special concern species.

Recognizing that in the face of a changing global climate and other threats, the next 30 years will bring many challenges. We must remain focused on the challenges but there are no easy fixes. One common theme is land protection and perhaps the most important conservation tool we have. At least 40% of the MESA-listed species require active habitat management to persist. Human alteration of the landscape has disrupted natural processes such as flooding and fire that maintain habitat conditions for our wildlife resources where we have made public investments to protect land. Invasive species, changes in water flow and water quality, and emerging wildlife diseases all increase vulnerability and require mitigation and management.

Massachusetts has a history of leadership among states when it comes to environmental protection. In 1818, 100 years before the passage of the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) Massachusetts passed the first law in the country providing protection for songbirds with a border act to follow in 1855 protecting nongame birds.

With Federal, State and Local governments working in concert perhaps we can make conservation a priority and protect not only these endangered, threatened and special concern species but all species.

A few of the 259 MESA listed plant species are Purple Hyssop, Mountain Alder, Purple Milkweed, American Bittersweet, Nodding Chickweed and Purple Clematis. The entire list is on the Mass.gov web site. Next time you plant consider planting a listed species which not only helps them thrive but helps insure the survival of other mammals, butterflies, bees, amphibians, fish, reptiles and a host of other species who are all part of the food chain. Conservation takes all of us working toward the same goal. If we want generations to come to enjoy the plants and animals we enjoy we need to make the next 30 years better than the last.

Source: Massachusetts Government Endangered Species List, Mass Wildlife (Division of Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife)