

10 September 2025

To the Honorable Governor Maura Healey,

I would like to thank you for the incredible opportunity I have had to serve the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as the Western District board member and Chairman of the Board for Masswildlife. The gravity of being the head trustee of all things wild for all the citizens of Massachusetts is something that I have taken with an immense sense of responsibility and respect for the people, resources and principles that guide their management. I am no longer able to serve in this capacity and am letting you know with this letter I am resigning from my volunteer position as appointed, effective immediately.

Throughout my tenure of 9 years as a board member of Masswildlife and about 20 years as a board member of the Massachusetts Outdoor Heritage Foundation much has been accomplished. The land managed by Masswildlife has grown from 208,000 acres to 240,000 acres with now over 100 Wildlife Management Areas across the state. Our programs to conserve and recover over 450 species of flora and fauna listed as threatened and endangered have grown. Our habitat management programs have also grown significantly with specific programs such as controlled burns that are restoring landscapes critical to our natural heritage. Many regulatory changes have taken place to allow for better management of our important resources that are harvested; and the "Hunters Share the Harvest" program is supporting our veterans and others in need. We are about to release our third State Wildlife Action Plan that will be a blueprint for our actions and those of our partners in conserving species of greatest conservation need and the habitats that support them.

Much more is needed to be done in the near future to fully support the Biodiversity Executive Order. Increased support and development of Masswildlife is key to this success. I want to emphasize that incremental increases in funding will be inadequate. A paradigm shift in funding and staffing is needed to enable the proper acquisition and stewardship of the lands protected via the plans for 2030 and beyond. Purchasing the land or conservation restrictions alone is not enough. Support for land agents, stewardship personnel, equipment, infrastructure, research and habitat management is essential for the success of this effort. The result will be positive for all the citizens and natural resources in the state. A new permanent funding mechanism to support this essential work is needed and should be shared by all of the citizens of the state. Currently, Masswildlife's funding is almost entirely from dedicated funds derived from hunters, anglers, trappers, and boaters, yet all citizens are beneficiaries of our natural heritage.

Masswildlife should be provided permanent funding for the reimbursement of licenses given to groups of special interest such as those over 70 or any other group to be designated by the state.

Currently only \$3,000 per year is provided for the total board member reimbursement for mileage and expenses. This is completely outdated and barely covers the cost of even one board member for a year. It is unreasonable that adequate reimbursement money is not available.

Continuing to develop essential relationships with regional non governmental conservation organizations, as well as corporate entities will be an important factor in finding new funding mechanisms that go beyond current dedicated funds. The record shows that Masswildlife works on behalf of all wildlife for all citizens, enhancing quality of life in the Commonwealth; our partnerships and support should reflect that. States such as Missouri and Arkansas recognized this decades ago and found mechanisms to provide secure funding; we should do the same.

Nevertheless, we must continue to exhibit progressive management of harvested species to benefit those who have demonstrated a vested interest in, and willingness to pay for conservation: the sportsmen and women of the Commonwealth. Embracing conservation organizations that promote catch and release fishing, for example, can and should be fostered to help in the education and promotion of responsible sportsmanship. Likewise,

collaboration with hunting organizations that promote fair chase will help to keep hunting a challenging and rewarding endeavor that fosters self-reliance and self-restraint.

The wonderful work of staff in recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3) of hunters is having a positive impact and is crucial for growth and diversification. Expanded reach and awareness into the underserved communities, particularly in urban areas, is an opportunity that should also be developed. Expanded programming for Social Justice communities needs to be advanced.

I want to recognize the great work I've been directly involved with in the Western District. Andrew Madden, Western District Manager, and his crew provide exceptional service to our community. Likewise the members of the Berkshire County League of Sportsmen are always working to protect and watch over our lands and waters as well as provide input to regulations managing these resources. I've been blessed to work with all of these folks and other members of the community to voice their concerns and to try and help to resolve issues in positive ways.

It is important for me to advocate for improvements to our district facilities and equipment. We are fortunate to have the incredible Field Headquarters facility. However our district facilities need more improvements than the incremental funding is providing. Things as simple as improved toilet facilities, roofs and equipment necessary to provide services in the field. Our staff deserve better. We are fortunate to have staff with skills that keep our aged equipment and facilities working; we can't expect to continue to have this expertise within our staffing in the future.

In my time as a board member I have met some of the most dedicated and passionate people working to support a common goal of protecting our natural resources for future generations. The board members I've worked with, both past and present, all volunteers, have put in well over 100 years of service to the state. Their passion and dedication is beyond reproach and certainly not understood by a majority of citizens. The Masswildlife staff are truly incredible. The quality of their work is and has been rightfully recognized throughout the nation.

I am very proud of what has been accomplished and look forward to the future positive impact all citizens of Massachusetts will have because of the work of Masswildlife. It has been my utmost honor and a significant achievement in my life to have contributed to improving the future of our environment. I am a "True Believer" of embracing the citizen trustee model, representing all peoples of the state in regards to oversight of Masswildlife. This model is and can be a major contributor to improving the health and well-being of our Commonwealth and the future of our natural resources.

Thank you for this amazing opportunity to serve the citizens of Massachusetts as a board member and as the Chairman of the Board of Directors for Masswildlife!

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Sears

Chairman of the Board of Directors, Masswildlife

cc via email:

Sen. Paul Mark,

Rep. Lee Davis,

Sec. Rebecca Tepper,

Com. Thomas O'Shea,

Dir. Mark Tisa