

Support Runs Deep for Land Conservation to Benefit Drinking Water

BY MATTHEW ZIEPER

In Massachusetts and across the country, voters have consistently demonstrated a willingness to support public investments in land conservation that will ensure clean, safe drinking water. Since 1996, The Trust for Public Land has been involved in the passage of more than 450 state and local conservation finance ballot measures nationwide, which together have generated more than \$35 billion in new funding for land conservation, in addition to helping pass more than twenty state legislative funding bills for land conservation.

According to public opinion survey research commissioned by The Trust for Public Land, the number one reason that voters supported ballot measures to fund land conservation was to safeguard drinking water supplies. Between 2001 and 2012, The Trust for Public Land commissioned nearly 300 public opinion surveys nationwide and found that 86 percent of respondents would be more likely to support a measure if it provided funding for drinking water protection.

Protecting land can reduce or eliminate the cost of filtering and treating drinking water, as detailed in The Trust for Public Land's 2013 report "The Return on Investment in Parks and Open Space in Massachusetts" (found at www.tpl.org/massachusetts).

In Massachusetts, cities and towns are taking the lead in protecting watershed lands, often working alongside nonprofit land trusts and conservation organizations. They often leverage state and federal grant funding, as well as private investments. Cities and towns use an array of funding sources, including ratepayer revenue, general municipal tax revenues, and Community Preservation Act funds.

Between 2005 and 2010, the state's Drinking Water Supply Protection program protected 2,200 acres at a total cost of \$35 million. Twenty-nine cities and towns received state grants totaling \$9.5 million and provided \$23.5 million of their own funding; additional federal and private funding completed the picture.

Here are some examples:

- In 2012, the city of Cambridge protected fifty-four acres of watershed land along the shores of its Hobbs Brook Reservoir in Lincoln using \$1.1 million in Community Preservation Act funds supplemented by a \$500,000 Drinking Water Supply Protection grant and \$300,000 from the Lincoln Rural Land Foundation. This land will provide passive recreation space and is near

Minuteman National Park. Cambridge also plans to work with the Department of Transportation to reduce stormwater runoff from nearby Route 2.

- Between 2005 and 2008, the city of Worcester protected 500 acres of watershed land in neighboring Holden and Rutland. Among the six projects completed was the protection of 209 acres of forest that stretches for two miles along Muschopauge Brook, a tributary of the Quinapoxet River that provides 200,000 people with drinking water in Worcester and surrounding towns. The \$2 million cost included \$1.1 million from Worcester revenue bonds backed by ratepayer funds, \$500,000 from the state's Drinking Water Supply Protection program, and \$395,000 from a Forest Legacy grant.
- In 2012, the town of Hingham approved a town meeting warrant article to spend \$755,000 of Community Preservation Act funds to preserve thirty-one acres along Accord Brook, to provide groundwater recharge for the town's drinking water supply.
- The city of Westfield has been awarded a \$250,000 Drinking Water Supply Protection Grant for the protection of ninety-three acres in Granville that was formerly an apple orchard and farm. The property will be remediated, including the cleanup of a farm dump, and will no longer be a threat to Westfield's water supply.

Many cities and towns in Massachusetts have been proactive in order to safeguard their precious drinking water by protecting critical watershed lands. Their actions have often been catalyzed by the Department of Environmental Protection's Drinking Water Supply Protection program. Environmental bond bills approved by the Legislature in 2002 and 2008 have provided funding for this program, and the administration's leadership has sustained its efforts. Protecting land that safeguards drinking water makes good economic sense and is one thing that voters of all stripes care deeply about. 🌱



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