

MACC AEC 2023 Award Write Ups

2023 Outstanding Public Service Award – Public Lands Preservation Act (PLPA)

This year, MACC is honoring three individuals for their outstanding public service: Representative Ruth B. Balsler, Senator Jamie Eldridge, and Philip Saunders for their efforts to pass Public Lands Preservation Act (PLPA) into law. We recognize this effort has taken more than 24 years of persistent effort, and sadly, Philip Saunders was not able to see the success of his advocacy efforts. We are happy to present his award to his family.

The benefits of protecting open space are numerous– from helping fight climate change, minimizing impacts of flooding from severe storms, protecting groundwater and surface water quality, supporting wildlife biodiversity and habitat, and improving the quality of life for people accessing those open spaces. The protection of open space is critical to protecting wetlands and mitigating impacts from climate change. The passage of PLPA into law is a huge victory that will provide consistency, transparency, and enforceable regulations to ensure open space is preserved for future generations.

MACC also thanks the many environmental advocates, conservation commissioners, land trusts, members of the PLPA conference committee, House and Senate leadership, experts at the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and Governor Baker for signing the bill into law. There were many individuals contributing to passage of the PLPA, but there were three primary leaders in this effort; Ruth Balsler, Jamie Eldridge and Phil Saunders.



Representative Ruth B. Balsler

2023 Outstanding Public Service Award – Public Lands Preservation Act (PLPA)

Massachusetts State Representative Ruth Balsler is well deserving of MACC's Outstanding Public Service Award because of her instrumental role in the passage of the landmark environmental bill known as the Public Lands Preservation Act. Representative Balsler introduced PLPA bills over a period of 24 years. How many of us can say we have been passionate and persuasive about one topic for 24 years, without giving up? Representative Balsler was a calm, focused voice guiding PLPA through the twists and turns of legislative actions. She was instrumental in moving PLPA through the House early in the 2021-2022 legislative session and was an important voice in the Conference Committee in 2022.

State Representative Ruth Balser received her bachelor's degree from the University of Rochester and her PhD from New York University. She was a practicing clinical psychologist prior to becoming a legislator in 1999 and was the first psychologist to ever serve in the Massachusetts legislature.

In 2022, Representative Balser was elected for the thirteenth time by the people of the 12th Middlesex District, which includes parts of Newton and Brookline, to serve as their State Representative. Rep. Balser learned early in her legislative career that the Massachusetts Constitution guarantees Massachusetts residents the right to clean air, clean water and protected open space. But that constitutional right could be usurped by a two-thirds vote of the legislature to remove that protection from a specific parcel of open space designated for some other purpose. Rep Balser has been filing evolving versions of the Public Lands Preservation Act (PLPA) legislation since 2000 and has been joined on the Senate side by Senator Jamie Eldridge (D, Acton) for much of that time.

While the Joint Committee on the Environment always approved the PLPA, the bill often did not survive the legislative subcommittee process. Representative Balser told her local newspaper in November 2022: "At last, working with a large, influential coalition of environmental groups, the PLPA won legislative approval." Representative Balser stated that she worked for 24-years on the PLPA legislation because she loves the outdoors and cherishes protected land, saying: "Ensuring that the intent of Article 97 of the state constitution is achieved has been worth the time and effort."



Senator James B. Eldridge

2023 Outstanding Public Service Award – Public Lands Preservation Act (PLPA)

Senator James B. (Jamie) Eldridge is well deserving of MACC's Outstanding Public Service Award for his dedicated, organized, and calm focus working on PLPA and open space protections for many years. Senator Eldridge, like Representative Balser, helped MACC and other environmental coalition partners traverse the twists and turns of legislative actions. Senator Eldridge has been a lead sponsor of PLPA for over a decade, with roots going back to Bob Durand and Pamela Resor.

Senator Eldridge notes on his Facebook page "The law ensures there is no net loss of conservation land in communities and it strengthens Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution. It is the most significant land protection legislation in a generation, at a time when development pressures are increasing." In addition, Senator Eldridge notes "the PLPA is one of the proudest accomplishments in my legislative career!"

Senator Eldridge is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University and Boston College Law School, where he served as President of the Public Interest Law Foundation (PILF) for two years. Prior to his election as State Representative, Jamie worked as a public interest attorney with Merrimack Valley Legal Services in Lowell,

a non-profit organization that provides free legal services to the poor and the elderly. As a public interest lawyer, he also worked to help low-income residents with issues of housing, Social Security, disability, and unemployment.

Jamie Eldridge has served the Middlesex and Worcester district since January 2009. Previously, Senator Eldridge served as State Representative for the 37th Middlesex district, after being elected the only Clean Elections candidate to public office in Massachusetts history in November 2002. Senator Eldridge has focused his energies on Beacon Hill on increasing investments in public education and transportation, combating climate change, making healthcare a right, stimulating the economy, advocating for affordable housing, reforming our criminal justice system, advancing campaign and ethics reform, protecting the environment, supporting immigrants, making government more transparent and updating our election and campaign finance laws. He lives in Acton, his hometown.



Philip Saunders, Jr. (1935 – 2022)

2023 Outstanding Public Service Award – Public Lands Preservation Act (PLPA)

Many of us in the PLPA environmental coalition believed that Philip Saunders' middle name was actually "PLPA", and others knew Phil as the "Godfather of the PLPA". Phil Saunders was a constant, relentless, ever-present advocate working to help pass PLPA during the past 20 years. Without Phil, Representative Ruth Balsler, or Senator Jamie Eldridge, we don't think PLPA would have passed into law. Unfortunately, Phil Saunders passed away in the spring of 2022 and he was not able to see the bill be signed into law. MACC is pleased to be able to recognize Phil Saunders' hard work as an advocate for public open space by providing this award to his daughter, Elizabeth Saunders, who picked up her father's advocacy efforts in 2022 and worked tirelessly to help pass PLPA.

More than 20 years ago, Philip Saunders watched the destruction of conservation land near his home in Weston. In the 1990s, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) petitioned to create a covered water tank in a wooded area which Phil loved. The construction resulted in a significant loss of a thriving ecosystem, and although some land was provided to address the "No Net Loss" policy, the replacement land was never the thriving wooded area Phil used to explore with his family.

Phil began researching public lands and learned that although there are approximately 1,200,000 acres nominally protected in perpetuity under [Article 97](#) of the Commonwealth Constitution, the public land protections could be removed by a two-thirds vote of each branch of the legislature. This was happening more frequently, and Phil learned about PLPA at the state house, and he began working to strengthen

Article 97 land protections. Phil brought together a coalition of organizations, municipal officials, conservation commissions, and advocates to work tirelessly to pass the PLPA.

Over the past 20 years, Phil Saunders became a common sight at the State House. During this time, the PLPA bills varied from a few pages in length, to more than 21 pages in length. In the 201-2022 legislative session, the bill was again shortened to its essence, and after several twists, turns, and many support letters and phone calls from many organizations, with Phil Saunders calling and reminding all of us to write yet another letter or call some other legislators. With his help, more than 100 supporting organizations, municipal officials, land trusts, and conservation commissions worked together to support PLPA. We are sorry Phil Saunders could not see the fruits of his labor, but we happy to have known him and his tireless advocacy to make sure public lands are conserved for our current, and future generations.

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Daniel Gilmore
2023 Outstanding Public Service Award – MassDEP

Nancy Lin & Lisa Rhodes, of MassDEP’s Wetlands Program in Boston, nominated Dan Gilmore for the MACC Outstanding Public Service Award. They told us, “When one thinks of quiet, thoughtful, and effective leadership within MassDEP’s (DEP) Wetlands Program, Daniel Gilmore is a name that stands out. Although he is less well known to some outside of DEP, Dan has been instrumental in the development of major regulations, policies, and guidance on wetlands issues throughout his 33+years. He is well known among the wetlands staff as an amazing resource because he always takes the extra time to provide valuable practical input on an issue that reflects not only wetland protection but also, the considerations of the regulations from the applicants’ *and* conservation commissions’ perspective.”

Currently, Dan is the Southeast Regional Office Wetlands Section Chief. In his many responsibilities through the years, Dan has served as the regional expert on the Rivers Protection Act, Amendments to the WPA, worked tirelessly on the Lead Shot Initiative to remove lead from polluting our waters, was the regional Vernal Pool point of contact, served as DEP’s interagency representative using his wildlife biology expertise on the Mass Wildlife led Barrier Beach Management team to protect rare shorebird species habitat (including piping plovers), and worked on the teams that developed many valuable resources to environmental management in Massachusetts, including the Coastal Mouth of River maps, the aquaculture permitting guide with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the Bordering Vegetated Wetlands delineation handbook, the Diadromous Fisheries Stream Management policy, and much more. Dan is described as MassDEP’s in-house human encyclopedia of the Wetlands Protection Act,

as he remembers every single policy, regulation, guidance, or historic landmarks/events. His excellent knowledge, experience, helpfulness, and dry sense of humor enriched those who know him. He is one of the people that built a strong wetlands protection program at MassDEP. Former Wetlands Director Lealdon Langley recalled an enforcement case he worked alongside Dan, “..it went on so long that we could tell the age of the case by how old Dan’s son was because he was born right when the case started. His son’s age got to the double digits before it was resolved! I called him Dan-O as in Hawaii’ Five O.”

Prior to DEP, Dan was the Director of the Department of Natural Resources in the Town of Wareham. Dan will be retiring from state service in 2023, and when asked to reflect on what he was most proud of in his career he said it wasn’t just one thing, they were the small things that helped others navigate through the wetlands’ regulations that gave him satisfaction. He has been generous with his time to conservation commissions, wetlands staff, and the small homeowners alike. He smiles broadly when he describes how the piping plover populations have increased substantially in the last few decades due to some of his efforts. In the long run, it may be the small things that matter the most...like the piping plovers. Dan Gilmore will be sorely missed at MassDEP.

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Jeffrey Livingstone, PhD
Conservation Commissioner of the Year Award 2023 – Franklin Conservation Commission

The Franklin Conservation Commission and Department Conservation Agent, Breeka Li Goodlander, nominated Jeff Livingstone for MACC’s Conservation Commissioner of the Year Award, stating, “Commissioner Livingstone has selflessly served on the Franklin Conservation Commission for over 13 years – and still proudly hangs his original Conservation Commission appointment letter on his office wall. Over my time spent with the Franklin Conservation Commission, it has become apparent that Commissioner Livingstone is a cornerstone, of the FCC. He has been described as having “institutional knowledge”, not just of the Wetlands Protection Act, but more importantly of the people in the community. He has proven himself time and time again to be fair, pragmatic, and committed to providing a service not just to the residents of Franklin, but to its natural resources. He is as much of an advocate for climate resiliency, wetland restoration, and natural resource protection as he is for the residents he serves.”

Jeff Livingstone has made a career in the biochemistry and IT world, but he has a passion for wetlands, conservation commissions, and the environment. He has more than 25 years of experience leading pharmaceutical and IT businesses and brings a wide variety of skills to MACC, including executive

management, finance, strategy, fund-raising, and organizational strategy. He has a technical background in the life sciences and holds a PhD in Biochemistry. Dr. Livingstone has been heavily involved with Conservation Commission work for 11 years and was the chair of the Franklin Conservation Commission for five years. He participated in the Franklin Open Space Plan, assisted with the plan development for the Del Carte Recreation and Conservation Area, and is on the Community Preservation Committee. In his spare time when not working or hiking, Jeff participates in the Franklin Keystone Cooperative, which focuses on preservation of native forests and woodland. In conjunction with serving as past Chair of the Franklin Conservation Commission, Commissioner Livingstone continues to be a leader in advocacy for community outreach and has unwavering devotion to building the relationship between the Town, its people, and the Conservation Commission. Commissioner Livingstone is truly the epitome of a dedicated and involved community volunteer.

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E. Heidi Ricci

2023 Outstanding Environmental Leadership Award

MACC’s Past President, Lana Seguin-Spillman, nominated Heidi Ricci for MACC’s Outstanding Environmental Leadership Award; she said, "Heidi is proactive in initiating and implementing a great variety of important environmental efforts at the state level, including those related to key environmental legislation. She has abounding background knowledge and experience, skillfully interacts with numerous key environmental organizations, the legislature, and the public. Heidi consistently does the necessary research, investigates options and feasibility, and puts forth extra effort to achieve success."

Heidi Ricci is the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Mass Audubon, with decades of experience in environmental policy and community engagement. She has expertise in land use policy; wetlands regulation and restoration; and open space protection. Heidi has been a member of MACC’s Board of Directors for 29 years, serving terms as President and as V.P. for Advocacy.

In her position at Mass Audubon, Heidi has co-authored many publications including *Losing Ground: Nature’s Value in a Changing Climate*, highlighting the role of land in responding to the twin crises of climate and biodiversity. This sixth in a series report on changes to land use patterns in Massachusetts informs conservationists and decision makers with findings that have become the data of record across the state. She has also developed a bylaw review tool and other resources that assist communities with sustainable development and nature-based climate resiliency. She is currently working on harmonizing

clean energy siting with preserving the important values of natural and working lands, and on accelerating the pace of wetlands restoration. Ms. Ricci holds a B.S. degree in Biology from Tufts and an M.S. degree from Antioch University New England. She serves on the Nashua River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council and on the Boards of the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative, Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, and the Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, and is a former Conservation Commissioner. She has received several awards including an **Environmental Merit Award** from EPA Region I and a Mass Rivers Alliance **River Advocate Award**.

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**Bruce Jaffe and the City of Everett, Madeline English School Science Club
Youth Environmental Service Award**

Adrienne Lennon and Carolyn Gorss, of BSC Group’s Ecological Service nominated the City of Everett’s Madeline English School Science Club for the MACC Youth Environmental Service Award, for their work on the **Rivergreen Park** and Malden River Wetland & Habitat Enhancements Project in 2022. The work completed by the Science Club symbolizes the start of environmental collaboration needed across the generations and across many organizations.

Rivergreen Park is a former GE industrial site and filled tideland. Once a thriving saltmarsh, it had been cut off from the ocean by dams, polluted, filled, and overtaken with invasive species. The conditions hosted no native plants and limited animal communities. The construction and restoration of **Rivergreen Park** was meant to impart Nature-based Solutions to jumpstart the ecological processes needed to establish a community of plants, insects, birds, animals, fungi and microbes. The intention was to build a novel ecosystem by layering in pioneering natives and soil builders to lay a foundation for ecological and climate resilience in the urban wild.

The first step in the **Rivergreen Park** restoration project was cleanup, which required working hard to peel back the generations of neglect and dumping that compromised the river and wetlands. More than 90 trees and specialty shrubs were planted covering more than a quarter acre of the four-acre site. Meanwhile, the larger site was made ready to receive restoration planting.

Habitat features have been systematically added, including bird boxes, bat boxes, bee boxes, snags, thickets, and sand banks as temporary housing while the urban forest (and public understanding) mature. Recently, groups removed invasive species from the newly restored meadow and wetland forest replication areas and constructed a new wetland replication. The work continues to restore habitat and function of **Rivergreen Park**.

MACC would like to recognize the vision of science teacher, Bruce Jaffee, and the initiative of the Science Club students at the Madeline English School who are leading the way to a climate resilient future. We also want to recognize the following groups and individuals who collaborated on this project:

- the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA),
- Encore Resorts,
- BSC Group,
- Friends of the Malden River,
- the Everett Conservation Agent, Tom Philbin, and Planner, Katherine Jenkins-Sullivan,
- the Everett Department of Public Works (DPW) staff,
- the Mayor's Youth Employment Interns and National Honor Society volunteer,
- and of course, the Madeline English Science Club Students and Science School teacher, Bruce Jaffe.

Later this year, whether on Earth Day, or another day, MACC will help plant trees, remove invasive species, or provide labor for another environmental project coordinated by the Everett Science Club.