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# Conservation Commissions and Staff

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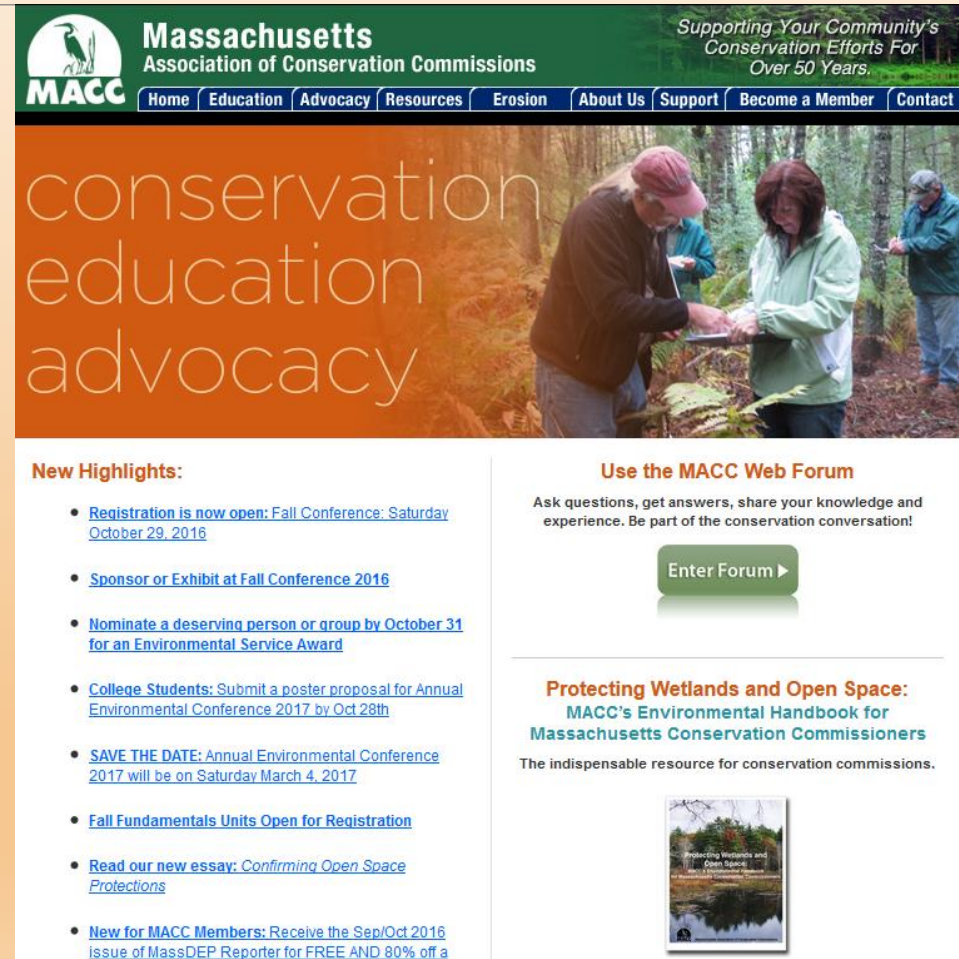
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# Protecting Massachusetts Wetlands and Open Space at the Local Level



# Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions

MACC protects  
Massachusetts natural  
resources through  
education, advocacy, and  
support of conservation  
commissions



The screenshot shows the MACC website with a green header. The header includes the MACC logo (a bird in a circle) and the text "Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions". To the right of the logo is the tagline "Supporting Your Community's Conservation Efforts For Over 50 Years." Below the header is a navigation bar with links: Home, Education, Advocacy, Resources, Erosion, About Us, Support, Become a Member, and Contact. The main content area has a large orange banner with the text "conservation education advocacy" and a photo of people in a forest. Below the banner is a "New Highlights:" section with a list of links. To the right is a "Use the MACC Web Forum" section with a button "Enter Forum ►". Below that is a section titled "Protecting Wetlands and Open Space: MACC's Environmental Handbook for Massachusetts Conservation Commissioners" with a small image of the handbook cover.

**Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions**  
Supporting Your Community's Conservation Efforts For Over 50 Years.

Home Education Advocacy Resources Erosion About Us Support Become a Member Contact

conservation education advocacy

**New Highlights:**

- [Registration is now open: Fall Conference: Saturday October 29, 2016](#)
- [Sponsor or Exhibit at Fall Conference 2016](#)
- [Nominate a deserving person or group by October 31 for an Environmental Service Award](#)
- [College Students: Submit a poster proposal for Annual Environmental Conference 2017 by Oct 28th](#)
- [SAVE THE DATE: Annual Environmental Conference 2017 will be on Saturday March 4, 2017](#)
- [Fall Fundamentals Units Open for Registration](#)
- [Read our new essay: Confirming Open Space Protections](#)
- [New for MACC Members: Receive the Sep/Oct 2016 issue of MassDEP Reporter for FREE AND 80% off a](#)

**Use the MACC Web Forum**  
Ask questions, get answers, share your knowledge and experience. Be part of the conservation conversation!

Enter Forum ►

**Protecting Wetlands and Open Space:**  
**MACC's Environmental Handbook for Massachusetts Conservation Commissioners**  
The indispensable resource for conservation commissions.



# Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions

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Non-profit, established in 1961, incorporated in 1978

## Membership Organization

- Conservation Commissions pay annual dues and are the voting members
- Corporate, individual, and non-profit organization members

## Funding

- Membership Dues
- Earned Income
- Grants and Donations

## Board and Staff

- 3 full-time; 1 part-time staff
- 21 person Board of Directors; majority current or former conservation commissioners



# MACC Programs

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## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Annual Environmental Conference

Fall Conference

Fundamentals for MA Conservation  
Commissioners certificate training  
program

Workshops throughout the year





# MACC Programs

## SUPPORT

Helpline

*Protecting Wetlands and Open Space: MACC's Environmental Handbook for Massachusetts Conservation Commissioners*

*Massachusetts Runoff, Erosion & Sediment Control Field Guide*

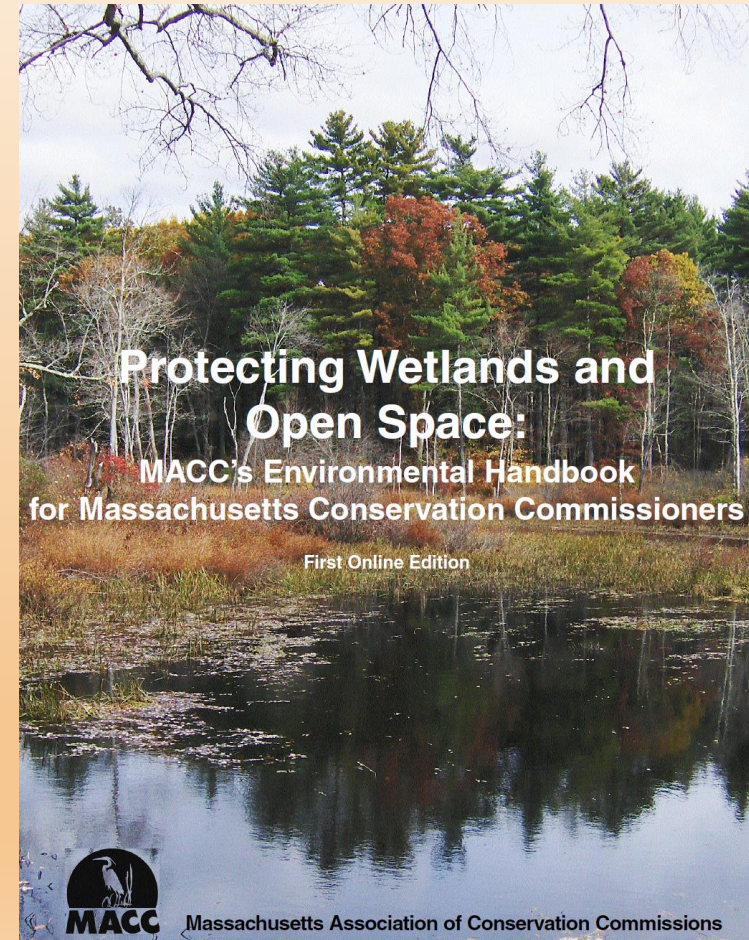
Conservation Quarterly

Bi-monthly eMACC

MACC Web Forum

Electronic Resources Library

MACC Environmental Service Awards



# MACC Programs

## ADVOCACY

Sound and protective science-based laws and regulations

Legislative and regulatory drafting, review, and comments

The voice for wetlands protection and conservation commissions on government advisory committees and in meetings with elected and appointed officials





# Why Wetlands?

Protecting public and private water supplies

Protecting ground water supply

Flood control

Storm damage protection

Prevention of pollution

Protection of land containing shellfish

Protection of fisheries

Protection of wildlife habitat

Wetlands are water filters. They trap pollutants in their soils, transform dissolved nitrogen into nitrogen gas, and break down solids and neutralize harmful bacteria



At the time of European settlement in the early 1600s, the area that was to become the conterminous United States had approximately 221 million acres of wetlands. About 103 million acres remained in the mid-1980s





# Why Wetlands?

Wetlands provide livelihoods from fishing, eco-tourism, farming, and more

Recreation

Aesthetics

Economics

Carbon Capture and Control

Salt water wetlands absorb and sequester more carbon than an equivalent area of forest land



With a changing climate and rising sea levels, the ability of wetlands to soak up carbon and storm water and buffer us from floods is especially significant



# Why Open Space?

- Protection of soil and water resources
- Flood control & storm damage protection
- Prevention of pollution
- Wildlife habitat
- Recreation
- Aesthetics
- Economics
- Public Health
- Carbon Capture and Control

Massachusetts forests absorb and sequester more than ten percent of the state's carbon emissions annually. Only 30% of MA forest land is protected from development



Parks and conservation lands make cities and towns desirable places to live and raise a family





# Why Conservation Commissions?

MA Conservation Commission Act (1957)

Cities and towns may establish a conservation commission

Each MA municipality has a conservation commission

Promote and develop natural resources and protect watershed resources

Conservation and passive recreation plans

Many conservation commissions manage municipal conservation and open space land



Conservation commissions are the local environmental agencies in Massachusetts - responsible for protecting the land, water, and biological resources of their communities



# Why Conservation Commissions?

## MA Wetlands Protection Act

Protects wetlands from destruction and alteration

Work in or near a wetland requires a permit (order of conditions)

Conservation commissions issue the permits and administer and enforce the WPA in their city/town

MA DEP writes the WPA regulations and policies. It reviews and can modify or reverse conservation commission decisions made under the WPA



Conservation commissions administer the state Wetlands Protection Act in their communities: reviewing applications, issuing permits, and making sure wetlands are not degraded or destroyed





# Why Conservation Commissions?

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More than 190 cities and towns in MA have adopted their own wetland ordinances/bylaws that are more protective (stricter) than the state WPA

Conservation commissions administer and enforce those local wetland laws in their cities/towns

Many cities and towns in MA have adopted storm water ordinances/bylaws

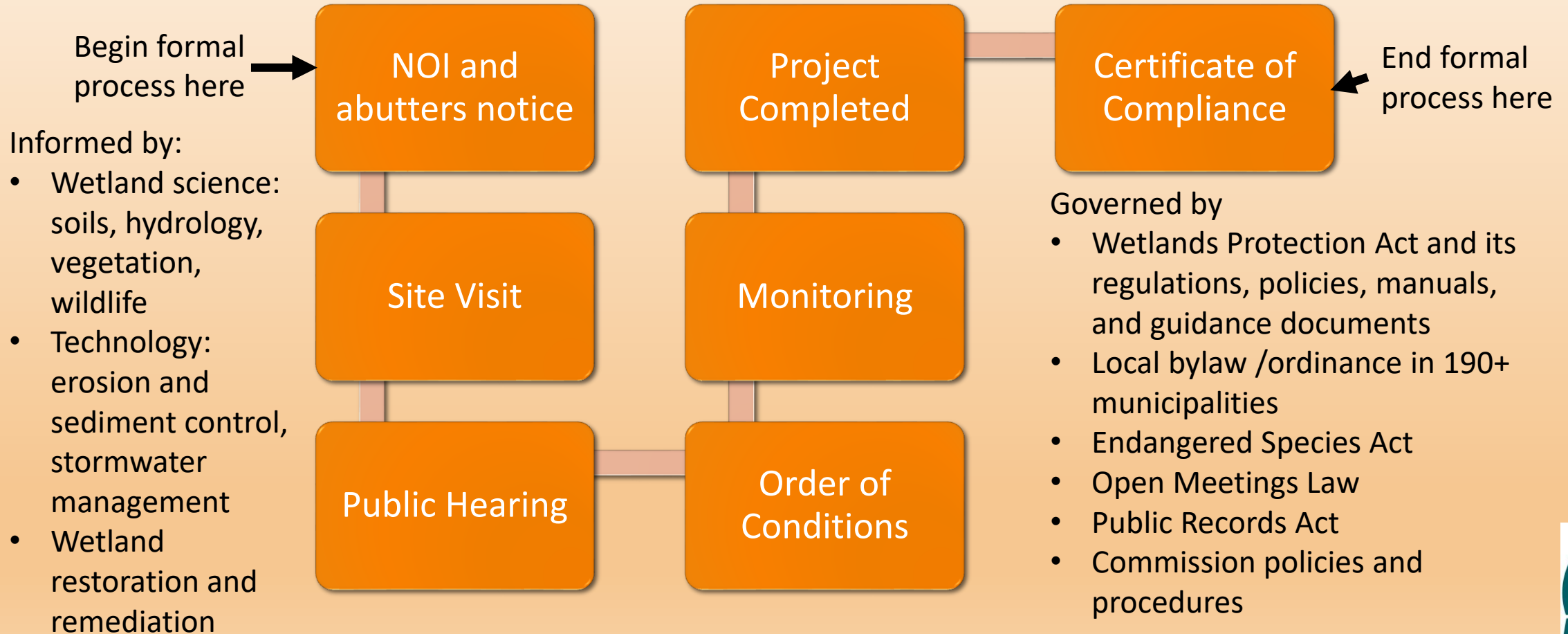
In some of those municipalities, the conservation commission administers and enforces those laws

Cities and towns that have adopted the Community Preservation Act must create a CPA Committee to make recommendations on spending CPA funds for housing, historic preservation, and parks and other open space

Conservation commissions have a seat on the CPA committee in their city/town



# Wetlands Protection Act Ideal Process



# Who is a Conservation Commissioner?

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Volunteers who work long hours to achieve community conservation goals

Three to seven members (number set by town meeting or city council in law), sometimes plus associates who help but do not vote

Terms are three years in length, can be reappointed numerous times

There are approx. 2,300 conservation commissioners statewide (10% annual turnover)

Appointed by their board of selectmen, town manager, or mayor (one town has an elected commission based on special legislation)

State law sets no age, citizenship, residency, knowledge, or experience requirements. There may be local requirements. Some commissioners have prior knowledge or experience in open space and wetlands protection. Others do not have such knowledge or experience before joining their commission. Most have little or no prior experience as environmental regulators



# Staffing the Conservation Commission

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More than 100 MA municipalities have permanent full-time employees to work with the conservation commission in carrying out its responsibilities

Some municipalities have more than one staff dedicated to that role

Other municipalities employ part-time staff for the function. More than 50% of conservation commissions have some level of staffing

In some communities, a staff person might be shared between conservation and another part of municipal government

Most commission staff have a title of conservation agent, conservation administrator, or similar title. They are municipal employees and generally are hired by and report through their municipality's employment system





# The Work of a Conservation Agent

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Provides support, coordination, and professional management for the Conservation Commission

Uses professional expertise, critical thinking and interpersonal skills to accomplish varied functions that range in nature from routine to complex and require considerable judgment and initiative in determining courses of action not clearly defined by precedent, statute or established guidelines.

Works under the general direction of the Chair of the Conservation Commission [or of the town manager/administrator and the policy direction of the Conservation Commission] and in accordance with applicable laws and regulations

Provides professional supervision for the Commission's work and projects. Supervises all other Commission staff. Occasionally supervises consultants hired by the Commission, and volunteers working on conservation land or Commission projects. Serves as advisor/liaison to other boards/departments

Has considerable independence and responsibility. Works with minimal supervision on a weekly basis.



# The Work of a Conservation Agent

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Some work is performed under typical office conditions. Some work is performed in the field, in thick woods, and in wet areas. There can be exposure to various weather conditions, including heat, high wind, rain and deep snow. There may be exposure to potential health hazards, such as lyme disease and west nile virus, plant irritants such as poison ivy, and the hazards associated with site work and construction such as noise and heavy equipment.

Work schedule is largely during business hours, but also includes regular evening meetings, some early morning, evening, and weekend field work and site visits.

There usually will be a mix of wetlands protection work, using expertise to administer the Wetlands Protection Act and local wetland and storm water requirements, and open space management. The agent may be the liaison with staff of other municipal boards and commissions, do public outreach, and interact with the public, developers, homeowners, consultants, and others who will appear before the commission and who may request an Order of Conditions



# Qualifications for Conservation Agent

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Vary widely from municipality to municipality

Most look for:

At least a Bachelor's degree in environmental science or related field

Some experience in wetlands protection, land conservation, environmental management, planning, environmental regulation, or a related field

Understand the importance of the work

Driver's license

Ability to work in office and in the field

Good communications skills

Well organized



# Conservation Agent: Great Job

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For a person who:

Cares about wetlands

Cares about open space

Likes being outside and also working inside

Is comfortable working with the public and with a volunteer municipal commission

Is comfortable working with science, technology, law, regulations, and policies

Likes to learn

Is organized, flexible, and creative

Wants to act locally and make a big positive difference for a community







You can see these in the woods when doing the job!

Enjoy