

# Conservation commissioners to gather for state-wide conference

*Gilda Geist*

Published February 26, 2025 at 10:47 AM EST

This Saturday is the annual conference of the [Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions](#).

Amy Ball, president of the association, says this is one of the largest environmental conferences of its kind in New England.

CAI's Gilda Geist spoke with her recently to learn more about the conference, and how the current presidential administration could impact the work of conservation commissions in Massachusetts.

**Gilda Geist** So, just for some background, what is the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions? What role does this organization play in conservation and conservation law and enforcement here in Massachusetts?

**Amy Ball** Each of the Massachusetts municipalities has a conservation commission. This is a local board that's typically made up of five to seven volunteers whose job it is to implement the [Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act](#), which is a state law, as well as their own bylaws or ordinances, and to also serve as stewards of their municipal conservation lands.

The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, or MACC, is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1961. In terms of our role in conservation, we are actually here to provide environmental education and training assistance to help conservation commissions better do their jobs, and to help advocate for the state's environmental resource protection. MACC does not serve in a regulatory capacity or enforcement role, but instead works cooperatively with conservation commissions to help educate these volunteer commissioners. We also coordinate with the state agency, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, who is responsible for the Wetlands Protection Act.

**GG** What conversations are you folks at MACC having about how the Donald Trump presidency will impact the work of conservation commissions here in Massachusetts, and in particular here in our region?

**AB** First thing I need to point out is that MACC is a nonpartisan organization. We've been through many administrations that are friendlier or less friendly to environmental protection, but I think there are a lot of us in the conservation circles here in Massachusetts who are increasingly anxious. I think one of the bigger concerns right now is for the potential impacts to federal funding that support some of our environmental initiatives at the state and local levels, particularly for things like restoration projects that are often supported through federal grant funding. It's these really important projects that have an enormous positive effect on the environmental system. They help to restore the wetlands and bolster the ability of our natural resources to combat the effects of climate change. So the possibility for potentially losing those opportunities is really disappointing. Wetlands and wetland resource areas serve several important roles in terms of providing flood control and damage prevention, as well as protection of things like our water supplies, our

groundwater and our drinking water supplies, and for things like fisheries and shellfish and wildlife habitat. They're also critically important for climate resiliency because of their ability to store carbon.

**GG** So the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions is having its annual conference on March 1. What are the priorities this year in terms of what you guys will be talking about and planning with your colleagues? What do you hope gets accomplished?

**AB** Yeah, we're really excited about our conference. This is the largest environmental conference of its kind in New England. This year we'll have probably 30 workshops covering a huge diversity of topics from things like restoration and habitat protection, coastal and climate resilience, and then to discussing some of the more nuts and bolts of implementing the Wetlands Protection Act, which is a state law, but it's implemented at the local level by conservation commissioners. It's intended to provide education as well as networking opportunities for conservation commissions, as well as other conservation professionals like engineers, land surveyors, land stewards and students who are just thinking about getting into in the environmental fields. But it's a huge conference and we look forward to it every year. We're always striving to cover topics that are on the forefront, as well as making sure we do cover those basics. Conservation appointments at the local level are usually about three years and they have staggered terms. So there's always turnover and new volunteer commissioners who want to learn more. We educate close to 2,000 folks each year.

Anyone can attend the MACC Conference, as long as they [register](#). Registration is open until Thursday at 12PM.