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NATIONAL STATE PARK DIRECTORS HONOR MAPLE-SUGARING PROGRAM IN DCR'S BLACKSTONE RIVER AND CANAL HERITAGE STATE PARK

The National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD) has presented a President's Award to the Blackstone Valley Maple Sugaring Association of Massachusetts, which runs innovative, hands-on programs in the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR's) Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park in Uxbridge. For eight years, the association has offered Maple Sugar Days on spring weekends at the park, teaching children and adults about the maple sugaring process.

"As we try to disconnect children from television and computers, the Blackstone Valley Maple Sugaring Association does a wonderful job reconnecting them and their parents to nature and the great outdoors," said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "We applaud the Association and the work it does, and we are proud to partner with them in our park."

Park visitors who participate in the Association's program learn they don't need fancy equipment to collect sap and make syrup (milk jugs make great sap buckets, for example), and they are encouraged to try maple sugaring at home. One inspired visitor who did just that reported, "Now my children check their sap buckets before they check their emails!"

"We engage visitors in the entire process, from identifying and tapping a sugar maple to eating maple sugar treats," said Valerie Paul, founder and president of the Maple Sugaring Association. "We want to connect kids to nature, and particularly to this New England tradition, this DCR park, and the rich history of the Blackstone Valley Corridor."

The NASPD awards recognize groups and individuals nationwide who have made an extraordinary contribution to state parks at a local, regional, or national level, and for outstanding efforts in original research and presentation of state park history.

"We are thrilled to honor people who have given their time and talents to better our nation's state park system through their actions in their home states," said Joe Elton, president of NASPD. "They represent many other individuals, friends, and partners who we, as park

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directors and citizens of our states, rely upon to help preserve and enhance our state park treasures across the nation.”

The National Association of State Parks Directors is composed of park directors from all 50 states. NASPD meets annually in September to share ideas about operations, budgets, and other issues. This year’s meeting focused on balancing budget challenges with meeting operational needs and visitor expectations.

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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, dams, and parkways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency’s mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit www.mass.gov/dcr. Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.