

Framing Questions for the Forest Futures Technical Steering Committee

The forests of Massachusetts, covering over 60 percent of the state, are an enormously valuable public resource, providing a wide range of benefits to the state's citizens. These include a range of ecosystem services, such as supporting biodiversity, providing clean water, soil formation, flood control, nutrient cycling and carbon sequestration; wood products including timber and fuelwood; opportunities for outdoor recreation, spiritual and aesthetic experiences. Our forests and woodlands define the character of Massachusetts. Yet we have entered at time when the capacity of the state's forests to continue providing these public benefits faces some significant threats – unsustainable management practices, loss of forest land to urban and suburban development, impacts of invasive species on biodiversity, changes in forest habitat and function due to climate change, and demands for increased harvesting of biomass for renewable energy production.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), which manages 285,000 acres of land in state forests, 110,000 acres of water supply lands, and 20,000 acres of urban park land, has launched the Forest Futures initiative to create a renewed vision for Massachusetts forests; describe the role of DCR in advancing that vision; and recommend a set of strategies and guidelines for carrying out DCR's role. Development of such a stewardship vision raises a wide array of scientific, economic and public policy issues that are best addressed through a process that first articulates a long-term vision for the forests of Massachusetts and then defines the role of DCR lands within this vision. Only in that context will it be possible to understand whether DCR's planning and implementation approaches are designed to effectively promote the vision. With this in mind, the Technical Steering Committee proposes to frame its deliberations and recommendations around the following seven issues.

1. **Vision for Massachusetts Forests:** What is the desired long-term condition and areal extent of Massachusetts forests? What types of ecosystem services should these forests provide and what are the desired levels of these services?
2. **Role of DCR Forests in Advancing the Vision:** Do DCR forests possess certain attributes that suggest a greater management emphasis on some ecosystem services rather than others? If so, which ones should be emphasized?
3. **Strategies, Policies, and Guidelines for DCR Forest Management:** Do current DCR land management and stewardship policies strongly advance the vision? If not, what changes does DCR need to make to successfully implement the vision?
4. **DCR Public Process:** As DCR implements the vision, are changes needed in how it manages consultations with and outreach to the public?
5. **Implications for DCR Oversight of Private Forest Lands:** What actions should the DCR Commissioner, in his/her role as State Forester, be taking to ensure a fully-integrated vision for all the forested lands in the state?

6. **Legislative Mandates:** Is the vision for managing DCR lands consistent with the agency's legislative mandates? If not, what kinds of legislative, organizational, or regulatory changes will be required for implementation of the vision?
7. **Resources and Timing:** Broadly speaking, does DCR have the resources needed to implement the vision? If not, what new resources will be required? What is a reasonable time frame for DCR to make substantial progress in implementing the vision?

The Technical Steering Committee anticipates that its final report and recommendations will address each of these questions, providing a vision, principles and guidance designed to inform DCR's future land management policies for forest lands.

Annex 1

Possible Framework Discussion Issues

As the TSC begins to work through the framing questions, it will be necessary to address the issues at a greater level of detail. This annex is provided as a starting point for these discussions, outlining possible issues that the committee may want to consider as it works through each of the framework questions.

1. **Vision for Massachusetts Forests:** What is the desired long-term condition and areal extent of Massachusetts forests? What types of ecosystem services should these forests provide and what are the desired levels of these services?
 - a. What are the primary threats to the capacity of the state's forests to provide these public benefits?
 - b. What is the right amount of forest land to protect for future generations? What do we mean by 'protect'?
 - c. What are the most important actions that need to be taken to ensure the state-wide forest vision can be achieved?
2. **Role of DCR Lands in Advancing the Vision:** Do DCR lands possess certain attributes that suggest a greater management emphasis on some ecosystem services rather than others? If so, which ones should be emphasized?
 - a. What should be the role or roles of DCR's own forests in the context of the broader forested landscape of the state?
 - b. Does this state-wide vision suggest any relative priorities in the provision of ecosystem services for the DCR lands -- watershed protection, native biodiversity conservation, recreation, marketable forest products, carbon sequestration, aesthetic values, etc.?
 - c. What role, if any, should economic considerations play in the determination of DCR's land management policies for its forests? Should commercial harvesting be conducted on DCR lands; and if so, what guidelines should apply?
 - d. Is the amount of land currently in DCR forests adequate for providing the desired ecosystem services? Or should DCR be acquiring additional land?
3. **Strategies, Policies, and Guidelines for DCR Forest Management:** Do current DCR land management and stewardship policies strongly advance the vision? If not, what changes does DCR need to make to successfully implement the vision?
 - a. What is the current ecological condition of the DCR forests and how closely do these forests currently approximate the conditions embodied in the long-term vision?

- b. Are DCR's current forest land management policies and practices consistent with achievement of the vision? Specifically, do DCR's policies appropriately address questions of vegetation management and biodiversity, including approaches for managing native species, invasive species, infestations, climate change, storm damage, fire and overuse? If not, what needs to be changed?
 - c. What should the balance be between active and passive management of DCR lands?
 - d. Is there a need for additional forest protection related to DCR lands -- for example a need to acquire additional forested parcels for buffers or connectivity?
 - e. Does DCR have an adequate scientific basis for selecting and implementing appropriate forest land management practices? What further research or program development is needed? Is there a need for the development additional best management practices?
 - f. What are the management implications of climate change for DCR forests? Are there changes in management that can increase carbon storage? Can/should DCR forests be a source of renewable energy (biofuels)? Are these strategies incompatible or can they be reconciled?
 - g. Is third-party certification by the Forest Stewardship Council a useful and appropriate component of the management policies for the DCR state forests?
 - h. If commercial harvests are appropriate, should sale revenues be dedicated to any specific purposes?
 - i. Are DCR recreational use policies and programs appropriately integrated with its forest land management strategy?
 - j. Are DCR's systems for monitoring the impacts of its forest land management and use adequate for determining if the vision is being achieved? Specifically, is a process in place that collects and analyzes the right data, providing DCR with the ability to adapt its management as needed to achieve the vision?
4. **DCR Public Process:** As DCR implements the vision, are changes needed in how it manages consultations with and outreach to the public?
- a. What forms of public involvement in decision making should DCR use in implementing the vision?
 - b. At what points in planning and management processes for forests land should these public involvement processes be used or traditional public notice processes be supplemented?
5. **Implications for DCR Oversight of Private Forest Lands:** What are the implications of the vision for current or future DCR initiatives that affect or could affect private forests in Massachusetts? As the State Forester, what actions should the DCR Commissioner take to ensure a fully integrated vision for all the forested lands in the state?

- a. What are the duties and responsibilities of the State Forester with respect to private forests in Massachusetts?
 - b. How are these currently being implemented?
 - c. Is the TSC making recommendations for DCR lands that have implications for future management of private forest lands?
 - d. If so, does the TSC want to make additional recommendations to the State Forester on management of private forest lands? Does the State Forester have the ability to influence the kinds of changes needed on private lands?
6. **Legislative Mandates:** Is the vision for managing DCR forests consistent with DCR's legislative mandates? If not, what kinds of legislative, organizational, or regulatory changes will be required for the state to implement the vision?
- a. What elements of the vision are difficult to implement under the current mandates?
 - b. Can the existing mandates be reinterpreted without new legislation? If not, can existing laws be amended or is completely new legislation needed?
 - c. Are changes required beyond the specific legislative mandates for DCR (e.g., some broader re-specification of responsibilities for forests within the state)?
7. **Resources and Timing:** Broadly speaking, does DCR have the resources needed to implement the vision? If not, where new resources will be required? What is a reasonable time frame for DCR to make substantial progress in implementing the vision?