

DCR Middlesex Fells Reservation - Resource Management Plan

Flora and Fauna Workshop – February 9, 2011

Notes from Presentation Question and Answer Session

Q: There was a mention in a presentation about some plants being removed/taken away?

A: There has been some cutting back by DCR – they didn't mean any harm. We lost two other species by clearing fallen trees – they weren't endangered species, but they were lost for the Fells.

Q: Are there any predictions for the red and gray foxes in the Fells?

A: There are no known studies, so I am going by own experiences. There are enough left; they are not rare, but 10-15 years ago, we saw more of them.

Q: A while ago there was talk about beavers in the Fells – are they gone now?

A: There were some at Whitmore Brook – but now they're gone. If there is a food supply, they will come. In Harold Parker State Forest there are now about 100 beavers and they will need to disperse – so you will probably see them as they look for new habitat. Beavers do great things as well as not so good, such as flooding neighbors.

Q: Coyotes – do they stay in the Fells or have they moved into the neighborhoods?

A: They are staying in the Fells, but they are smart animals. Don't leave food out at night – even in the trash cans – it's an inducement to come into the neighborhoods at night.

Q: Animals stressed by paths – had there been suggestions of designating areas as off-limits?

A: Yes, it had been suggested to designate areas, and cut back on fire roads and trails by about 50 percent.

Q: Over the years, have wild turkeys become more prevalent, and are they a problem?

A: Yes, wild turkeys are prevalent. And yes, they are a problem if they are suddenly in front of your car. These birds are bizarre in their behavior in many ways – they act aggressively towards everyone; Just swat at them with a newspaper; beyond that, they do not pose a problem. They are, like the bald eagles, a great success story in that they have been able to come back in numbers and can be found all the way from the Bay to the Berkshires. They were gradually introduced, and they have made it big. If you have beech trees that produce a lot of nuts, the turkeys will stick around. The MassWildlife (Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife) does a count every year, and probably has the most exhaustive publication on Wild Turkeys you will ever find.

Q: One of the themes I heard was the importance of early successional habitat and getting it back – how might we do that? And, since you've suggested trail-less areas, do you have a suggestion of where?

A: In the Fells hemlocks are dying off - this will create a large area of early successional habitat. It will be there a long time, but it is unknown whether the hemlock will come back. There is also the issue of fires being lit in the Fells – these sites are often full of young growth, many species, and there is a lot of early successional habitat already. Some of these areas have come from construction too, such as rock walls, rock blasting from I-93 being pushed into the Fells – this creates early successional habitat. The oldest trees are around 200 years old – some are dying off – it has the characteristics of old growth, but gaps create a diversity of habitat.

Q: There seem to be a lot of threats – man-made or naturally occurring. Are there groups or human activities that have enhanced the Fells – protecting the Fells and lessening the threats? We have to take activities into account; the good and bad, but perhaps we can enhance the groups and activities that have a more positive impact on the Fells.

A: People don't have to be convinced to protect what they like. Public Education is what it comes down to – learn to love the place. People who are passionate about something will exert pressure on public officials and agencies to try to change habits that need changing. My recommendation is to create natural history programs where people can learn about the Fells and its uniqueness and how they can be part of protecting the Fells. Brow-beating does not work. We need Public Relations and Public Education. Also, introduce children to nature and the Fells – they'll grow up loving nature.

Q: Great presentations tonight – I was unaware of some of the species mentioned tonight. We have to somehow let others know this is a reservation, not a park, and to be conscious of this. How else do we get the word out?

A: There will be a workshop on education March 16, during which this should be addressed.

Q: What activities do humans do that are destructive?

A: The human species is an invasive species here.

Comments

Some areas are more precious than others in the Fells – I want to hear from the experts on this.

We all need to think about when we step into the Fells that we have an impact.

Need to find a way to curtail new trails and off-trail use.

We should look at the different zoning areas, and increase areas that can handle human activities.

Don't badmouth the bikers. Let us have an open conversation - it can bring people on board; you may need the support of the bikers at a later point. Bikers are not one-dimensional; there are different portals to everyone/ every group.

There is a struggle between human use of the Fells and protecting species. Remember that every time we go to the Fells, we have an impact.