

Henry Lee

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October 15, 2010

Representative Charles Murphy
Chair, Senate Ways and Means Committee
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Murphy:

During the last several years the Legislature has understood and championed the essential benefits that our State's park system provides to our citizens and our communities across the Commonwealth. We, the members of the Massachusetts Stewardship Council, are committed to doing everything we can ensure these benefits continue to be available to every state resident and to every visitor wishing to "get away" in one of our many wonderful park facilities.

However, absent the restoration of a significant amount of funding cut from the agency in the most recent budget, DCR will have to dramatically alter the manner in which it manages and operates our park facilities. These alterations *will* affect the public's use and enjoyment at a time when visitation and use of our facilities is at an all-time high.

As you balance the very difficult choices you may face when presented with a supplemental budget request, we urge you to allocate and restore \$6 million of DCR's funding cut from the agency in the most recent budget. This will allow the agency to continue delivering park and recreation experiences across the state. It will not eliminate the need for changes, but it will allow DCR to make these changes without significantly eroding these experiences.

Prior to reductions mandated in the FY11 budget, DCR's operating budget dropped almost \$22 million or more than 22% on a real basis between FY07 and FY10. This has resulted in the loss of over 170 employees, or more than 18%, of its full time workforce through layoffs, incentivized early retirements and forced vacancies. Because most of the agency's funding flows to its state park operations, these reductions have included park supervisors, carpenters, mechanics and laborers – the troops on the ground that are so essential to providing safe and enjoyable experiences in our parks.

Last year's FY10 DCR operating budget (\$78.8 million) was, on an inflation adjusted basis, \$4.4 million below the lowest budget appropriated to DCR in the last 25 years (2004) and \$151 million below the agency's 25-year, inflation-adjusted budget high water mark (1988). With the FY11 budget reduction of \$8.2 million to \$70.6 million, DCR will have had to manage a reduction in operating resources of more than 30% over four years, a magnitude of cuts that would change the face of any organization. Despite all this we can all take pride in the dedication and hard work the remaining DCR employees have invested in continuing to deliver high quality park and DCR-facility experiences to the public.

We are fully aware of the economic challenges facing the Commonwealth and understand the need to manage DCR's mission in a manner more suitable to the constrained budgets we now are facing over the coming years. At the existing budgeted level, DCR will need to lay off more staff, close all but the 25 most iconic parks and facilities

in the state (presently 200 are staffed) and otherwise reduce operations.ⁱ We ask that you maintain the important experience that DCR's facilities provide to our citizens by allocating \$6 million of the FMAP funds back to DCR's operating budget.

We welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss the options we think are available to DCR with or without the restoration of \$6 million.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry Lee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "H" and "L".

Henry Lee
Chair
DCR Stewardship Council

Attachment: Inflation-Adjusted DCR Operating Budget

ⁱ My research on state park systems across the country found that opening previously closed or "mothballed" park facilities in the end cost more than it would have otherwise to continue operating the facilities.