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October 15, 2010

Honorable Deval Patrick, Governor
State House, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Patrick,

From the outset your administration has understood and championed the essential benefits that our State's park system provides to our citizens and our communities across the state. We are committed to doing everything we can to 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.

As you balance the very difficult choices you face in (re)allocating the FMAP funds the state has or will soon receive, we urge you to allocate and restore \$6 million of DCR's funding cut from the agency in the most recent budget. Let us put the problem into perspective.

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 DCR's 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.

The Council recognizes that even when \$6 million is restored to DCR's budget the agency will be forced to reassess its organization and the way it operates. What these funds will do is allow DCR to maintain its parks, beaches and other recreational facilities at a minimally acceptable level. Without these funds the park system will deteriorate at a time in which public interest in these parks are at an all time high. In addition, our preliminary analysis suggests that at FY11 authorized levels (\$70.6 million) DCR may need to close all but 25 of the most iconic parks and facilities. We should note that research on other state park systems we conducted over the summer suggested that the cost of opening closed or mothballed facilities often exceeded the savings realized by closing them.

Department of Conservation and Recreation Stewardship Council

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www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship_council.htm

Your Administration has been a champion for the parks and for the millions of citizens who enjoy the unique experiences that our parks provide. As members of the Council appointed to oversee this system, we ask that you restore the \$6 million needed to allow DCR to keep the parks operational for the millions of citizens who now enjoy them.

Sincerely,

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

Henry Lee
Chair
DCR Stewardship Council

Attachment: Inflation-Adjusted DCR Operating Budget