

December 10, 2009

The Honorable Ian Bowles
Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Secretary Bowles,

The Governor's recent announcement of 9C cuts, immediately on the heels of the FY10 budget cuts and voluntary layoffs, only reinforces what the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Stewardship Council has come to believe: There is a growing mismatch between the resources DCR can expect to receive from state revenue and the job it is expected to perform in maintaining and stewarding our state's park facilities. Further, this situation isn't going to change for the better any time soon.

With the 9C cuts DCR's budget will fall below \$80 million, and we are concerned about the need for additional expense reductions in the FY11 budget. It is abundantly clear to this Council that the agency cannot safely and reliably maintain all its parks and facilities throughout the year to the standards that we and the agency staff are accustomed to delivering. Accordingly, DCR must immediately and radically rethink how and what it manages among its holdings in order to operate those facilities deemed most important and critical.

DCR has two choices. It can try to survive the next few years by closing facilities, reducing its staff below the levels required for minimal operations and ignoring the deterioration of its assets or it can aggressively explore new models of operation, relying more on partnerships with Friends Groups, other NGOs, localities and local employers. We are doubtful that the former is a sustainable option going forward.

The Stewardship Council urges the senior management of DCR to change the way it manages its properties so it can ensure that public safety is protected and that the benefits to the public are maintained to the extent possible. Instead of spreading DCR staff thinner and thinner as budget cuts mount, the Council suggest that the agency reconsider its historical centralized model of doing business and look towards greater cooperation and partnerships with a wide variety of private and non-profit organizations. These can arrange from volunteer partnerships and collaborations to outright subcontracting responsibility for the operations of certain facilities.

We fully realize that even with a strong commitment to such a new paradigm of operations that some facilities will have to be closed or mothballed and others will have their hours shortened. To retain credibility with the public during these difficult times, DCR should promulgate clear criteria to govern which facilities are kept open and which are not.

1) Adopting Inclusive Volunteer and Public Private Partnerships Approaches:

Focusing initially on the most intensively used DCR facilities that predominantly serve their immediate communities (rinks, pools, golf courses and others), DCR should develop alternative models by which more of the responsibility for managing a park or facility would fall on non-DCR shoulders. These models should clearly describe DCR's residual responsibilities and roles, including what financial and technical support the agency would be prepared to provide to its partners. We believe that Friends Groups can play an important role and should be heavily involved in the ongoing discussions to develop these models. Further, both the models and the criteria that will be used to select candidates for PPP arrangements should be made available to the public and that the selection process should be transparent. Finally, these changes will alter the way the agency operates, placing more emphasis on technical and financial assistance, as well as oversight of DCR's managing partners.

2. Closing, Mothballing, Reducing Hours:

DCR should develop and circulate clear financial and operating criteria by which it will close or curtail the operation of parks, pools and other properties. In addition, DCR should state the dollar savings that will be expected from its actions.

The Council recognizes that we are asking DCR to change its operating structure and to do so in a time of great fiscal constraint. It will need some additional resources to negotiate these partnerships and to make the changes that we are recommending. We hope that EOEEA will work with the Council to identify these resources, including those who might provide such help on a pro-bono or discounted basis.

We recognize that these are tough times, but we are also convinced that this is a unique opportunity to establish a new operating paradigm that will meet the long-term needs of our parks and recreational facilities in a manner that will be fiscally sustainable in the decades ahead.

Sincerely,



Richard Cross, Chairman
MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, Stewardship Council

Cc: Governor Deval Patrick
Senate President Therese Murray
House Speaker Robert Deleo
Representative Charles A. Murphy, Chairman House Ways and Means
Senator Steven C. Panagiotakos, Chairman Senate Ways and Means