



For immediate release
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PATRICK ADMINISTRATION LAUNCHES PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF FOREST STEWARDSHIP

Forums and online conversations will facilitate public input

Keeping to Governor Patrick's commitment to civic engagement, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has launched a public process to discuss the future stewardship and management of state forest lands, including public forums and online discussions.

"We are committed to having an open, wide-ranging, public conversation about forestry in Massachusetts," said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "I am proud to announce the formation of a Technical Steering Committee whose members are respected experts in their fields, and I look forward to their recommendations for the future of DCR forests."

DCR is considering how best to manage the myriad public benefits and values of forest land, including recreation, tourism, aesthetics, renewable forest products, habitat diversity, and landscape ecology, and how to strike the appropriate balance among them.

The agency has contracted with the Massachusetts Office of Dispute Resolution & Public Collaboration (MODR) at the University of Massachusetts in Boston to develop a design for the public process, act as facilitators throughout its implementation, and ensure that the discussion and processes are unbiased.

The process will have several components, including public forums, conversations through the DCR blog, online surveys, and the formation of an advisory group of stakeholders and a Technical Steering Committee. The steering committee, with input from the public and the stakeholders, will make recommendations to DCR on forest stewardship.

DCR is partnering with Harvard Forest, a Harvard University research site in Petersham, to present an initial public forum on May 18 to frame and explore the key issues related to forests and forestry. The forum will be 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m. in the Fisher Museum at the Harvard Forest on Route 32 in Petersham. Space is limited and preregistration is required. Those interested in attending should send an email to modr@umb.edu with "Harvard Forum" in the subject line, or call 617-287-4040.

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Commissioner Sullivan named Lisa Vernegaard, director of planning and stewardship at The Trustees of Reservations, as chairwoman of the committee, which also includes academics, practitioners, and scientists.

With input from a small group representing academia, environmentalists, citizen stewards, professional foresters, and forest landowners, MODR coordinated the selection process for the remaining 10 members of the Technical Steering Committee.

“I am delighted and honored to work with such a knowledgeable and talented group of people to help develop a vision for Massachusetts’ state forests,” said Lisa Vernegaard. “These forest lands are a vitally important part of our landscape.”

“Proper stewardship of the state’s forests is directly linked to the public’s support for sustainable forestry on both public and private forestland, and their confidence that the local wood products they buy come from well-managed forests,” said Fred Heyes of the Massachusetts Forest Landowners Association, who participated in the steering committee selection process.

The advisory group of stakeholders will be composed of about 20 individuals who reflect the various interests related to the public benefits and values of forests. Members will be drawn from interest groups such as citizen stewardship, environmental, forestry, local government, forest landowners, recreational, and wildlife protection.

“The forest visioning process proposed by DCR will allow for updating the management of state lands under its care in keeping with current best practices, and will bring to bear expertise on forest policy informed by an understanding of climate change impacts,” said Laura Johnson, president of Mass Audubon. “We applaud DCR’s commitment to making this an open, transparent, and far-ranging assessment for reviewing stewardship of the public forests.”

A number of opportunities for the public to become involved will be developed through online surveys, site visits, public forums, and blog conversations. Dates and locations of the site visits and forums will be announced soon on the DCR website.

For more information on this public process, and the Technical Steering Committee members, visit www.mass.gov/dcr. To read and participate in DCR’s Commonwealth Conversations blog, visit <http://conservation.blog.state.ma.us/>.

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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, and dams, in addition to 278 bridges and miles of roadways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency's mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit www.mass.gov/dcr. Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.