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**Contact: Wendy Fox
617-626-1453**

DCR REACHES MILESTONES IN FOREST MANAGEMENT

The Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Stewardship Council has approved Forestry Resource Management Plans for three of its forest districts across the Commonwealth. As the council had previously approved a fourth plan, these new approvals mean DCR now has management plans for 145,000 acres of state forest lands, out of the total 285,000 acres.

Voting unanimously, the Stewardship Council approved plans for the Western Connecticut Valley District, the Northern Berkshire District, and the Southern Berkshire District. The council had previously approved a fourth plan for the Central Berkshire District. Another four Forest Resource Management Plans are still being developed.

Early in 2009, DCR will kick off a statewide public discussion of forestry issues and the optimal use of DCR forests and other lands for both the short and the long term. The discussion will include a series of public forums, and if needed, the agency will reopen the Forestry Resource Management Plans for revision based on the outcome of that process.

"Having these plans in place will enable DCR to move forward with appropriate forest management practices that have been discussed and developed by a broad group of individuals and organizations with a wide range of interests," said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "The plans address issues such as forest thinning and timber harvesting, improving wildlife habitat diversity, managing and controlling non-native insect pests and pathogens, and providing a model of reasonable and sustainable forest management strategies for private landowners who also own forested land in Massachusetts."

DCR's Forest Resource Management Plans are meant to guide the management of more than 285,000 acres of state forests and their associated natural resources. Under the plans, forest management is conducted as part of an integrated approach to establishing long-term, sustainable levels for all resources. Because landscapes and ecosystems are dynamic and do change, the plans are designed to be adaptable to new conditions and information.

For several months, DCR worked with major environmental organizations, including Mass Audubon, The Nature Conservancy, the Environmental League of Massachusetts, the Sierra

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS · EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600
Boston MA 02114-2119
617-626-1250 617-626-1351 Fax
www.mass.gov/dcr



Deval L. Patrick
Governor

Timothy P. Murray
Lt. Governor

Ian A. Bowles, Secretary, Executive
Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Richard K. Sullivan, Jr., Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

Club, and the Appalachian Mountain Club, as well as members of the general public, to clarify and improve the three management plans.

“DCR has made significant progress in planning for the forest management of these extensive public lands,” said John J. Clarke, Mass Audubon’s director of public policy and government relations. “The proposed upcoming public process will provide broad input for DCR to clarify how best to optimize habitat protection and management, recreation, forestry, and other interests in our public lands. We appreciate the agency’s willingness to consider amendments to the plans as necessary.”

"The approval of these plans is an important step in the long-term protection of our state's forest resources," said Wayne Klockner, state director of The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts. "The plans will play a key role in helping our forests remain resilient and adapt to future impacts of climate change."

Forest Resource Management Plans for four remaining forest districts – the Eastern Connecticut Valley District and the Northeast, Southeast, and Midstate districts – are currently being developed. Until plans have been completed and approved by the Stewardship Council, DCR will restrict timber harvesting on all properties within those districts. Harvesting will be permitted only in limited situations, such as those involving public safety or mitigating a fire risk.

“The core management principles described in these Forest Resource Management Plans are quite appropriate for Massachusetts public lands,” said Matthew Kelty, associate professor of silviculture and forest ecology at the University of Massachusetts. “The important aspects of modern forest management are included and adapted to Massachusetts forest conditions. These plans provide an excellent framework for future management.”

To view the four plans that have been approved to date, and to learn more about DCR’s forestry program, visit www.mass.gov/dcr and click on “Forestry.” Also, go directly to www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/forestry/index.htm.

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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.