

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (“DCR”) has the primary responsibility to manage the publicly owned forests of the Commonwealth in an exemplary fashion and to respect the rights and interests of the public in those lands.

As private landowners, we realize that keeping our private forestland both private and forested depends heavily on the economic sustainability of these lands. As the largest owner of forestland in the Commonwealth, the DCR must lead the way in setting a positive example for forestry and all it entails: from basing management decisions not just on sound science, but also on public values regarding forests. The viability of private forests and private forestry in Massachusetts depends on how the DCR conducts itself in managing its forestland. Private forestland owners and foresters should not have to be defensive about their forestry activities because of decisions made by public servants on public lands.

DCR has made some mistakes in its management, but the mistakes are not as significant as the agency’s lack of respect for and acceptance of the public’s right to inquire about public forestland management.

The DCR needs to use this visioning process not just to restore confidence in the agency, but also to restore respect for the image and practice of forestry in the Commonwealth. This is also an opportunity to begin the process of creating markets by restoring the image of locally produced forest products in general.

As advertised on the DCR’s website, the goals of this process are to review the public benefits and values of DCR forestlands, to ensure that stewardship on DCR lands is implemented consistently, and to develop strategies for strengthening public dialogue. This is a huge task to undertake, and is why regulation of private forestlands has its own separate venue, the State Forestry Committee.

This process is almost exactly what the Stewardship Council passed over to the Visioning project, namely DCR’s approach to the management of state lands. It is not about private forest land, and trying to expand it in that direction is a diversion from the topic at hand. We do not support the expansion of the dialogue into forestry practices on private land. It is not the charge of this group to do so and is a separate issue.

There really are two major matters at hand: The technical vision and the trust issue. If we solve the technical vision first, the necessary trust may not be in place to accept the technical vision. However, if we solve the trust issue first, there may be the opportunity for the technical vision to be well received and respected.

Stakeholders - Private forestry group - June 23, 2009