



January 4, 2011

Dear Users and Supporters of the Middlesex Fells:

On September 20, 2010 the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) wrapped up a year-long planning process with the public release of our Draft Trail System Plan for the Middlesex Fells, and the initiation of a 60-day comment period. That comment period ended on November 19, 2010.

DCR received an incredible 2,562 public comments from over 2,000 individuals via email, letter and phone regarding the Draft Middlesex Fells Trail System Plan, evidence of vigorous public interest in the future of the Fells. These comments and a summary of them with DCR response are posted at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/news/publicmeetings/greenwaysfellsplast.htm>

We are gratified by the level of public interest and participation that these comments represent. Letters were received by neighbors to the reservation, users of the Fells, local environmental and user organizations, and state-wide environmental and user organizations. We received comments from as far away as California and British Columbia, but the majority was from users who reside in the communities surrounding the Middlesex Fells Reservation.

It is clear from the comments that there is great love for the Fells, and keen interest in the array of recreational uses and natural values at the reservation.

DCR celebrates the history of the Fells, and the recreational, ecological and cultural values that the reservation preserves. We also acknowledge a significant public

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interest in DCR completing a Resource Management Plan (RMP) which will describe and document the full natural, cultural, management and historic profile of the reservation and its management for all appropriate uses. As a result, we are launching the RMP process now, and will soon be announcing a series of meetings and workshops to further engage the public in the plan.

The impressive work of the Trail System Plan (which will become a component of the future draft RMP) documented issues at the Fells reservation that DCR should begin to address now. The plan describes a culture of non-compliance with the reservation's rules, and a need to enhance enforcement at the Fells now. As a result, we are revising some rules so that they make better sense to users and are more enforceable. We will then work with park staff, rangers, local and state police to enhance enforcement. As a result, I am announcing that we will be:

- allowing off-leash dogs only in a designated area at the sheepfold, and better enforcing the leash laws elsewhere beginning in the spring,
- changing the winter closure for mountain biking to month of March, or as conditions warrant to protect the trail tread during "mud season," and enforcing this restriction,
- affirming the regulation of no-off trail uses (without the appropriate permit) and enforcing this restriction, and
- working with the Town of Winchester, MWRA and the State Police to better enforce no trespassing on posted water supply lands.

The trails planning process generated substantial discussion about the proper role of mountain biking in the Fells Reservation. DCR reaffirms that mountain biking is a suitable recreational use in the Fells and that properly managed mountain biking is compatible with the natural and cultural values of the reservation. Like other recreation and resource management goals, we believe that mountain biking can be enhanced in the Fells, but because of the public disagreement about the subject, we will not be designating any new trails for mountain biking use prior to the completion of the RMP, a draft of which we hope to have before the Stewardship Council for review by their July meeting.

We further recognize that there is a significant desire for many walkers and hikers to find a hiking-only experience at the Fells, during which they do not have to worry about encountering bicycles. As noted in the trail plan, DCR is committed to providing quality hiking-only experiences at the Fells on trails like the Skyline and the Rock Circuit.

As we engage in the Resource Management Planning process, I encourage all stakeholders, users and residents to come together in a spirit of collaboration to help DCR plan for the management of the reservation and build common ground among all those who enjoy and care about the Middlesex Fells.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JM' with a vertical line extending downwards from the right side.

Jack Murray
Acting Commissioner