



Stewardship Council

Strategic Oversight Plan Public Comments

#EndLoggingOnPublicLand

My comment is about how impressed I am with not only the specificity of the SMART goals set but in the layout in which they are written to help many types of reader in easily agreeing with and thus wanting to support the Plan.

The DCR Stewardship Council needs to educate itself by learning from presentations provided by independent climate scientists the information necessary for our public forests to sequester the most carbon and to protect the forest ecosystem from disruption. The council needs to promote its influence on DCR to make sure the DCR governmental agency, working for the public good, is taking every step it can to respond to the climate crisis and use our public lands as carbon sinks and wildlife corridors for the forest ecosystem.

Overall I think this oversight plan hits all of the major responsibilities of the Stewardship Council -- great work. You received a lengthy comment from Doug Pizzi at Mass Parks for All -- Friends of the Fells would like to formally endorse those comments as they reflect our thinking on these issues well.

My only critique is the section, "6. Stakeholder Engagement" could be improved. This section lacks clarity -- it discusses fostering "a deeper engagement and sustainability for our parks working with the DCR." I don't know what is meant by this statement. Engagement with whom? and "parks" can't work with the DCR -- do you mean "park partners"? I think this paragraph needs a thorough rewrite.

Also, on this same topic and later down in the document, the second paragraph under the heading "Stakeholder Engagement" has mysterious/unclear language: "The coordination and strategic pursuit of expanded access to all State lands is of the utmost interest of the Stakeholder Committee. Therefore, working to create and maintain an assured diversity of use and access moving into or with a new Administration will be an area of continued priority." What does this mean? What kind of access? E-bikes? Snow mobile trails? Logging? I can think of many kinds of access that would be opposed by many in the park advocacy community. This language made me nervous.

The RMP section is the only section with bolded language -- and the tone of this section seems a bit more energized/critical? Maybe review with an eye on tone and possibly use more neutral language?

Finally, one small correction, under "Council Structure, Role and Governance" -- "meets monthly" should be amended to "meets monthly, except in August" to be precisely correct.

DCR Stewardship Council Strategic Plan - 2023

Page 3: Agree re: "seek to eliminate Councilor vacancies".

Page 3: Re: "3. Continue Finance Partnership and Advocacy": The proposed dashboard for capital backlog as a high priority goal is a great idea.

Page 3: Re: #4: Spotlight Climate Change and Biodiversity: "The Council will seek regular updates and presentations about how the DCR is contributing to objectives...": If/when there are potentially controversial issues or issues where the best practices & understanding may be evolving, e. g. e-bikes or logging on public lands, if there are presentations from one perspective, please make sure to also offer all perspective(s).

Page 4: Re: "The Council has rarely had a full complement of councilors in its history.": This should change. A full complement should be the rule rather than the exception.

Page 4: "Yes" to greater staggering of terms. With 9 expiring the same year, there will be quite a loss of institutional memory.

Page 5: Master calendar: Great idea.

Page 7: Re: "The Council has yet to receive for approval a single plan under the new format, although it did approve a 'legacy' plan in 2022 and anticipates more before 2023 is complete.": This is a problem. How do other states handle things like RMPs?

Page 8: Re: "every DCR park, forest, and reservation": Please add 'parkway' to the list. There is a parkways master plan, but some parkways are still without individual plans, and when they do all have plans, they will need to be part of the "freshening" /monitoring.

Page 13: Strategic Readiness Roadmap: #14: "Transfer State House Security Function to Bureau of the State House". This is a great suggestion. The DCR Rangers should be in the parks!

Thank you to all who volunteer to serve. Best of luck moving forward.

Monday, August 22, 2023

Re: Stewardship Council Strategic Oversight Plan Draft

Comments submitted by Mike Ryan, Melrose, Mass.

I submit the following comments regarding Stewardship Council oversight responsibilities for Resource Management Plans on the basis as having served for twelve years as the executive director of the Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation, during which time the 2012 Fells RMP was created and published by DCR. Based on extensive experience with DCR's process for forming the Fells RMP and with DCR's failure to implement the key recommendations of the Fells plan I strongly disagree with the Stewardship Council's characterization that DCR's pre-2019 RMPs were 'thorough and exhaustive.' The problem with the Fells 'legacy' RMP was not its length. The solution for a 'better' Fells RMP outcome would not have been to produce a streamlined version.

Stewardship Council Oversight Plan Draft

The Oversight Draft dismisses Council's key role for conducting evaluation of DCR Resource Management Plans

M.G.L. Chapter 21: Section 2F; Management plans shall include guidelines for operations and land stewardship, provide for the protection of natural and cultural resources, and ensure consistency between recreation, resource protection, and sustainable forest management.

The SC Oversight Strategy Draft ignores the fundamental problem with the DCR Resource Management Plan Program.

DCR Resource Management Plan oversight requires evaluation of the degree to which DCR park and forest RMPs have addressed stewardship requirements for protection of natural and cultural resources and consistency between recreation, resource protection and forest management.

The SC Oversight Plan Draft document does not do this.

On the contrary, according to the Oversight draft there would be no need for such an evaluation of existing RMPs because the SC Oversight Draft asserts that up until 2019 the DCR process for creating RMPs had been

Dear Chairman Buckley and Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Stewardship Council's Strategic Oversight Plan. As a stakeholder in the effort to secure adequate funding, staffing and other resources for our state parks, Mass Parks for All (MPA) is committed to working with the Council, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), park friends groups, the Legislature, the Governor, and other stakeholders to bring a 21st Century vision for our parks into focus and ultimately an on the ground reality.

We thank the Council for this detailed plan, and in the interest of remaining brief, will concentrate on what we think are the most important goals and tasks within it.

On the operations budget side of the ledger, the Council has adopted the practice of recommending a funding level for DCR to the Executive Office of Administration & Finance prior to the governor's filing of the annual budget with the Legislature. Rather than merely reacting to what the governor proposes, the Council has become a gubernatorially appointed vocal advocate for funding our parks. We support continuing this practice.

On the capital side of the ledger, the Council's commitment to having DCR create and maintain a Capital Budget Dashboard is critically important for the Administration, the Legislature, and the public to get a handle on the \$1.0 billion deferred maintenance backlog, much of which will take capital spending to alleviate. Only by seeing the need on paper and in public will the Council and other stakeholders be able to illustrate what more than a decade of under funding has done to our parks. MPA continues to believe that the present capital budget of approximately \$150 million per year is insufficient to fulfill DCR's responsibilities to the people's parks. To successfully begin chipping away at the backlog and moving forward on new projects, DCR needs an annual \$250 million capital budget for the remainder of this decade.

On the policy side of DCR operations, we fully support the Council's plan to have DCR devote more resources to developing partnerships outside of state government, and that DCR coordinate with the recently created but as yet unstaffed Office of Outdoor Recreation to bring willing partners with private dollars to bear on the quest to bring DCR parks squarely into the 21st Century.

One need only see the visitors center at Walden Pond State Reservation, accomplished via a partnership with Walden Woods, to see the vast potential of public-private partnerships. More recently, the re-prioritization of the long discussed Charlesgate Park Revitalization project involving DCR, the Charlesgate Alliance, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, and the Solomon Foundation, which is providing matching

funding, promises to improve the visitor experience with new facilities while reuniting the Charles River with the Charlesgate neighborhood. These and similar efforts will serve to leverage our existing resources with new, private funding from more than willing partners to improve our parks.

Also in the policy realm, we support the Council's push to have DCR engage in a comprehensive strategic planning process as recommended by the Legislative Special Commission on DCR's 2021 report. While DCR responded to this report quickly with a Strategic Readiness Initiative, all parties involved stipulated that this exercise is not a substitute for a strategic plan, which, among other things, will tie staff and funding levels to DCR's vast holdings and responsibilities.

Finally, we are glad to see the Council examine and contemplate changes to the 2003 enabling legislation, MGL Chapter 21, that created the Stewardship Council as a quasi-board of directors to oversee the then new agency, DCR.

Specifically, we support the Council's suggestions to cut members' seven-year terms to five-year terms, and to stagger those terms so that not every council member is subject to gubernatorial replacement at the same time. We agree with the council that the current term length may be a roadblock to recruiting new members to fill vacancies. And we agree that staggering the terms will tend to promote the retention of institutional knowledge as Council members are replaced.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Strategic Oversight Plan. As the only statewide non-partisan, non-profit NGO with a primary mission of supporting our state parks and the millions of people who rely on them for their physical and mental well-being, MPA stands ready to work with all stakeholders to make our state parks, and the \$16.0 billion annual outdoor economy they support, second to none.

Yours in conservation,

Doug Pizzi

August 22, 2023

DCR C/O Matthew Perry
10 Park Plaza, Suite 6620
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Strategic Oversight Plan Public Comment

Dear Chairman Buckley and Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Stewardship Council's Strategic Oversight Plan. As a stakeholder in the effort to secure adequate funding, staffing and other resources for our state parks, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy is committed to working with the Council, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), park friends groups, the Legislature, the Governor, and other stakeholders to bring a 21st Century vision for our parks into focus and ultimately an on the ground reality.

We thank the Council for this detailed plan, and in the interest of remaining brief, will concentrate on what we think are the most important goals.

FOCUS ON INCREASED FUNDING

On the operations budget side of the ledger, the Council has adopted the practice of recommending a funding level for DCR to the Executive Office of Administration & Finance prior to the governor's filing of the annual budget with the Legislature. Rather than merely reacting to what the governor proposes, the Council has become a gubernatorially appointed vocal advocate for funding our parks. We support continuing this practice.

SUPPORT AND LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Our recent partnership with DCR for the Charlesgate Park Revitalization, in partnership with the Charlesgate Alliance, Esplanade Association and many others is an example of the power of partnership and leverage that can occur with organizations working in concert. This project will transform the park user/visitor experience with new facilities while reuniting the Charles River Esplanade and the Emerald Necklace, revitalizing the Charlesgate parkland, now virtually devoid of amenities. These and similar efforts will serve to leverage public resources with new funding from more than willing partners to improve our parks. The partnership office must be staffed, invested in and grown to capitalize on these opportunities.

Another example of a strong and successful DCR and Emerald Necklace Conservancy partnership is our Olmsted Tree Society. This is a joint partnership with our three public partners, Boston Parks & Recreation, Brookline Parks and Open Space and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. Over the last seven years, we have jointly invested close to \$6 million into the care of over 10 years, completing the first full seven-year cycle of tree care for our 1,100-acre system. This project plants new trees, but also maintains and invests in our older mature trees, which research shows are perhaps the most effective in the provision of significant environmental benefits in total and over time. These systems require considerable staff, flexibility, creativity and partnership and will only happen with the focused growth in DCR's partnership staff and resources.

"MAKE NO SMALL PLANS"

In the policy realm, we support the Council's push to have DCR engage in a comprehensive strategic planning process as recommended by the Legislative Special Commission on DCR's 2021 report. While DCR responded to this report quickly with a Strategic Readiness Initiative, all parties involved stipulated that this exercise is not a substitute for a larger strategic plan, which, among other things, will recommend future staff and funding levels to DCR's vast holdings and responsibilities. Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Strategic Oversight Plan.

Sincerely,

Karen Mauney-Brodek
President Emerald Necklace Conservancy