



MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



Resource Management Planning Program: Belle Isle Marsh Reservation

November 13, 2024

View from the Observation Tower



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Governor

Maura T. Healey

Lieutenant Governor

Kimberly Driscoll

Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary

Rebecca L. Tepper

Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner

Brian Arrigo



DCR MISSION

**To protect, promote and enhance our
common wealth of natural, cultural
and recreational resources
for the well-being of all.**



DCR Core Principles

Our Core Principles:

Provide access to a diversity of outdoor recreational experiences & unique landscapes

that is equitable, inclusive, and welcoming



Conserve lands, water, and forests

by integrating science, research, and technical expertise into the management of our natural resources

Advance climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts

by implementing sustainable practices & advancing resiliency across our infrastructure, assets, & resources



Support healthy communities

by providing places for people to connect with nature and each other

Inspire generations of stewards

by recognizing and honoring our legacy through partnerships, public engagement, and education





Meeting Logistics



- ▶ You will have the opportunity to submit comments through December 13, at:
 - ▶ DCR Public Comments <https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>
- ▶ Two ways to offer comments during the meeting
 - ▶ Use chat feature
 - ▶ Raise your hand using the Zoom function, and you will be given permissions to unmute and speak.
- ▶ *Please note that this public meeting will be recorded; the recording will be a public record.*

Today's Meeting

- ▶ RMP Requirements
- ▶ RMP Planning Process
- ▶ Belle Isle Marsh Reservation
- ▶ Your thoughts



Bennington Street gateway

RMP Mandate



Viewing platform in the Reservation

M.G.L. c. 21 § 2F:

“The Commissioner of Conservation and Recreation shall submit management plans to the Stewardship Council...with respect to all reservations, parks, and forests under the management of the department...”



dcr
Massachusetts



► M.G.L. c. 21 § 2F, continued:

“Said management plans shall include guidelines for the operation and land stewardship of the aforementioned reservations, parks, and forests;

Shall provide for the protection and stewardship of natural and cultural resources; and

Shall ensure consistency between recreation, resource protection, and sustainable forest management.

Required Elements, continued

304 CMR 7.02 (Management Plans & Massachusetts Wildlands):

- ▶ Management planning process shall produce:
 - Description of unique resources;
 - Discussion of land's potential use;
 - Land Stewardship Zoning analysis; and
 - Action Recommendations.

Seating area along the
John Kilmartin Walkway



Resource Management Plans



Resource Management Plan Purgatory Chasm State Reservation



Adopted by the DCR Stewardship Council: MONTH, 2024

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Conservation and Resource Stewardship
Office of Cultural Resources

Purgatory Chasm State Reservation

<https://www.mass.gov/location/purgatory-chasm-state-reservation>

1. PROPERTY OVERVIEW

Characteristic	Value
Class/Colored shed	1000
Location	South
Proving it	See Town of England Coastal Plains and Hills
Waterland	State-owned
DCR Region	Central
DCR District	Central Valley
DCR Complex	State-owned
Management Priority District	544 N. 10
Fire Control District	South Worcester
State forest	198.0
Acres/length (feet)	4.2
Elevation - Minimum (feet)	188.8
Elevation - Maximum (feet)	620.3
Overhead (upside) (feet)	0.0
Annual (feet) (feet)	113.144
Interpretive Programs (Interpretive, 2024)	154
Interpretive Programs (Interpretive, 2024)	1,494

2. LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Acres
Parkland	20.0
Recreation	10.0
Woodland	10.0
No Designation	66.0

3. REGULATORY DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Acres
Priority Habitat (MHA)	10.0

4. LONG-TERM AGREEMENTS

Agreement	Agreement Year
None identified	N/A

5. CONCESSIONS

Concession Type
None identified

6. PARTNERS & FRIENDS

Group(s)
None

Resource Management Plan: Purgatory Chasm State Reservation

Introduction

Purgatory Chasm State Reservation (Purgatory or the Reservation) is located in Sutton (the Town), approximately 22 miles southeast of Worcester and 25 miles southwest of Boston. It is bounded on its north, west, and much of its south by Sutton State Forest. The Reservation's most distinctive is a unique geological feature that has long attracted visitors: a one-quarter-mile-long cliff in the south with sheer cliffs up to 20 feet high. (See cover photo.)

The Reservation is a land shaped by geology and the lives of Indigenous people and non-Indigenous inhabitants. For and among Indigenous residents, notably the Algonquian, traditional occupations in the above and spaces now known as Purgatory Chasm State Reservation. Groups and individuals, including Indigenous people known as the Algonquian, are recorded in available documentation (Baker, 1994; Dyer, 2014) as having relationships to this place over centuries and generations. The hills and valleys of Sutton were important for resource collection, including game quarrying. Today, Indigenous people maintain an ongoing presence in the region. Following Indigenous people's displacement, many local Indigenous residents were brought into larger towns in the region. In 1704, the Massachusetts General Court (MGC) granted lands in what would become the Town to settling (repopulation) followed in 1724 (Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1948). Purgatory Chasm was individually well-known to the Algonquian that located the area and to early European settlers. The name "Purgatory" had been attached to the feature by 1700 and, by the 1800s, Purgatory Chasm had become a recreation destination. In the early 2000s, it was "rediscovered" by large numbers of people, both inside and outside the State (Shepherd and Rowe, 1917). Visitors continue the tradition of thronging to the chasm for a day of recreation.

Purgatory Chasm State Reservation was established in 1922, so that the chasm would always be in the public trust. A portion of the Reservation's early days is recorded in Gaudy (1952). As a State Reservation, Purgatory was owned by the Commonwealth, but managed by the county. In 1924, over 200 acres of adjacent land was protected with the establishment of Sutton State Forest (Sutton). Management of Purgatory was transferred to the Commonwealth in 1978 (MGC, 1978), bringing both Purgatory and Sutton under the management of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM), a predecessor to DCR. Although both are now DCR properties, Purgatory remains heavily influenced by its past as a county-run reservation and a recreation destination, and Sutton remains heavily influenced by its history as a state forest. Visitor activities in these parks differ, in large part due to their management histories.

Today, Purgatory is a heavily forested, irregularly shaped tract of rocky outcrop, Purgatory Road, the Reservation's entrance road, approximately abuts the Reservation on an east-west course. Rocky slopes descend southward from the road towards Purgatory Brook and are bisected by the chasm itself. As a property with a long history of recreational use, there are a number of historical buildings, small-scale landscape features, and well-used trails that, in conjunction with the chasm itself, define and help to define the visitor experience. Purgatory Chasm is contiguous with Sutton State Forest and the Reservation's recreation is best understood from the context of the two parks combined. (See the Sutton State Forest RMP for additional information on the property.) Purgatory Chasm has recreation facilities (e.g., picnic areas, visitor center, parking lots, water fountain, and a playground), that encourage visitors to interact with the Sutton State Forest and the Reservation. Together

RMP – Main Body

- Introduction
- Park Identity
- Defining Resources & Values
- Statements of Significance & Interpretive Theme
- Visitor Experience
- Threats and Opportunities
 - Natural Resources
 - Cultural Resources
 - Recreation
- Climate Exposure

Natural Resources

Threats

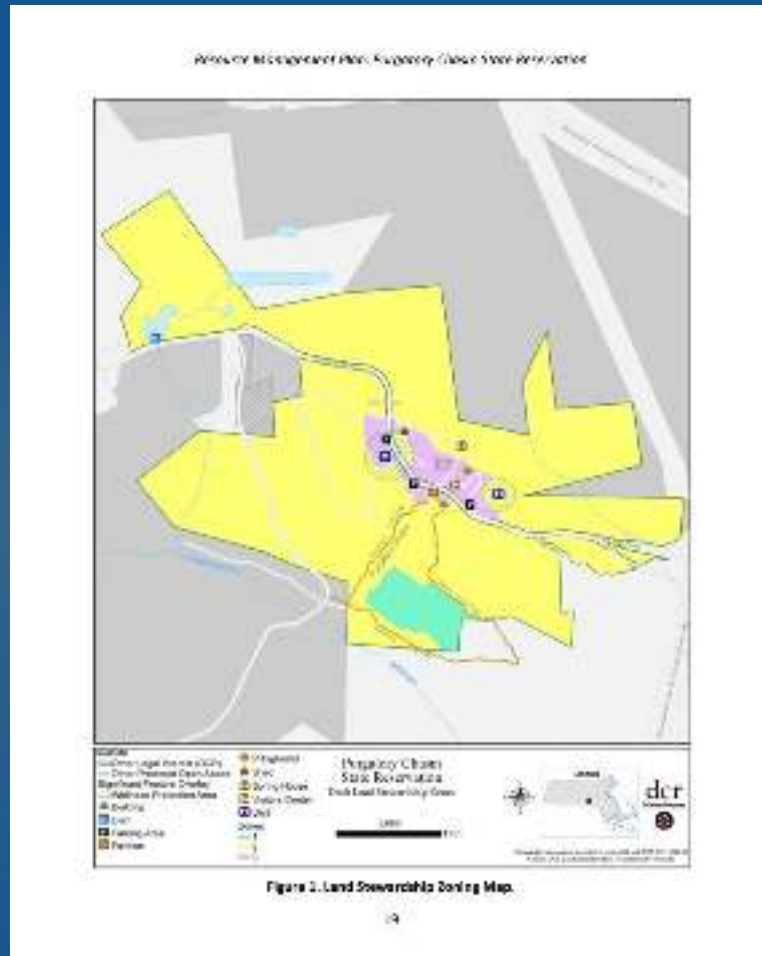
- Visitors have created countless access points from the pavilion and parking areas on the south side of Purgatory Road to the north chasm entrance. This has resulted in approximately one-quarter acre of exposed mineral soils with exposed rocks, and only scattered tufts of vegetation.
- Activities within the Zone I Wellhead Protection Area for the seasonally used well (i.e., not the well connected to the Visitor Center) are inconsistent with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) guidance and best management practices for wellhead protection (MassDEP 1995, DEP 2011). This includes vehicle parking, seasonal equipment and vehicle storage in the pump house, and the maintenance of picnic areas within a Zone I.
- Long-term use by hikers has eliminated much of the vegetation along the east rim of the chasm. Bare soil, exposed bedrock, and exposed tree roots are common. Most of the ground cover and shrub layer have been worn away, leading to little regeneration of canopy trees. Under the current trajectory, canopy trees will eventually die without being replaced, resulting in gaps in canopy and increased light into the chasm below.
- The portion of the Chasm Loop Trail where it exits the south end of the chasm has become hazardous and unsustainable. The surface of this steeply sloped trail bed consists of mineral soils, exposed rocks, and tree roots. Soil has eroded from beneath the tree roots leaving many of the roots several inches above the ground, creating a tripping hazard. Soils in this area are Chatfield-Holls-Rock Outcrop, 15 to 35% slope, which is considered unfavorable for paths and trails.
- Inspections of Purgatory Chasm Dam (Dam No. MA02897) have identified multiple major deficiencies, maintenance issues, and remedial modifications that need to be addressed. Failure to address deficiencies could result in loss of the pond (Pare Engineering Corporation 2006). The small size of the dam and impoundment does not warrant a hazard rating for the structure. (See Figure 1, Land Stewardship Zoning Map for location of dam.)
- Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, a non-native insect that kills Eastern Hemlock, has already resulted in the death of many hemlocks at Purgatory and continues to threaten hemlocks in the Reservation's forests. In 2022, DCR's Forest Health Program treated 231 individual hemlocks in a 7-acre area (DCR 2022).

Opportunities

- The Reservation's potential vernal pools may provide additional breeding habitat for the state-listed amphibian documented in the park. Surveying and certifying these pools (Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) 2009), as appropriate, may help better protect this amphibian. Additional vernal pools, not captured in the Potential Vernal Pool data set, may exist in the Reservation. These pools should be surveyed and certified, as appropriate, as encountered.
- Ensuring that activities and conditions within the Reservation's Zone I Wellhead Protection Areas are consistent with MassDEP Wellhead Protection Tips (MassDEP 1995) and Guidance (MassDEP 2011) would better protect the Reservation's drinking water.

Contents continued

► Applied Land Stewardship Zoning (Land Stewardship Zoning Analysis)



- Consistency Review (Ensure consistency)
- Priority Recommendations (Action Recommendations)

Table 10. Priority Recommendations for Regulatory Group 2010. All recommendations are intended to be implemented by the end of 2010. The recommendations are intended to be implemented by the end of 2010. The recommendations are intended to be implemented by the end of 2010.

Category	Recommendation	Implementation
Regulatory Group 2010	Review the Regulatory Group 2010 and ensure that the recommendations are consistent with the Regulatory Group 2010.	Regulatory Group 2010
Regulatory Group 2010	Review and recommend that the Regulatory Group 2010 be consistent with the Regulatory Group 2010.	Regulatory Group 2010
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RMP Planning Process

Activity	Date
Kickoff Meeting for DCR Staff	2023
Site Visit	2023
DCR staff complete on-line survey	2023
Background research (natural, cultural, recreational resources)	2023-present
Public Meeting 1	Nov. 13, 2024
Preparing Draft RMP	Winter 2024-2025*
DCR and NHESP Review	Spring 2025*
Public Meeting 2 + Review and Comment Period	Summer 2025*
Presentation to Stewardship Council/vote	Summer-Fall 2025*

* Subject to change.

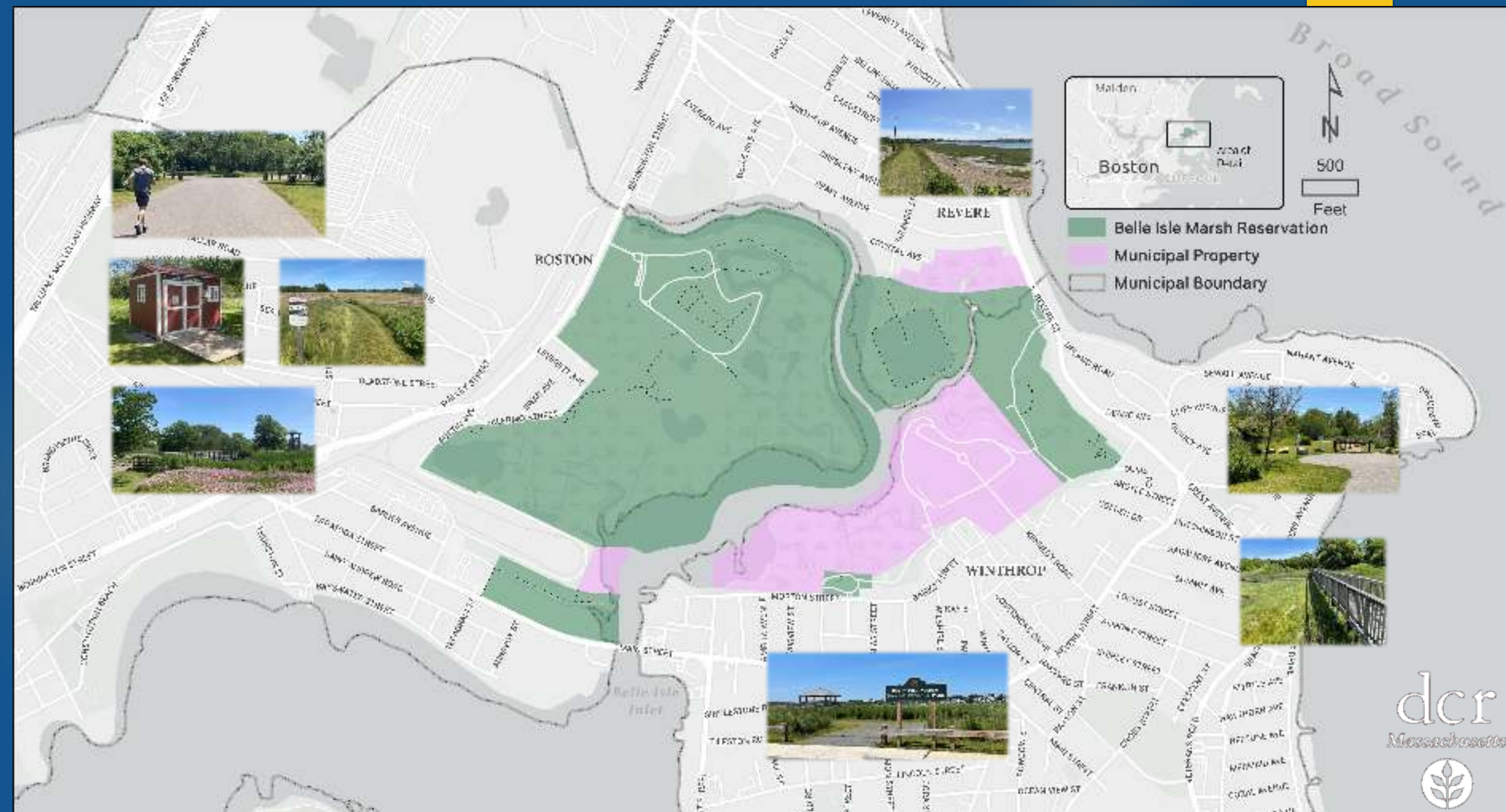
Belle Isle Marsh Reservation



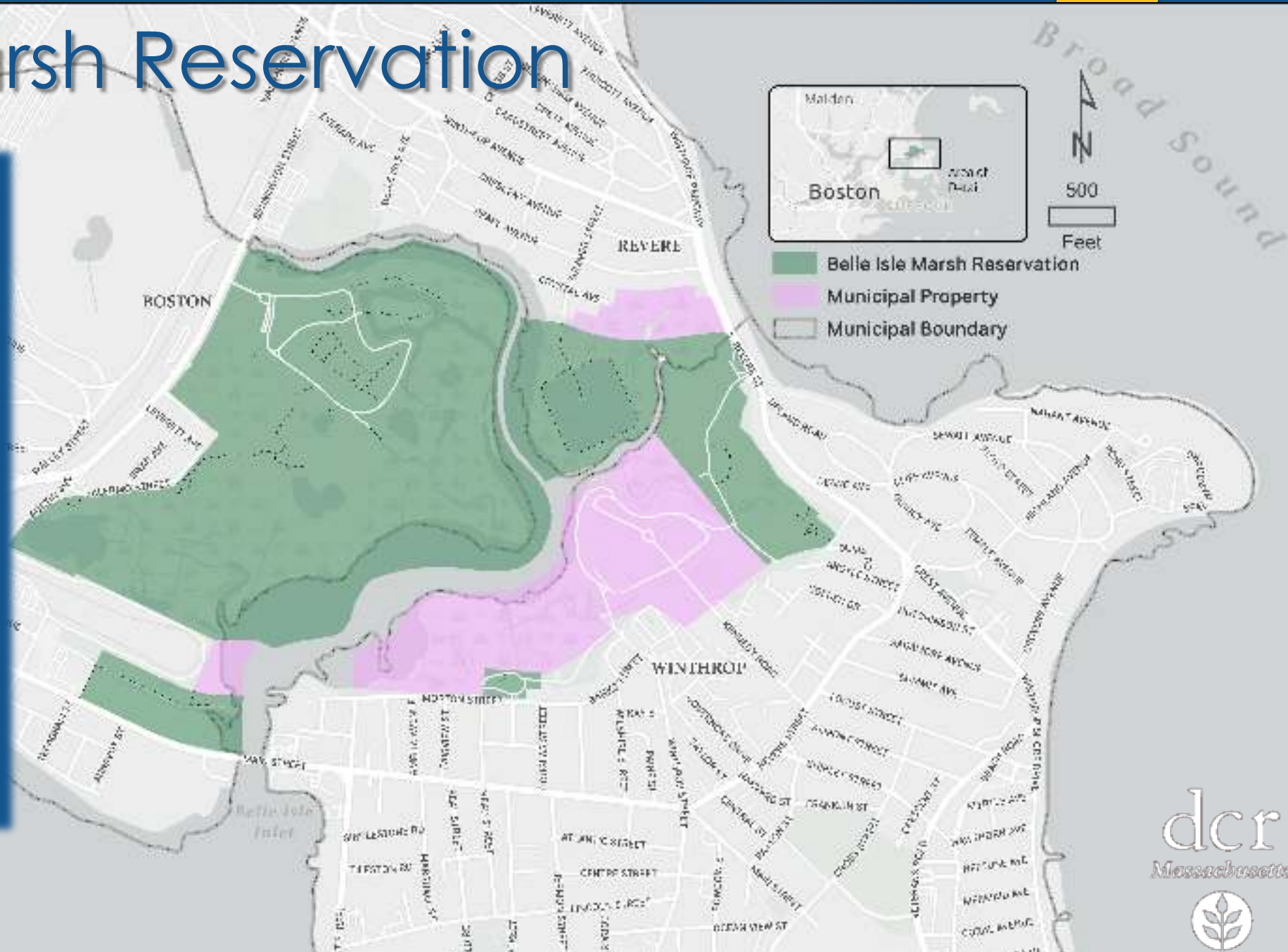
Detail, 1978 MDC aerial photo of Belle Isle Marsh, looking SE from former Suffolk Downs.



Sketch plan, proposed MDC Belle Isle Marsh Reservation. James Falck and Charles Shurcliff, landscape architects; Robert Furniss, planner.



Belle Isle Marsh Reservation





Please share your thoughts on topics such as:

1. What Facilities attract you to this park?
2. What Natural Features attract you to this park?
3. What Activities do you enjoy participating in?
4. What, if anything, prevents you from fully enjoying your visit to this park?
5. What activities, facilities, or services would make you feel more welcome or more satisfied with your experience in this park?
6. What is the biggest challenge facing this park?
7. What makes this park special to you?
8. Any other information about this park that you think is important for us to know.



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Public Comment

General Guidelines

- ▶ Please wait to be recognized by the moderator
- ▶ Please state:
 - ▶ Name
 - ▶ Affiliation (if any)
- ▶ To assist us, please make comments in the context of what resources or issues DCR should address during the Resource Management Planning process.

Share your thoughts!

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Additional Information

- ▶ Recording and tonight's slide deck will be available at:
www.mass.gov/dcr/past-public-meetings
- ▶ If you wish to subscribe to a DCR general information or project-related listserv: contact DCR's Office of Community Relations via email at mass.parks@mass.gov

Public Comment

- ▶ Go to DCR Public Comments web page (<https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>)
- ▶ Select Belle Isle Marsh RMP from the Topic Selection drop down
- ▶ Submit comments (2,000-character limit)

DCR Public Comments

Submit a comment to DCR on a proposed capital project, policy, or program.

If you wish to submit a comment to DCR on a proposed capital project, policy, or program, please enter the information requested in the form below.

If the proposed capital project, policy, or program does not appear as a topic on the form below, the comment period has closed.

This form helps DCR to process your comment in a timely manner, while also controlling spam.

Unfortunately, we are unable to accept email attachments because of the risk of internet viruses. Fields marked with an (*) are required.

As an alternative, DCR also welcomes comments submitted by letter to the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Office of Public Outreach, 251 Causeway Street, Boston, MA 02114, with the topic being addressed in the subject line.

If there are no options to select in the drop down menu for comment, there are currently no public comment periods open for ongoing projects at this time. If you have any general inquiries, please email mass.parks@mass.gov.

Please note that the content of comments you submit to DCR, along with your name, town, and zip code, will be posted on DCR's website. Providing additional contact information, notably email address, is optional, and will only be used for outreach on future updates on the subject project or property.

First Name

Last Name

Topic Selection

Comment

CONTACT

Department
Conservation
Recreation

Address

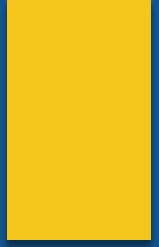
Main Office
State Transportation
Park Plaza | Suite 500
Boston, MA 02116
[Directions +](#)

Phone

(617) 626-1250

Community Relations

[more contact](#)



Thank you!

