



MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



Brook Farm Historic Site Resource Management Plan

July 31, 2025



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

Nicole LaChapelle

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



Entrance to Brook Farm Historic Site
and The Gardens Cemetery

During the meeting:

- ▶ Use chat feature – comments go to moderator
- ▶ Raise your hand using the Zoom function, and you will be given permissions to unmute and speak

After the meeting, through August 30th:

- ▶ DCR Public Comments
<https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>

Please note that this public meeting is being recorded; the recording will be a public record

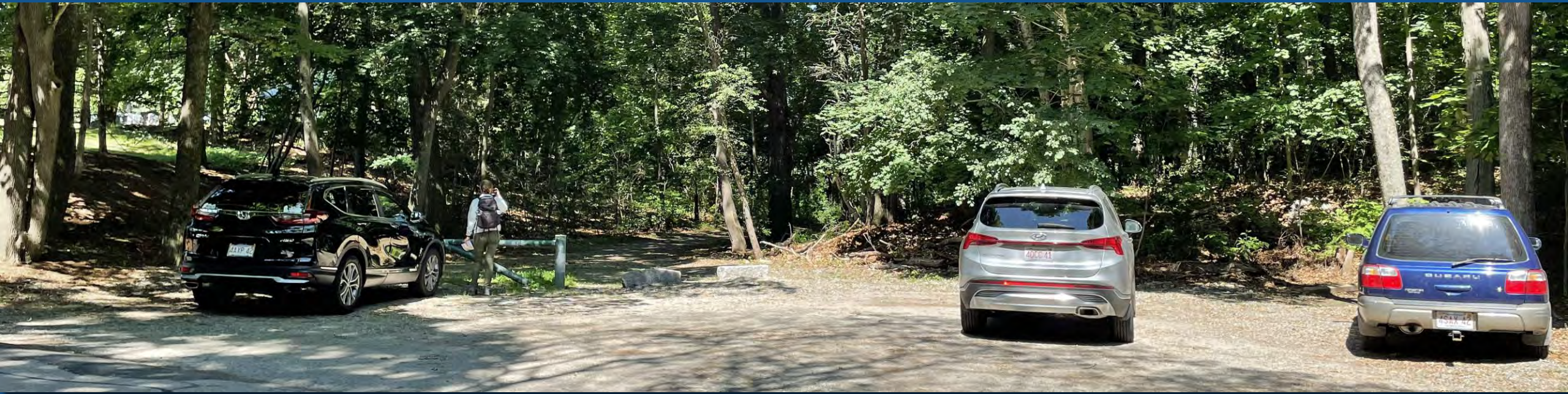
Tonight's Meeting

- ▶ RMP Requirements & Contents
- ▶ Brook Farm Historic Site
- ▶ Brook Farm Planning Context
- ▶ RMP Timeline
- ▶ Conceptual Design Timeline
- ▶ Your thoughts & comments



Wetlands along the Charles River

RMP Mandate



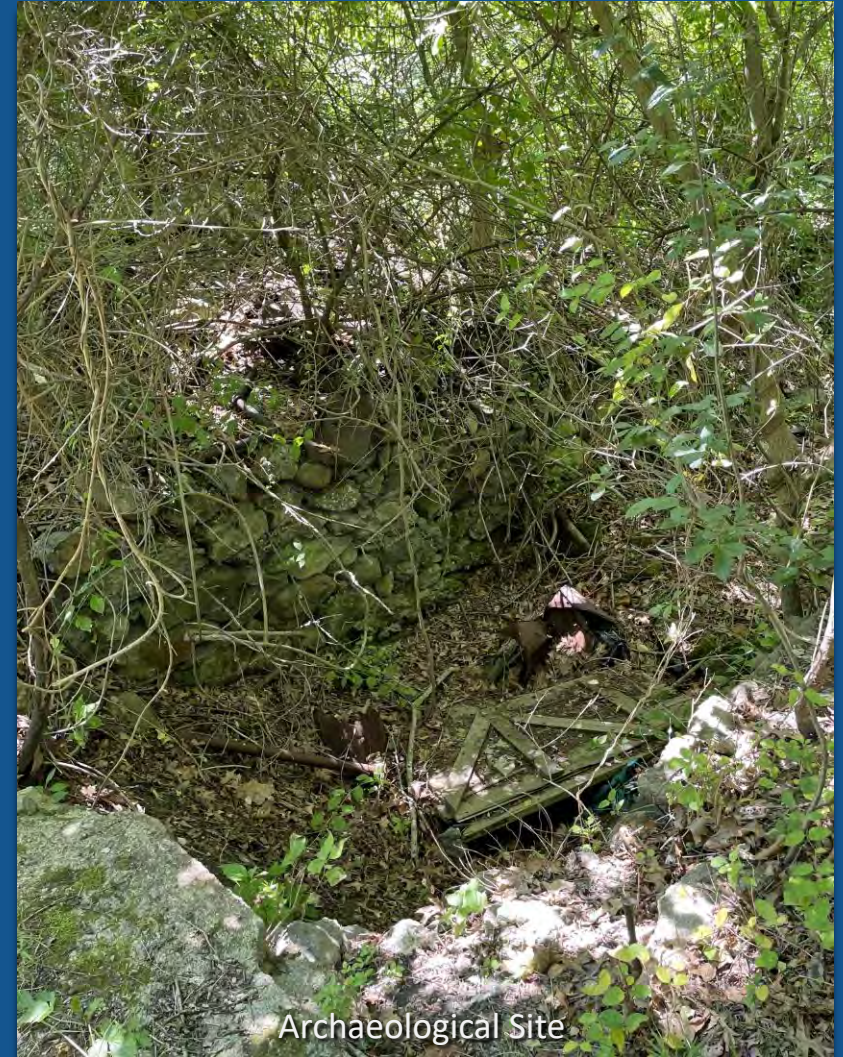
M.G.L. c. 21 § 2F:

“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...”

Required Elements

Said management plans shall:

- ▶ Include guidelines for operation and land stewardship;
- ▶ Provide for the protection and stewardship of natural and cultural resources; and
- ▶ Ensure consistency among 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

Resource Management Plans



Resource Management Plan Purgatory Chasm State Reservation



Adopted by the DCR Stewardship Council February, 2025

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

Purgatory Chasm State Reservation

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

1. PROPERTY OVERVIEW

Characteristic	Value
Date Established	1910
Location	Sutton
Ecoregion	Southern New England Coastal Plains and Hills
Watershed	Blackstone
DCR Region	Central
DCR District	Central Valley
DCR Complex	Blackstone
Management Forestry District	Mid-State
Fire Control District	South Worcester
Size (acres)	238.9
Boundary Length (miles)	6.7
Elevation - Minimum (feet)	388.8
Elevation - Maximum (feet)	620.3
Environmental Justice (acres)	0.0
Estimated Annual Attendance (2020)	117,295
Interpretive Programs (number of programs, 2023)	154
Interpretive Programs (number of attendees, 2023)	7,494

2. LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Acres
Parkland	93.5
Reserve	0.0
Woodland	56.6
No Designation	88.8

3. REGULATORY DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Acres
Priority Habitat (MESA)	18.9

4. LONG-TERM AGREEMENTS

Agreement	Expiration Year
None identified	N/A

5. CONCESSIONS

Concession Type
Mobile Food Concession - Juniper Farms Ice Cream Co., Inc.

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 10 miles southeast of Worcester and 35 miles southwest of Boston. It is bounded on its north, west, and much of its south by Sutton State Forest. The Reservation's main attraction is a unique geological feature that has long attracted visitors, a one-quarter-mile long cleft in the earth with sheer cliffs up to 70 feet high. (See cover photo.)

The Reservation is on land shaped by generations of Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous inhabitants. Past and present Indigenous residents embody fluid, relational connections to the places and spaces now known as Purgatory Chasm State Reservation. Groups and individuals, including Indigenous people known as the Nipmuc(k), are recorded in available documentation (Native Land Digital 2023) as having relationships to this place over seasons and generations. The hills and waterways of Sutton were important for resource collection, including stone quarrying. Today, Indigenous peoples maintain an ongoing presence in the region. Following Indigenous peoples' dispossession, many local Indigenous residents were brought into praying towns in the region. In 1704, the Massachusetts General Court (MGC) granted lands in what would become the Town to settlers; incorporation followed in 1714 (Massachusetts Historical Commission 1983). Purgatory Chasm was undoubtedly well-known to the Nipmuc(k) that inhabited the area and to early European settlers. The name "Purgatory" had been attached to the feature by 1793 and, by the 1800s, Purgatory Chasm had become a recreation destination. In the early 1900s, it was "attractive to large numbers of people, both inside and outside the State" (Shepard and Rane 1917). Visitors continue the tradition of thronging to the chasm for a day of recreation.

Purgatory Chasm State Reservation was established in 1919, so that the chasm would always be in the public trust. A narrative of the Reservation's early days is provided in Dudley (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 1974 (MGC 1974), bringing both Purgatory and Sutton under the management of the Department of Environmental Management, 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 these management histories.

Today, Purgatory is a heavily forested, irregularly shaped tract of rocky upland. Purgatory Road, the Reservation's entrance road, approximately bisects the Reservation on an east-west course. Rocky slopes descend southwest 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 sites (including trails) that, in conjunction with the chasm itself, organize and help to define the visitor experience. Purgatory Chasm is contiguous with Sutton State Forest and the Reservation's recreation is best considered from the context of the two parks combined. (See the Sutton State Forest RMP for additional information on that property.) Purgatory Chasm has recreation facilities (e.g., picnic areas, visitor center, parking lots, water fountains, and a playground) that concentrate visitors. In contrast, recreation at Sutton State Forest is trail-based and dispersed. Together

RMP – Contents

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

Natural Resources

Threats

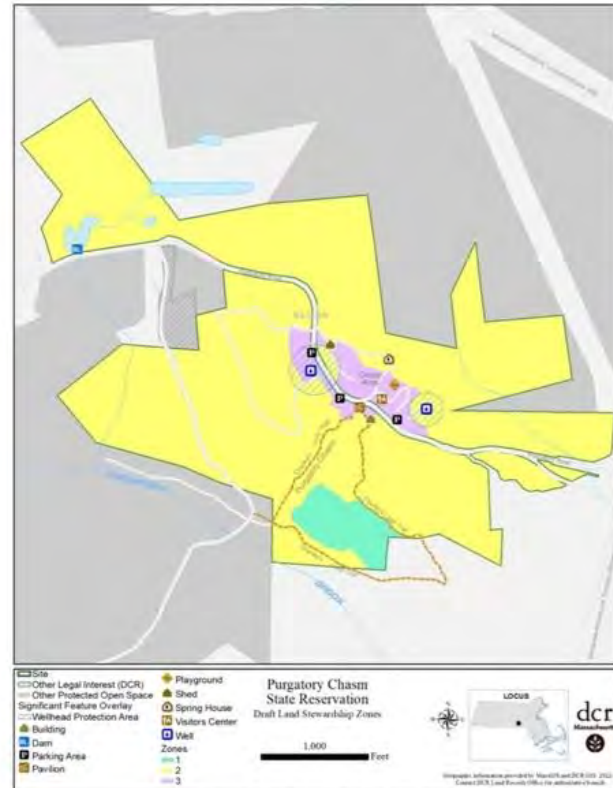
- Visitors have created countless access points from the pavilion and parking areas on the south side of Purgatory Road to the north chasm entrance. This has resulted in approximately one-quarter acre of exposed mineral soils with exposed rocks, and only scattered tufts of vegetation.
- Activities within 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.
- One invasive plant is known from the Reservation: Japanese barberry. This invasive plant is not considered an Early Detection Priority Species (BSC Group 2017) or known to be impacting rare species or Priority Natural Communities.
- 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-Hollis-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 2022a).

Opportunities

- Some of the Reservation's two potential vernal pools may "support rich communities of vertebrates and invertebrates" (Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) 2009) and serve as important habitat components for other wildlife, including one of the Reservation's state-listed species. Surveying and certifying these pools (DCR (n.d.) and MassWildlife (2009)), as appropriate, may help better protect these animals. Additional vernal pools, not captured in the Potential Vernal Pool data set, may exist in the Reservation. These pools may also be surveyed and certified, as appropriate, as encountered.

RMP Contents (continued)

► Applied Land Stewardship Zoning (Land Stewardship Zoning Analysis)



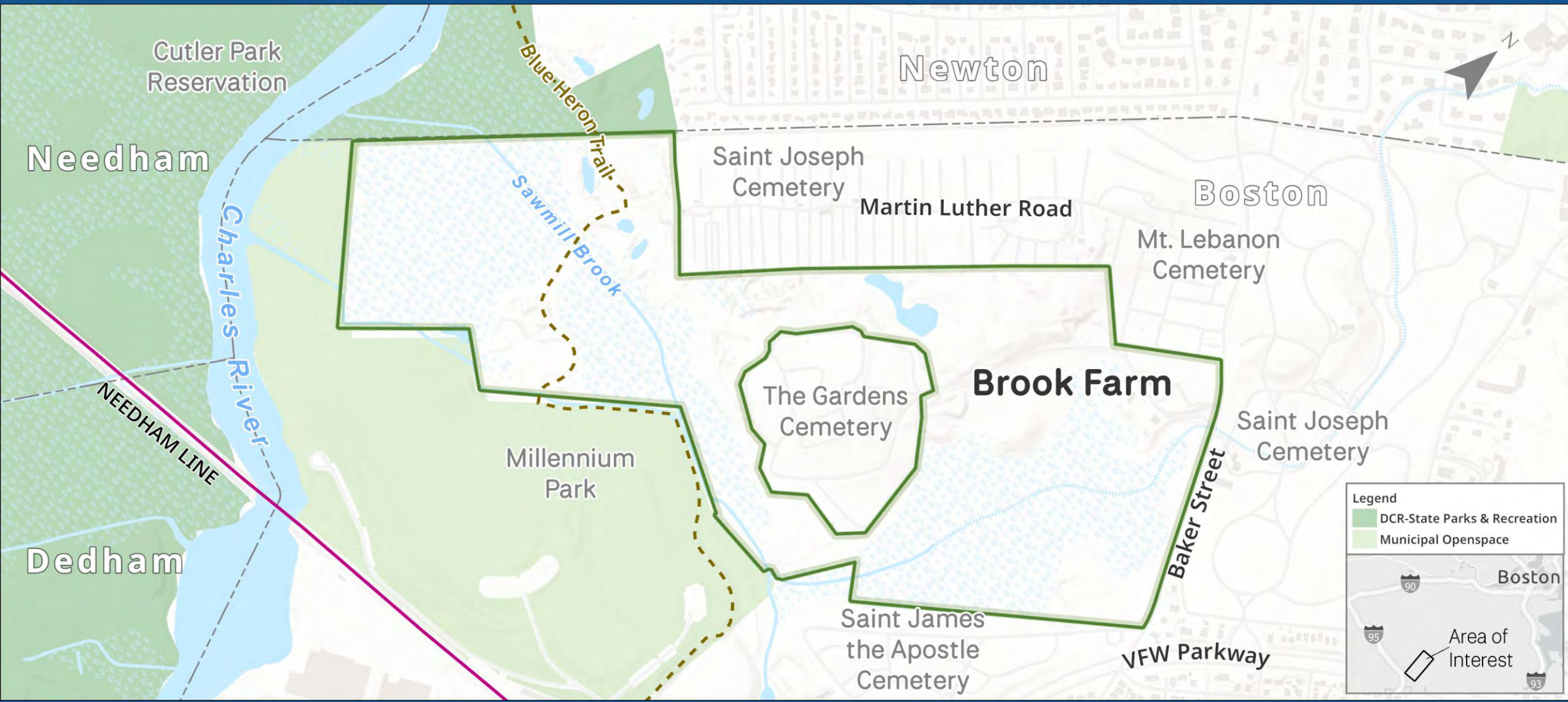
► Consistency Review (Ensure consistency) ► Priority (Action) Recommendations

Resource Management Plan: Purgatory Chasm State Reservation

Table 18. Priority Recommendations for Purgatory Chasm State Reservation. All recommendations are of equal importance. When multiple parties are responsible for implementing a recommendation, they are identified parenthetically in the Implementation column. Property managers should enter these recommendations as work orders in CAMIS to ensure their tracking and implementation.

Category	Recommendation	Implementation
Natural Resources	Review and implement MassDEP Wellhead Protection Tips and Guidance (MassDEP 1995, MassDEP 2011) within the Forest's Zone I Wellhead Protection Areas.	Park Operations
Natural Resources	Remove and relocate picnic tables from within the existing Zone 1 Wellhead Protection Area.	Park Operations
Natural Resources	Assess the potential to disconnect the seasonal day-use area water fountains from the well near the Pump House Garage and connecting them to the Reservation's other public well.	Facilities Engineering (Co-Lead), Park Operations (Co-Lead)
Natural Resources	Assess the need for a new maintenance garage and shop in order to consolidate park maintenance equipment and supplies into a single building, and to end the practice of storing power equipment and fuels within a Zone I Wellhead Protection Area and multiple park buildings.	Contractor, Facilities Engineering (Lead), Park Operations
Natural Resources	Implement recommendations identified in the Phase I Inspection/Evaluation of the Purgatory Chasm Dam (Pare Engineering Corporation 2006). Integrate activities to be performed by Reservation personnel into the annual operations plan.	Contractor, Office of Dam Safety (Co-Lead), Park Operations
Natural Resources	Survey, document, and submit documentation to certify potential vernal pools that are in NHESP habitat of MESA-protected vernal pool obligate species, in accordance with DCR (n.d.) and MassWildlife (2009), as warranted.	Contractor, Office of Natural Resources (Lead), Volunteers
Natural Resources	Work with trash hauler to provide bear-resistant trash containers with self-locking lids.	Park Operations

Brook Farm Historic Site





Brook Farm Planning Context

GOALS

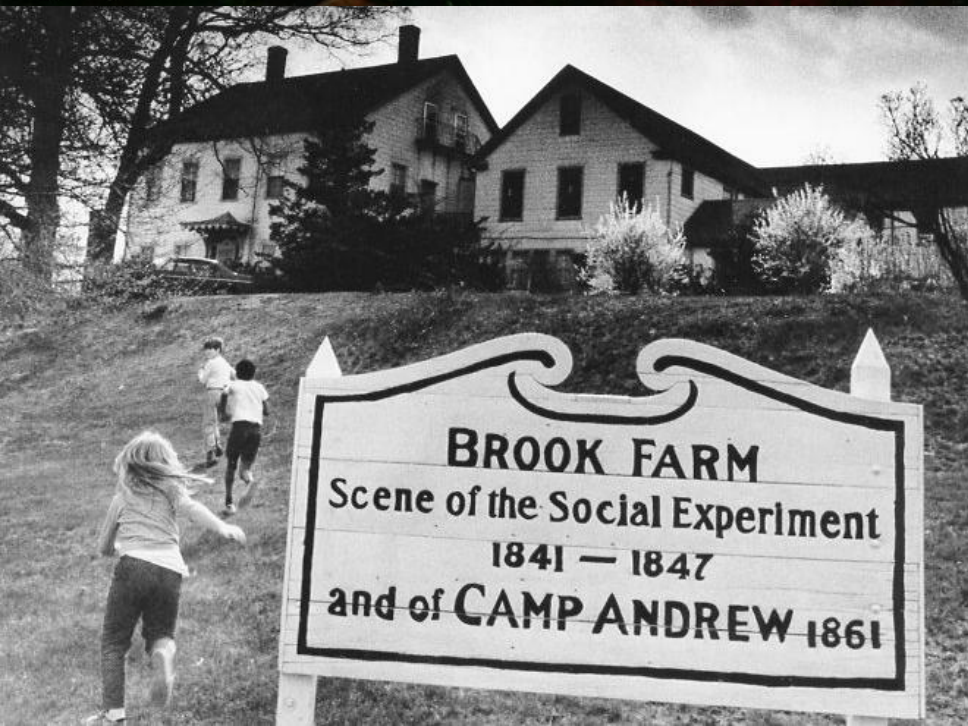
- ▶ Establish resource management framework
- ▶ Understand significance of the property and current conditions
- ▶ Identify opportunities to enhance visitor experience

PRODUCTS

- ▶ Resource Management Plan
- ▶ Conceptual Design

Planning Context (continued)

- ▶ National Historic Landmark
 - ▶ 1841-1847 Transcendental Community
 - ▶ 1861 Civil War Training site (Camp Andrew)
 - ▶ 1870-1943 Lutheran Orphanage
- ▶ City of Boston Landmark
- ▶ History of Partnership with The Gardens Cemetery and with New Brook Farm





Planning Context (conclusion)

- ▶ Natural Setting
 - ▶ Charles River floodplain
 - ▶ Sawmill Brook with extensive wetlands
 - ▶ Protected species and habitat
 - ▶ Puddingstone outcrops
- ▶ Forested trail system with connections to DCR Charles River system, City of Boston parks, and beyond.

RMP Timeline

Activity	Date
Internal Kickoff Meeting: DCR Staff & Contractor (Ray Dunetz Landscape Architecture)	June
Site Visits	July - August
DCR staff on-line survey	July
Public Meeting 1	July 31
RMP Preparation	August – November*
Public Meeting 2 & Review and Comment Period	January*
Presentation to Stewardship Council/vote	March*

* Subject to Change

Conceptual Design Timeline

Activity	Date
Internal Kickoff Meeting: DCR Staff & Contractor (Ray Dunetz Landscape Architecture)	June
Existing Conditions & Site Analysis Mapping	July – August
Development of Conceptual Design	October – January*
Public Meeting – Conceptual Design alternatives	January*
Accessibility Review	February – March*
Finalization of preferred plan	February – March*

* Subject to Change

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 at this park?
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.

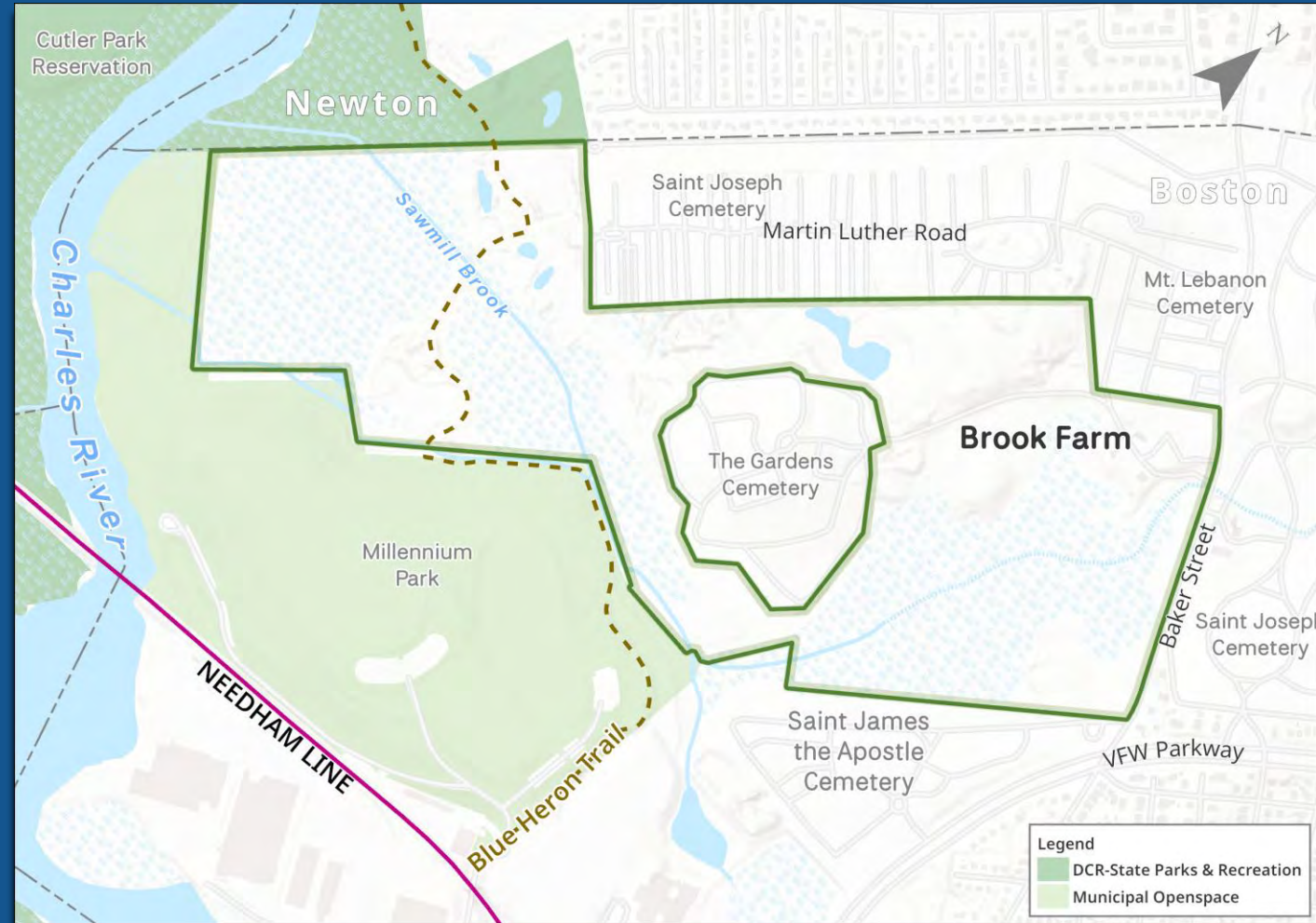
Public Comment

General Guidelines

- ▶ Raise your virtual hand
- ▶ Please wait to be recognized by the moderator
- ▶ Please state your affiliation if speaking on behalf of a group.
- ▶ 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!

1. What Facilities attract you to this park?
2. What Natural Features attract you to this park?
3. What Activities do you enjoy at this park?
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?
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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

Submitting On-line Comments

- ▶ Go to DCR Public Comments web page (<https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>)
- ▶ Select Brook Farm 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.

Name*

First Name
Last Name

Topic Selection

Comment

CONTACT

Department
Conservation
Recreation

Address

Main Office
State Transportation
Park Plaza | Suite 200
Boston, MA 02116

[Directions](#)

Phone

(617) 626-1250

Community Relations

[more contact](#)

Thank you!

dcr
Massachusetts

