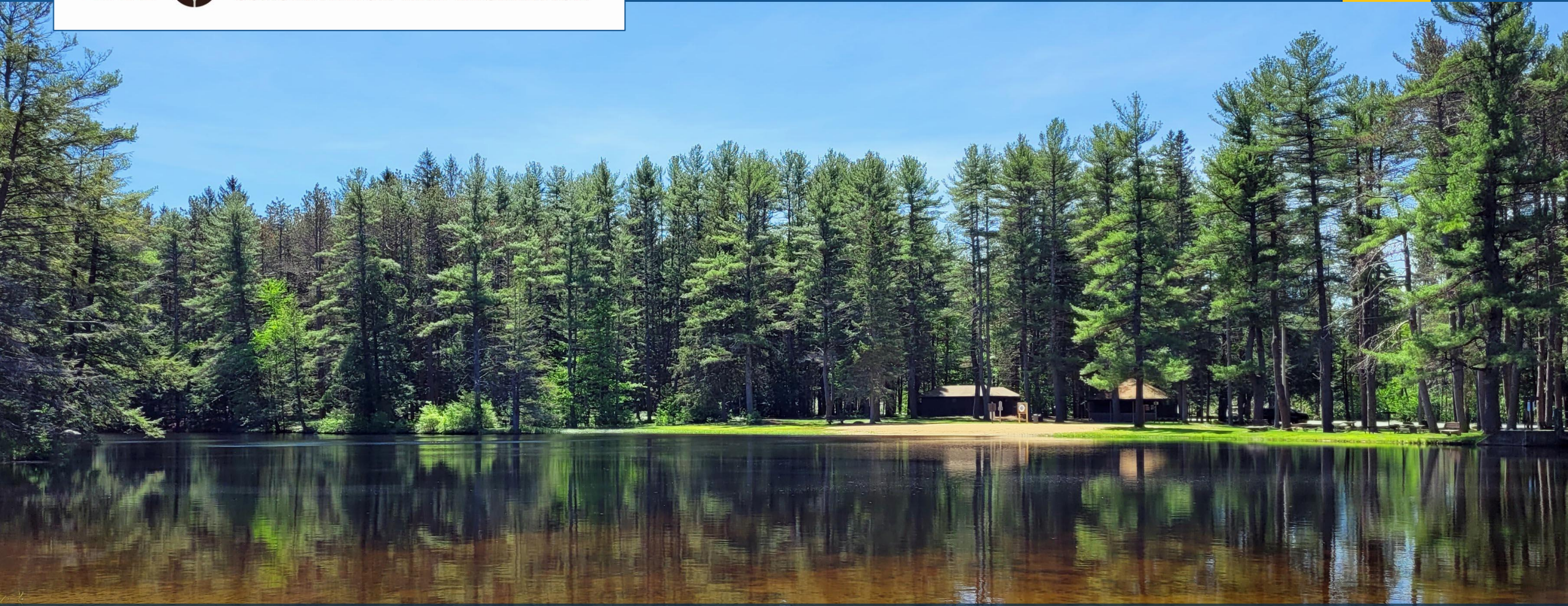




MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



Otter River Complex Resource Management Plans (RMPs) August 21, 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



During the meeting:

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

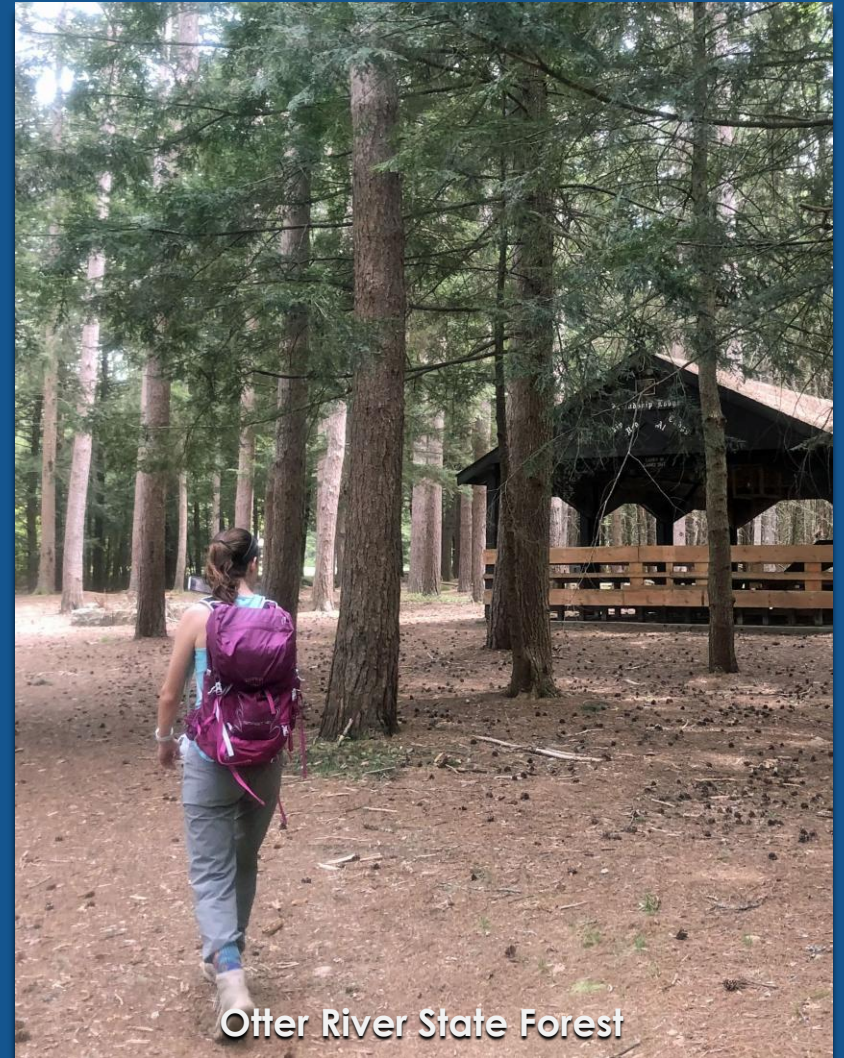
After the meeting, through September 20th:

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

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

Tonight's Meeting

- ▶ RMP Mandate and Required Elements
- ▶ Otter River Complex Overview
- ▶ Project Timeline
- ▶ Otter River Complex RMPs
 - ▶ Key Resources
 - ▶ Key Findings
- ▶ Public Comment



RMP Mandate



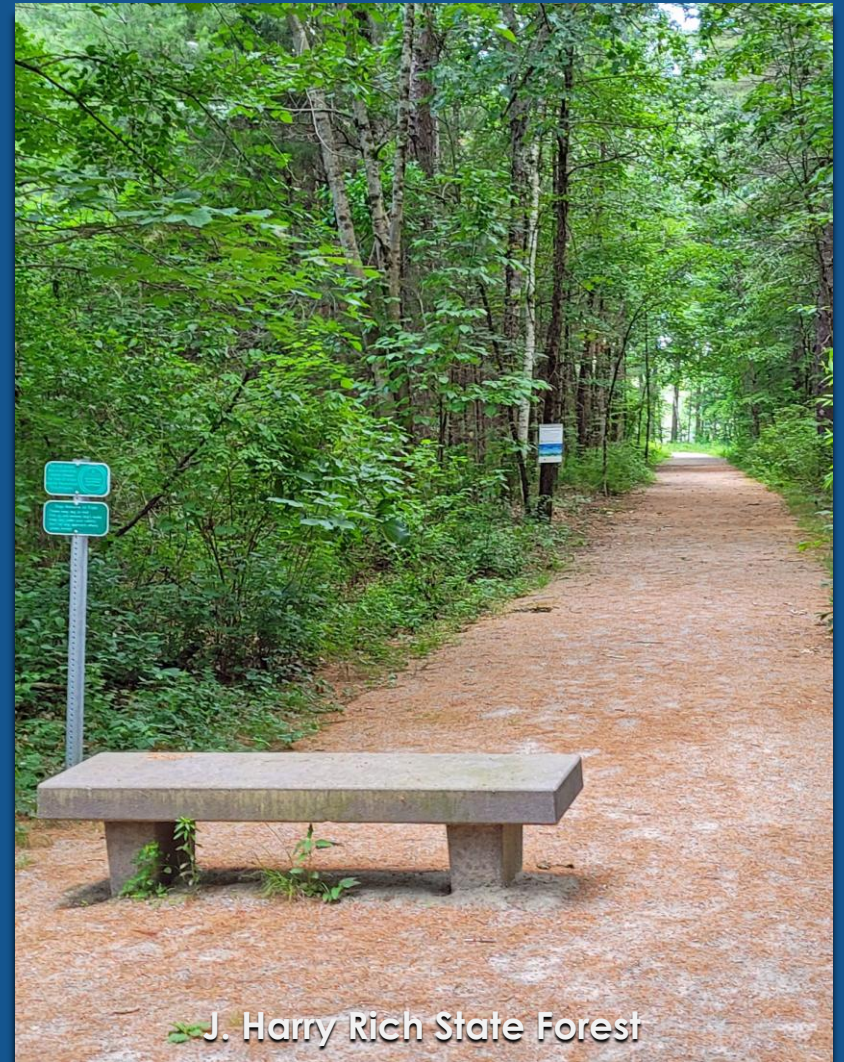
M.G.L. c. 21 § 2F

“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)



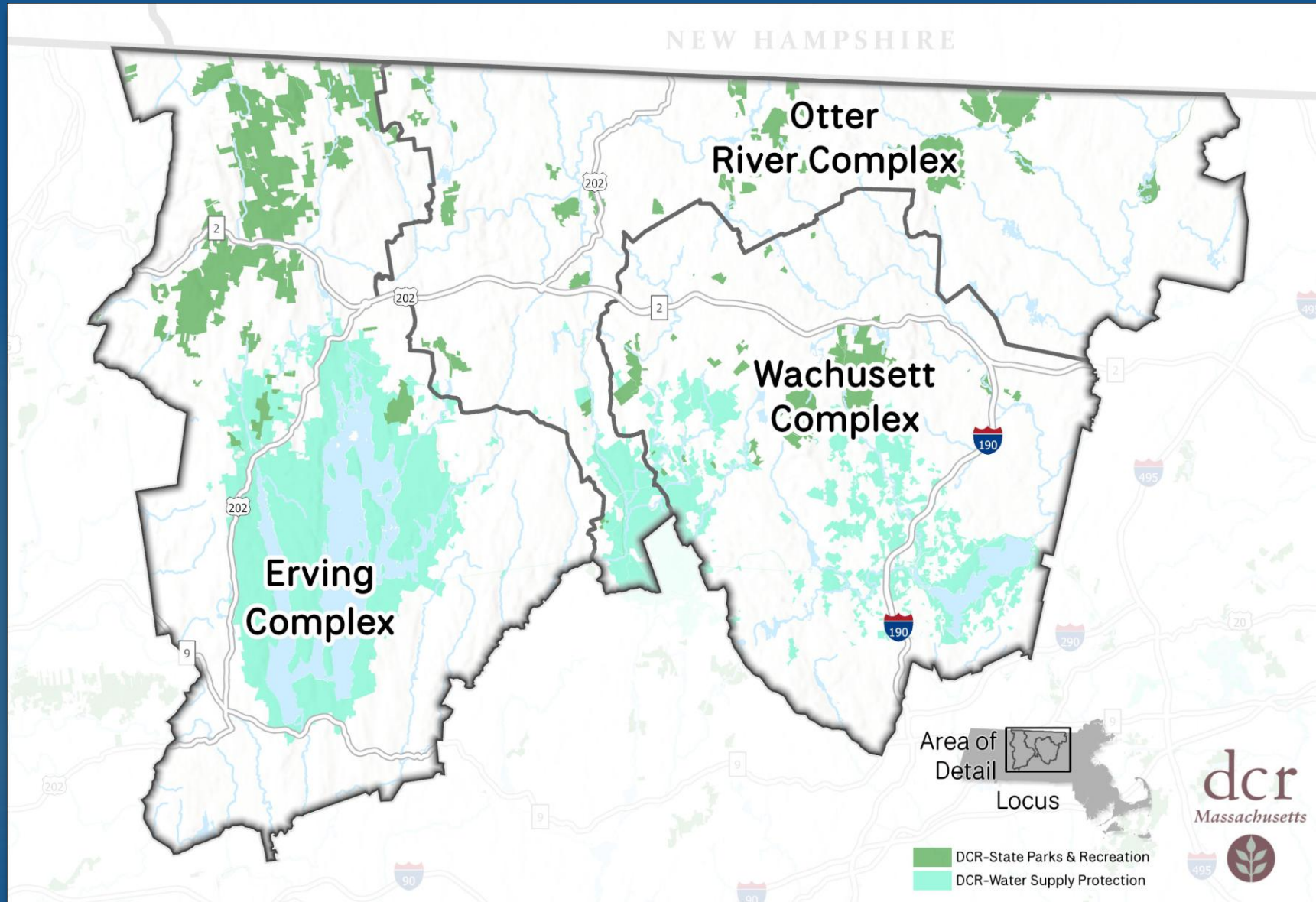
Pearl Hill State Park

304 CMR 7.02 (Management Plans & Massachusetts Wildlands):

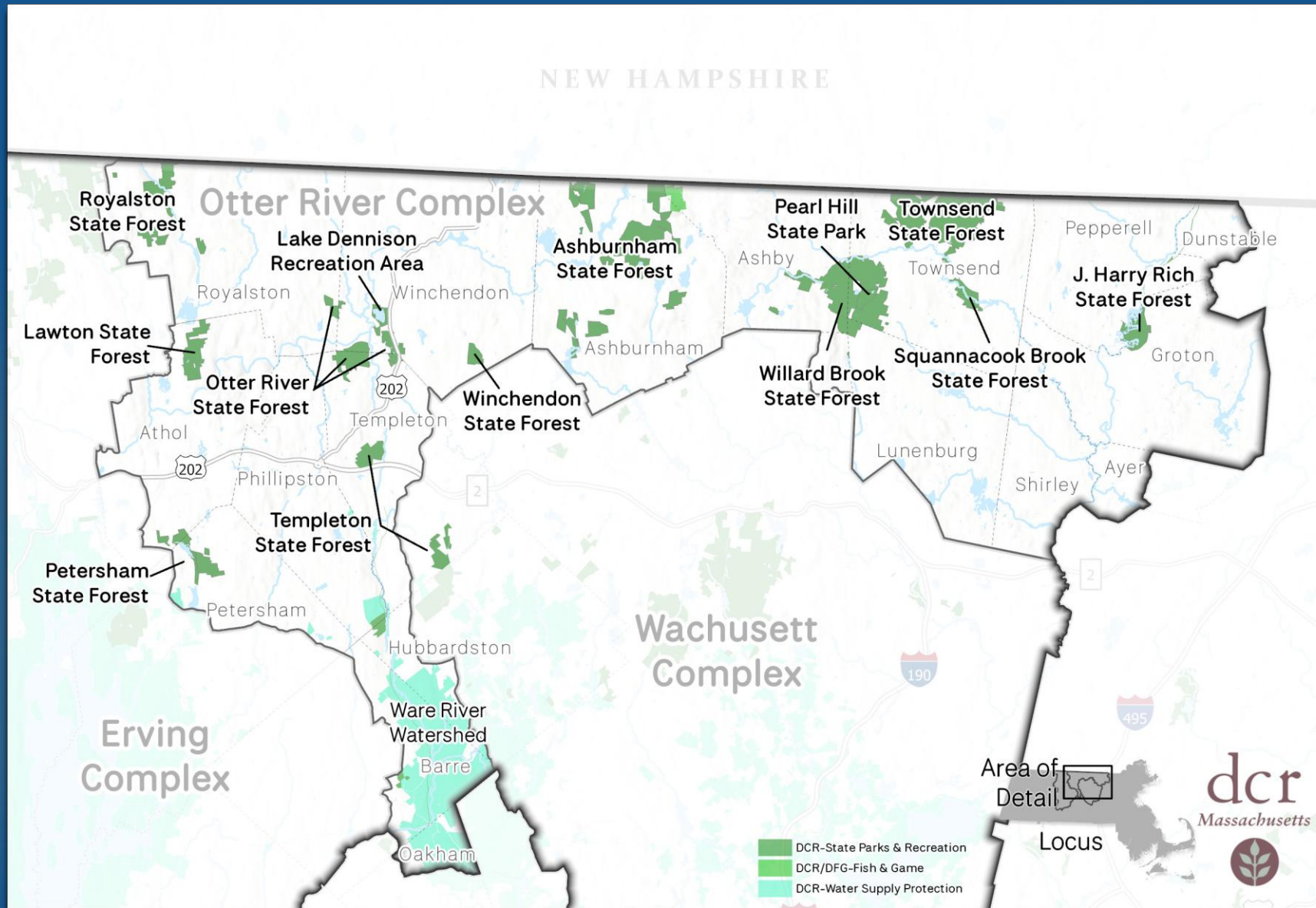
Management planning process shall produce:

- ▶ Description of unique resources;
- ▶ Discussion of land's potential use;
- ▶ Land Stewardship Zoning analysis; and
- ▶ Action Recommendations

Central Highlands District

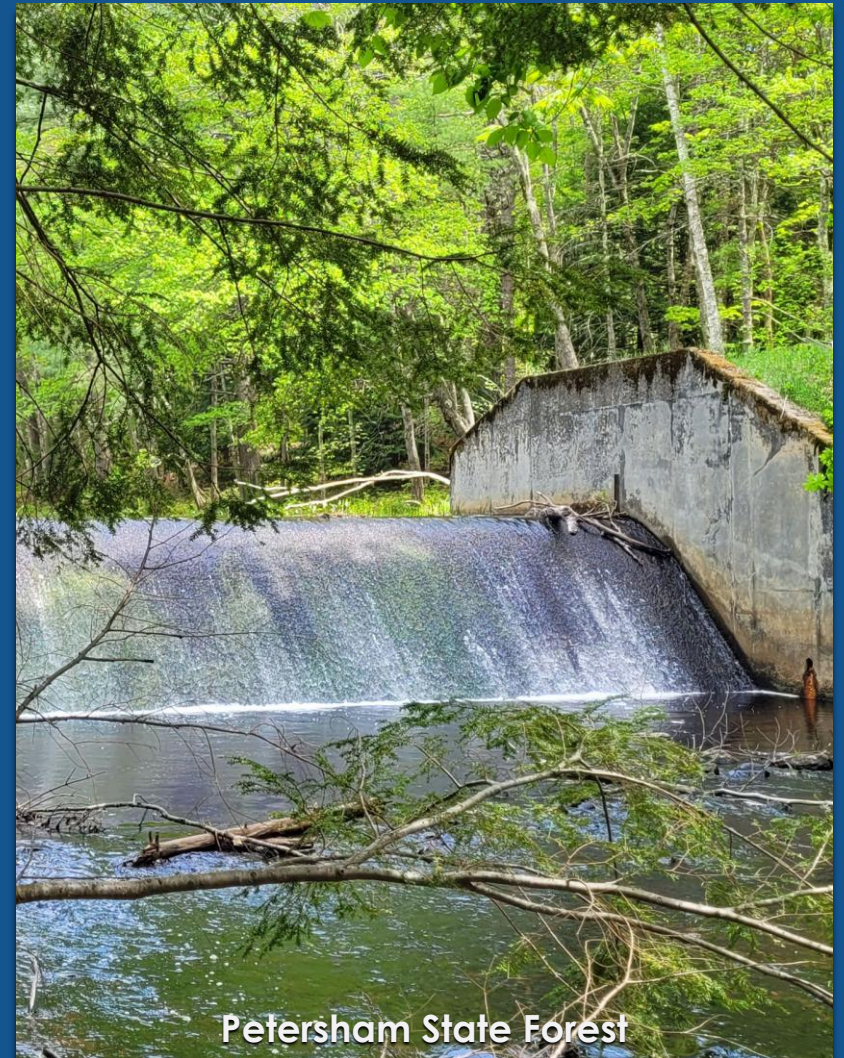


Otter River Complex



Otter River Complex RMPs - Project Timeline

- ▶ Public meeting (for entire Central Highlands District) - June 2022
- ▶ Drafting plans - 2022–2024
- ▶ Release of draft RMPs - August 11th
- ▶ Public meeting - August 21
- ▶ Public Comment Period - through September 20th, 2025
- ▶ Presentation to Stewardship Council - October 2025



Common Recommendations



- ▶ Conduct an archaeological reconnaissance survey
- ▶ Create a trail map
- ▶ Establish a DCR web page
- ▶ Establish a Forest/Park gateway area with parking, Identification Sign, Welcome Wayside, and kiosk
- ▶ Implement measures to curb unauthorized OHV use
- ▶ Implement recommendations from Central Region Invasive Plant Management Plan
- ▶ Resolve potential encroachments
- ▶ Work with Geocaching community to ensure that caches located in sensitive natural and cultural resources are relocated
- ▶ Work with Indigenous partners to inventory, document, conserve, and interpret Indigenous resources and Indigenous history within the Forest

Ashburnham State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	2,895.3
Landscape Designation	Woodland (2,210.6 acres) No Designation (796.5 acres)
Rare Species	16 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	0 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Boating (non-motorized) Canoeing/Kayaking Dog walking, on leash Fishing Hiking/Walking Nature Study/Photography Picnicking Running/Jogging Skiing, cross-country Wildlife viewing



Ashburnham State Forest: Key Findings



- ▶ Gateway to Mount Watatic Reservation
- ▶ Biodiversity hot spot – 16 rare species & 4 Priority Natural Communities
- ▶ Two long-distance trails: the Midstate and Wapack trails
- ▶ 17 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Improve forest roads for emergency vehicle access
 - ▶ Maintain Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) water holes in accordance with DCR Best Management Practices for these resources
 - ▶ Coordinate with the Ashburnham DPW and MassDOT, as appropriate, to install trail crossing signs where the Midstate Trail crosses Rindge State Road (Route 119) and at other trail crossings
 - ▶ Post DPH Fish Consumption Advisory posters at fishing access locations along Lake Wampanoag

J. Harry Rich State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	464.3
Landscape Designation	Woodland (464.3 acres)
Rare Species	3 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	1 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Bicycling, mountain Boating, motor Canoeing/Kayaking Dog walking, on leash Fishing Hiking/Walking Horseback riding Hunting Picnicking Skiing, cross-country Snowmobiling Wildlife viewing



J. Harry Rich State Forest: Key Findings



- ▶ Located at the intersection of the Nashua River (a Wild & Scenic River) and DCR's Nashua River Rail Trail
- ▶ 19 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Clarify the extent of DCR land ownership and boundaries in the Boutwell Island area of the Forest
 - ▶ Prepare a Forest Resource Management Plan
 - ▶ Document the presence of the Hemlock Swamp by completing a Natural Community Field Form and submitting it to NHESP
 - ▶ Explore feasibility of preparation and implementation of an interpretive plan
 - ▶ Locate all unsanctioned small craft landings in the Forest and determine their appropriateness (based on potential threats to natural and cultural resources) for continued recreational use

Lake Dennison Recreation Area: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	225.7
Landscape Designation	Parkland (121.3 acres) No Designation (104.7 acres)
Rare Species	2 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	9 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Boating, sail Camping Canoeing/Kayaking Dog walking, on leash Fishing Hiking/Walking Hunting Picnicking Skiing, cross-country Swimming/Sunbathing Snowmobiling



Lake Dennison Recreation Area: Key Findings



- ▶ Owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE); leased to DCR for recreation and fish and wildlife purposes
- ▶ Plays crucial role in USACE flood management
- ▶ 9 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Assess three culverts with high restoration potential for replacement with structures consistent with Massachusetts Stream Crossing Handbook
 - ▶ Conduct an assessment of the existing contact station to determine whether it meets all operational needs
 - ▶ Replace three comfort stations with accessible facilities
 - ▶ Implement key recommendations from 2020 Accessibility Assessment

Lawton State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	650.3
Landscape Designation	Woodland (394.7 acres) No Designation (255.6 acres)
Rare Species	0 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	0 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Bicycling, mountain Dog walking on leash Hiking/Walking



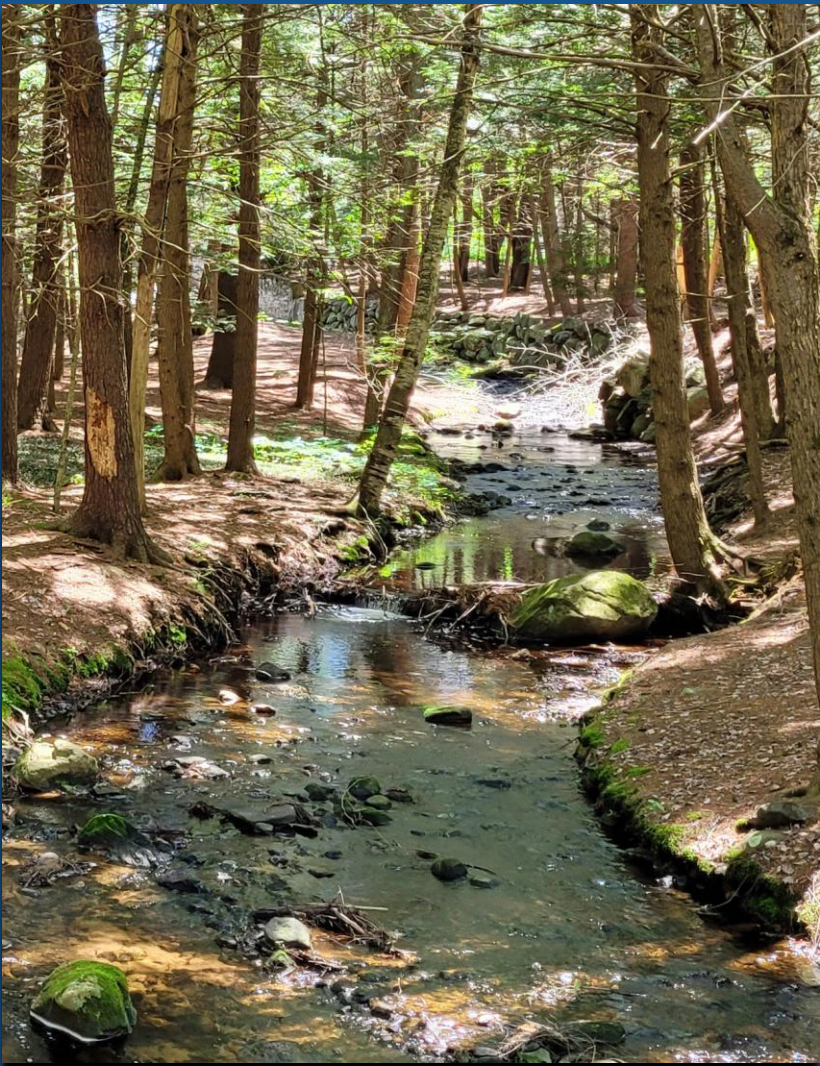
Lawton State Forest: Key Findings



- ▶ First tree farm in New England
- ▶ Environmental Justice populations in Athol within 0.5 miles of Forest
- ▶ 19 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Investigate acquiring land or easements to enhance recreational trail connectivity
 - ▶ In partnership with NHESP, survey recently acquired 186-acre northern parcel of rare species, priority natural communities, and potential vernal pools
 - ▶ Conduct a historical landscape survey of the former Hill-Lawton Farmstead
 - ▶ Reroute trail or acquire trail easement where the existing trail leading to the northerly parcel crosses private property

Otter River State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	1,102.7
Landscape Designation	Parkland (293.0 acres) Woodland (728.8 acres) No Designation (150.4 acres)
Rare Species	2 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	8 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Biking, mountain Camping Canoeing/Kayaking Educational programs Fishing Hiking/Walking Hunting Picnicking Swimming/Sunbathing



Otter River State Forest: Key Findings



- ▶ Massachusetts' first State Forest (1917)
- ▶ Partially owned by the Commonwealth and partially owned by the USACE
- ▶ Closely associated with Lake Dennison Recreation Area
- ▶ 13 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Create a Master Plan for the Otter River Campground
 - ▶ As funding allows, prioritize and implement recommendations from "Other Measures Evaluated" section of a recent energy audit report
 - ▶ Initiate discussions of new lease agreement with USACE and MassWildlife
 - ▶ Following development of detailed spatial information on the boundaries of the DCR lease area, redo Landscape Designations and Land Stewardship Zoning

Pearl Hill State Park: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	182.8
Landscape Designation	Parkland (182.8 acres)
Rare Species	1 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	0 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Biking, mountain Camping Dog walking, on leash Fishing Hiking/Walking Hunting Nature study/Photography Running/Jogging Skiing, cross country Snowmobiling Swimming/Sunbathing



Pearl Hill State Park: Key Findings



- ▶ Park is organized around the Pearl Hill Brook corridor, associated wetlands, and white pine forests
- ▶ 16 Priority Management Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Remediate wetland and stream crossings where erosion is occurring
 - ▶ Implement steps necessary to protect rare species habitat in the Park
 - ▶ Remediate native vegetation loss and soil erosion in the campground and picnic areas
 - ▶ Conduct requisite study/studies and permitting for, and implement:
 - ▶ Projects to improve the waterfront area by replenishing beach sand and removing aquatic vegetation and impounded sediments
 - ▶ Projects to abate bacterial loads for the purposes of increasing safety and swimming access and improving waterbody health

Petersham State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	644.4
Landscape Designation	Woodland (643.8 acres) No Designation (0.9 acres)
Rare Species	9 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	3 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Dog walking, on leash Hiking/Walking Hunting Nature study/Photography



Petersham State Forest:

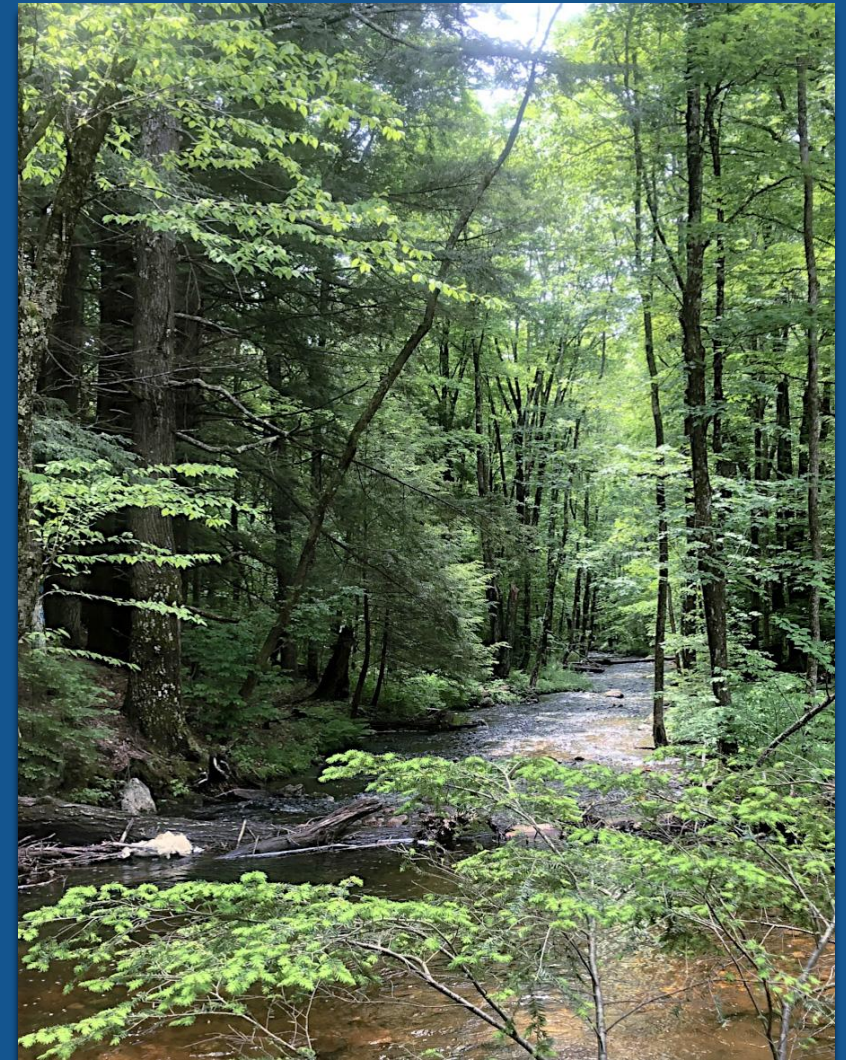
Key Findings



- ▶ Due to a near absence of recreation infrastructure and low levels of visitation, the Forest's natural and cultural resources are believed to remain relatively undisturbed
- ▶ 12 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Implement recommendations in Phase I Inspection/Evaluation Report of Riceville Pond Dam
 - ▶ Establish a formal agreement to allow DCR and public access across private property to access the New Sherborn Road Tract
 - ▶ Add standard DCR trails signage and assurance blazes to existing trails to "keep people from getting lost and contribute to a positive user experience"
 - ▶ Following completion of natural and cultural resources surveys, revisit the Land Stewardship Zoning and adjust as needed to reflect new information on the Forest's resources

Royalston State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	857.2
Landscape Designation	Parkland (7.2 acres) Woodland (847.3 acres) No Designation (2.7 acres)
Rare Species	3 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	2 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Dog walking, on leash Hiking/Walking Horseback riding Snowshoeing



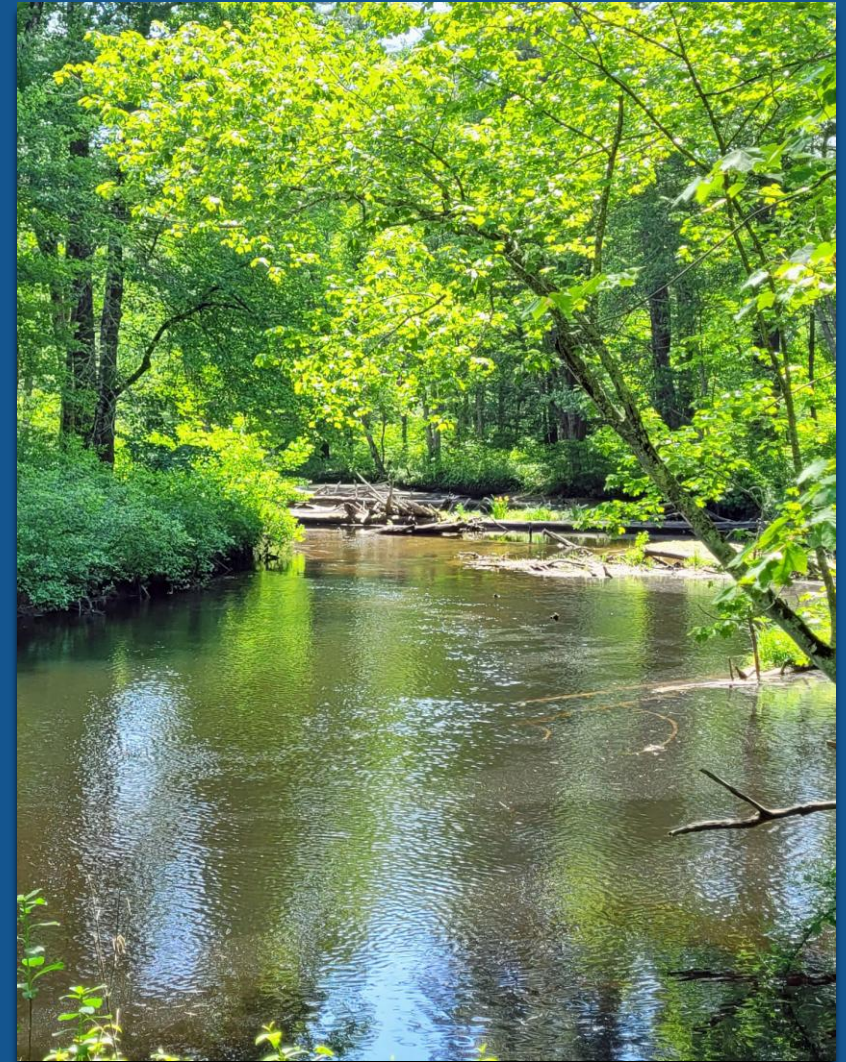
Royalston State Forest: Key Findings



- ▶ Most visitation is associated with the Tully Trail
- ▶ 21 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Survey parcels where boundaries cannot currently be verified
 - ▶ Partner with State of New Hampshire and/or regional land protection groups to conserve adjacent open space in New Hampshire
 - ▶ Partner with the Town of Royalston to repair/replace Falls Road culvert at Tully Brook; block OHV access into Forest adjacent to the culvert
 - ▶ Partner with Town, MassDOT, and USACE to create safe walking routes along the Tully Trail where it crosses and follows Route 68

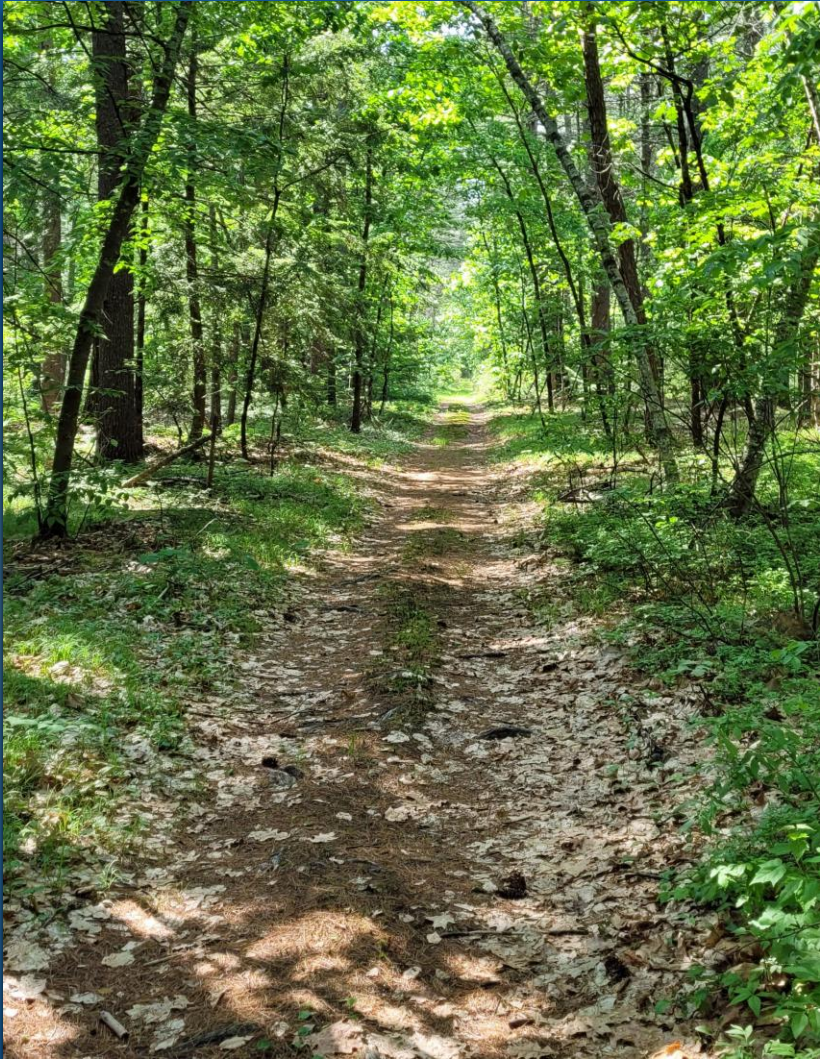
Squannacook Brook State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	319.8
Landscape Designation	Parkland (23.8 acres) Reserve (297.0 acres)
Rare Species	3 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	0 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Biking, mountain Canoeing/Kayaking Dog walking, on leash Fishing Hiking/Walking Hunting Nature study/Photography Running/Jogging Skiing, cross-country Snowshoeing Wildlife viewing



Squannacook Brook State Forest:

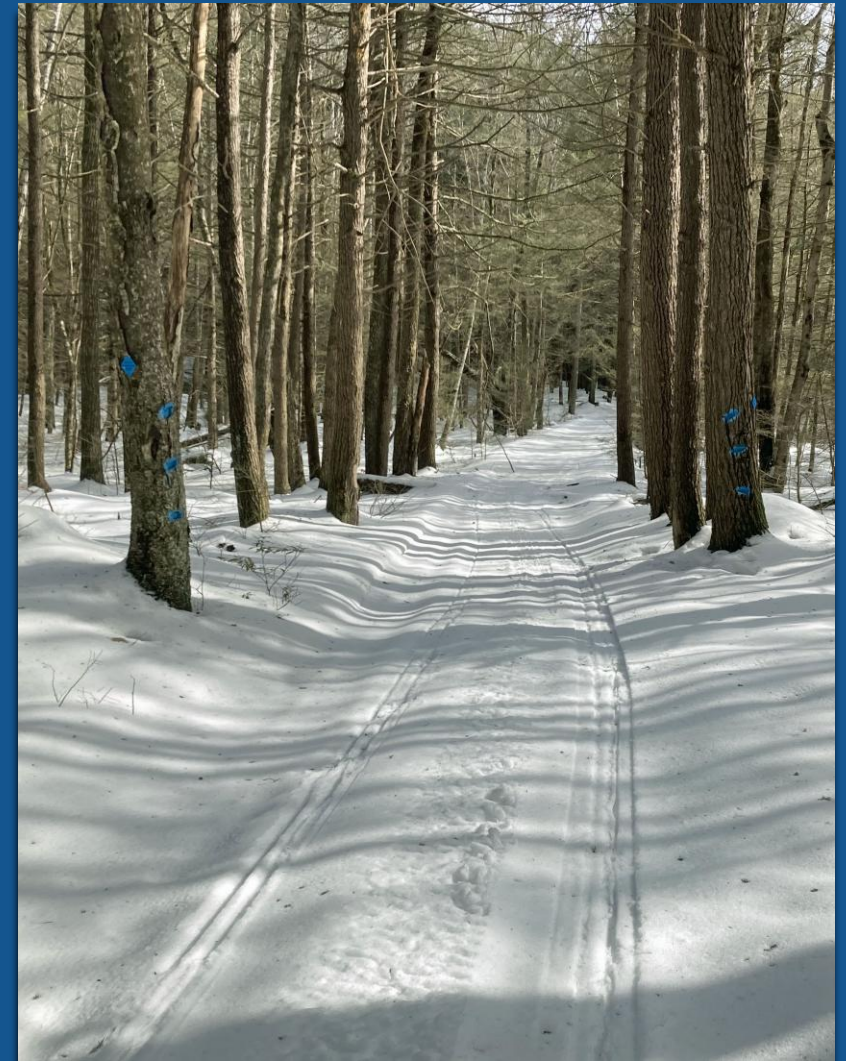
Key Findings



- ▶ Traditionally associated with the Squannacook River; increasingly associated with the Squannacook River Rail Trail
- ▶ 11 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Add accessible picnic tables, cantilevered identification sign, and kiosk along the boundary with the Squannacook River Rail Trail
 - ▶ Provide an authorized trail connection between the Squannacook River Rail Trail and the Squannacook River:
 - ▶ Maintain approximately 750 feet of existing trail
 - ▶ Install destination and wayfinding signs
 - ▶ Install kiosk and bike rack along the Forest's boundary with the rail trail

Templeton State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	718.1
Landscape Designation	Woodland (638.6 acres) No Designation (79.5 acres)
Rare Species	0 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	0 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Hiking/Walking Horseback riding Snowmobiling



Templeton State Forest:

Key Findings



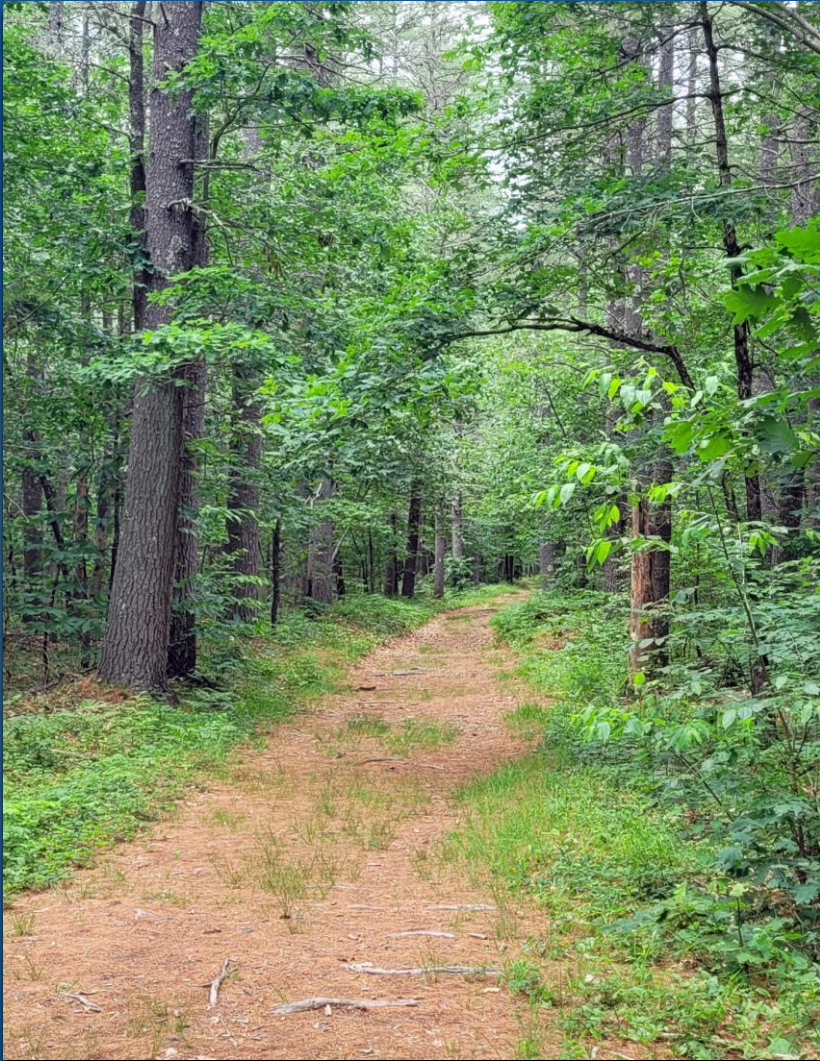
- ▶ Trails are the only recreational development in the Forest
- ▶ 16 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Update the Open Space data layer using legal and boundary information on file with DCR Management Forestry
 - ▶ Partner with MassWildlife to erect a gate and to install identification and orientation signs at the forest road off King Philips Trail
 - ▶ Evaluate and implement options to remediate flooding on the Trout Brook Tract's forest road
 - ▶ Implement measures to curb unauthorized OHV use (Motocross)

Townsend State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	3,163.4
Landscape Designation	Woodland (2,963.4 acres) No Designation (199.9 acres)
Rare Species	5 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	0 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Biking, mountain Canoeing/Kayaking Hiking/Walking Horseback riding Nature study/Photography Picnicking Running/Jogging Skiing, cross-country Snowmobiling Wildlife viewing



Townsend State Forest: Key Findings



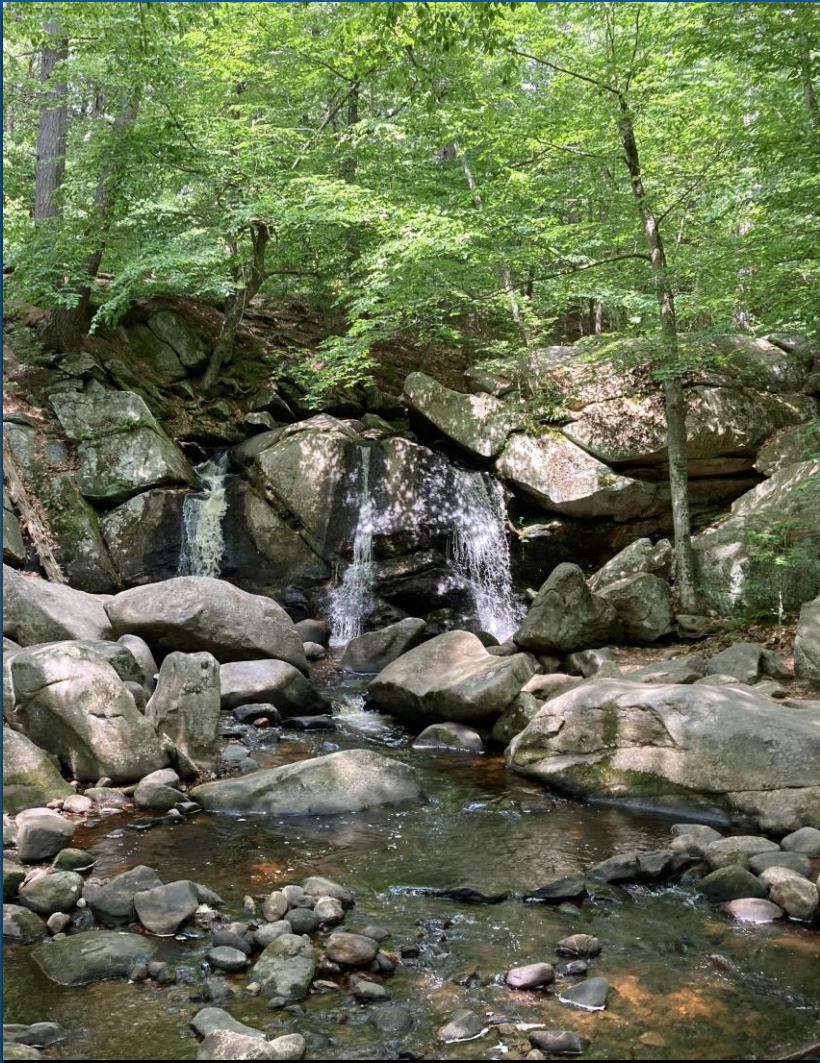
- ▶ Protects portions of the scenic Squannacook River and its watershed
- ▶ Fessenden WMA is an inholding within Forest
- ▶ 23 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Monitor for town initiatives to deaccession or otherwise sell open space parcels appropriate for Forest expansion
 - ▶ Take appropriate steps to evaluate cellar holes where unauthorized digging is occurring and to determine if any mitigative or preventative actions are necessary
 - ▶ As appropriate, promote EOEA Environmental Justice Policy goals
 - ▶ Conduct a study to determine if expansion of the Old Turnpike Road parking area is warranted

Willard Brook State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	2,832.2
Landscape Designation	Parkland (2,719.2 acres) No Designation (113.1 acres)
Rare Species	2 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	5 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Bicycling, mountain Camping Dog walking, on leash Hiking/Walking Hunting Nature study/Photography Picnicking Skiing, cross-country Snowmobiling Swimming/Sunbathing Wildlife viewing



Willard Brook State Forest: Key Findings



- ▶ Recreation development is concentrated along the scenic Willard Brook corridor
- ▶ 29 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Review and implement MassDEP Wellhead Protection Tips and Guidance within the Forest's Zone I Wellhead Protection Area
 - ▶ Improve waterbody health and ensure consistent swimming access by conducting requisite study/studies to identify and abate bacterial loads in Damon Pond and/or Willard Brook
 - ▶ Prepare a Master Plan for Damon Pond Campground to resolve issues of camp site spacing and privacy, accessibility compliance, bathroom improvements, and ageing forest stands
 - ▶ Develop a comprehensive Trails Plan consistent with DCR Trails Guidelines and Best Practices

Winchendon State Forest: Key Resources

Metric	Value
Area (acres)	182.9
Landscape Designation	Woodland (160.5 acres) No Designation (22.4 acres)
Rare Species	0 State; 0 Federal
Cultural Resources	0 total 0 on National Register
Recreation	Hiking/Walking Hunting Wildlife viewing



Winchendon State Forest:

Key Findings



- ▶ Located adjacent to MassWildlife's Nineteenth Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA); access is from the WMA's parking lot
- ▶ Due to a near absence of recreation infrastructure and low levels of visitation, the Forest's natural and cultural resources are believed to remain relatively undisturbed
- ▶ 6 Priority Recommendations, including:
 - ▶ Conduct natural resources surveys prior to creation, expansion, or improvement of any trails or other recreation infrastructure
 - ▶ Following completion of natural and cultural resources surveys, revisit LSZ and adjust as needed to reflect new information on the Forest's resources

Public Comment

General Guidelines

- ▶ Raise your virtual hand
- ▶ Please wait to be recognized by the moderator
- ▶ Please state:
 - ▶ Affiliation (if speaking on behalf of a group)
 - ▶ Property/Properties you are commenting on
- ▶ To assist us, please make comments in the context of what resources or issues DCR should address during the Resource Management Planning process.

Additional Information

- ▶ Draft RMPs are available for review at:

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/central-highlands-district-rmps>

- ▶ Recording and tonight's slide deck will be available at:

<https://www.mass.gov/dcr-public-meetings-information>

- ▶ If you have comments on this project:

- ▶ *Submit online:* <https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>

- ▶ *Deadline: **September 20, 2025***

Please note: the contents of comments submitted to DCR, including your name, town and zip code, will be posted on DCR's website. Additional contact information provided, notably email address, will only be used for outreach on future updates to the subject project or property

- ▶ 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

Thank you!

