



Stewardship Council

DCR Stewardship Council Statement on Resource Management Plans

The DCR Stewardship Council is charged by statute with approving resource management plans (RMPs) created by the DCR for every park within DCR's care. The plans for each park (as part of a park complex) serve many purposes: they define geographic boundaries, identify stakeholders, catalog resources of all kinds (including artifacts, rare species, historical features, endangered plant and wildlife), note deficiencies and opportunities, and record available recreational activities.¹ The Stewardship Council has collaborated with its DCR partners for many years to improve efficiency of plan creation and adoption, without compromising their core qualities and obligations. The long-articulated goal is for all parks to be subject to a current plan, so that they can be the roadmaps for management of all lands and resources within the DCR's care, as we believe the statute contemplated.

Recently, the Council has become concerned in its approval role about the perception that some aspects of park management plans, particularly forest stewardship elements, are being removed from the statutory RMP process. In addition, there is concern that overarching aspects of land stewardship, particularly, landscape designations, be kept current and up to date, as they are critical definers of the obligations under any approved RMP. Clarity on these points is critical to the integrity of the approval process as well as public confidence in the RMPs as roadmaps for good land stewardship and park management.

Landscape Designations

The DCR's Landscape Designations contain guidelines, recommended by the Forest Reserve Science and Technical Advisory Committee (FRSTAC), and approved by the Council, that help determine how land within a park subject to an RMP is classified, as parkland, woodland or reserves, with corresponding implications for stewardship, public enjoyment, and resource protection. The Council does not have the capacity or expertise to examine acre by acre the particular designation of each property, and approval of the guidelines by the Council, with advice and expertise it seeks, is an appropriate level of oversight.

That said, the updating of the 2012 Landscape Designations document is long overdue, with a planned decennial review (2022) now several years behind us. The Council understands that the Forest as Climate Solutions and related initiatives provided an opportunity for new learning and cross-agency alignment. However, as the agency is responsible for the largest amount of forest land of any of the agencies, **the Council is insistent that the DCR should forge ahead with its completion and approval of updates of the Landscape Designations and not be further delayed by activity outside its sphere of control.**

Forest Resource Management Plans

Similarly, FRMPs are critical frameworks for management of a particular type of resource contained within DCR responsibility, and there is overlap

¹ As stated in MGL Ch 21 Sec 2F, "management plans shall include guidelines for the operation and land stewardship of [DCR] 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."

between RMPs and FRMPs. FRMPs provide guidance and recommendations for forests to protect habitat and forest health; manage fire risk; and promote conservation, using a range of management approaches tailored to forest conditions. **Both DCR leadership and the Council agree that FRMPs are subject to Council approval.** For some forests, an RMP may precede the FRMP, or the FRMP may precede the RMP. Regardless, as with the RMPs, the goal of the Council is the same: that all forest lands have current FRMPs to guide their stewardship.

Conclusion

The approval of all of these plans takes place under imperfect conditions. There are gaps in the coverage of DCR properties where an RMP or FRMP has yet to be completed, and the Council acknowledges the DCR's efforts to continue to work on a steady path to their completion. For the reasons described above, RMPs and FRMPs begin to "age" as soon as adopted and will ideally cycle through a process when ALL properties are covered by current plans that are updated on a regular basis. We understand there is a proposal for a Commonwealth-wide Forest Resource Management Plan, with regional district components. We look forward to learning more on this front, and to our role in the approval process.

Until then, the Council does not intend to pause its process of approval of plans solely due to the lack of full completion of all plans that may impact the park complex. Rather, the Council will continue to participate in the approval process, advocate for robust public participation and comment, and for the resources DCR needs to complete current plans for all properties and maintain capacity to keep plans current going forward. In addition:

- The Council will continue to advocate for DCR's update of the 2012 Landscape Designations and to press for a reasonable timeline for that update.
- For each RMP presented to the Council for its approval, the Council requests, in writing:² a list of related plans (FRMPs, trails plans, etc.); any required plans not yet completed (such as an FRMP); and the status and anticipated timeline for their development.

² We are happy to discuss the best format for this information, but hope it is contained in or proximate to the RMP (i.e., a section, cover sheet or addendum), and visible to the Council and public.