**December Meeting Minutes**

**Council Members Present**: Jack Buckley, Jennifer Wilson, Dicken Crane, Melissa Harper, Susan Smiley, Ted Dooley, Dennis Smith, Jeff Collins (Via Zoom for a portion of the meeting), Vivian Ortiz (Joined meeting at 10:16am)

**Council Members Absent**: Ann Canedy

**DCR Staff Attendees:** Doug Rice, Priscilla Geigis, Nick Conners, Julie Martin, Mary Cardwell, Matthew Perry

**Public Attendees as Registered**

**In person:** Chris Egan, Laura Mattei

**Via Zoom:** Irv Rockwood, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Charlie Thompson, Glenn Ayers, Karen Mauney-Brodek, Jun Lee, Bill Boles, Laurel Facey, Lynne Man, Chuck Anastas, Caroline Reeves

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**Call to Meeting, 10:05am – Chair Jack Buckley**

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone in attendance. He reported that over the past week, he attended the new Office of Outdoor Recreation event at Wachusett saying the new office is a good collaboration for DCR. He was present at the DCR Research Symposium and enjoyed hearing from all of the presenters, adding that it was a great event he hopes to see again in the future. He was also invited to and attended the Legislative Park Caucus meeting via Zoom which featured legislators, their staff, and advocacy groups such as the Appalachian Mountain Club and Charles River Conservancy. He informed Councilors that they will be setting the meeting calendar and electing new officers for the next year. He ended his comments by reflecting on the Council’s accomplishments over the last year including the end of retained revenue as a mechanism to partial fund DCR and a significant increase in the agency’s funding, increased staffing of the RMP program, continuing to make budget recommendations, an increase of public attendance at meetings, the hiring of a DCR staff member to assist in the administration of the Council, and the creation of transition recommendations for the new administration. Chair Buckley thanked all of the Councilors for their work over the past year and also thanked park advocates, friend’s groups, and others for supporting the council and the state’s forests and parks.

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**DCR Report – Doug Rice, Commissioner**

Commissioner Rice thanked the Council and chair for inviting him to speak. He then gave an update on DCR activities over the prior month.

*Research Symposium*

Commissioner Rice spoke about the first annual DCR Research Symposium that was held on Tuesday, December 6 and was a great success. He noted that this year it was limited to DCR staff only, but the hope is to expand it to outside groups in the future.

*Blue Hills Deer Hunt*

The deer hunt at Blue Hills was successful again this year with an estimated 23 deer harvested over the 11 days that the hunt was opened. The hunt started in 2015 and since 2020, has been an 11-day archery only hunt, with no shotgun hunting. The annual hunt is part of the long-term Blue Hills Deer Management Program and a collaboration between DCR and MassWildlife.

*Office of Outdoor Recreation*

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs announced this week that they are creating a Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation which will work across the state government with several agencies including DCR. The office is intended to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities throughout the Commonwealth and support the associated economic, environmental, and quality of life benefits they bring.  The Director of Outdoor Recreation position has been posted and we are excited to work together as this office takes shape.

*Ernestina Morrissey*

The Commonwealth's official vessel - the *Ernestina Morrissey* - will return to its home port after a seven-year absence during which time it underwent a major rehabilitation in Maine. The vessel’s return will be marked by a homecoming celebration at the State Pier Terminal, New Bedford MA on Saturday, 12/17/22 at 10:00am. The ceremony will mark the public handover of the Ernestina from DCR to Mass Maritime Academy and Preservation Planner Wendy Pearl will be there representing DCR.

*Groundbreaking at South Boston Playground*

There will be a groundbreaking at the Michael Joyce Memorial Playground at Marine Park in South Boston. The playground will undergo a $1 million renovation with funding from Colin’s Joy foundation and the Joyce Family. It is now the largest and most accessible playground that DCR has. All are invited to attend the ceremony. DCR is working on getting a date for the groundbreaking and will update the Council when its available.

*First Day Hikes*

DCR is continuing the tradition of First Day Hikes at 10 parks this year: Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, Purgatory Chasm, Wachusett Reservoir, Breakheart Reservation, Halibut Point State Park, Walden Pond State Reservation, Blue Hills Reservation, Great Falls Discovery Center, Mount Greylock State Reservation, and Middlesex Fells. First Day Hikes occur nationwide in all 50 states and are a way to encourage people to start off the new year by getting outside. We hope that you can join us on January 1 at one of the events. The information will be posted online soon and Matt will be sending details on each of the events to the Council.

*Public Skating*

Public Skating opened at DCR rinks on November 25 and runs until April 16. Public skate times are available on the DCR website. Commissioner Rice thanked all of the rink staff that has worked hard to prepare for this season.

*Deferred Maintenance Update*

For FY2023, $106 million is devoted to work that falls under the umbrella of deferred maintenance. That is 75% of the DCR Capital Budget, when land is excluded. This is work that repairs, upgrades, or replaces existing facilities. The five DCR regions receive an allocation of Deferred Maintenance funds which they control for repairs within their region. A number of key deferred maintenance projects are set to be completed this fiscal year, including a program to restore all campsites in the DCR system which is more than 70% completed.

*Summer Planning*

Even though winter is just starting, DCR is planning out our summer season now, preparing rosters of seasonal positions that will be needed for its properties. Positions include forest and park supervisors, laborers, visitor services staff and park interpreters, shorebird monitors, lifeguards and administrative positions.  DCR staff is starting early on recruitment efforts as well.  Some of the positions will be filled through the annual recall process and those that do not get filled will then be posted on the Mass Careers Website.

Park Serve Day has been scheduled for Saturday April 22, 2023, which is also Earth Day. This event attracts hundreds of volunteers to properties around the state helping with projects at the park, and fostering stewardship for all those who participate.

The DCR team worked tirelessly to attract lifeguards last season.  DCR exceeded its target number of 623 lifeguards and hired a total of 707 lifeguards for summer 2022. The Commissioner was pleased to announce that DCR’s Lifeguard Recruitment Initiative Team will be awarded the *Manuel Carballo Governor's Award for Excellence in Public Service* next week at a ceremony with Governor Baker and Lt. Governor Polito.

**Strategic Readiness Initiative Update**

Commissioner Rice gave the Council a brief update on the DCR Strategic Readiness Initiative.

The teams continue to work towards their respective goals and, with guidance from the Commissioner’s office, have also started to think about how we transition this work from sprint project to institutional workstreams.  In addition to the projects, DCR and EEA have opened discussions to transfer the Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns (ACEC) program back under EEA’s jurisdiction, which was another recommendation identified in the Strategic Readiness.

Staff is in the home stretch on the first six recommendations that were advanced. Commissioner Rice spoke about the core principles. The core principles were a significant component of the strategic readiness roadmap and were created to help articulate the agency priorities for staff, stakeholders, and constituents.  These five principles are:

1. Provide access to a diversity of outdoor recreational experiences and unique landscapes that is equitable, inclusive, and welcoming;
2. Conserve lands, water, and forests by integrating science, research, and technical expertise into the management of our natural resources;
3. Advance climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts by implementing sustainable practices and advancing resiliency across our infrastructure, assets, and resources;
4. Support healthy communities by providing places for people to connect with nature and each other;
5. Inspire generations of stewards by recognizing and honoring our legacy through partnerships, public engagement, and education.

They can be seen throughout DCR’s projects.  They are components of evaluations and qualification criteria within capital planning, partnership projects, and research projects.  They have been folded into the visitor experience and engagement training that will be provided to all DCR staff.  Staff is also identifying ways to augment DCR’s hiring and interviewing practices including ensuring all that interviews discuss how a position supports the core principles..

Speaking about the project updates, Commissioner Rice began by congratulating the Research Team on a very successful and well-run Symposium Tuesday.  At this stage of the project, not only have they have met the initial intent of the recommendation but continue to highlight the importance of research and the sharing of critical data across the agency for informed decision making.

The Partnership Team and the Visitor Experience and Engagement Teams have strong foundations in place and continue to socialize them throughout the agency before a full roll out after the turn of the calendar.  Staffing gaps in the External Affairs team will have an impact on the partnership team to fully achieve their goal but there is a solid framework developed to help the next partnership team get out of the gate running.  Visitor Experience training will host the first training sessions late January.

The Capital Planning Team unfortunately was not able to secure the right vendor to support a process redesign.  The team continues to explore their options and are not deterred by this late set back.  While the timeline may extend beyond the calendar year, they will continue to work until they achieve their goal.

The last team update is related to hiring.  While Strategic Readiness shined a light on DCR’s hiring activity, the agency as a whole prioritized hiring, both SRI and beyond.  Since June 1, DCR has increased its headcount by 72 FTEs, the highest count since 2015.  All 50 of the long-term seasonal conversions are completed and DCR continues to work through the process on the remainder of the positions.  It is anticipated that a few start dates will drift into January. Staff has also experienced small candidate pools relative to some of the engineering positions, so the team has launched a subcommittee to develop focused recruitment activities for these critically important positions.

*Councilor Questions and Comments*

Chair Buckley commended DCR for their aggressive approach to hiring. He said it is important how deferred maintenance is articulated, and that he thinks it is good that 75% of capital funding is being spent on it.

CouncilorOrtiz asked about the ACEC program being moved to EEA. Commissioner Rice clarified that it was a program that was under EEA, was moved to DCR, and is now moving back to EEA as part of the Strategic Readiness Initiative. Councilor Smiley then asked about seasonal hiring being converted to full time positions and if that will be expanded from the 50 positions talked about. Commissioner Rice said that it is dependent on the FTE cap.

Councilor Crane asked if any of the seasonal positions that were converted to full time were involved with the creation of RMPs. Councilor Rice responded that yes, two of the 50 positions were.

Councilor Ortiz asked if the 700 lifeguards that were hired last summer filled the needs of DCR for all of its swimming facilities. Commissioner Rice said that it did. Councilor Ortiz then asked about the training in January for all DCR staff on how to interact with the public. Deputy Commissioner Nick Connors responded that the training is part of a national curriculum for organizations such as DCR.

Councilor Harper asked about the Strategic Readiness Initiative and what it says about stakeholders and partnerships. Commissioner Rice said that the team has been putting a framework together that addresses how to best work with stakeholders and partners going forward. Councilor Harper commented that it is important to keep an emphasis on the Strategic Readiness Initiative and to continue to promote it and advance it.

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**Regular Business I**

*Presentation from DCR Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis*

Ms. Geigis presented on the DCR research initiative speaking about its origins, an agencywide survey that was conducted on what research is currently happening at DCR, the creation of the Office of Research, and the Research Symposium.

After the presentation concluding, Councilors were given the opportunity for questions and comments.

Councilor Crane commented that he was interested in the social science research that was being undertaken by DCR.

Councilor Ortiz said that she was going to post a flyer provided by Ms. Geigis to the Council about DCR’s research to the DCR rail trail by her house so that the public can learn more about the research.

Councilor Wilson stated that there must be a really great satisfaction for employees and a benefit for participating in something like the research symposium.

Chair Buckley commended Ms. Geigis on her efforts and for making the research initiative come together so quickly. He said that it is important to let the public know that the research being done by DCR is not esoteric science and to emphasize that it is practical science. He said that research makes parks better, more accessible, and protects natural resources.

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*Approval of Minutes* – *November 10, 2022 Meeting*

Councilor Crane made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 10, 2022 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Ortiz seconded the motion.

**Roll Call on Approval of Minutes**

Councilor Harper: Abstain

Councilor Smith: Abstain

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Abstain

Councilor Dooley: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

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*Public Comment*

[Guidelines for Public Comment are available on the DCR Stewardship Council website.](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dcr-stewardship-council-public-comment-guidelines/download)

Because of the technology available in the Gardner Auditorium, those observing over Zoom were unable to make public comments during the meeting. They were asked to submit written comments which are attached to these minutes. In addition, two statements made by Chris Egan and Laura Mattei who attended the meeting in person are also attached to these minutes.

Chairman Buckley invited members of the public for comment, which was offered by the following:

* Chris Egan, Mass Forestry Alliance
* Laura Mattei, Sudbury Valley Trustees
* Sarah Freeman, Arborway Coalition, Boston, MA Resident

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**Regular Business II**

*Committee Updates*

**Policy** – The Policy Committee met on December 6 and received an update from Paul Cavanaugh on the status of RMPs. Mr. Cavanaugh updated the committee that there were two seasonal planners on RMP process and that they have both been hired full time. Coming down the pike are the South Coast RMPs, Blackstone Complex RMPs, Central Highlands RMPs, and the Lake District RMPs. The committee discussed designating a couple of Stewardship Council meetings for the discussion and approval of RMPs.

The committee received a brief update on Landscape Designations from Matt Perry and is interested in seeing a snapshot of comments received from the public about the process.

The committee also discussed revisiting the enabling statute of Council, mostly looking to align goals of commissioner with statutory responsibilities of council.

**Stakeholders** – The Stakeholders’ Committee met on December 2, and spoke about setting the 2023 meeting schedule. Councilor Smiley thanked the Council for filling out the survey about meeting preferences. She reported that the results of the survey showed that Councilors prefer a hybrid model, to keep meetings in the mornings on Thursdays, and to keep the day and time consistent. Of the 11 meetings for 2023 the recommendation from the committee is to have seven virtual and four in person. Of the four in person, two would be at 9 am and two in the evening at 5 pm. For locations, two of the meetings will be held in Boston, and the committee is looking to have the other two at MassWildlife Headquarters in Westborough and at Walden Pond.

Councilor Smith made a motion to accept the recommendations of the Stakeholders’ Committee for 2023 Stewardship Council meetings.

Councilor Dooley seconded the motion.

Councilor Ortiz commented that they should use the 5 pm meetings as a learning experience and should be open to moving them later if it better accommodates the public.

Councilor Smiley stated that they will use 2023 as research to see what meeting time works best.

**Roll Call on Accepting Stakeholders Committee Recommendations for 2023 Stewardship Council Meetings**

Councilor Harper: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

Councilor Dooley: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

**Finance –** The Finance Committee did not meet last month but they are looking to meet next month to discuss the capital budget and if there is a need for a new bond bill.

**Nominating –** The Nominating Committee met on November 28 and presented the following slate of officers to the Council:

Chair – Jack Buckley

Vice Chair – Melissa Harper

Secretary – Ann Canedy

Councilor Smith made a motion to accept the nominating committee slate for Stewardship Council officers for 2023.

Councilor Crane seconded the motion.

**Roll Call on Accepting Nominating Committee slate of officers for 2023**

Councilor Harper: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

Councilor Dooley: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

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*Councilor Comments*

Chair Buckley encourages Councilors who are interested in leadership positions to talk to him about taking on one of the officer roles next year.

Councilor Wilson thanked those who attended the meeting in-person and said that it can be helpful to have in-person meetings. She said that they will work to improve the Zoom experience for those who attend meetings remotely.

Councilor Ortiz asked how many people attended the meeting via Zoom and thanked them all for coming.

Councilor Crane said it was great to meet in-person again.

Councilor Smiley thanked Matt Perry for organizing the meeting at the State House and recognized Priscilla Geigis for her innovative management at DCR.

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**Adjournment**

The Council adjourned the meeting at 11:37.

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Please check the DCR Stewardship Council webpage for notice of upcoming meetings. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council>

**Public Comments**

**Glen Ayers, Greenfield MA**

Good Morning Councilors, my name is Glen Ayers and I live in Greenfield, MA.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide public comments. Today I would like to bring to the Council's attention that we are 28-days away from the beginning of the new Healey Administration. As part of Maura's Climate Plan, she has indicated that she will institute a temporary moratorium on commercial harvesting on State-owned forest lands. Right now a sign-on letter is circulating which has gathered over 340 signatures over the past 4-days. This number includes more than 30 group sign-ons, so the number of people supporting an end to logging on our State Forests and Parks is really hundreds more than the current 340 number suggests. The sign-on letter will continue to collect more signatures until the middle of this month, at which point it will be sent to the Healey Team, along with a press release that emphasizes how crazy it is to continue to intentionally degrade our publicly-owned forests during this time of climate emergency.

The Stewardship Council is entrusted with providing oversight for DCR activities, and for approving the DCR budget. In light of your statutory responsibilities, I am asking you to help DCR plan ahead for the logging moratorium, and use your authority to redirect the portion of DCR budget allocated for the "Management Forestry Program" towards implementing the Municipal Reforestation Framework that is envisioned in legislation being sponsored by Senator Cynthia Stone Creem (S.504) which will be reintroduced into the next legislative session in January. The Council can use your power to redirect the existing and proposed funding from something that is very harmful to the climate, and instead use that funding to begin implementation of the framework using existing DCR staff who will otherwise be sitting idle for the next year or more while the logging moratorium is in place. The Council can also insert the following language into your approval of the DCR budget-

"No funds shall be expended in FY24 by the Department of Conservation and
Recreation related to the preparation, offering, contracting, or implementation
of commercial timber sales on any lands owned by or under the control of the
Commonwealth of Massachusetts."

This language would make it clear to DCR that they need to work with nature to address the climate emergency, instead of ignoring the damage that they are doing to our public forests and the climate. I ask that you take this under advisement and that you have an open discussion about the budgeting process, as the Chair has indicated is needed in order to provide oversight of DCR functions.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide these public comments.

Glen Ayers

**Suzanne Gall Marsh, Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands**

Grape, Bumpkin and Lovells Islands have clivus multrum (composting toilets) that have been closed to the public since 2019.  The plan was to demolition them and replace with a new version.  This has not been done yet.

At the December 1, 2022 BHI Partnership Operations Committee meeting DCR staff reported that they, "haven't heard anything yet for the 2023 season intentions. Staff are, seeing and smelling a lot of pollution on the islands without bathrooms.  Ops Staff are finding human excrement along the trails and such, especially Grape and Lovells."

Great Brewster Island  no longer has a functioning clivus multrum and should also be demolished and replaced.  This is a serious public health situation finding excrement and used toilet paper along the trails and in out of the way spots.

Please see that the funding and the process can happen for the 2023 visitor season.  Thank you.

**Laurel Facey, Wendell MA**

I would like to rebut comments being made by a commercial logger/forester who objects to the upcoming moratorium. He speaks of "'existing jobs" which you may have good reason to proceed with, but these are the very types of forest destruction that I would ask you to stop permitting.  We should be protecting our forest lands for the conservation values they have and for the recreation opportunities the public has every right to enjoy (see Chapter 132A Section 2B).

The moratorium we expect Governor-Elect Maura Healey to institute as of the first day of her term is a time when certain laws need to be examined. Specifically, Chapter 132A Section 2B needs to be updated so that forest products are not the focus of the work of forest management by the Commonwealth. The Department of Conservation and Recreation should be separate from economic motivation in its forestry work. There are many more acres of forestland owned by private landowners where economic objectives may be obtained, but the lands held in common by the people of the state should not be included for commercial logging.

**Lynne Man, Lunenburg MA**

My public comment, as always, has to do with forest management on public lands. I know that DCR staff are sincere in their belief that practices such as "forest thinning" and silvicultural techniques are good for the forest. I acknowledge that there is science behind this. However, there is a growing body of current evidence related to climate change, biodiversity loss and forests that increasingly points to the need to let forests grow old with minimal human interference. I can send you a long list of references if you're interested. And so I ask once again, please find a way to put all public forest land into permanent reserves in order to protect this most precious resource.

As incoming governor, Maura Healy's office is also concerned about this and has promised a moratorium on logging on public land.

“Maura will place a temporary moratorium on commercial harvesting on state-owned public forest land. Within her first year as Governor, she will develop and implement a science-based state forest management plan that accounts for the impacts of climate change on our forest resources and the role our forests can play in protecting the climate.” *(*[https://maurahealey.com/issues/climate/)](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/maurahealey.com/issues/climate/%29__;!!CUhgQOZqV7M!jAG40BmrpiJDnM6UdgH2PJZX_spaQpUddFeduQjZ4XbLCYoIn7hfauur9-oE2r6sAxs5RcdE2iolIbaGUZI-0tbJ$)

I am confident that DCR and the DCR Stewardship Council will honor this and make sincere efforts to redirect resources that are currently used for logging on public land to conservation efforts that are more in line with the evolving understanding of the roles and interactions between forests, biodiversity and climate.

**Laura Mattei, Sudbury Valley Trustees**

Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) is a regional land trust whose mission is to protect natural areas and farmland for wildlife and people in the 36 communities that surround the Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Rivers. We currently manage 94 properties totaling 2,400 acres and oversee 97 conservation restrictions totaling 3,300 acres. As the Director of Stewardship, I have worked on habitat restoration and management projects at SVT for the last twenty-one years.

I am here today to share my and SVT’s concerns that the DCR administration has put the breaks on all active forest management that involves the cutting and removal of trees (aka logging). SVT believes that responsible forestry can be a critical tool in restoring and managing the health of our forest habitats and wildlife, and with good forest management prescriptions, can assist the Commonwealth’s efforts to mitigate and adapt to the negative impacts of climate change.

In many instances, quality forest management is needed for the birds. As you know, the DCR is part of a program with MassAudubon to certify foresters in bird habitat assessment and to help landowners to manage their forests for the benefits of birds. You also know that many of our present-day forests require active management and the cutting of trees to improve important forest bird habitat.

Forests capture carbon. Active management of forests, including cutting trees, can be a component of the overall equation needed to capture and store carbon. The New England Forest Foundation is promoting exemplary forest management practices and the use of wood in construction that will help our region to capture and store carbon. Wood products are a significant part of our building construction and furnishings. Sourcing wood from our local woodlands, rather than importing wood products from distant forests across the globe (which are often not managed sustainably) increases our global carbon footprint.

Active forest management can be an essential tool to reduce the risk of wildfires, especially in forests that have been mismanaged in the past. This has become a nationally recognized issue. With warming temperatures and more acute droughts in Massachusetts, we have had more wildfires.

I was prompted to come here to speak to you today because of one specific case. For the last 12 years, I have been coordinating a collaborative pitch pine-scrub oak barrens restoration project at the Desert Natural Area, located in Sudbury and Marlborough. This 600+ acre area includes lands owned by SVT, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs of Massachusetts, the City of Marlborough, the Town of Sudbury and DCR. This habitat type supports many rare and declining species of wildlife such as the whip-poor-will, brown thrasher, prairie warbler and a suite of moths, butterfly and beetles.

We have been communicating for several years with the DCR forester regarding the management of their land in the Desert Natural Area, known as the Hanson Lot. The management plan for the DCR land includes removing a large stand of dying red pine and restoring twenty-five acres of pitch pine-scrub oak barrens. This site experienced a wildfire just this past summer. We were lucky that the dying and drying red pines were not ignited and local fire teams were able to control the fire.

This year, the City of Marlborough and SVT received funding from MassWildlife so that the City can expand its restoration acreage – and this entails logging - and we will also be doing some coarse mowing and creating firebreaks in preparation for a burn. The City of Marlborough and SVT were hoping to join forces with the DCR to coordinate our logging operations this winter to improve efficiency, to have positive impacts on habitat and to reduce the risk of wildfire. However, we were disappointed to learn from the DCR forester, that he was told that they were pausing all forestry operations “due to the new incoming administration.”

I am here today to ask the Stewardship Council to advise the administration that our forests need to be actively managed – for the benefits of forest habitat, wildlife, and endangered species, for the reduction of the risk of wildfire and to help the Commonwealth to mitigate the impacts of Climate Change. As land managers, DCR should have access to the full array of management tools, including cutting, to achieve the goals that we all share.

The DCR’s Forest Action Plan of 2020 specifies these actions. It is essential that we move positively forward on this plan.

**Chris Egan, Massachusetts Forest Alliance**

I’m Chris Egan from the Massachusetts Forest Alliance. We represent forest landowners, foresters, timber harvesters, and forest products companies in Massachusetts. I’m concerned about actions taken by DCR in our state forests in the last few weeks.

As you may know, Governor-Elect Healey promised in her climate plan to enact a temporary moratorium on sustainable forest management on state- owned forestland. This is troubling, and we do not believe it lines up with climate science. Instead, it appears to side with a school of thought well outside the climate science mainstream called “proforestation.”

We wrote an article challenging many of the claims put forward by proforestation activists, and clearly demonstrating that climate science groups and leading environmental organizations are on the opposite side.

Leading environmental groups sent a Climate and Environmental Policy Briefing Book to all candidates for statewide office earlier this year. It called for a continuation of forest management on state-owned forestland, saying:

“Both forest reserves (areas left to natural processes, without timber harvest) and sustainably managed forests (areas managed by people for a range of values, including timber) are important and appropriate on both private and public forest lands in Massachusetts.”

Our understanding is that many of these leading environmental organizations have repeated this position to Healey’s transition climate committee in recent weeks in the hopes of avoiding a moratorium being implemented. We believe that there is still a possibility that no moratorium will be enacted due to the opposition of these groups and the strong science backing forest management.

Nevertheless, DCR seems to have gotten a head start on a possible moratorium since the election. Specifically, this includes forest management projects that went through the full approval process in 2022, only to be pulled back from the bidding process at the last moment in recent weeks. This is already having a negative effect on the small mom-and-pop forest product companies in Massachusetts that we represent.

When we first heard from our members that DCR was pulling these projects back, we contacted DCR senior leadership and were told that there was no moratorium and things were moving ahead as normal, but there was of course no guarantee that the new Healey administration would follow suit.

Communication to our members from management foresters saying otherwise was blamed on miscommunication, which would shortly be cleared up.

However, that proved to not be the case, and we have received confirmations from DCR staff that they were clearly and specifically instructed not to put these approved projects out to bid – instructions which still hold.

We’re uncertain why DCR would put a moratorium in place based on what the next administration may or may not choose to do, especially for projects that made their way through the entire approval process and were ready to be put out to bid this year. We have yet to hear an explanation, never mind an actual acknowledgement that this is in fact happening.

Even more troubling, there is a belief within DCR that the Healey moratorium will include forest management projects that already went to bid and were awarded, with the winning bidder having paid a deposit to DCR to finalize the contract. The actual harvests of trees have not yet taken place and are scheduled for early 2023. We have had our member timber harvesters and sawmills contact us, extremely worried that they will be prevented from proceeding on these harvests that are on their calendar and in their financial plans.

Sawmills are counting on the wood they have purchased showing up at their mill at a certain time, and if it doesn’t appear they will be in serious financial jeopardy, unable to fulfill sales of lumber that in some cases they have already made.

We would expect DCR staff to explain to the Healey Administration that this action would involve breaching contracts and potentially open them up to legal challenges, never mind result in serious economic damages to our members that will be highlighted in the media. We have communicated this to the Healey transition committee as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.