

LAND STEWARDSHIP ZONING GUIDELINES

July 2012

The Department of Conservation & Recreation's Mission:

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

I. Authorization and Purpose

The Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) has a very broad and dynamic mission that encompasses protection of resources, providing the public with access to recreational opportunities, and active forest management. This multi-faceted mission sometimes results in complex management challenges. To help meet its mission, DCR has developed a two tier system for guiding the management of all state forest and park properties¹ under its care:

- 1) Landscape Designations - applied statewide to assess and guide management activities throughout the DCR state forest and park system; and
- 2) Land Stewardship Zoning, and the RMP process of which it is a part, addresses the agency's statutory responsibilities in M.G.L. Chapter 21: Section 2F to prepare management plans that encompass all reservations, forests and parks; provide for the protection and stewardship of natural, cultural, and recreational resources under the agency's management, and ensure consistency between recreation, resource protection and sustainable forest management. Land Stewardship Zoning is applied to DCR state forest and park properties on an individual basis during the Resource Management Planning process, incorporating site specific information to guide management of specific areas within these properties.

These two systems, while applied at different levels – statewide scale vs. site specific scale – work in an integrated fashion to accommodate primary ecosystem services while recognizing and providing site specific resource protection. Table 1 illustrates how these two systems work together.

The DCR is committed to protecting important natural and cultural resources while simultaneously providing for sustainable public access and recreation across all properties. The DCR is also committed to complying with all state and federal regulations and policies and meeting all state health and building codes - responsibilities that are central to the agency's mission and statutory charge.

II. Landscape Designations

The Forest Futures Visioning Process, an advisory initiative undertaken in 2009 – 2010, recommended the establishment of three landscape designations to differentiate and prioritize ecosystem values at a statewide scale. Acting upon that recommendation, DCR undertook an effort in 2010-2011 to designate all of the properties within the DCR State Parks System as either Reserves, Parklands, or Woodlands, as a means to establish the primary ecosystem services provided by these properties, guide management

¹ These management systems do not apply to DCR's Division of Water Supply Protection properties.

decisions based upon these services, and communicate the agency's landscape scale management objectives to the public.

The designations have been determined via the use of available GIS information drawing upon statewide resource databases, and incorporating extensive input from DCR field staff and the public. These designations are designed to provide a framework for overarching management guidelines that are applicable to properties within the state forest and park system.

The three landscape designations are:

- Parklands focus on providing public recreation opportunities while protecting resources of ecological and cultural significance.
- Woodlands demonstrate exemplary forest management practices for landowners and the general public, while supporting the range of ecosystem services that sustainably-managed forests offer, including a diversity of native species and age classes, and compatible recreation opportunities.
- Reserves provide backcountry recreation experiences and protect the least fragmented forested areas and diverse ecological settings. Successional processes will be monitored to assess and inform long-term forest stewardship.

III. Resource Management Plans and Land Stewardship Zoning

The Land Stewardship Zoning Guidelines defines three types of zones to ensure resource protection based upon site specific field data, and provides guidance for current and future management based upon resource sensitivities. Inventory and assessment of resources during preparation of a Resource Management Plan (RMP) is factored into land use management and decision making, and provides guidance for stewardship of these resources. The process results in zoning of areas and specific sites within DCR properties based on their sensitivity to recreation and management activities that are appropriate for each facility as recognized during the RMP process. In this way, the Land Stewardship Zoning system helps to “ensure that recreation and management activities do not degrade ecological, cultural, or experiential resources and values.”²

The three Land Stewardship Zones provide a general continuum to categorize resources (relative to potential degradation from human activities) from undisturbed sites with highly sensitive resources, through stable / hardy resources, to sites that have been developed and consistently used for intensive recreation or park administration purposes.

The Land Stewardship Zoning system also includes Significant Feature Overlays that may be applied to highlight resource features that have been assessed and documented by professional resource specialists. Information on the significant features is brought into the RMP process via review of previous research projects and associated designations. Significant Feature Overlays can be applied in any of the three Land Stewardship Zones. An example is a natural or cultural resource, recognized through professional inventory / research (such as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern or National Historic District), which cuts across more than one Land Stewardship Zone. Management and protection of these resource features is guided by specific management recommendations that have been developed by resource specialists. An expanded description of Significant Feature Overlays is provided at the end of Section VI.

² *Capacity Reconsidered: Finding Consensus and Clarifying Differences.* Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, Spring 2011, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 1-20.

Application of the three-zone system, including Significant Feature Overlays, to individual DCR properties during the RMP process is facilitated by gathering available field data related to natural and cultural resources, recreational uses, and developed facilities, and reviewing available data sources including BioMap 2 and NHESP Priority habitat information. As a part of this approach:

- lands of special resource sensitivity and significance are identified and mapped, and
- resource and landscape features such as priority habitat areas, wetlands, streams and ponds are mapped,
- new information is brought into the RMP process through public input.

This type of mapping and data collection, based on the best information currently available, provides the basis for subsequent analysis and ultimately the development and application of appropriate management guidelines for specific resources, designed to provide greater protection to valuable natural or cultural assets. This process identifies specific areas for specialized resource management guidance beyond those protections already provided by standard best management practices and legal regulations, such as the agency's Old Growth policy, or Coastal Zone Management's Barrier Beach Management Guidelines. Highly sensitive ecological or cultural assets identified through this process may be found within any of the three Landscape Designations.

IV. Forest Resource Management Plans

Another key tool in DCR's land management activities are the Forest Resource Management Plans (FRMPs) that have been completed for large geographic areas within the western part of the state. The FRMPs identify silvicultural treatments for properties or portions of properties that have been identified through the Landscape Designation process as being suitable for active forest management. These plans will be amended for consistency with the final Landscape Designations. Information and data collected in the FRMPs related to forested areas is similar to what is gathered for an RMP and will be utilized in the development of RMPs for properties located in these areas. As DCR continues to develop RMPs for its properties, forest management planning will occur as a part of the RMP process. Forest management decisions and activity in designated Woodlands will be directed by the Landscape Designation Management Guidelines which lay out procedures that include the identification of different approaches to appropriate silvicultural treatments to ensure resource protection.

V. Planning Integration

With the two tier planning approach – a statewide scale and a site specific scale - it is critical to understand how they work together in an integrated fashion to provide overall guidance to resource management and assist with administrative decisions. Landscape Designations will be used to inform the RMP process and the application of LSZ zones. Specific management guidelines associated with each LSZ zone are intended to provide additional protection and stewardship for site-specific natural and cultural resources and to ensure consistency among the activities that are allowed in each property under the broad management guidelines described for each Landscape Designation.

In most cases, the Landscape Designation and the LSZ zoning systems will work in coordination with each other to set high-level land management priorities based on ecosystem services, and to supplement those priorities with site specific resource protection and management guidelines. RMPs identify and assess specific resources and site conditions at a finer scale than the Landscape Designation process. However, the vertical and horizontal integration of these two systems, as exhibited in Table 1, allows us to apply consistency across processes.

Table 1. Landscape Designation & Land Stewardship Zoning – A Land Management Framework

Landscape Designation Management Guidelines →* Land Stewardship Zones ↓**	Reserve – <i>The least fragmented forested areas where ecological processes will predominate and inform management, and where commercial timber harvesting is not allowed.</i>	Woodland – <i>Forested areas actively managed for forest health, resource protection, sustainable production of timber, and recreation.</i>	Parkland – <i>Areas providing public recreation opportunities, connections to nature, and protection and appreciation of natural and cultural resources.</i>
Zone 1 – <i>Highly sensitive resources requiring special management approaches.</i>	Rare species habitat, natural communities, archaeological sites, or fragile cultural sites identified as being sensitive to / easily degraded by human activities.		
Zone 2 – <i>Resources that support recreational and management activities appropriate to the site.</i>	Large areas of natural vegetation and associated natural and cultural features, including rare species habitat, that is compatible with dispersed recreation.	Forest stands and associated natural and cultural features, compatible with dispersed recreation and active forest management intended to enhance species and age class diversity.	Stable / hardy natural and cultural landscapes, where a variety of outdoor recreation activities can be provided in a sustainable manner.
Zone 3 – <i>Intensive use areas such as recreational sites or maintenance areas.</i>	New zone 3s will not be established in Reserves. <i>Exception</i> – an RMP may identify existing intensive use areas missed during designation and not already captured in a Parklands designation area, in which case the application of a zone 3 may be considered.	Intensive recreation and park administration areas currently embedded within the forested landscape.	Areas that require regular maintenance by DCR staff, including altered landscapes in active use, intensive recreation areas, and park administration areas. Sites that may accommodate administrative or intensive recreation areas to meet future demands.

*See *Landscape Designations for DCR Parks & Forests: Selection Criteria and Management Guidelines* for complete management guidelines for Reserves, Parklands and Woodlands.

** For a complete description of management guidelines for each zone, please see Section IV of this document.

VI. Land Stewardship Zones

Each of the three Land Stewardship Zones have general management guidelines that are intended to provide additional protection for natural and cultural resources and to ensure consistency among resource stewardship, recreation and sustainable forestry. In addition, specific management recommendations derived during the preparation of each individual RMP are designed to ensure that management practices are tailored to the resources within the facility, factor in and assess existing uses, and address site specific management challenges and opportunities.

Zone 1

Management Objective:

Protection of sensitive resources from management or other human activities that may adversely impact the resources.

A. General Description

This zone encompasses areas with highly sensitive ecological and cultural resources that require additional management approaches and practices to protect and preserve the special features and values identified in the Resource Management Plan. Zone 1 areas are not suitable for future intensive development.

B. Examples

Examples identified as being highly sensitive to human activities include rare species habitat or natural communities, areas with concentrations of sensitive aquatic habitats, excessively steep slopes with erodible soils, archaeological sites or fragile cultural sites, where stewardship of these resources must be the primary consideration when assessing management and recreational activities in these areas.

C. General Management Guidelines

- **Recreation and Public Access:** In general, recreation activities will be limited to dispersed, low impact, non-motorized recreation and dependent on assessment of specific resource sensitivity and stewardship considerations by resource specialists - e.g. NHESP, MHC, DCR Bureau of Planning and Resource Protection - in conjunction with field staff. Snowmobiles may be permitted on existing designated trails during the appropriate time of year and according to DCR policies and regulations. Existing trails will be evaluated for compatibility with resource protection goals. Trails will be discontinued if discontinuance furthers sensitive resource protection and does not compromise public safety. Proposals for new activities will be strictly evaluated, and management guidelines will be applied by resource specialists for the protection of resources and to address specific issues.
- **Vegetation Management:** Commercial timber harvesting is not permitted. Vegetation management may occur for public safety purposes, removal of invasives, stewardship of cultural sites, or historic vista maintenance.
- **Water and Soil:** Management will focus on erosion control to protect sensitive natural and cultural resources.

- **Habitat Protection:** Public access will be guided away from sensitive rare species habitat and sensitive Priority Natural Communities. Long-term protection strategies will be developed in consultation with the NHESP; Habitat Management Plans will be prepared in advance of proposed management activities.
- **Forest Health and Protection:** Spread of invasive species, forest pathogens and wildfires may be controlled if a threat to sensitive natural or cultural resources is identified.
- **Cultural Resources:** Public access will be guided away from archaeological or historic sites sensitive to human activity and reoriented to areas that can sustain appropriate recreational activities. Management activities will focus on protection of sensitive archaeological and historic sites. Use of metal detectors, artifact collecting and digging is prohibited.
- **Facilities and Transportation:** Existing roads may be maintained to assure continued administrative and/or emergency access according to either the DCR Historic Parkways Preservation Treatment Guidelines or guidelines associated with DCR Forest Road Classification System. Roads identified as unnecessary for administrative and/or emergency access will be evaluated for compatibility with resources, and discontinued if discontinuance furthers sensitive resource protection and only after consultation with local emergency services personnel.
- **Interpretation, Public Information and Outreach:** Interpretation and public information related to the sensitive natural and cultural resources may be provided through programs, kiosks and other outreach venues that will avoid impacts to the actual resources.
- **Monitoring, Enforcement and Research:** Professional research projects in support of sensitive natural and cultural resource protection may be permitted with approval of the Director of State Parks & Recreation and the Director of Forest Stewardship. Baseline conditions will be evaluated and monitoring will be conducted to document changes, dependent on capabilities and availability of operational resources for staff and outside experts.
- **Special Use:** In general, Special Uses other than research projects described above will not be permitted.

Zone 2

Management Objective

Provide for a balance between the stewardship of natural and cultural resources and recreational opportunities which can be appropriately sustained.

A. General Description

This zone encompasses stable yet important natural and cultural resources. Zone 2 is a very important component to DCR's management responsibilities, because the protected landscape within this zone provides a buffer for sensitive resources, recharge for surface and groundwater, and large areas where existing types of public recreation activities can be managed at sustainable levels.

B. Examples

Examples include areas of non-intensive use that contain diverse ecosystems, rare species habitat that is compatible with dispersed recreation and sustainable management practices, and cultural resources that are not highly sensitive to human activities.

C. General Management Guidelines

- **Recreation and Public Access:** Resources will be managed to support a variety of safe, sustainable recreation opportunities that are compatible with the long-term stewardship and character of natural and cultural resources. New public access may be allowed depending upon existing area trail densities, purpose and need, physical suitability of the site, and specific guidelines for protection of rare species habitat and archaeological resources, as reflected in DCR's *Trails Guidelines and Best Practices Manual*.
- **Vegetation Management:** Vegetation may be managed for public safety purposes, stewardship of cultural sites, vista maintenance, maintaining native biodiversity, protection of recreational assets and ecological management and restoration, provided that the management activities are consistent with the applicable Landscape Designation for the property. Commercial timber harvesting will be limited to properties designated as Woodlands.
- **Water and Soil:** Prevent soil erosion via BMPs for management and recreational activities. Maintain water quality of surface and groundwater resources with pollution prevention and holistic watershed management strategies.
- **Habitat Protection:** Maintain and where possible enhance habitat for rare species, Priority Natural Communities, and ecological diversity. Management activities in NHESP designated Priority Habitat areas must follow guidelines of an approved Habitat Management Plan.
- **Forest Health and Protection:** Potential for wildfires may be lessened through fire prevention strategies. Spread of wildfires will be controlled for public safety purposes. Forest stands may be managed to lessen adverse effects of forest pathogens. Invasive species that are degrading native ecosystems may be controlled depending on availability of operational resources and trained volunteers.
- **Cultural Resources:** Management will ensure long-term stewardship of archaeological and historic sites. Newly discovered sites will be documented and inventoried in consultation with MHC. All proposed projects must be reviewed by the DCR Bureau of Planning and Resource Protection Office of Cultural Resources during their planning stages to determine potential impacts to cultural resources. Use of metal detectors, artifact collecting and digging is prohibited.
- **Facilities and Transportation:** In Parklands and Woodlands, new roads necessary for recreation, administration or emergency use may be constructed if consistent with resource management goals, after review for impacts to natural and cultural resources. Existing roads that are not required for administrative or public safety purposes may be closed and restored to a natural condition after consultation with local emergency services personnel. Roads will be maintained according to either the DCR Historic Parkways Preservation Treatment Guidelines or guidelines associated with DCR Forest Road Classification System.

- **Interpretation, Public Information and Outreach:** Interpretation will be focused on enhancing the variety of environmental education opportunities, and on building public support for the long-term stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- **Monitoring, Enforcement and Research:** Monitoring and research projects may be conducted as approved through the Special Use Permit process. Enforcement of prohibited or regulated activities is critical related to public safety, enjoyment of appropriate recreation activities and long-term stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- **Special Use:** Special uses may be allowed, and will be evaluated on an individual basis as provided in DCR's Special Use Policies and Procedures.

Zone 3

Management Objective

Provide public access to safe and accessible recreational opportunities, as well as administrative and maintenance facilities that meet the needs of DCR visitors and staff.

A. General Description

This zone includes altered landscapes in active use, and areas suitable for future administrative, maintenance and recreation areas. The resources in this zone can accommodate concentrated use and require regular maintenance by DCR staff.

B. Examples

Examples of areas of concentrated use include park headquarters and maintenance areas, parking lots, swimming pools and skating rinks, paved bikeways, swimming beaches, campgrounds, playgrounds and athletic fields, parkways, golf courses, picnic areas and pavilions, and concessions. Examples of future use areas include disturbed sites with no significant ecological or cultural values and not suitable for restoration, identified through the RMP or in a Master Plan as being suitable for intensive recreation or park administration sites. Note: Development would be preceded by detailed site assessments to ensure protection of natural and cultural resources.

C. General Management Guidelines

- **Recreation and Public Access:** Intensive recreation areas will be managed to maintain public health and safety. Agency policies, resource protection and recreational goals will determine activities that are supported in individual properties.
- **Vegetation Management:** Commercial timber harvesting is not permitted. Native species will be used for landscaping. Trees and other vegetation may be removed or trimmed for public safety, vegetative health, protection of cultural resources, and aesthetic purposes.
- **Water and Soil:** Management will focus on maintaining water quality for water-based recreation, including implementation of strategies to prevent erosion and siltation and remediation of pollution sources. Employ Best Management Practices to capture, treat and recharge storm water run-off.

- **Habitat Protection:** Management will focus on identifying, documenting and protecting rare species habitat, in consultation with the NHESP.
- **Forest Health and Protection:** Spread of forest pathogens and invasive species may be controlled if there is a threat to native ecosystems that surround the intensive recreation or park administration sites.
- **Cultural Resources:** Historic sites that are the focus of intensive public visitation will be managed to minimize degradation of the historic resource. Proposed projects must be reviewed by the DCR Bureau of Planning and Resource Protection's Office of Cultural Resources during the planning stages for potential impacts to historic and archaeological resources. Historic buildings, structures, objects, sites and landscapes will be preserved in original use or adaptively reused when appropriate for park uses or in compatible use, such as through the Historic Curatorship Program. Use of metal detectors, artifact collecting and digging is prohibited.
- **Facilities and Transportation:** Continue efficient use of existing facilities or employ appropriate reuse of existing facilities to minimize new impacts. Roads will be maintained according to either the DCR Historic Parkways Preservation Treatment Guidelines or guidelines associated with DCR Forest Road Classification System. New roads and facilities may be established as necessary for public and administrative use after review for potential impacts to natural and cultural resources. Adaptive reuse of historic resources for park or other appropriate uses is encouraged.
- **Interpretation, Public Information and Outreach:** Interpretive programs may be provided in association with intensive recreation sites or activities. Programs will be aimed at building public support for the long-term stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- **Monitoring, Enforcement and Research:** Monitoring will focus on water quality related to water-based recreation activities. Enforcement of prohibited and regulated activities will be conducted to provide for public safety and enjoyment of appropriate recreation activities.
- **Special Use:** Special uses may be allowed, and will be evaluated on an individual basis as provided in DCR's Special Use Policies and Procedures.

Significant Feature Overlays

Management Objective

The purpose of the overlays is to provide precise management guidance in order to maintain or preserve the recognized resource features regardless of the zone in which they occur.

A. General Description

The three land stewardship zones may be supplemented with significant feature overlays that identify formally designated or recognized resources. These resource features have been recognized through research and assessment by professional resource specialists. Information on the significant features is brought into the RMP process via review of previous research projects and associated designations.

B. Examples

A natural or cultural resource, recognized through professional inventory / research, which cuts across more than one land stewardship zone, such as:

- National Register Historic District
- Areas subject to public drinking water regulations
- Priority habitat for species that are not sensitive to human activities
- Biomap2 Core Habitat
- Designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

A natural or cultural resource, recognized through professional inventory / research, which is located in an area characterized by intensive visitor use. In these cases, the Significant Feature Overlay is used to highlight the potential conflict between resource stewardship and ongoing visitor use, and provide mitigation strategies. Examples include:

- A NHESP Priority Natural Community associated with a summit that is also a popular destination for hikers.
- A barrier beach that provides habitat for rare shorebirds, and is subject to CZM barrier beach management guidelines and coastal wetlands regulations, but also supports thousands of visitors during the summer season.
- A significant cultural site such as Plymouth Rock that is subject to ongoing, intensive visitation.

C. Management Guidelines

Specific management guidelines are provided by resource specialists and/or by the professional staff of the agency or NGO that assessed the significant resource feature or has a regulatory role for protection of the resource. Examples include MHC requirements for treatment of historic resources within National Register Historic Districts, and NHESP guidelines for Priority Natural Community habitat stewardship.