# **July Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Jennifer Wilson, Dicken Crane, Melissa Harper, Susan Smiley, Vivian Ortiz, Dennis Smith, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty, Kevin O’Shea, Ted Dooley

Council Members Absent: Ann Canedy

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Chloe Gotsis, Matthew Perry

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Chris Redfern, Denis LaForce, Doug Pizzi, Glen Ayers, Erin Baker, Charlie Thompson, Barbara Fullerton, Laurel Facey

## Call to Meeting, 9:00am – Chair Jack Buckley

Chairman Buckley welcomed attendees and did a role call of councilors. Chairman Buckley recognized the DCR and Department of Fish and Wildlife wildland firefighters that went to Quebec to assist with the ongoing wildfires in the province. He commended the firefighters and the agency for their international cooperation.

## DCR Report – Brian Arrigo, Commissioner

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the Council for having him and for recognizing the DCR firefighters.

He then gave an update on recent activities at the agency with accompanying photographs on the shared screen.

Commissioner Arrigo started by briefing the Councilors on a tragic event that occurred the night before in the picnic area of Myles Standish State Forest. A 25-year-old man was shot and killed during an altercation. Three DCR staff members performed CPR on the victim, before he was transported to the nearby hospital, and was later pronounced dead. The Commissioner said that DCR is very grateful to the members of its staff who did everything they could to help, and to the members of the State Police, the Plymouth Police Department, and the Environmental Police who responded to the incident. The incident is now under investigation by the State Police and the Plymouth County District Attorney’s Office. He said it is very tough morning and day for the staff at the Park and for everyone at the agency, noting that this is not a typical occurrence for parks, and that the parks are peaceful places where passionate public servants work to preserve natural resources for residents and visitors to enjoy.  He said that DCR is committed to doing everything they can to ensure that all of our recreational areas, including our beaches, pools, and parks are safe and welcoming places for our families and residents to enjoy, and that counseling services will be available on site for the team tomorrow.

### Fourth of July

This Fourth of July, the Commissioner visited Cochituate State Park, Hopkinton State Park, Walden Pond State Reservation, Great Brook Farm State Park, Houghton’s Pond in the Blue Hills Reservation, and the Esplanade for the Boston Pops Fireworks Spectacular where he stayed until the early hours helping to clean up after the event. He said that while everyone thinks of the Fourth of July at DCR as the Pops Esplanade event, the Fourth of July is huge for our agency at our parks all over the state. Noting that he has so much appreciation for all of the work DCR staff put into preparing for the holiday and including making sure visitors had a safe and enjoyable time at the DCR properties.

### Fire Fighters to Quebec

On June 15, 11 Wildland Firefighters traveled to Quebec to help battle the ongoing blazes happening in the province. They were sent as part of the Northeast Forest Fire Prevention Compact, a collaboration of the six New England States and New York, the Maritime Provinces of Canada and Quebec, and four federal agencies that work together to provide the means for its member states and provinces to cope with fires that might be beyond the capabilities of a single member. They spent two weeks providing relief to Quebec’s firefighters and working alongside others from around the world by working on the fire line, building fire breaks, securing fire perimeters, and containing fires and protecting structures.

The crew returned home on June 30 and the Commissioner noted how proud he is of their willingness to help our neighbors to the north, and how they represented DCR on the international stage and I’d like to take this opportunity to thank them again.

Last week, 16 more wildland firefighters, 14 from DCR and 2 from the Department of Fish and Game, made the trip north to assist in Quebec and will also be there for two weeks. They are joined by four firefighters from Connecticut and one from Vermont and are traveling to Baie-Comeau, Quebec, where they will be assigned to one of many ongoing fire incidents throughout the eastern part of the province. The Commissioner wished them luck on their journey and looks forward to welcoming them home after a job well done.

### Move to 10 Park Plaza

DCR officially moved into its new headquarters on the sixth floor of the Transportation Building at 10 Park Plaza. This is the first week that staff has been in the offices, and everyone is settling in nicely. The Commissioner invited the Council to see the new space.

### Full Access to Salisbury Beach Restored

The Commissioner reported that Access Point 8 at Salisbury Beach has been reopened, restoring full access to the beach before the Fourth of July holiday.

### Plaque Honoring the Kings

Commissioner Arrigo and other dignitaries attended the unveiling of a new plaque in the Southwest Corridor commemorating civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his wife Coretta Scott King’s newlywed home.  During the first year of their marriage, the Kings lived in a one-bedroom apartment on the fifth floor of the Lincoln Apartments at 396 Northampton Street – what is now the Southwest Corridor Park. Years after the Kings left the apartment and Boston, the building was torn down and our park – the Southwest Corridor – was built.  The plaque will educate the thousands of people who walk through the Southwest Corridor every year on the legacy of Dr. King and Corretta Scott King and their ties to Massachusetts.

### MassTrails Grants Awarded

Commissioner Arrigo joined Lt. Governor Driscoll and Secretary Tepper in Billerica to announce $11.6 million in funding DCR awarded through the MassTrails Grant Program to support 68 trail improvement projects across the Commonwealth.  The grants will help communities all across the state provide recreation space for residents and build key connections between existing trails.

### Summer Nights

On Tuesday, Commissioner Arrigo was joined by Governor Healey, Lt. Governor Driscoll, Secretary Tepper, and Mayor Wu at Martini Memorial Shell Park in Hyde Park to kick off the 2023 Summer Nights program. They were joined by more than 90 representatives from more than 40 of our Summer Nights partner organizations from all over the state to community-based celebrate this incredible program that allows DCR to partner with organizations in urban areas across Massachusetts to offer free educational and recreational activities for thousands of teens and young adults during July and August.

DCR has expanded the program this year to 84 organizations, who will host programs at 125 locations in urban areas around Massachusetts. Partners are providing programming to young people in nine Boston neighborhoods as well as other cities, including Western, Central, Northeast, and Southeastern Massachusetts, including in Fitchburg which is new to the program this year. In Boston alone, there are more than 750 programs happening at 50 locations across the city.

### DCR Pools

All DCR pools opened for the season on June 24, and registration has opened for the free Learn to Swim program. Nine pools across the state will hold free swim lessons for ages four to twelve. There are three sessions, the first from July 10 – July 21, the second from July 24 – August 4, and the third from August 7 – August 18. More information is available on the DCR website.

### Mohawk Trail State Forest Campground Update

The Commissioner gave an update on the Mohawk Trail State Forest campground:

“In February 2023, DCR detected algae in the water source feeding the Mohawk Campground bathhouses. As a result, we had to close the facilities, and the rest of the winter camping season cancelled. Since the closure in February and through mid-June, DCR’s Engineers, Park Support, and Operations teams and contactors worked hard to try to resolve the issue without having to close for the summer season. Unfortunately, no immediate solution was found, and it was determined a new well would have to be dug. With a new well needed, DCR made the hard decision to close for the season in order to complete the well work and tackle larger maintenance projects that cannot be done with campers on site. Campers who had reservations for the summer season were notified of the closure and fully refunded. The day use areas of the park, including hiking trails, fishing, swimming, picnicking, all satellite sites, and interpretive programs will remain open during the construction period. Both full-time and part-time park staff will remain stationed at Mohawk, providing support there and for the satellite sites under their care including Hawley State Forest, DuBuque State Forest, Monroe State Forest, Catamount State Forest, and H.O. Cook State Forest. We anticipate the campground closure will allow our staff to provide much needed deferred maintenance at these parks as well.”

### Update: Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative

The Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative was formally announced on June 7th, and a website has been created to provide information on the Initiative.  (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/forests-as-climate-solutions>)

The first meeting of the Climate Forestry Committee (CFC) has been held and a work schedule established leading to issuance of updated forest management guidelines on December 8th. The CFC is the expert committee convened by the Administration to provide scientific and expert guidance and recommendations to help the state ensure its forestry land management decisions are prioritizing climate mitigation and resilience, informed by the latest science.

Work is underway on a first draft of the Guidelines that EEA will refine over the coming six months with input from the CFC, stakeholders, and the public.

Public meetings are being planned, with specifics to be announced as soon as details are finalized.

Project teams comprised of staff from EEA, DCR, and DFG are being established for each of the four major “planks” of the Initiative:

* Implementation of Climate Oriented Management Guidelines
* Conservation of Forest Land and Expansion of Forest Reserves
* Provision of Landowner Incentives and Business Assistance
* Forest, Forestry, and Carbon Data Acquisition, Use, and Availability

An “Action Plan” listing major activities, deliverables, due dates, & other critical information has been created to ensure that all aspects of the Initiative advance in a deliberate & timely manner.

### Cyclist Camping

At last month’s meeting, the Council heard two public comments regarding cycling tourists and walk-in camping at DCR campsites. Prior to 2020, DCR campsites had a policy of accepting day of walk-in camping reservations for the entire day at all campsites. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, this policy was amended so that DCR still accepts day of camping reservations but asks that those wishing to reserve a campsite day of do so on reserveamerica.com or 877-422-6762 by 2:00pm. This policy remains in place, and as of now, there are no plans to change it.

DCR asks that those who are cycling or hiking and using DCR campsites as places to stay try to plan ahead as much as they can by making a reservation by 2:00pm. They know that when traveling by bike or foot, things may not always go according to plan, and if someone traveling can’t make it to the planned campsite and needs to divert to a different one, staff will work with them to best accommodate their situation. However, they stress the importance of having a campsite reservation within the DCR system to help staff with planning.

### Port Norfolk Update

Commissioner Arrigo also gave an update on the status of the Stearns Building in the Port Norfolk section of Dorchester which was commented on at the previous meeting. He said that DCR has withdrawn their proposal from the Boston Conservation Commission and will be holding public meetings to talk about the future of the site.

### Upcoming Events

On July 15, Commissioner Arrigo will be at the Blue Hills Weather Observatory Ribbon Cutting. The Observatory has been in continuous use since 1885, and the 2-year, $2 million renovation is its first major upgrade since 1999.

On July 22, Commissioner Arrigo will be attending Mountain Day at Bousquet Mountain in Pittsfield. It’s a day of food, music, and outdoor activities, and he is speaking as part of the conference portion of the event.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Smith commented that the pictures that accompanied the Commissioner’s report are very helpful.

Councilor Ortiz agreed with Councilor Smith, and thanked the Commissioner for making sure there is a public process for the Stearns Building in Port Norfolk, adding that the Neponset River Greenway will be extended through that area. She also thanked DCR staff for quickly responding to remove a tree branch that was blocking the Neponset bike trail while she was biking on it.

Councilor Collins asked if there was a way to maintain data on day of camping reservations, whether it was a common occurrence and if it was something that was hard for staff to handle.

Commissioner Arrigo replied that data informed decisions are important, and it is something that they will take a look at.

Councilor Dooley asked for an update about signage at King’s Beach and Lynn Shore Drive concerning bacteria in the water there, including in Spanish.

Commissioner Arrigo said that DCR has been dealing with water quality issues statewide and is working with DPH to deal with the issue and provide municipalities with information. He added that DCR has been doing social media around the issue, and that the conversations with DPH are ongoing.

Chair Buckley commented that it is great to see the Governor and Lt. Governor out at DCR events to see what DCR does. He commended the Commissioner on his enthusiasm and willingness to interact with the council. He added that the Commissioner is at DCR to make a difference. He then said that he has gotten calls from people about the Special Commission Report and the Strategic Readiness Initiative. He said that he thinks that it is important that these reports are followed by a strategic plan.

The Commissioner thanked him and said that they are thinking about all the work that has been done, and that from the governor down, people are seeing the value and importance of DCR and the work that is done. He said that DCR has been analyzed and been looked at, and that they are asking what’s next and what can be added to the foundation that has been built.

## Legislative Update – Matthew Perry, Manager of Stewardship Programs and Strategic Initiatives

Mr. Perry reported that they are still waiting for the final FY24 budget, adding that the House has called a formal session for today which is most likely to consider the budget. The House also moved forward a supplemental budget this morning, but the supplemental budget does not contain any funding for DCR.

## Regular Business I

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Collins made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 9, 2023 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Smiley seconded the motion.

### Roll Call on Approval of Minutes

Councilor Harper: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Abstain

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

Councilor Dooley: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

The June 8, 2023 minutes were approved.

### 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)

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

* Charles Thompson, Pelham
* Glen Ayers, Greenfield

## Regular Business II

*Councilor O’Shea joined the meeting at 9:54am.*

### Discussion and Approval of FY 2025 Budget Recommendations

Chair Buckley said that this is the third year of making budget recommendations to present the administration with budget priorities. On May 25, over 40 people attended a budget listening session, and the major takeaways were people want to see more staffing and investment in facilities which were included in the general recommendations, along with the list of past funding priorities. Also included is the recommendation for transparency with the capital budget and a dashboard that allows the public to see the status of capital projects. It also addresses the forestry climate initiative and urges that the funds invested in it doesn’t take away from the general investment in infrastructure in state parks. Chair Buckley asked if there was any discussion.

Councilor Wilson thanked Chairman Buckley and Councilor Crane for their work on the document, saying it was well written and reflects the themes that the council has been talking about. She said that the visibility portion can also include that the more people know what DCR offers statewide, the more pride that is taken in the resources, and then hopefully that leads to more support and funding. She said it is easier for people to vote in favor of an agency that they are proud of and feel is doing a good job.

Chair Buckley said that in California, there is an emphasis on it being a park system, and that he has encountered a lot of people who take a lot of pride in their individual park and that there needs to be a way to develop a mindset that people take pride in the whole park system.

Councilor Crane added that through listening sessions, one thing they heard a lot about is communication, and that it is part of the public service aspect of what parks can do. He said that it is one of the most frequent comments that they have heard. He feels that this needs to be constantly brought up.

Chair Buckley said that the Commissioner’s presentation at the meeting is a small step in that direction.

Councilor Wilson asked if there can be a source for the statistics in the second column.

### Approval of Budget Recommendation

Councilor Wilson made a motion to approve the budget priorities, subject to comments consistent with those discussed at this public meeting.

Councilor Smith seconded the motion.

### Roll Call on Approval of Budget Recommendations ([Recommendations are available on the Stewardship Council website](https://www.mass.gov/lists/stewardship-council-documents))

Councilor Harper: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

Councilor Dooley: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Councilor O’Shea: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

### Discussion of Strategic Oversight Plan ([Plan is available on the Stewardship Council website](https://www.mass.gov/lists/stewardship-council-documents))

Councilor Wilson said that the council is responsible by legislation for producing a strategic oversight plan annually. She said that the council has not done it annually, and it used to be done every other year. The process involves a 30-day public comment. It hasn’t been done in awhile in part because of the Strategic Readiness Initiative and Special Commission Report, where the Council was waiting for important output before taking on the plan. She noted that the plan is different from a strategic plan for the agency, and that it is not about what DCR should do, but about what the Council should do in its oversight of the agency. It reflects the goals, values, and responsibilities of the Council. She said the objective is to get feedback and to determine when it can be released to the public for the 30-day public period. After it is approved, it will be filed with the EEA Secretary.

Councilor Wilson asked if there were any comments on the document.

Councilor Smiley thanked Councilor Wilson and Councilor Collins for their work and asked if they received the comments she provided and whether they were included.

Councilor Wilson said that they were not included in the version that was being discussed today, but that they will be included in the next version which will be for public comment.

Chair Buckley said he thinks the document does a good job of laying out what the Council does, how they operate, and what their priorities are.

Councilor Harper agreed with Chair Buckley and said that the Council should be aware of and address soon that nine councilors terms all expire in the same year. She said that they should think about mitigation strategies so that they don’t lose the progress they have made.

Chair Buckley said that he believes the Office of Boards and Commissions needs to work on this issue.

Councilor Ortiz said that the same issue jumped out at her, and that many are surprised when they learn councilors have seven-year terms.

Councilor Wilson said that the Council has a legislative proposal that would move the term from seven-years to five-years saying that this could help with recruitment and the ability to take on a second term.

Chair Buckley said that he will discuss with the Commissioner to try to find a solution to the problem.

Councilor Smith pointed out that there is the opportunity to be reappointed and suggested that people consider it to avoid losing all nine members at once.

Chair Buckley asked if there was a consensus that they should move forward with the document to get public opinion on it. There were no objections.

Councilor Wilson noted that some people sent small changes that don’t substantively change the overall document that will be included. She said the next step is to have a cover letter from Chairman Buckley explaining what the document is and what its basis is so the public knows what it is commenting on. She added that Mr. Perry walked the policy committee through the process for public comment and that it is user friendly, and that the council will receive the comments before the September meeting.

### Approval of Strategic Oversight Plan for Public Comment

Councilor Smiley made a motion to move forward with the Strategic Oversight Plan to seek public comment.

Councilor Crane seconded the motion.

The motion was approved.

### Committee Updates

Stakeholders

The committee was unable to meet this month and is looking to reschedule its meeting.

Policy

The committee has been focused on the Strategic Oversight Plan and also received positive updates from Paul Cavanagh about the RMP process and the pieces moving forward.

Finance

The committee has been focused on the budget recommendation. Chair Buckley also forwarded a letter from Mass Parks for All to the Councilors that is addressed to the Secretaries of EEA and ANF about DCR moving staff salaries from the capital budget to the operating budget and suggesting this take place over two years. He asked for a sense from the council about recommending to the Commissioner that this would be a good use of the money.

Councilor Crane added that related to the RFP for Capital Projects, the contract and contractor should be chosen by the end of the month, and that it hopefully addresses the deferred maintenance and backlog and will expand to a more thorough solution.

Chair Buckley asked if there were objections to him recommending the Mass Parks for All plan to the Commissioner, to which there were none.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Smith said that the report on the firefighters going to Quebec to help out was very important, and that he compliments them for doing that work to help others.

Chair Buckley responded by saying that Massachusetts is part of a compact and that if there is ever a fire here, they will come and help us as well.

Councilor Ortiz complimented the DCR social media presence, saying it is nice to see what staff is doing and everything else that is being promoted, not just parking situations.

Councilor Collins said that the environmental organizations listed in legislation have met several times about the open council seat, and that a letter has been drafted and approved, they are just waiting on one more signature. He said that the letter will go to the Commissioner very soon, and from the Commissioner it will go to the Governor’s office.

Chair Buckley thanked Councilor Collins for his efforts.

Councilor Smiley said that it is nice to see DCR expanding summer nights to other communities. She added that it seems like it has been awhile since an update on the Strategic Readiness Initiative and that it feels like they are due for one, and for an update on the Office of Outdoor Recreation and what its relationship with DCR is.

Councilor Doherty said he received an email about Lake Cochituate and people not being let in because of a headcount, asking if there are headcounts for DCR parks.

Chair Buckley said that yes, they have to shut down parks at a certain point.

Councilor Ortiz said that this is a reason to list alternative forms of transportation to get to parks on the website.

## Adjournment

Councilor Dooley made a motion to adjourn.

Councilor Doherty seconded the motion.

The Council adjourned until their next meeting on September 14, 2023.

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