Department of Conservation and Recreation Stewardship Council Meeting via video conferencing and in person.

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough

**May 12, 2022 from 9:00 – 11:00 am**

Members Present: Chair Jack Buckley, Ann Canedy,Esq. Dennis Smith, Jennifer Wilson, Esq., Susan Smiley.

Members Present via videoconferencing: Vice Chair Melissa Harper, Dicken Crane, Jeff Collins.

Members absent: Vivian Ortiz

Staff Members Present: Acting Commissioner Stephanie Cooper, Nick Connors, Paul Cavanaugh, Ally Trahan, Max Tassinari, Dan Cushing, Mike Nelson, Meghan Crane.

Members of the Public through videoconferencing: Bill Vickstrom, Lizzie Roche, Jim Beucherer, Sarah Freeman, Nancy Polan, Chuck Anastas, Chris Redfern, Erin Baller, Catherine LeBlanc, John Bescherer, Suzanne Gall Marsh, “Buzz”. Bill Boles joined the Council in person.

Chair Buckley called the meeting to order at approximately 9:16 am. He commented that a lot was going on and he listed the following positive initiatives:

* Special Commission Report accomplishments;
* Ongoing Current Strategic Readiness project;
* There is a growing legislative interest in DCR which has had positive budgetary results, removing retained revenue and significantly increasing DCR’s budget. The recently released Senate budget appropriated $85 million to DCR
* The Governor’s Economic Development & Infrastructure Bill appropriates $231 million dollars to DCR.

In conclusion, the silver lining of COVID may be people’s recognition of the importance of State Parks and a renewed commitment to funding our State Parks.

Chair Buckley reminded Councilors that he and Councilor Crane, as the Financial Subcommittee, were hosting a listening session on May 17th from 6-7 pm. Chair Buckley and Councilor Crane want to get the public’s thoughts before they develop the Stewardship Council’s priorities and recommendations for the 2024 budget. Last year, DCR Stewardship Council presented recommendations for DCR’s budget and some of those recommendations have come to fruition, particularly retained revenue.

Chair Buckley announced that there would be no break out sessions for the subcommittees during this meeting, because the Agenda was full.

Acting Commissioner Stephanie Cooper’s Report: Acting Commissioner Cooper agreed with Chair Buckley that there was much going on:

* The Senate Budget allocated additional revenue:
  + Funded $11.8 million over the Governor’s H.2 recommendation – most allocated to Park operating account.
  + Maintains H.2 proposal to remove retained revenue account and directly appropriate funding to other accounts.
  + Funded $12. 6 million higher than FY 22 budget;
  + Funded $6.2 million higher than FY 23 House Ways & Mean proposal.
  + The Supplemental Budget funded the long-term seasonal conversion of 50 positions.
* The Governor accepted ARPA spending and has made considerable investments in clean energy and environmental initiatives; to wit:
  + $230 million has been earmarked for the State Parks system and associated infrastructure, such as trails and campground expansions.
  + $20 million is directed for remediation, resiliency, access and improvements such as the reopening Gallops Island, part of the Boston Harbor Islands.
  + There is special projects funding in the amount of $13 million for Lynn Heritage State Park coastal infrastructure.
  + $13 million is earmarked for the rehabilitation of 2000 feet of deteriorated shore protections along Georges Islands.
  + In anticipation of the availability of ARPA funds, DCR staff has compiled a list of projects.
* The Strategic Readiness Initiative
  + Sprint based process takes a big picture look to the future.
  + DCR hired ACCENTURE consulting firm.
  + This Administration wants to put DCR on a future path.
  + The first part of the process is foundational; developing core strategies and values.
  + These principles will articulate how DCR carries out their mission.
  + The process reflects themes heard during public process:
    - Provide access to a diversity of outdoor recreational experiences and unique landscapes that is equitable, inclusive and welcoming.
    - Conserve lands, water, and forests by integrating science, research, and technical expertise into the management of our natural resources.
    - Advance climate change mitigation and adaption efforts by implementing sustainable practices and advancing resiliency across our infrastructure, assets and resources.
    - Support healthy communities by providing places for people to connect with nature and each other.
    - Inspire generations of stewards by recognizing and honoring our legacy through partnerships, public engagement and education.
  + The consultant is benchmarking with all 50 states and drawing comparisons with peer organizations in population and density, land area, park system land area, annual visitors, annual budget, inventory (facilities) and staffing (full time equivalent).
  + The consultant is synthesing data and creating an analytic metric.
  + Interesting facts:
    - DCR manages more properties than many other states.
    - Massachusetts has a more diverse set of properties compared to other states.
    - DCR ranks near the top with number of seasonal employees.
    - Massachusetts is 10th in terms of land area; 6th in number of properties; 10th in visitation.
  + The consultants are looking at DCR’s functions, comparing DCR’s interactions with local communities, state wide and regionally.
  + Unique aspects of Massachusetts’s DCR include providing security to a State Capital; the Ranger Program; the Universal Access Program; ownership of ice rinks, boat ramps.
  + The process will render more tactical recommendations; a big picture look and a portfolio of responsibility.
* Many campgrounds will be opening. The Agency is gearing up for summer and is actively recruiting.
* DCR hosted its 16th Annual Park Serve Day.
* There has been a big increase in wildfire activity. Year to date, there have been 332 fires with 824 acres burned.

The Acting Commissioner addressed public comments made during last DCR Stewardship Council meeting:

* Thanks to Suzanne Gall Marsh and the Friends of Boston Harbor Islands (BHI). The Acting Commissioner highlighted the free Ferry Day, scheduled for May 21, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the BHI.
* In response to Sarah Freeman’s comments on the Arborway Project, Acting Commissioner Cooper noted that she is meeting with Jeff Parenti and team and they are working forward on the plans. The goal is to revise the preferred alternative and prepare for another round of public comment.
* In response to Glenn Ayers comments on DCR’s forestry practices, the Acting Commissioner stated that they hope to come before the Council in the near future with a broad view of DCR’s forestry practices.
* Acting Commissioner stated that the DCR internal review of 25-50% design of Edgewater Drive was scheduled for May 18th. A stakeholder meeting will be scheduled for June and a public outreach meeting is planned in July to review the 50% design plans. Permitting will begin in May. Bidding is anticipated for summer 2023 with construction starting during fall 2023.

Chair Buckley thanked Nick Connors and staff for organizing the meeting and thanked the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife for hosting.

Councilor Canedy asked Acting Commissioner Cooper if the wildfires were caused by human negligence. The Acting Commissioner responded that the fires were primarily caused by gusting winds, low humidity, higher temperatures and dry surface fuels. She stressed that because of these factors, public awareness and education were important.

Councilor Wilson asked if any progress was being made on recruiting councilors. Nick Connors responded that progress was being made.

Councilor Smith asked if any progress was being made on securing support staff for the Council. Acting Commissioner Cooper responded that DCR was updating its hiring plan.

Councilor Smiley asked if the Consultants would provide a schedule of milestones and achievements to be met. Acting Commissioner responded that the Consultants were creating a set of benchmarks from which they would derive recommendations.

Councilor Smiley also asked for an update on E-Bike legislation. The Acting Commissioner responded that the regulations are in the last stage of review.

Chair Buckley commented that funding was obtained for converting short term employment to full term employment. He asked how the budgeted money will interact with the ARPA fund and how does it effect DCR’s inventory of deferred maintenance. Acting Commissioner stated that these funds will definitely reduce the deferred maintenance. Chair Buckley advised the Council that next month, the Council will discuss the Strategic Readiness Initiative and Capital Plan.

The Ranger Bureau Presentation:

Mike Nelson, Director of Ranger Services presented a power point about the Ranger Bureau (ADD LINK HERE).

The Rangers offer programmatic support to State Parks and the State House and Division of Water Supply Protection. Park rangers are assigned across 5 regions (east, west, north, south, central Boston). They are stationed in the Division of Water Protection at Quabbin/Ware and Wachusett/Sudbury.

*Mission Statement*: To provide, through a variety of means, public safety, emergency response and security in DCR owned and DCR managed priorities and at the Massachusetts State House; protection of the Commonwealth’s natural, cultural, and recreational sources; enhancement of the visitor experience of all properties under the care and control of DCR.

*Example of functions*: Rangers act as park ambassadors and liaisons with local law enforcement.

Councilor Crane asked what was the relationship between the Rangers and ETOs, specifically whether the Rangers were involved with enforcement in dealing with the use of motorized vehicles. Acting Commissioner Cooper responded that there has been some progress and they are hiring more rangers. Ranger presence acts as a deterrent. Councilor Wilson asked about enforcement of dogs on lease. Mr. Nelson responded that they prefer to educate offenders first, but they have the ability to issue citations.

Meghan Crane, Chief Ranger, State House Security Program discussed State House Security, which is provided 24 hrs a day/7 days of week/365 days a year. MGL Ch. 8 & 9 state: The Commissioner of Conservation and Recreation shall utilize members of the Urban Park Program, established under Section 34B of Ch. 92, to maintain security at the State House. The State House rangers work with various partners including the State Police.

Chair Buckley asked how many rangers are in the State House and how many are in the field. Ranger Crane responded that 36 rangers are in the State House and 40 rangers are in the field.

Approval of Minutes: Councilor Smith moved that the Minutes of March 10, 2022 and April 14, 2022 be approved as written. Councilor Smiley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Buckley announced that the June meeting will follow a similar format.

Public Comments:

* Sarah Freeman: Ms. Freeman commented that she was grateful that Arborway was on the list of DCR’s long term plans. She noted however that many items on the list of short-term plans and modifications have not moved forward and expressed hope that there would be follow through on modifications which might improve interim problems. It has been almost a year.
* Bill Boles, NEMBA, reported that his organization was involved in trail clearing all over the State. The October storm left a lot of damage. NEMBA has partnered with Massachusetts Conservation Voters to get more revenue for DCR. Mr. Boles recently rode Pearl Hills State Park, which is an “excellent facility” and proves that DCR “is on the right track”.

Chair Buckley distributed the Massachusetts Wildlife Booklet and recommended Councilors read an article entitled *Burning For Wildlife* about controlled burning.

Chair Buckley urged everyone to thank their legislators for what they have done for DCR.

Myles Standish Complex Resource Management Plan Presentation: (ADD LINK HERE)

Paul Cavanaugh presented the RMP for Myles Standish Complex for DCR Stewardship Council’s consideration and approval at June 2022 meeting. The RMP will be submitted to the State Archives, provided to the Joint Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture and posted to the Web.

Only 1 entity responded to the extended public comment period.

This RMP is the last one which will utilize the old format. It includes multiple properties. In the future, one plan per property will be prepared.

There are 6 properties within the Myles Standish Complex:

1. Myles Standish State Forest:

* 55 priority recommendations;
* 12,437 acres;
* Comments included concern about competing interests – recreation vs. protection of endangered species; specifically, how the Pine Barrens restoration impacts recreation.
* There were comments surrounding the ownership of cottages, program policy and value.
* Challenges include ownership of the road over the East Head Reservoir Dam. DCR doesn’t own it and negotiations with the current owner have not been successfully resolved.
* Campgrounds need improvements.
* This is the largest campground without a playground.
* Friends of Myles Standish submitted helpful comments and input.

Chair Buckley noted that these Plans did not portray a static situation. It is our job to educate the public that the management plans are also important as they evolve.

1. Kingston State Forest

* 2 separate properties: Pratts Pond parcel; Holmes Lot parcel
* Trails based recreation-subject to illegal use
* 6 priority recommendations
* No comments received from the public

1. Ellesville Harbor State Park

* 9.9 acres- ½ is saltmarsh
* Challenge-to balance a compact trail system with a sensitive ecosystem
* Allows access to the shore; views of Cape Cod Bay
* 15 priority management recommendations

1. Pilgrim Memorial State Park

* 19 acres
* Plymouth Harbor
* 2 National Register properties
* 1 National Historic Landmark
* Heritage tourism
* 16 priority recommendations
* Climate change and storm surge/resiliency plan recommendations

1. Standish Monument Reservation

* Duxbury
* 28 acres
* Heritage tourism
* 5 priority recommendations

1. Scusset Beach State Reservation

* 2nd largest in complex-238 acres
* Army Corp & DCR ownership
* OKH historic District
* 11 priority recommendations
* Comments included:
  + Reconfigure park entrance
  + Provide notification of full lot
  + Increase tent sites
  + MHC-prepare MHC forms for undocumented resources.

Councilor Collins applauded the partnerships intrinsic in the RMP. He noted the need for planting and for a plant species list. Councilor Collins realizes that the new format references will be handled differently, but he recommends that reference documents be hyperlinked to the Plan. He was concerned about references to documents which no longer espoused best practices and that some notation should be made that the document is no longer authoritative. He felt also that it was important to refine priority interests. He felt there should be more emphasis on natural resource challenges at the Pilgrim Memorial Park.

Councilor Canedy asked whether the Army Corps of Engineers responded to the public comment period including extended comment period. Mr. Cavanaugh responded no, although they were notified directly.

Both Councilors Smith and Canedy urged resolution regarding the East Head Reservoir access road.

Councilor Wilson urged fellow councilors to review the RMP and be ready to vote on acceptance at next meeting.

Councilor Smith requested a calendar of upcoming meetings and meeting locations.

Because of time constraints, no subcommittee break out meetings were held this meeting.

There being no further business, Chair Buckley moved to adjourn the meeting at approximately 11:27 am. The next meeting of the DCR Stewardship Council will be held on Thursday, June 9, 2022.

Ann Canedy, Secretary, DCR Stewardship Council