

*Department of Conservation and Recreation
Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

Stewardship Council

Stewardship Council

October 7, 2015

Whitney Hatch, Chair

Walter E. Bickford

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Matthew A. Beaton, Secretary
Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Secretary Beaton:

Thank you for your commitment to promoting the outdoor experiences Massachusetts forests and parks offer and for maintaining a firm understanding for the breadth of DCR management responsibilities. In a letter to Governor Elect Baker, in our 2015-2016 Oversight Strategy and in a subsequent meeting with you earlier this year, the DCR Stewardship Council recommended that you encourage the Department of Conservation and Recreation to focus on two priorities: i) an operations/budget gap analysis to determine the appropriate level of staffing and expenditures needed to ensure parks and other facilities are operated at or close to generally accepted performance standards; and ii) more deliberate agency engagement with other agencies, municipalities and NGOs in climate adaptation planning. Our original letter is attached.

Recognizing that DCR has had much on its plate in the aftermath of the early retirement program and that a new team has needed to develop its sea legs, we recognize the challenge inherent in our request. That said, embarking on and making progress on these two priorities will be essential to ensure: i) the agency adequately staffs and manages its considerable number of properties to the public's satisfaction; and ii) those properties are managed in a forward-looking way to withstand the potential stresses of our changing climate.

Our recommendations are based on the firm belief that until DCR knows what gaps exist between current, non earmarked appropriations amounts and the funding actually needed to meet clear and basic standards of park/facility operations and maintenance, budgeting and staffing in the aftermath of the ERIP program will be an exercise in shadowboxing. Climate adaptation planning will provide the agency and Administration with a clearer view of risks and the ability to prioritize planning and adaptation measures. Adaptation planning will effectively give DCR the ability to make the best use of its limited funds to protect the most vulnerable and important resources.

The \$5.4 million and the \$650,000 reductions in the Park Operations and DCR Administration accounts, respectively, from the ERIP program, notwithstanding the small amount of money returned to re-fill some staff positions, will, we believe, result in a material diminution in DCR's capacity to do its job across the state. The Commissioner and her staff are working hard to meet this challenge, but we believe this will be an almost impossible task given the previous 5-year staffing and budget reductions the agency has had to accommodate long before the ERIP reductions.

The Administration and Legislature could continue to ask DCR to do the impossible with inevitable diminishing returns, and our parks will suffer. Alternatively, we recommend EEA take the same proactive approach as is occurring in some other agencies and openly analyze the degree to which DCR's operating budget and climate risk assessments are sufficient. And if not, by what amount?

We look forward to working with you on this effort.

Sincerely,



Whitney Hatch
Chairman

DCR Stewardship Council:

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cc: *Governor Charlie Baker*
House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo
Senate President Stanley C. Rosenberg
DCR Commissioner Carol I. Sanchez
Stewardship Council