

*Department of Conservation and Recreation
Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

Stewardship Council

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Whitney Hatch, Chair

Walter E. Bickford

John R. Buckley

Elisa K. Campbell

Heather A. Clish

Michele Hanss

Wayne A. Klockner

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Christine L. Poff

Antonia M. Pollak

James P. VanDyke

October 7, 2015

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:

Walter E. Bickford
Worcester County, Berlin

John R. Buckley
Plymouth County, Abington

Elisa K. Campbell
Hampshire County, Amherst

Heather A. Clish
Middlesex County, Reading

Wayne A. Klocker
Middlesex County, Acton

Michele Hanss
Middlesex County, Chestnut Hill

Chad McGuire
Bristol County, Dartmouth

Christine L. Poff
Suffolk County, Boston

Antonia M. Pollak
Suffolk County, Charlestown

James P. VanDyke
Berkshire County, Hancock

cc: Governor Charlie Baker
House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo
Senate President Stanley C. Rosenberg
DCR Commissioner Carol I. Sanchez
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December 10, 2014

Governor-Elect Charlie Baker

c/o Baker-Polito Transition Committee
1505 Commonwealth Avenue, 5th Floor
Brighton, MA 02135

RE: DCR Transition Recommendation – Priority Assessment

Dear Governor-Elect Baker:

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) improves the quality of Massachusetts residents' lives every day. Its 300,000 acres of urban and non-urban parks, 37 swimming pools, 8 skating rinks, 29 campgrounds, 60+ play grounds, 55 ball fields, 2,000+ miles of trails, historic parkways, dam safety responsibilities - and more – make this a great place to live.

The Stewardship Council was established in 2004 to oversee the new Department of Conservation and Recreation with a specific requirement that we approve the Agency's Resource Management Plans and its budget, though our ability to influence annual operating budget appropriations has been challenging.

Budget Challenges & Needs

For decades there has been an unmistakable trend of disinvestment in the agency's operating budget. In the past 5 years this trend has accelerated – risking DCR's ability to achieve its new 5-year capital investment plans. Budgets and staffing levels have fallen more than 30 percent in that short period – and significantly more over the past 20 years when factoring in inflation. At the same time the agency has been asked to steward new parks and facilities. As a result, DCR often falls short of both its potential and statutory obligation to provide a meaningful difference in the quality of lives of residents across the Commonwealth. Swimming areas have been closed and parks left without staff to welcome visitors or care for the recreational amenities and natural resources.

Your pledge to restore the state's overall environment operating budget to 1% of the total was a welcome and refreshing sign. Our preliminary analysis indicates the DCR operating



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budget would have to be increased from \$82.8 million (FY15 without earmarks, pre 9C cuts) to \$105 million to reach its proportionate share of the 1% goal.¹

We look forward to working with your administration and the legislature to find a way to achieve the 1% goal and to accelerate a serious evaluation of the Commonwealth's climate adaptation exposure, beginning with your first budget.

Recommended Transition Step: We believe it is critical to take a step back in order to move DCR ahead. In order to invest wisely its financial and human resources, DCR needs a standardized, data-driven approach to measuring its overall output and productivity. With a small investment in consulting services, DCR could develop a standardized framework and set of metrics that could be used to prioritize where to optimally allocate existing resources across the state. The goal would be not only to evaluate current efficiency and service delivery, but also to deliver a product that the agency can use over and over to prioritize resource needs and investment.

To that end we recommend you fund an independent, 6-month effort to create a financial and operational system to guide how operating funds should be deployed across DCR's properties. This system should prioritize facilities based on simple criteria, determine existing resource allocations to each unit, evaluate staffing patterns and needs, determine standard service levels for each category of facility, and determine where additional operating funds should be invested given existing resource levels and investment need.

In 2006 we hoped to launch an independent analysis but the \$250,000 needed never materialized. A pilot effort by DCR staff convinced us such an independent analysis would produce results well worth the investment. The Stewardship Council is eager to oversee such an effort. This analysis would indicate how quickly and where funding from a "1% environmental budget" should be deployed.

We look forward to working with you and your administration to enhance the experience of our citizens in the Commonwealth's Park and Recreation System.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Whitney Hatch", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Whitney Hatch
Chairman

¹ **Climate Adaptation Funding:** This operating goal does not include funding to cover a coordinated effort and investment to assess and plan for Climate Adaptation which DCR, owner of many of the Commonwealth's natural resources affected, should begin. DCR should have additional resources to play a central role in working with all affected State agencies and the many partners from educational institutions, not for profit organizations, health care organizations, municipalities and others working on this critical environmental/public health issue.

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cc: *Steven Kadish, Chief of Staff*
 Representative Matthew Beaton
 DCR Commissioner John P. Murray