

*Department of Conservation and Recreation
Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

Stewardship Council

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July 18, 2018

Chairman Jeffrey Sanchez
House Committee on Ways & Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Oppose H.4677 Affecting Leominster State Forest

Dear Chairman Sanchez and members of the House Committee on Ways & Means,

The DCR Stewardship Council wishes to thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony on An Act Authorizing the Town of Westminster to Acquire State Forest Land (H.4677).

In 2003 the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Stewardship Council was established by the Legislature to oversee DCR activities under enabling statute, M.G.L. Chapter 21. The Stewardship Council is an independent body that assists and monitors the DCR's mission "To protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources for the well-being of all."

Among the responsibilities of the Council is the duty to approve Resource Management Plans prepared by DCR. These plans provide guidelines for the operation and land stewardship of all reservations, parks, and forests under DCR's management and are essential in prioritizing the level and deployment of operating and capital resources across the agency. We also are called on occasionally to approve DCR's acquisition of land for conservation and recreation purposes.

The Council reviews very carefully all requests to transfer land owned by all of the citizens of the Commonwealth under the care of DCR. Article 97 of the Constitution is intended to protect lands acquired for conservation purposes and to resist the conversion of that land to incompatible uses.

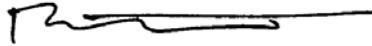
It is with these duties and responsibilities in mind that the Council states its opposition to H. 4677, which would destroy 85 acres of contiguous public forest, including a favorite hiking trail, and convert it to expand an existing landfill.

Importantly, the lands now comprising Leominster State Forest were first acquired by the state for conservation in the 1920's. Subsequent conservation acquisitions were made in 1934/35, and again in the 1950s. The State never owned any of the land on which the landfill is now situated. That was acquired by the landfill owners in 1969 with a subsequent expansion in 1994-1995 within its ownership.

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We respectfully request that you not allow this conversion of Article 97 land to an inapposite purpose, wholly incompatible with the reason that the citizens of the Commonwealth initially purchased the forest land in the first place.

Respectfully,

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

Whitney Hatch, Chair
DCR Stewardship Council

Copies: House Committee on Ways and Means
EEA Secretary Matt Beaton
DCR Commissioner Leo Roy