

## STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL OVERSIGHT STRATEGY (AS OF 10/28/05)

**Legislation (M.G.L. c. 21, s. 2G):** “The stewardship council shall develop an oversight strategy of park management plans, capital planning and policy development. Such oversight strategies will be published annually and after a 30 day public comment period will be finalized and submitted to the Secretary of Environmental Affairs. Such oversight plans must be prepared and submitted 45 days prior to the submission to the legislature of the governor’s annual budget.”

### **Recommended Due Dates:**

October 21, 2005 – Assisting the Council, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) completes preparation of the draft plan for internal review by the Commissioner. The draft plan then will be forwarded to the Council.

October 27, 2005 – Council drafts plan, prepared with the assistance of DCR, is presented at Council meeting.

October 28, 2005 – Draft plan published on DCR website and 30 day public comment period begins.

November 28, 2005 - Comment period closes on draft oversight plan.

December 2, 2005 – Council finalizes oversight plan at Council meeting.

December 5, 2005 – Council submits final report to the Secretary of Environmental Affairs.

## OVERVIEW

### SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The Stewardship Council first assembled on September 28, 2004. Through its initial meetings the Council developed perspectives that:

- The integration of the two legacy organizations that merged to form the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) was far from complete.
- Morale was low and performance was a concern across the board.
- There were far more properties under DCR’s umbrella of responsibility than it could manage effectively with its resources.
- There was a backlog of planning work to be done that, according to practices then in place, would take decades to complete.
- Other management systems, including a managerial accounting system, cost controls and performance evaluation metrics, were missing.
- There was a backlog of physical maintenance to be completed that would never be overcome if the recent budgeting climate were to continue.

- There was an overall sense of a noble, but enormous, mountain to be scaled for DCR to meet its expectations to become a world class organization delivering world class results.

#### APPROACH AND OBJECTIVES

Against this backdrop, and from the eleven meetings since its first gathering in September of 2004, the Stewardship Council has begun the process of refining its role and its mode of operations within the broad charter of its enabling legislation.

As defined in its enabling legislation, the 13-member Council has chosen to operate as an advisory body, at a policy-level, in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities for the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Accordingly, it has set out a three part agenda that drives its activities:

- Overseeing the transformation of the DCR organization into a high performance model for park and conservation agencies in other states.
- Overseeing DCR's meaningful progress toward the delivery of one, and then more, world class parks in the Commonwealth.
- Establishing widespread public support for DCR and for the resources it manages.

Upon this platform, the Council is now gaining momentum in two key areas: (1) in formalizing its own practices and procedures; and (2) in effectively overseeing and intervening in the policy-level affairs of DCR, as outlined below.

1. **Park Management Plans:** The Stewardship Council has established a Resource Management Planning Committee chaired by Henry Lee. This committee has worked with DCR staff to create the overall strategy for completing the Resource Management Plans (RMP's) and has advocated for additional resources to fund this strategy. In turn, this plan was reviewed and approved by the Council during its meetings in the summer of 2005. The plan ensures that the RMP's are created through a transparent public process. Going forward the Stewardship Council will:
  - a. Seek funding to support efforts for the timely completion of all RMPs
  - b. Review and approve the framework for the resource management plans, including the standard/typical outline, and the standard protocols for public review and comment
  - b. Monitor progress so that all RMP's are completed within approved time - frame.
  - c. Review and adopt all RMP's.

2. **Capital Planning:** The Stewardship Council has established a Finance Committee to oversee the development and management of DCR's capital budget. This committee, chaired by Whitney Hatch, has had a number of meetings with DCR's Director of Administration and Finance and continues its work to familiarize itself with DCR's budget, its financial operations and the legislative budgeting process. The DCR will:
  - a. Continue to brief the Council on both the legislative process for capital authorization and DCR's internal process for submitting capital requests. In particular, DCR will explain the criteria used in determining projects that are submitted to the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs for approval for spending.
  - b. Review the annual operating and capital spending plans once they are approved by the administration.
  - c. Review DCR's annual report. This report provides a recap on an annual basis of DCR's operating and capital budget as well as annual programs and significant accomplishments.

Working with these inputs the Stewardship Council shall serve as the final approval authority, before DCR's annual submittals of its:

- a. Annual report
  - b. Annual budget
3. **Policy Development:** The Stewardship Council has recently established a formal Policy Committee for policy review, chaired by Laura Johnson. Previously, external policy issues had been brought to the attention of the Council on an "ad hoc" basis by DCR staff and by members of the public.

The Council will continue to rely on an interdisciplinary DCR group to review all external policies that may substantially affect the public. Going forward, however, through its new Policy Committee, the Council will become more proactive in its policy oversight role through:

- a. Continuing to expect DCR to consult the Council on any external policies that require public input.
- b. Maintaining a formal schedule for review of external policies.
- c. Maintaining an agenda for reviewing a list of: (1) pre-existing policies at DCR (2) policies in progress at DCR (3) policies expected to be addresses at DCR during the next calendar year.

Furthermore, The Stewardship Council will seek advice from its new Policy Committee to further define its own overarching role as it moves forward in time.