

Transition Recommendations Offered by the DCR Stewardship Council

Background

The following transition recommendations are offered by the DCR Stewardship Council to provide the new administration with our thoughts on the changes, improvements, and initiatives that we see as critical to the DCR's success in its mission.

We are a body of volunteer councilors appointed by the governor and representing various geographic regions of the Commonwealth, or legislatively mandated environmental/ecological non-profit organizations. Collectively, we are charged broadly by statute with the approval of strategy, budget, and certain planning and management efforts for the resources within the DCR's jurisdiction. We are required to hold regular monthly public meetings to that end. These monthly meetings include committee discussions (Finance, Policy, and Stakeholders), DCR staff presentations, presentations by partners (i.e., "Friends" groups), and robust public comments. In addition, this year the Council held a listening session specifically to gather public comment on budget priorities. These input and discussion opportunities place the Council in a sound position to understand the importance of our state park system and identify improvements and programmatic and staffing needs.

The pandemic has clearly demonstrated the importance of our state park system to public well-being. Park usage has reached historic levels. Additionally, parks serve as vital infrastructure to our outdoor economy, generate significant sale tax revenue, serve as the backbone of communities, and play a critical role in addressing climate change. No longer should our state park system rank last in the country in per capita spending.

The Council looks forward to working with the new administration in building and enhancing a park system that the citizens of the Commonwealth deserve.

Recommendations

Policy and Finance

- 1. Provide Continuity of Leadership and Governance**
The new administration should seek/retain a skilled commissioner with a strong background in park administration and natural resource management with a commitment to multi-year tenure. A new Commissioner must be charged with rebuilding the park system in a way that is transparent and tied to specific performance metrics.
- 2. Promptly Fill Stewardship Council Vacancies**
The Council members are citizen volunteers, and the work of the Council could be significantly improved with full membership. Constituencies intended to be represented

are not with an incomplete body.

3. **Ensure Sufficient Funding**

The new administration needs to develop a strategy to address the chronic underfunding of the DCR operating budget and the estimated current one-billion-dollar gap in deferred maintenance. A strategy should be transparent and include the administrative capacity to implement a plan.

4. **Follow Through on Recent Strategy Efforts**

Continue work on Strategic Readiness Initiative begun under the current administration and use the Special Commission report as a resource/touchstone for building the park system for the future.

5. **Provide Leadership on Land Management/Conservation Efforts**

The natural resources represented by DCR's 500,000 acres warrant a comprehensive public dialogue around their management and use. Massachusetts, a forerunner in so many ways of conservation and public parks, should be a clear national leader in stewarding its natural resources. Conservation and stewardship decisions should be transparent and based on best available science.

6. **Keep DCR Resources Central in the discussion on Climate and Economic Justice**

Promote, focus, and deliver on the role of DCR natural resources in addressing climate change.

Stakeholders and Public Engagement

1. DCR should invest staff and resources in building and fostering partnerships with all stakeholders, Friends groups, conservation groups and others to leverage private resources—financial and otherwise—to support DCR's mission.
2. Work to address and improve transparency at DCR through innovative outreach and communication.
3. Increase online and other communication tools to enhance public knowledge and accessibility of DCR properties and programs. A significant investment is needed in digital marketing, branding and outreach.

The Council looks forward to working with the new administration on the future of DCR.