

*Department of Conservation and Recreation
Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

Stewardship Council

March 7, 2018

Stewardship Council

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Chairwoman Karen Spilka
Senate Committee on Ways & Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

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

Re: Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) FY19 Budget

Dear Chairwoman Spilka and Chairman Sanchez:

Thank you for your ongoing leadership in developing the Commonwealth's annual budget. On behalf of the DCR Stewardship Council, I write to respectfully request your support for a FY19 budget for the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) at a level that will enable the agency to improve its lands, parks, recreational facilities, drinking water supplies, and parkways, and to ensure the safety of dams across the Commonwealth.

The DCR Stewardship Council was established by the Legislature to oversee a number of DCR's activities, including its annual operating budget. Under the enabling statute, M.G.L. Chapter 21, Section 3C, the DCR Commissioner is required, "with the approval of the stewardship council..." to submit an annual budget for the agency. DCR's FY19 budget contained in the Governor's House 2 submission to the legislature, in our judgement, makes slight but inadequate improvements toward restoring DCR's ability to manage its important and extensive responsibilities.

Background

DCR funding has been in a steep decline over the last decade, with 436 full-time positions—34% of its workforce—being eliminated since 2008. These are positions that should be helping steward DCR's 450,000 acres of open space in Massachusetts, or 9% of the state, which include land, beaches, forests, and ponds that are in high demand by our residents and visitors. DCR manages 40 swimming pools and spray decks, 72 ocean and inland beaches, 8 skating rinks, 16.5 islands in Boston Harbor, 29 campgrounds, more than 60 playgrounds, 55 ballfields, over 2,000 miles of trails, as well as seawalls, historic parkways, and oversight of over 3,000 dams. DCR's operations directly supports the \$16 billion of recreation spending in Massachusetts each year¹. DCR manages many of the state's most treasured forests, waters, and coastal areas for resilient habitat and natural conditions to last generations. Its parks and forests are available to everyone in the state. They are an essential component for

¹ Outdoor Industry Association. The Outdoor Recreation Economy. 2017.

our quality of life, providing places for a quick walk or ride after work, places for a respite from the summer heat, and safe and affordable places for youth and families to play outside.

As recently as FY16 the GAA budget for DCR was \$90.19 million. During that fiscal year, the Administration imposed over \$6 million, or 7%, in 9C cuts and in 2017 implemented an early retirement program. These actions resulted in further cuts to staffing with the combined effect of requiring DCR to postpone openings of many facilities and further reduce visitor services. At the current level of funding, the availability of programming and management oversight for the Commonwealth's citizens and visitors has been significantly reduced. While the FY18 budget established three new dam safety officers, which has been an important and valuable step, DCR staffing has otherwise fallen well below effective levels for management and stewardship.

FY19:

We expect to begin FY18 with the fewest FTEs in more than a decade. In 2008 DCR had 1,279 FTEs and as of February 2018 they are down to 843 FTEs, and Governor Baker has submitted essentially a flat budget for FY19. The FY18 budget for DCR, including overrides, is \$86.4 million and the Administration's proposed FY19 budget is \$86 million. At this level a number of facilities will remain unstaffed and levels of deferred maintenance will increase.

While the Administration's proposed budget will not turn the tide on the needed re-investment in operations, there are a few bright spots that we ask the Ways and Means Committee to also support.

Specifically, the Administration's proposed budget would:

- Restore the full camping season, which had to be reduced last year due to insufficient seasonal staff funding.
- Support lifeguard hiring with a seasonal lifeguard wage consistent with the City of Boston's hourly wage.
- Continue three new dam safety officer positions that were restored in FY17.
- Set a Retained Revenue target that strikes the right balance of being ambitious and achievable.

However, all other aspects of the Administration's proposed budget continues to lock in the dramatic reductions in natural resource management, property oversight, and programming with no financial flexibility for DCR to backfill for substantial vacancies cascading from earlier cuts and early retirement programs.

Asset Management Modernization:

The DCR Stewardship Council applauds the Legislature's FY18 additional allotment of \$250,000 for an asset management modernization program pilot within the department with the goal of efficient, adequate stewardship and budgeting. Already the pilot has highlighted a palpable need for greater communication and technology within the agency. Phase I has been implemented in four unique locations. It is scheduled to go live at these locations late this month. During Phase I, priorities for the next phase of the program's implementation were identified as: piloting the program at different asset class types (pools and rinks); integrate the agency's extensive GIS data into the system; and further refining the process and training to speed the incorporation of future parks and asset classes into the system.

The Stewardship Council urges \$250,000 in funding for this effort be continued in FY19 which would support the asset management project manager position, a second year contract business analyst and other resource needs to refine the program in the four "live" park units, implement the program in phase 2 asset classes during the busy summer season, plan for additional roll-out across the state, and provide training, support and technology upgrades to facilitate the system's deployment. The Stewardship Council looks forward to reviewing and sharing the performance and reporting benefits this system will bring to the agency.

Summary and Recommended FY19 Funding Levels:

The Stewardship Council strongly recommends the Legislature establish at funding levels that will allow DCR to incrementally regain adequate staffing for operations. To that end we recommend the following amounts:

2800-0100 Conservation and Recreation: \$4,150,126

This is the same recommendation as H2. (see Asset Management Modernization note below recommending the addition of an incremental \$250,000.)

2800-0101 Watershed Management: \$1,100,000

This will restore a flood and drought management coordinator position and an aquatic invasive species management coordinator.

2800-0401 Stormwater Management \$430,131

This is the same recommendation as H2.

2800-0500 Beach Preservation \$908,497

This is the same recommendation as H2.

2800-0501 DCR Seasonal \$16,017,412

This is the same recommendation as H2. It will restore the full camping season and allow a competitive wage increase for lifeguards to attract an adequate pool of applicants.

2800-0700 Office of Dam Safety \$620,361

This is the same recommendation as H2 and will continue three new dam safety officers.

2810-0100 DCR State Parks & Recreation \$ 42,500,000

This will begin to restore services to provide a welcoming and safe experience across the state, including staffing unstaffed parks, providing the necessary ~25 people for the Park Support Operations Crew, and ensuring there is full time management and oversight at priority properties across the state.

2810-2042 DCR Retained Revenue \$20,000,000

This is the same recommendation as H2 and strikes the right balance an ambitious and achievable revenue goal.

2820-0101 State House Park Rangers \$1,794,106

This reflects the actual cost.

2820-2000 Parkway Street Lighting \$3,600,000

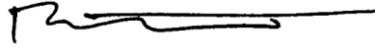
This reflects the actual cost.

Additional \$250,000 to 2810-0100 for Phase II of Asset Management Modernization

The Stewardship Council also recommends the Legislature continues to work with the Administration to more securely moor DCR's budget to what the agency actually needs to maintain its parks and other assets at a publicly acceptable level through continued implementation of the Asset Management Modernization program. Phase I is on track to be in use late this month. FY19 funding is recommended for the necessary staffing, outside consulting, and training to plan and implement Phase II at 42 rinks, 30 pools/spray deck, and one visitor center; integrate GIS data into the asset management system; and identify objectives for future phases to continue progress toward full agency implementation. The Stewardship Council further recommends a report to the Joint Committee on Ways & Means on Phase I implementation adjustments, the system's effectiveness in clearly highlighting maintenance and funding needs, and on Phase II progress not later than February 1, 2019.

Thank you for considering our recommendations, and please don't hesitate to contact me with questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,



Whitney Hatch, Chair
DCR Stewardship Council

Copies: Vice Chairman Sal DiDomenico
Vice Chairman Stephen Kulik
Members, Joint Committee on Ways & Means
Governor Charlie Baker
Secretary Matthew Beaton
Commissioner Leo Roy
Stewardship Council