

Arborway Coalition

Bay State Trail Riders Association

Bike to the Sea

Blackstone River Coalition

Blackstone River Watershed Association

Boston Cyclists Union

Boston Harbor Now

Boston Society for Landscape Architects

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance

Charles River Conservancy

Charles River Watershed Association

Charlesgate Alliance

Emerald Necklace Conservancy

Esplanade Association

Friends of Lynn & Nahant Beach

Friends of Mary Ellen Welch Greenway

Friends of the Middlesex Fells

Friends of Nantasket Beach

Friends of the Blue Hills

Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands

Friends of the Malden River

Friends of Upton State Forest

Friends of Walden Pond

Friends of Whitehall, Inc.

Greater Boston Trout Unlimited

LivableStreets Alliance

Magazine Beach Partners

Mass Conservation Voters

Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network

MassBike

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance

Melrose Pedestrian Bicycle Advisory Committee

Muddy Water Initiative

Mystic River Watershed Association

Neponset River Watershed Association

Rt 16 Traffic Calming Coalition

Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets

Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership

Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance

Southwest Corridor Park Management Advisory Committee

Speak for the Trees

The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

The Harborkeepers

WalkBoston

WalkMedford

March 28, 2022

Speaker Ronald Mariano
Representative Aaron Michlewitz
Representative Mindy Domb
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA, 02133

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Speaker Ronald Mariano, Representative Aaron Michlewitz and Representative Mindy Domb,

On behalf of the organizations below, representing many Friends' Groups and Partners of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), **we urge you to prioritize a more full investment in our state parks through the FY23 state budget.**

The need for investment in our parks system has been apparent for years, but has become more urgent as the Commonwealth struggles to respond to accelerating climate change and equity challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has also made clear the value of state parks as essential natural infrastructure that supports the physical health and mental well-being of communities across the Commonwealth. We must ensure that DCR, which has a broad management and stewardship responsibility for 450,000 acres of parks, parkways and natural resources, has the personnel and resources to respond to these challenges and increased demand on our state park system.

The recently-completed **DCR Special Commission Report authorized by the Legislature found that Massachusetts is chronically underfunding our parks.** Natural and recreational resources are key to our economy, health, and resilience, yet since 2009, DCR funding - both capital and operating - has fallen by 16 percent. The Report also found that "relative to its population, income, and total government spending, Massachusetts' local and state investments in parks and recreation are at or near the bottom of all states" ([UMDI Report](#), page 4). As a champion of green innovation and pioneer in land conservation, it is time for Massachusetts to once again become a national leader in state park and natural resource management.

The Special Commission process has also highlighted many of DCR's strengths, including how **the agency rose to the challenge of the pandemic** over the last two years. In the face of a public health crisis, Massachusetts state parks saw increases in use of up to 300% and remained open while other parks in the region closed. This was particularly important for underserved populations who rely on local parks in their neighborhoods. DCR shared important safety and health information over social media, allowing visitors to plan for their visits and take advantage of the outdoors to maintain health and wellbeing throughout a challenging time.

As organizations that care deeply about equitable access to safe, clean, and healthy parks, a properly funded DCR is critical. We have had a front

row seat to staffing turnover, long backlogs of deferred maintenance, leadership challenges, and the underutilization of partner resources due to lack of staffing. DCR currently has approximately 892 full-time equivalent staff (FTEs), down from 1,279 in 2008, while the deferred maintenance backlog has grown in excess of \$1 billion!

Given recent DCR Special Commission Report findings, backed by rigorous research and data analysis, and COVID-driven increased demand on our state parks, we urge the legislature to support the following investments.

- Setting DCR's STATE PARKS AND RECREATION line item (2810-0100) at \$80M, including the transfer of retained revenue, while maintaining Governor Baker's increase in DCR SEASONALS (2800-0501) at \$24M. These increases begin to provide DCR the personnel and financial resources to meet its mission and to hire staff positions to support capital, operational, legal, and planning work that is so critical to partner groups and statewide park visitors alike.
- Governor's Baker's proposal to eliminate the retained revenue policy burden for DCR that creates perverse incentives for the agency and often forces DCR to choose between what's needed to derive revenue and best practices in park stewardship.

The DCR Special Commission report was an important first step in diagnosing the challenges DCR faces as an agency - and the resulting frustration felt by partners, advocates, park visitors, elected officials, and the public. It also pointed to solutions and a path forward. It is now time to act on its recommendations in collective support of DCR. We only have ONE state parks system and we need its health and resilience benefits more than ever. With the resources outlined above and the collective dedication of DCR staff and partners, we ensure results that will improve the vibrancy, inclusivity, and resiliency of our state park system for generations to come.

Sincerely,

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