

Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation

Prepared for Boston Park Advocates 3/11/17

An overview of budget & impacts

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation manages 450,000 acres of parklands, forestlands, reserves, including campgrounds, beaches, pools, skating rinks, parkways, nearly 2,000 miles of trail and forests that protected drinking water supplies for millions of people in the Commonwealth. DCR manages the largest base of public land in the state, which supports \$10 billion in annual recreation spending. (Outdoor Industry Association, 2012)

Staffing and funding have been declining over the past several years. Here's an overview of the state of DCR's budget and what we can expect in the year ahead, unless the trend is reversed.

Staff declines:

31% of staff positions have been cut since 2008:

2008 full time employees: 1,279

2017 full time employees: 883

Budget declines:

The highest operating budget in last decade was 2008: \$98M

What's been going on during the past couple of years?

FY16:

- Legislatively Approved Appropriation (known as the General Appropriations Act/GAA): \$90.2M
- Governor's cuts & early retirement: \$85M: 5% cut from the Legislature's budget

FY17:

- Final Appropriation: \$86.9M
- Governor's cuts reduced budget to \$80.8M
- Recent supplemental budget restored \$1.5M of Retained Revenue for DCR to keep \$82.4M

FY18:

H1, the Governor's budget, would keep DCR funded at about \$82M by:

- Reducing Parks Operations by 13%
- Increasing Retained Revenue by 15%
- 0% budget growth means probable layoffs

Retained Revenue:

DCR can retain 80% of the revenue it generates, and it is generating more revenue each year. However,

budget cuts to DCR mean the agency is still far behind its previous funding level. Retained revenue was intended to help fund improvements to parks and facilities, but it is increasingly used to offset cuts to basic parks operations.

	Retained Revenue (80% of total)	State Parks & Recreation
FY15	\$14 million	\$40.4 million (after 9C cuts)
FY17	\$19.2 million (after Supplemental budget)	\$36.2 million (after 9C cuts)
FY18 H1	\$20 million	\$35 million

Impacts:

- The camping season was shortened this year
- Unstaffed facilities and lands exist throughout the state
 - This negatively impacts not only visitor services, but the ability to monitor properties & facilities, enforce rules, ensure a positive user experience and appropriate natural resource management
 - Example: Mt. Greylock, the state’s highest peak, no longer has full-time staff
- The entire state has a 15-person maintenance crew (compared to 45 in the 1990’s for the Boston metropolitan region alone)
- Partnership matching program: as of this time last year, 36 projects were approved, but only 3-4 were implemented because they require engineering support and there are too few engineers. Partner funds are being left on the table.

With every \$1 million restored, DCR could hire back approximately 20 positions.

What to do:

- Read the [Green Budget](#), produced by the Environmental League of Massachusetts and supported by a coalition of over 100 organizations and companies
- Contact your State Representative and Senator share with them why DCR’s ability to staff and manage its parks and lands is important to you. Ask them to voice support for the funding recommendations. In particular, focus on advocating for DCR State Parks & Recreation (line 2800-0100).
- Sign up for updates specific to DCR’s budget and operational needs

Key Budget Dates:

- 4/11/17 Likely date for House Ways & Means budget release
- 4/14/17 Likely date for House amendments due
- Week of 4/17 or 4/24 House budget debate
- 5/9 or 5/16 Senate Ways & Means budget release
- 5/11/17 or 5/18/17 Senate amendments due

DCR Structure & Contacts

Divisions of DCR:

- Division of Engineering
- Bureau of Forestry & Fire Control
- Office of the General Counsel
- Division of MassParks
- The Division of [MassParks](#) maintains nearly 300,000 acres of the state's forests, beaches, mountains, ponds, riverbanks, trails, and parks. The Division protects land and resources on privately and municipally held land through technical assistance, grant and planning programs, policy development, and other services.
- Bureau of Planning, Design & Resource Protection
- The Bureau of Planning, Design & Resource Protection provides professional planning, design and project management services, and natural and cultural resource protection in support of DCR's state parks and forests, urban parks and reservations, and water supply divisions. [More](#)
- Office of Water Resources
- Division of Water Supply Protection
- Office of Watershed Management

DCR Stewardship Council

A thirteen member citizen advisory council appointed by the Governor to work with the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the Commissioner of Conservation and Recreation, and agency staff. First met in 2004. The Stewardship Council works with the agency to provide a safe, accessible, well-maintained, and well-managed system of open spaces and recreational facilities. [Learn more](#)

How to contact the agency:

- Maintenance issues: Share comments, questions, or concerns by e-mailing Mass.Parks@state.ma.us or calling the Community Relations line: 617-626-4973.
- Capital projects you are interested in pursuing, contact: Nick Connors, Director of External Relations & Partnerships, Office: 617-626-4997, Mobile: 617-455-7588, nicholas.connors@state.ma.us.
- Volunteer: Speak directly with the staff at the park at which you would like to volunteer or call 617-626-1250.

Friends Groups

Friends groups are essential partners in advancing the mission of DCR. [Learn more](#) about how to get involved with an existing group or form a new one.

To connect with friends groups around the state, visit <http://www.networkingfriends.net/> and sign up for their list-serv.

There is also a new Boston Park Advocates Google Group to facilitate communication among open space advocates across Boston.

Capital Projects:

To get started exploring a possible capital project, contact the Office of External Relations & Partnerships. DCR will soon be releasing the application for the Partnerships Matching Funds Program. Selected projects receive anywhere from a few thousand dollars up to hundreds of thousands of dollars (i.e. MacDonald Park in Medford, a \$300k+ project). Projects compete for a small portion of DCR's capital program each year which is set aside to work with local groups, corporations or individuals who are interested. The selected projects receive a 2-1 dollar for dollar match up to \$25k, and 1-1 above \$25k. The projects are managed and executed by DCR; the partner organization submits its portion to DCR, and the agency contributes its portion from its capital program.

*****Contact Nick Connors (see above for contact info) to request to be on the notification list.*****

Best Practices for Friends Groups

- Relationships are key. Get to know interested parties in your community as well as your elected officials and relevant agency staff. Give recognition publicly. For concerns, start by expressing those quietly to key individuals.
- If you are looking for help from elected officials, make sure your ask is specific and timely. This makes it easier to get a "yes."
- When seeking to connect with elected officials, go to office hours, call, schedule a meeting, send a personalized letter, or send an e-mail and make a follow-up call. When e-mailing, include the elected's staff to increase the chance the message is seen.
- Identify allies in the agency. See where the common goals are and then pursue those, i.e. if staff are supportive of a project idea, it's much easier to advance it.
- To build community support for an idea, seek input as the idea is being formed, demonstrate that you are sensitive to community concerns and needs, reach out to groups you have not yet worked with, and build broad coalitions of individuals and/or groups that support the idea. Engage the coalition to communicate to decision makers.
- Identify ways to build interest and momentum, i.e. hosting events on-site, clean-ups, community fundraisers to raise matching funds.
- Once DCR starts working on your desired project, maximize your influence on the project by staying involved throughout the process (i.e. bidding, review and execution).
- Use Boston's 311 reporting system (dial 311, use the 311 smart phone app, or go to <https://www.cityofboston.gov/311/>) to report park/parkway issues to the City. DCR will get notified of issues in its jurisdiction.

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