

# M | MASSACHUSETTS CONSERVATION VOTERS

March 21, 2019

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair  
House Ways and Means Committee  
State House  
24 Beacon Street, Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133

**RE: FY2020 Budget Line Items 2810-0100; 2810-2042**

Dear Chairman Michlewitz and Committee Members,

Massachusetts Conservation Voters (MCV), a statewide non-partisan, non-profit NGO, appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the FY2020 budget, specifically as it relates to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

MCV's mission is to support the operation, maintenance and improvement of our state's parks and open spaces. Our focus is simple: ensure that residents and visitors have access to world class parks in the Commonwealth with an eye toward reversing the massive funding cuts DCR has experienced over the past decade.

A modest increase in DCR's budget last year has only begun to reverse the loss of some 400 employees, a third of its workforce since 2008. This has had a devastating impact on the agency's ability to maintain nearly a half-million acres of open space, including parks, campgrounds, forests, beaches, swimming pools, 2,000 miles of walking and bike trails, skating rinks, ball fields, playgrounds, several of the Boston Harbor islands, and historic parkways.

We appreciate the Administration's limited increases to certain line items in House 1 related to environmental and recreational concerns. However, they do not go far enough. We respectfully request the House Ways and Means Committee consider increasing DCR's State Parks and Recreation account (**Line Item 2810-0100**) by \$6 million more than FY 2019 to \$47 million for FY2020.

The requested increase in the 2810-0100 account, in line with the proposed Green Budget, would allow DCR to reconstitute a roving repair/maintenance crew to fix routine problems DCR must now contract out to resolve at greater expense. It would also allow DCR to hire additional

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engineers to support ongoing and new projects. Finally, it would allow DCR to convert approximately 25 percent of its best seasonal employees to full-time employees, bringing much needed year-round staff to daily operations and reverse the loss of good, experienced seasonal employees to places that can offer full-time work and benefits.

Additionally, MCV is concerned about the Administration's proposed increase in DCR's Retained Revenue account (**Line Item 2810-2042**). House 1 shows an increase of 29 percent over FY2019 to \$25.8 million, which DCR has said it can attempt to raise by charging for parking at and along its properties that now have no parking fee, such as Memorial Drive. MCV supports DCR being able to keep a portion of the money it raises as retained revenue. But when first initiated, the retained revenue account was supposed to supplement, not supplant, tax dollars used to fund DCR programs. As you can see from the accompanying chart, with few exceptions, retained revenue has had just the opposite impact on the DCR budget. We strongly object to DCR operations being penalized because the agency is becoming more efficient at raising money. A budget reliant on retained revenue that has yet to be collected can result in an actual budget cut if that revenue, for whatever reason, does not materialize. We would urge the Legislature and the Administration to revert back to the philosophy that retained revenue is a bonus for DCR, and thus the people who use its facilities. Our residents and visitors have every right to expect a first-class park and recreation experience at DCR properties, one that reflects the value that a \$16 billion annual outdoor economy brings to the Commonwealth.

On behalf of Massachusetts Conservation Voters, I thank you and your staff in advance for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have regarding these important matters.

Sincerely,



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