

# M | MASSACHUSETTS CONSERVATION VOTERS

April 2, 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,

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) FY 2020 appropriation. Please consider this letter as supplemental to our March 21, 2019 letter.

To briefly reiterate, Massachusetts Conservation Voters (MCV) supports the Green Budget's proposed \$6 million increase to DCR's State Parks and Recreation account (Line Item 2810-0100) for FY2020, \$4M more than H1.

On the policy front, MCV is concerned about the potentially unintended role and effect DCR's Retained Revenue account (Line Item 2810-2042) has on the agency's operating budget. 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.

As noted, MCV supports DCR being able to keep a portion of the money it raises as a way to supplement DCR programs, improvements considered by staff as great to have for our visitors but not essential to operations. But that notion has long since expired.

Over the years, the retained revenue account has become an excuse for cutting DCR's taxpayer funded operational budget. This has resulted in two serious unintended consequences – one internal to DCR and one external for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Internally, in order to “keep the lights on” and to keep people in their jobs, DCR has had to shift

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its focus from recreational programming and land stewardship to maximizing revenue. This is forcing our state employees to act more as profit-based managers than public stewards.

Externally, we as citizens take great pride in our state park system, which includes such gems as the Esplanade, the Blue Hills, Douglas State Forest, Lowell Heritage State Park, Walden Pond, Horseneck Beach, Connecticut River Greenway, Mt. Greylock, and so many other amazing assets. These facilities provide respite for all of our citizens that visionaries such as Charles Eliot and Frederick Law Olmsted hoped for more than 125 years ago.

It is the recreational areas, forests, beaches, bike paths, skating rinks, and swimming pools that citizens not affluent enough to own Cape Cod property or a place in New Hampshire go to for health and happiness.

As we force DCR to rely more and more on retained revenue, and in turn impose admission fees and user fees and parking fees for citizens to enjoy these publicly-owned assets, we rightly fear that revenue-focused policy is changing who can use our state parks and which state parks we attend to and which state parks we do not.

MCV supports retained revenue. We do not support replacing taxpayer support for basic operational needs with user fees because of what that will eventually mean to our citizens' access to and enjoyment of facilities our citizens already own.

We urge the Legislature and the Administration to return 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 recreational 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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