



March 11, 2022

Chairman Michael J. Rodrigues  
24 Beacon St.  
Room 212  
Boston, MA, 02133

Chairman Aaron Michlewitz  
24 Beacon St.  
Room 243  
Boston, MA, 02133

Re: Testimony on behalf of the Massachusetts Conservation Voters

Dear Chairman Rodrigues and Chairman Michlewitz,

On behalf of Massachusetts Conservation Voters (MCV), thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) FY2023 budget. MCV is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit dedicated to supporting our state parks, the millions of people who enjoy them, and the \$16 billion annual outdoor economy they support.

The pandemic has proven that our public open spaces are essential to our physical and emotional well-being. In March of 2020, as things were starting to shut down, I wrote a piece for our website called, ["Get Thee to a Park."](#) And get there we did, in record numbers. To cope with the onslaught, DCR developed real time tools to help people find less crowded parks, forests and beaches to visit safely, and for free.

Now that we are hopefully nearing the end of this ordeal, please turn your attention to giving DCR the budget it needs to conduct its essential mission. Sadly, the Special Legislative Commission on DCR the Legislature wisely created and funded determined that while Massachusetts has one of the largest percentages of state managed public open space in the country, we are near the bottom of the barrel in funding it. Let us do right by our historic parks, the legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Eliot, and reverse that embarrassing trend.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fix this problem. [Other states are already doing this.](#) Massachusetts must join this trend immediately. Let us use federal COVID relief and federal infrastructure money, upwards of \$16 billion, and the unexpected 22 percent state tax surplus windfall, several billion more, to do right by our parks, which have never recovered from the drastic cuts that grew out of the 2008 Great Recession.

This fiscal year, DCR still has several million dollars less in operating funds and about 300 fewer employees than it had in FY2009, along with 50,000 more acres to manage, and an exponential increase in demand on its portfolio.

With that in mind, we ask you to support the following:

- **A \$10 million increase over Governor Baker's proposal for the State Parks and Recreation Operations account (2810-0100) to \$86.5 Million**, to be funded in its entirety by general revenue tax dollars. This will allow DCR, as recommended in the Special Commission Report, to improve its public communications and bolster its engineering staff.
- **Eliminate the Retained Revenue account (2810-2042)** in line with Governor Baker's budget proposal.
- **Fund the DCR Administration account (2800-0100) at \$5.5 million**. Also, as recommended by the Special Commission Report, strike lines 2-5\* in this account. This will truly eliminate Retained Revenue and allow DCR to have an annual spending plan instead of having to guess how much it can raise off the backs of park users in the form of fees and other income.
- **Fund the Seasonal Employee account (2800-0501) at \$24 million**. While increasing full-time employees is preferable, with DCR down 300 employees since 2009, we need boots on the ground in our parks now.
- **Restore the Governor's proposed \$100 million in American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funding for DCR** so it can begin eliminating its \$1.0 billion deferred maintenance backlog in a timely manner. The Legislature's cut of \$85 million from Gov. Baker's proposal was a step backwards for our 500,000-acre state park system.
- **Create an entirely separate account for any earmarks in the budget**. Be they from the Governor or legislators, earmarks give the impression of inflating the accounts they included in yet do just the opposite. Most recently, Gov. Baker \$3.0 million snow and ice removal separate line item from the budget and incorporated it in the 2810-0100 operations account.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with you throughout the budget process. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance as you conduct your deliberations.

Very truly yours,

Doug Pizzi  
Executive Director  
Massachusetts Conservation Voters  
27 Prospect Street  
Marlborough, MA 01752  
[www.massconservationvoters.com](http://www.massconservationvoters.com)

*\*"...provided, that notwithstanding section 3B of Chapter 7 of the General Laws, the department shall establish or renegotiate fees, licenses, permits, rents and leases and adjust or develop other revenue sources to fund the maintenance, operation and administration of the department."*