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More than 50 organizations call for major improvements at Massachusetts state parks

Despite significant progress during the FY2023 budget process and the recently passed economic development bill, our state parks remain in crisis due to a decade of underfunding and understaffing, a condition exacerbated by an exponential increase in use that began with the pandemic and continues unabated today.

This on the ground reality prompted Mass Conservation Voters (MCV) to hold a state parks summit on October 14, 2022. [Participants representing more than 20 organizations drafted an open letter on our parks, subsequently signed by more than 50 park-supporting organizations across the Commonwealth.](#)

“The pandemic proved beyond all doubt that our parks are essential for our physical and mental well-being. It’s long past time to treat them that way,” said MCV Executive Director Doug Pizzi. “We truly appreciate the progress we have made over the last year, but it will take at least another decade of similar support to erase what took a decade to break.”

The letter, sent to legislators, the current and incoming gubernatorial administrations and other park stakeholders, provides a path to reverse the shockingly sad fact that Massachusetts is ranked 50th among the states in per capita spending on state and municipal parks. This and other observations came from an exhaustive report written by the Special Legislative Commission on DCR conducted by the UMass Donohue Institute and released in December 2021.

Starting with the 2008 Great Recession, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) lost some 300 positions and accumulated a \$1.0 billion deferred maintenance backlog. The result has been a distinct lack of boots on the ground in our parks, forests, and beaches, crumbling and/or unkempt infrastructure, and shuttered facilities or shortened open periods.

These circumstances serve to rob Massachusetts residents and visitors of the experience they pay taxes to support and deserve to have when visiting our historic, vital state parks and other DCR facilities, the living legacy of landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Eliot. Poor park conditions also detract from the state’s \$16 billion annual outdoor economy.

“Massachusetts is awash in billions of dollars in federal and state budget surplus funds,” Pizzi said. “Our coalition aims to make sure our parks and park users see their fair share of those dollars.”