



June 28, 2010

Richard L. Sullivan, Commissioner
Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway St., Suite 600
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Commissioner Sullivan,

The Park Watch Program, as presented on the DCR website, (<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/metroboston/trailwatch/mapw.htm>), was designed to enlist the aid of concerned citizens in reporting violations of park regulations and to report problems with buildings, signage, trail damage and other maintenance issues of which the staff may not be aware. Understanding the continued need for focused efforts to enforce regulations and maintain parks while recognizing DCR's difficult financial situation and staff shortages, we are asking you to consider making the Park Watch Program an immediate priority.

Park users appreciate their parks and become disturbed when they see others disregard park rules without fear of reprisal. Training volunteers to report problems and violations in a safe manner allows users to participate in the protection of their park without putting themselves or others in jeopardy. At the same time, knowing that officials care about the problems and want to encourage reporting gives users a sense of involvement and partnership that translates into stronger support for our parks, DCR, and enforcement officers.

It is our understanding that there are four steps to setting up Park Watch. First, Regional Rangers reach out to Friends Groups and others to explain the Park Watch program to determine if there is adequate community interest. Once the level of interest is assessed, the Ranger reaches out to DCR park management and enforcement officials, including State and local police and the local Environmental Police Officers to ask for their cooperation and participation. Next, a one-day training course is given to members of the public about what to report and how to do it safely. The Ranger is responsible for keeping in touch with the volunteers and for providing periodic feedback to inform and encourage continued efforts in the program.

This process appeared to be underway with presentations given to some Friends Groups and at one of Conrad Crawford's "Partnership Chats", held at Lake Quinsigamund. The several Friends groups represented at the "chat" were very much in favor of the program. We are aware of three Friends Groups who have asked for the program. Those groups were promised volunteer training and have asked their members to report to the 24/7 Ranger line at the State House. To the embarrassment of their leaders, nothing has happened. As far as we can tell, no one is approaching law enforcement officials, setting up training meetings, or providing feedback, when reports

are made to the State House line. Several people were disappointed when they called the 24/7 line only to find that some Ranger operators seemed to be unaware of the program. The slow start is undermining citizen confidence in the program and is causing many to wonder why DCR posted the Park Watch program on their website if it does not intend to give support to it.

Park Watch is not just about enforcement of violations. It is about encouraging good stewardship and developing partnerships among the various state agencies and with citizens in support of our public lands. We are asking for a chance to prove that the Park Watch program will work. We believe a cost benefit analysis will prove that the program is necessary for the protection of our parks and is a good economic and social investment.

At the very least, please consider conducting a trial at Myles Standish State Forest, Robinson State Park and Upton State Forest, all located in different parts of the state, and the Middlesex Fells in the urban region, since all of these Friends groups have asked to be part of this program. Please make implementing the Park Watch program a goal for the performance reviews of the DCR staff responsible for the program and for seeing that it is instituted in both our Urban and State Parks.

We look forward to partnering with you to insure the success of this very important program.

Sincerely,

For the Massachusetts Forests and Parks Friends Network Facilitators

Ellen Arnold, Friends of Upton State Forest

Sharl Heller, Friends of Myles Standish State Forest

Claudia Hurley, Friends of Robinson State Park

Mike Ryan, Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation

Mike Toomey, Friends of Douglas and Spencer State Forests

Cc: Ian Bowles, EOEEA, Secretary

Henry Lee, DCR Stewardship Council, Chairman

Conrad Crawford, DCR, Partnership Director

Priscilla Geigis, DCR, Director State Parks

Aaron Gross, Director, Environmental Police

Samantha Overton, DCR, Director Urban Parks

Brian Shanahan, DCR, Southeast Regional Director

Susan F. Hamilton, DCR, Northeast Regional Director

Evelyn Jimenez, Regional Director, DCR

Curt Rudge, DCR, Chief Park Ranger

Gary Briere, DCR, Recreation Bureau Chief