



Call to Action: Support Forest Reserves and Management Planning

The public forests under the custody and control of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife have recently received "Green Certification" from the Forest Stewardship Council, an independent forestry certification group. This certification is contingent upon commitments to designate forest reserves and to improve forest management planning in the Commonwealth.

The planning process presently underway will determine which parts of your state forest system will be used for timber cutting and which will be dedicated to forest reserves. Through sustainable management practices, public and private forests can provide a continuous supply of timber and other forest products. At the same time, some public lands need to be set aside from active management, for their natural and cultural values.

You can help encourage DCR to seize the opportunity to establish a bold and lasting vision for the future of our Commonwealth's forests!

Submit comments by **July 20, 2005**, on the *Landscape Assessment and Forest Management Framework for the Berkshire Ecoregions*. Support forest reserves and other measures to protect wildlife habitat and scenic values in state forests and parks in the Berkshires and statewide. See the sample letter below under "[Send Your Email to DCR Today!](#)"

Background on State Forest Initiatives

Massachusetts has nearly 3 million acres of forest, of which about 500,000 acres are owned by the state. From the globally-rare pine barrens of southeastern Massachusetts to the vast forests of the Berkshires that harbor black bear and bobcat, these areas support a great diversity of plant and animal species. Forests also provide scenic beauty and opportunities for recreation and renewal. They filter and store clean drinking water, clean the air, help make Massachusetts an attractive place for residents, and support tourism's contributions to our economy.

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"Green Certification" has provided an important incentive for DCR to develop management plans for its state forests, parks, reservations, and watershed lands. The agency is required by state law (Massachusetts General Law Chapter 21, Section 2F)-which was drafted by Mass Audubon- to develop management plans for all its properties, with public input. These plans must provide for the protection and stewardship of natural and cultural resources and ensure consistency between recreation, resource protection, and sustainable forest management.

DCR's *Landscape Assessment and Forest Management Framework for the Berkshire Ecoregions* is a regional level plan that will form the basis for more specific management plans at numerous DCR properties located in the Berkshires. The assessment/framework is designed to inventory and assess the current state of the natural resources; identify the major issues related to management of the area's natural resources; and recommend courses of action for improving forest and other resource management in the Berkshire Ecoregions. The draft plan can be viewed [here](#).

DCR and its sister conservation agency, the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, have identified several large blocks of forestland to be designated as "forest reserves." These eight large forest reserves, each of which is approximately 15,000 acres in size, will be managed as natural areas where no commercial timber harvesting will occur. Six large forest reserves are proposed in the Berkshires, while two other reserves are proposed in central and southeastern Massachusetts. [Click here](#) to see a map of the proposed reserves.

Numerous smaller reserves will also be designated within individual properties to protect special features such as old-growth forests, wetlands and streams, steep slopes, and rare and sensitive habitats. Within the reserves, forests will be allowed to mature naturally and new roads and motorized vehicles will be excluded.

These reserves will provide a variety of benefits including:

- development of structurally complex forest areas containing late successional and old-growth characteristics
- habitat for species that thrive in large areas undisturbed by human activities;
- "control" areas for scientific comparison to actively managed forests; and
- recreational and scenic values.

For more information on forest reserves, Green Certification, and the state forest management planning process, [click here](#).

Mass Audubon's Position on DCR's Draft Proposal

Mass Audubon applauds DCR for engaging the citizens of Massachusetts in this important dialogue about the values of our Commonwealth's forest resources. While we believe the eight proposed forest reserves and accompanying management planning process represent a significant achievement for our public lands, Mass Audubon encourages DCR to think even more boldly.

The Harvard Forest (a research arm of Harvard University) recently issued a report entitled, *Wi Idlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the Forests of Massachusetts*. [Click here](#) to review the report. We believe that Harvard Forest has made a compelling case for substantial additional forest reserves on state lands, as well as an aggressive program to protect half of the forestland in the state from development by the year 2050.

The Harvard Forest report calls for the establishment of 15-20 large unmanaged Wildland Reserves that would encompass 250,000 acres, predominately on existing state forestland. Managed Woodlands would compromise the remaining state-owned forests and an additional 1.5 million of privately-owned forestland, totaling 2.25 million acres. As documented in Mass Audubon's report *Losing Ground: At What Cost?*, Massachusetts is losing nearly 40 acres of forestland per day to development, and remaining forests are being fragmented into smaller pieces. Both wildlife habitat and opportunities for local production of wood products are threatened by these trends. While ambitious, Mass Audubon strongly supports the vision of Harvard Forest and encourages the Commonwealth to go above and beyond their current plans for forest reserves and forestland protection efforts, consistent with the Harvard Forest proposal.

We believe that other forest areas owned by DCR deserve to be designated as reserves. Old-growth forest stands, continuously forested areas that have never been clearcut, steep slopes, areas adjacent to wetlands and ponds, rare and fragile habitat types, and sites of special scenic or recreational significance are some of the areas that should be excluded from timber cutting. Some of the sites on state lands deserving recognition as forest reserves are small, while others are substantial! .

The forests of Mohawk, Savoy, and Monroe State Forests are some of the most exemplary in the state, yet are not fully incorporated into DCR's draft proposal. Species like white ash, white pine, sugar maple, and northern red oak exhibit extraordinary height and growth performance. The largest individuals of 15 or more species of trees grow here, including white pines more than 160 feet tall. This would be an impressive performance for any woodland, but are even more extraordinary as these forests often grow on steep slopes. Mohawk Trail and adjacent Savoy Mountain State Forests should incorporate at least a 5,000-acre reserve including 800 acres of old-growth forest, and Monroe State Forest has about 2,500 acres deserving reserve designation, of which about 250 acres is old-growth. With less than 3,000 acres of old-growth forest in Massachusetts, existing stands are small, scattered, and highly susceptible to destruction by catastrophic storms or other disturbances-unless protected along with adjacent forests that have the capacity to become future old-growth, and surrounding buffer area that is of the size, character, and configuration to protect the old-growth stands. Protecting these old-growth forests would establish ecological benchmarks or scientific reference for assessing the effects of active management on the biological diversity of other Commonwealth forests. For more information on old-growth forests and a bill pending to protect them, [click here](#)

Send Your Email to DCR Today!

You can make a difference in determining the future of our Commonwealth's forests by sending an email today in support of forest reserves and management planning. The public comment deadline for the *Landscape Assessment and Forest Management Framework for the Berkshire Ecoregions* is **July 20, 2005**.

The following is a sample communication to agency officials. Standardized messages have very little impact in influencing public officials' decisions. To attract attention and support, we urge you to customize the sample communication by adding personal details, insights, and reflections about the state forests and parks that you know and love.

Email your message to: mike.fleming@state.ma.us

SAMPLE EMAIL:

-Date-

Mike Fleming
Department of Conservation and Recreation
Bureau of Forestry
180 Beaman Street
West Boylston, MA 01583

Re: Forest Reserves on Public Lands, and *Landscape Assessment and Forest Management Framework for the Berkshire Ecoregions*

Dear Mr. Fleming:

I am writing to express my strong support for designation of substantial forest reserves on state forest and park lands. Over 400,000 acres of lands are under the stewardship of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. These lands are habitat for great diversity of plants and animals. They provide scenic beauty and opportunities for recreation and renewal. They filter and store clean drinking water, clean the air, help make Massachusetts an attractive place for residents, and support tourism's contributions to our economy. I value these places for my own enjoyment, for their contribution to Massachusetts' environment and quality of life, and as special treasures that we can pass on to future generations.

I support the designation of forest reserves where no active timber management will occur. Large forest reserves such as those proposed in the *Landscape Assessment and Forest Management Framework for the Berkshire Ecoregions* and Harvard Forest's *Wildlands and Woodlands* report offer the best available opportunities to:

- Protect habitat for species that thrive in large areas undisturbed by human activities;
- Establish "control" areas for scientific comparison to actively managed forests; and
- Support recreational and scenic values associated with wild, unmanaged areas.

In addition to the major reserves proposed by DCR, I urge that other special places be excluded from timber management and preserved for their natural values. Areas deserving of such protection include old-growth areas, lands that have never been clearcut, wetlands and streams, steep slopes, and rare and sensitive habitat types .

I urge you to seize the opportunity to establish a bold and lasting vision for the future of our Commonwealth's forests. While your agency's eight proposed forest reserves and accompanying management planning process represent a significant achievement for our public lands, I encourage you to look closely at the Harvard Forest's *Wildlands and Woodlands* report and work to match this ambitious scale for landscape scale conservation.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

(Insert your name and address)

For maximum effect, please copy your email to:

Ellen Roy Herzfelder, Secretary
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, MA 02114
mass.parks@state.ma.us