

Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network Conference
Saturday October 22, 2011
Union Station, Worcester, MA

The Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network is an independent grassroots organization of volunteer "Friends" groups working together to better protect and enhance Massachusetts' state forests, parks, and trails. Our goal is to foster mutual support among friends groups and to facilitate communication between Friends groups/volunteers and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). We are also working to see a friends group for every forest and park in the Commonwealth!

Theme today is "Common Goals, Strong Partnerships".

Forty-two people representing 16 different public forests and parks in Massachusetts attended the conference. Friends Group members provided a variety of photographs to display their forests, and the volunteer projects and activities they sponsor.

Ellen Arnold, Friends of Upton State Forest, made welcoming remarks that included our gratitude to Lawrence Adams and Trish Settles of the Central Mass Regional Planning Commission for hosting us at their conference room in Union Station. Trish has been very helpful giving us assistance with technical support and set up.

Ellen introduced the Keynote Speaker, the DCR Commissioner Edward M. Lambert:

Commissioner Edward M. Lambert, Jr. was appointed by Governor Patrick in February 2011 to oversee DCR, the largest of the six EEA agencies. Prior to coming to DCR, Commissioner Lambert served as the first Executive Director of the Urban Initiative at U Mass Dartmouth, a research center that focuses on a variety of urban policy issues and that provides technical assistance and independent research to communities and private organizations throughout Massachusetts.

The Commissioner brings with him over 30 years of governmental and public management experience, having served 12 consecutive years as Mayor of Fall River, MA, 7 years as a member of the MA House of Representatives (representing the 8th Bristol District), and over twenty years on the Fall River School Committee. His accomplishments in public service have garnered significant attention and accolades from community based and non-profit organizations throughout the region.

In addition to his career in the public sector, Commissioner Lambert also has experience as an administrator of a non-profit organization, serving as the Director of Social Services at St. Vincent's Home for Children in Fall River. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from UMass Dartmouth and his Master's degree in Education in Counseling at Bridgewater State College.

Keynote Address

Commissioner Lambert praised the Friends Group members for their passion for and assistance with the stewardship of the state forests and parks. He appreciates the input and help provided to "remind DCR of its job as stewards of these properties." Commissioner Lambert appreciated the Network's recognition of citizen volunteers and of DCR employees.

Commissioner styled his remarks as a discussion that focused on the difficulties of performing stewardship responsibilities "on a shoe string".

"We have great places, where folks come together and work together. This requires strong partnerships. Sometimes the partnerships are for specific events such as the Breast Cancer walk. We must find the perfect

balance between conservation and recreation.”

Commissioner Lambert recalled the origins of a Network of Friends Groups that first started with Emily Norton in 2007. He praised the Network as a great development for the agency because a statewide perspective is needed in addition to the advocacy for individual special places.

“We have a chance now to advocate for our state forests and parks in a very difficult times. Our public budgets will probably never be what they once were. We need to remember our mission statement to protect, promote and enhance our common wealth.”

“There is a large volume of land, ‘common’ because it belongs to all of us. This causes tensions. How do we use the lands without hurting resources? We can consult science, but science does not always agree.”

“The Resource Management Plan (RMP) is the best process to guide the best stewardship. It is more than a legislative mandate. The process provides for conversations with the Friends Groups. We must not lose site of the multitude of other responsibilities of the agency: snowplowing, overseeing dams, providing Security at the State House. We seek new ways to fulfill these responsibilities.”

Commissioner Lambert praised Governor Patrick as a Friend of the Agency, and supportive of land acquisition.

Secretary Sullivan [former Commissioner] before me [Lambert] agrees with the concept of the Friends Network.

Commissioner Lambert said they are seeking ways the Agency can be financially sustainable. They are approaching the legislature with ideas so that the agency can retain more of its revenue. Currently DCR has about \$13.5 million dollars in revenue. Care must be taken with ideas: sponsorships could possibly mar the visitor experience. “We don't want to cut off access to anyone; we need to think of ways to make properties more self sustaining.”

“It is important to connect with the next generation. Education is key. Our next generation will be stewards of the properties. We should better use social media to reach the public and to brand the agency in a positive way.”

Commissioner Lambert thinks of DCR as the “value added” agency, not in competition with other agencies, contributing to quality of life in Massachusetts.

Lambert praised the role of Friends groups who: 1) display interest in the properties; 2) bring people together; 3) have done great things at the properties; 4) have sometimes challenged the agency. “The passion is valuable. It means that what we are all doing is important.”

An update on the Volunteer Policy: Commissioner Lambert stated that he agreed with the comments that the policy put together by the agency and was not “volunteer friendly”. The first thing he did was to remove its unacceptable title, which was “managing volunteers”. The policy is being reworked and will be put out for more public input. It is difficult to satisfy the lawyers, employees and volunteers. It will include liability protection and will be reflective of public comment.

Commissioner Lambert took questions from the Friends Group members:

Q: How will DCR react to tornado damage at Brimfield State Forest since it has been proposed as a reserve?

A: FEMA will support clean up near trails. We are evaluating the significance of carbon loading and risk of fire. We knew that with reserves we would have to expect that “things will happen”.

Q: The Forest Futures Visioning Process recommended that a Forest Reserves Science Advisory Committee be chosen to advise on such decisions regarding reserves. Can DCR appoint that committee quickly and use their expertise for the treatment of Brimfield?

A: That is a very good idea.

Q: In the Draft RMP for Middlesex Fells, DCR appears to have accepted the conclusions of a study that suggests that mountain biking has the same impact on trails as hiking. We have concerns that the studies are biased and other conclusions are possible. Why does DCR incorporate these conclusions in the draft RMP?

A: There is a comment period for the RMP now. I will ask the people to back up their conclusions.

Q: Will DCR continue to keep the Historic Parkways?

A: A report has been completed and is going to the legislature. DCR agrees these are “special places”. Dept. of Transportation thinks DCR is better to handle these properties.

Q: I have assembled five different suggestions for DCR one of which might help with the current financial problems, would you be willing to accept this list? One of the ideas is for State Forest and Park Registration Plates for cars.

A: Yes, of course, thank you. Great idea.

Q: Can we raise out-of-state camping rates? Our rate structure is cheap!

A: We're having that discussion right now. We don't want to dampen tourism. And this is part of the larger discussion of retained revenue. An example is that we get substantial revenue from skating rinks and golf courses. We wish to be able to use that revenue as needed, not only on those facilities.

We are also talking about an “enterprise account”. Perhaps we can sell merchandise.

We are also in discussions about the creation of a 501(c) (3) that is completely aligned with parks. Money would go directly to the parks. These kinds of financial mechanisms are available in other states.

Q: Friends group member describes her effort to protect a valuable Urban Wild, where a private landowner is imposing his building plans on the forest. She needs the cooperation of DCR and for them to play a role. Asking DCR to purchase the private property to protect the Urban Wild.

A: Offer of email address and promise to look into the situation.

Q: At Scusset Beach we offer ‘dry camping’ and we have had to turn people away. What can be done to expand the potential for accepting more people?

A: Are you taking notes, Conrad? !

Q: We are concerned about communication in general. Example stated regarding a cottage that needed roof repair. Engineering was supposed to take charge, Park employees/staff not informed. Do you agree that basic communication needs improvement?

A: Part of this is a result of losing employees, but admits communication has been a problem. We are making some changes in language of the merger of DEM with the MDC. There has been an artificial division between urban and state parks. We will downsize some regions. Shouldn't have a practical effect. May help

communication.

Q: Concern that Park Ranger is given all sorts of responsibilities beyond the job which interferes with the job of protecting the resources which is their primary responsibility.

A: Point taken, but difficulty with having less staff and trying to accomplish everything.

Q: It appears we do not have a representative on the DCR Stewardship Council from the Worcester area. Do you agree we need a representative?

A: I believe in geographic representation. There are certain guidelines with respect to where members reside. We are looking at this right now.

Q: "Reserve America" is getting a lot of the camping reservation money. Can DCR get some of that money?

A: We haven't fought to get that money because we can't keep it. (Implication that the attempt to retain more revenue would inspire them to address that issue)

Thanks and appreciation was extended to the Commissioner for giving his free time to attend the conference.

Before introducing individual representatives of Friends Groups, Ellen Arnold reminded everyone that the Draft Guidelines for the DCR Stewardship Council to review RMP's is currently open for public comment through October 28. Details can be found on the DCR Stewardship Council web page.

She announced that Bill Finn from Mt Tom Advocacy Group has a handout regarding the Recreational Trails Program. See him if you would like more information.

She also requested that participants review two legislative action alerts on the MA Audubon website: One is An Act Authorizing the Establishment of Old Growth Forest Reserves (H. 236) and the other is An Act Further Regulating Dam Safety Repair and Removal (S-1985). Talk with your groups to see if you want to contact your legislators.

The following representatives of Friends Groups introduced themselves to Commissioner Lambert and made presentations with accompanying slide (*) or video (**) presentations relative to their missions, projects, and goals:

1. Dave Conley, Friends of Robinson State Park*
2. Sarah Freeman, Arborway Coalition
3. Becky Kalagher, Bay State Trail Riders Association (BSTRA)*
4. Salt Philla, Freetown Fall River State Forest
5. Mike Ryan, Friends Network Facilitator, Friends of Middlesex Fells Reservation*
6. Anthony Marcecellus, Friends of Myles Standish State Forest*
7. Ellen Mass, Friends of Alewife Reservation**
8. Bob Leverett, Friends of Mohawk Trail State Forest
9. Bill Boles, Friends of Wompatuck State Forest, New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA)
10. Ellen Arnold, Friends Network Facilitator, Friends of Upton State Forest*
11. Bob Schwobe, Mt. Tom Advocacy Group*
12. David Harris, Friends of Scusset Beach Reservation*

Claudia Hurley presented some highlights from the recent public input submitted to DCR with respect to the draft Landscape Designations. Claudia has reviewed the 606 pages of public comment and organized a summary with emphasis was on issues that received the most attention in the comments. A copy of the

summary is available on the Friends Network website.

11:45 Award Presentations:

Congratulations to the Friends Network 2011 Award Winners for their excellent work on behalf of Massachusetts parklands and their involvement with Friends Groups!

The Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network 2011 Volunteer of the Year:

Paul Louiselle, Vice President, Friends of Scusset Beach!

Runners-up are:

Nan Finkenaur, Friends of Georgetown Rowley State Forest

Dr. Manuel Luciano da Silva, President, Friends of Dighton Rock State Park & Museum

The Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network 2011 Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) 'Friend' of the Year

John DeCosta, DCR Park Supervisor of Scusset Beach!

Runners-up are:

Alec Gillman, Mt Greylock State Reservation, DCR CCC Program Committee Coordinator

Tim Rayworth, Northeast Region, Member DCR CCC Program Committee

Timothy Zelazo, District Manager, North Berkshire District

The DCR Civilian Conservation Corps Program Committee

All the nominees deserve our recognition and appreciation!

Lunch

A catered lunch was enjoyed. The break allowed for continued networking and viewing of displays.

Afternoon Session: Mike Toomey introduced the Guest Speaker Robert T. Leverett.

Robert T. Leverett is Cofounder and Executive Director of the Eastern Native Tree Society (ENTS), a forest and tree advocacy organization. Members are devoted to scientific research, tree modeling and measurement, education, and general enjoyment of forests and trees. He is also Cofounder, President, and principal old growth forest researcher of the Friends of Mohawk Trail State Forest (1993), a federally recognized, non-profit environmental organization and an officially recognized Friends organization to the state forests and parks system of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. FMTSF specializes in scientific research and interpretive programming.

Speaker Robert T. Leverett

Bob Leverett has performed 25 years of old growth research across the United States. He has studied how different states manage their properties. He has enjoyed a productive partnership with DCR for many years based on providing quality and accurate information about our natural resources.

His inspirational talk focused on the importance of sharing valuable and reliable information and increasing

the general knowledge base. He challenged Friends Group members to enlist the help of retired college professors and other qualified individuals to study and inventory public properties, convey the data and information to DCR and facilitate the transfer of the information to the general public.

Bob referred to a loose quote of an important concept: “That which we do not understand, we do not value. That which we do not value, we do not protect. That which we do not protect, we lose”.

Bob suggested that Each Friends Group build a list of volunteer specialists who can help them upgrade the information network. He encouraged members to start by an examination of the DCR description of each forest and park. How could that information be improved and updated?

Bob mentioned specific professors who are his acquaintances, from the multitude of universities and colleges in Central Massachusetts to teams of associates within the Eastern Native Tree Society. There are people ready, willing and qualified to provide DCR with in depth knowledge of their properties.

He knows this will not solve infrastructure problems, but he described the trust and respect that can grow as partners share valuable knowledge. His own experience which started in 1986 with only about 200 acres of identifiable old growth in 4 small areas has grown to documentation of over 1300 acres of old growth and a state “Old Growth Forest Policy”.

He described an invaluable relationship with Pat Swain of Natural Heritage. He described the necessity of not disclosing the exact location of rare or extremely sensitive cultural or natural resources, but the importance of documenting their existence. Clearly with incomplete data, Natural Heritage and DCR could benefit from volunteer expert documentation.

He made an example of the Tulip Poplar Community at Robinson State Park that is the Best Representation of that species here in the northern most limits of its distribution. In Robinson one can see trees similar to those commonly seen in Southern States. Knowledge of the Tulip Poplar stand has been quite limited until its discovery about 5 years ago.

Bob's association with the Mohawk Trail State Forest has led to many valuable discoveries. A small gravesite of extremely important historical significance, evidence of how Native Americans viewed our forests, a study of how much carbon a large tree stores in a year.

A participant at the conference suggested we all become familiar with the free website: Word Press where people can add content. There was some discussion of the value of holding a bio blitz on individual properties. There was some discussion of obstacles to be overcome in making sure new information is well received by DCR. There are very real problems related to protections of resources versus allowing certain types of recreation and commercial timber extraction.

Despite obstacles, Bob Leverett urged everyone to become a partner in the development and sharing of key natural resource knowledge. He suggested it was the route to the best possible partnerships.

Conrad Crawford, Director of Partnerships

Conrad offered his appreciation to members of the Friends Network. Conrad has been the main contact person between the Network and DCR. He made a presentation about some of the successful partnerships that have been formed with private corporations related to projects in Urban Park Playgrounds. He updated the participants on the Matching Grants Program

Sharon Jordan, Friends Network Representative to the DCR Off-Highway Vehicle Trails Advisory Committee

Sharon provided an update on the work of the OHV TAC. She said progress has been made in establishing regulations and fines related to illegal OHV use. Enforcement is still the most difficult problem. She advised

Friends Group members to help educate local police about what the new legislation provides.

Sharon mentioned that negotiations are ongoing in an attempt to acquire land for legal use of Off Highway Vehicles. She pointed out that creating legislation is hard and takes years, but effecting regulations is by comparison easier. She urged those with concern for protection of natural resources to make their voices heard to balance the well-organized voices of the recreational groups.

Closing

Sharl Heller closed the conference. The participants agreed that the growth of the Network and its outreach is very positive and that it was evidence of a growing partnership with DCR that Commissioner Lambert, Conrad Crawford and Tim Rayworth, all of DCR, attended the conference. The presence of Chief of Park Ranger Services Curt Rudge was noted and the suggestion made that anyone interested in Park Watch take a moment to speak to him.