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July 27, 2009

Ms. Johanna Lyons  
NH Department of Resources & Economic Development  
Division of Parks & Recreation  
PO Box 1856  
Concord, NH 03302

Dear Ms. Lyons:

This letter is to formally convey comments from the Forest Society concerning the Legislative mandate for the Division of Parks & Recreation (DPR) to prepare a master plan for the state park system.

The Society's interest in the future of the state parks system is rooted in our long history conserving land in the State, and particularly our work in conserving and contributing to the State several of the properties today managed by DPR as state parks.

The Forest Society believes that the state park system is one of the most visible living legacies we in New Hampshire will leave to future generations. These lands are held by the State in a public trust. We encourage you to work together with the Governor, the Legislature and the citizens of the state to assure that the stewardship of this trust is successful. We believe that the state park system's master plan should set the bar for success.

We believe Commissioner Bald made an appropriate decision to withdraw the original draft plan for the reasons he stated, and direct our comments to the next draft and the process by which it is completed. We have four recommendations.

First, we strongly recommend that DPR prepare and share with the public profiles of each of the 68 properties it presently stewards. In order to determine the stewardship needs—including operating costs, capital improvements, and overhead--on an annual basis, we think a property-by-property review is a necessary starting point for a thoughtful and thorough examination of the current park system. To more fully educate and engage all interested stakeholders, we suggest each profile include the information included on the attached sheet.

Second, we suggest DPR improve its public engagement and outreach on the master plan in order to build the broad public support that the state parks deserve and that any master plan will require. Visiting with White Mountain National Forest Supervisor Tom Wagner to discuss the process the Forest Service used to complete its Forest Plan may be helpful.

Third, if there is to be any new public investment in the system's annual operating costs or in its capital needs (identified at \$90 million plus in the

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withdrawn report), there must be a compelling economic argument that these investments will have returns to the taxpayers as well as multiplier effects on the State's economy. We recommend that the new master plan clearly identify and explain these returns on investment, in an effort to make the most compelling argument possible to the executive and legislative branches for additional investments in the system.

Fourth, we believe that the master plan should address whether the current authorizing statutes best equip the agency to meet the future goals established for the system in the master plan. If there is a lack of clarity, or of if there are conflicting mandates, the master plan should identify these shortcomings and suggest changes.

Similarly, if there is doubt as to whether DPR's present organizational location (at DRED) or capacity (or both) present barriers to future success, the master plan should address these issues. While we have no preconceived notion of whether the agency is in fact well positioned to meet future challenges, some self-assessment (perhaps with external help) can always lead to improvements in the delivery of public services by a public agency. One clear prerequisite to any larger investment of public funds in the state park system is public trust and confidence in the ability of the agency to deliver.

The Forest Society's unique history with New Hampshire's public lands drives our keen interest in DPR's stewardship of the state park system. Some of today's flagship parks are lands that the Society protected and then gave (or, in the case of Monadnock State Park, leased) to the State. We see the master plan you develop for the system as the roadmap to successful long-term stewardship. The Forest Society is prepared to advocate on behalf of additional public investments in the state park system if these needs are clearly articulated in a well designed master plan.

Sincerely,  
  
Will Abbott  
VP for Policy & Land Management

cc: George Bald, Commissioner  
Ted Austin, Director, Division of Parks  
SPNHF Policy Advisory Committee

**Addendum to SPNHF Letter of July 27, 2009 to Johanna Lyons  
Concerning State Park System Master Plan**

**Recommended Data to Include of Park Property Profiles:**

1. Date the property was acquired by DPR and the grantor of the deed
2. Deed restrictions on the property
3. Acreage DPR is responsible to steward on the property, and, if it is part of a larger state forest reservation, acreage of the entire reservation of which the DPR piece is a part
4. Narrative description of the property (the land and all developed improvements) and the use or uses commonly made of it by the public
5. Estimated or actual annual public visitation to the property
6. Annual revenues generated from the property, and from what activities these revenues are derived
7. Consistency in its current use(s) with the four statutory purposes for which DPR holds park properties
8. Any removal, maintenance or replacement investments needed at the property, and, if so, their projected costs. The draft master plan withdrawn detailed a set of property by property capital expenses by dollar amount, but provided no narrative explanation.
9. Projected new development investments anticipated at the property, and, if so, their projected cost
10. Ways these new development investments will improve public uses and generate new revenues for DPR
11. If a master plan for the property exists when was it completed and where copies available to the public
12. Stewardship needs of the property on an annual basis if DPR were to provide the optimum stewardship it believes appropriate for the property, including operating costs (including home office overhead) of this optimum stewardship program for the property
13. Possible alternative uses of the property to current public use(s) that would be more appropriate in the future.