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MA Forest Futures Visioning Process

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MA Forest Futures Visioning Process

MA Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs, MA Department of Conservation & Recreation and the MA Office of Public Collaboration

Summary/Abstract

The MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) initiated the Forest Futures Visioning Process to develop a long-term strategy for managing the 308,000 acres of lands in the State and Urban Parks system. The MA Office of Public Collaboration at UMass Boston designed and facilitated this year-long collaborative visioning process which culminated in a set of consensus recommendations for a 100 year vision for the forests of Massachusetts.

Approaches and Methods

The FFVP was designed to be an inclusive and transparent process with many opportunities for public engagement and public input. An 11-member Technical Steering Committee (TSC) was selected by representatives of the stakeholder community for their expertise relevant to managing MA forests -- climate change, conservation, ecology, invasive species, landscape ecology, natural resource economics, law, recreation, silviculture, social policy, visual aesthetics, watershed management, and wildlife habitat. The TSC met over several months and developed stewardship recommendations for MA Forests which were informed by input from an Advisory Group of Stakeholders (AGS) and by an extensive public comment process that included five public forums that collectively attracted over 500 participants, 450 written submissions, and over 250 responses to an on-line survey. All presentations, meeting summaries and public comments were posted online for public viewing.

Results/Impact

The TSC with input from the AGS and Public made some of the following key recommendations: Adoption of an Ecosystem Services Model to Guide Forest Protection and Management; Elevated Role for Massachusetts Forests in the Commonwealth environmental decision-making processes; Adoption of a 3-zone Landscape Planning Model (forest reserves, parklands and woodlands); Improved Public Processes -- Create a robust process that gives the public opportunities to express their concerns and values; and Resources – DCR should identify and commit resources necessary to implement the recommendations. The FFVP leveraged substantial in-kind resources from the public, private and civic sectors, in terms of technical, scientific and other kinds of expertise and services.

Conclusion/Next Steps

In April 2010, the Secretary of Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs announced that he was adopting the FFVP recommendations in their entirety. An FFVP Implementation Team was created and many of the TSC's recommendations have already been implemented, including the establishment of a 3-zone Landscape Planning Model.

Goals and Objectives

1) Review public benefits/values of DCR forest lands & examine their inter-relationships - Recreation, tourism, aesthetics, renewable forest products, habitat diversity, local economics, landscape ecology, water quality, and climate change; 2) Develop recommendations to ensure forest stewardship is coordinated and implemented consistently with public benefits and values and DCR's legal mandates; and 3) Develop strategies for continuing to strengthen public dialogue and understanding of forest management principles and practices that support public benefits and values.

References and Resources

Link to DCR's Futures Visioning Process : www.mass.gov/DCR and click on the "Forest Futures Visioning Process" or contact Loraine Della Porta at MOPC - loraine.dellaporta@umb.edu

Additional Partnerships, Information and/or Contacts

EEA, DCR, MOPC, MA Audubon, Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, UMass, Trustees of Reservations, Harvard Forest, LandVest, Appalachian Mtn. Club, MA Landowners, MA Friends Network.