

APPENDIX D

Forest Designations in Wendell

Wendell Forest Conservation Alliance Letter

Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee Chair Response to Wendell
Forest Conservation Alliance Letter

Reasons for Managing our Forest Landscape Letter

WENDELL FOREST CONSERVATION ALLIANCE LETTER

November 5, 2010

The Wendell Forest Conservation Alliance is a group of local individuals interested in the protection of public and private lands supporting local forests and their associated, essential natural functions. We are especially concerned with forests within Wendell and surrounding townships that comprise an important "greenway," with the ecological, aesthetic, and conservation values inherent in contiguous tracts of naturally occurring forest habitat. We thank the Wendell Open Space Planning Committee for its tremendous efforts in putting together a new Open Space Plan, which contains data, suggestions, and action plans to support our general interests in forest preservation.

We appreciate this opportunity to publicly make the following recommendations:

1. That the OSRP include a statement in support of the conversion of Wendell State Forest lands to "Reserve" status as is currently proposed for a percentage of DCR land in Massachusetts, thereby protecting it from further industrial forest harvesting. The Wendell State Forest deserves this protection for the following reasons:
 - a. The surrounding matrix of protected and privately-held forest lands provide an unprecedented opportunity to support the OSRP's mission of "Using Island Biogeography to Protect Wendell's Biodiversity" and generally enhance and protect its rural character;
 - b. The New England National Scenic Trail (The M & M Trail) bisects Wendell State Forest. This trail has recently been designated as a National Scenic Trail by the Federal Government under the National Trail Systems Act (1968). This Act was designed "to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation." This objective is inconsistent with logging. The portion of WSF that contains Bear Mountain should also be given the highest level of protection, as it is a likely candidate for the future re-routing of the trail (the trail now follows the paved Farley Road in this location).
 - c. WSF has undergone recent industrial timber harvesting activity, but rather than consigning it forever to this role, long-term and geographic factors recommend a change of policy toward a conservation purpose. Whereas Wendell would stand to potentially benefit economically by access to the products of its state forest, we residents have a strong ethic of land and forest conservation. We might be more willing than most to support Reserve zoning for the greater, longer good that

continuous logging would jeopardize, plus the ability to hike and bike in such forests, and observe and learn in them.

2. That the Wendell Forest Conservation Alliance be acknowledged as a group that supports the broader land conservation aims outlined in the OSRP, and particularly supports the notion of conservation bylaws covering land development.

3. That Section 4-p. 35 be modified as was suggested by OSRP contributors in an earlier draft to provide a more balanced perspective on the management of private forest lands – as it currently reads there is a strong message that forest cutting promotes biodiversity when in fact, as noted in earlier sections on Island Biogeography, it can be equally strongly argued that the opposite is true. Instead, the Wendell Forest Conservation Alliance supports the general notion that forest “wildland” habitat is diminishing and therefore non-managed forests hold great ecological and conservation value for wildlife habitat, environmental quality, and human health.

4. That forestry activity as is outlined in the ORSP on the remaining town-owned Phelps tracts be discontinued in order to protect and promote wild forest habitat in Wendell. Although there is historical rationale for the logging, a “hands-off” management strategy would serve more modern economic and ecological gains to the town.

November 23, 2010

Dear members of the Wendell Forest Conservation Alliance,

The Open Space & Recreation Planning Committee has considered your request that the OSRP include a statement in support of the conversion of Wendell State Forest lands to "Reserve" status that is currently proposed for a percentage of DCR land in Massachusetts. However, we do not support including this recommendation in the plan for a variety of reasons.

First, members of the committee hold differing viewpoints on this topic. While we all agree that it is beneficial that some forestland be held in reserves and other lands be managed as sustainable working landscape, the committee membership include both strong proponents and strong opponents of reserve status for the Wendell State Forest. As the general topic of reserve status versus working landscape has historically been an especially divisive subject in Wendell in recent decades, I believe that the strong differences of opinion among members of the planning committee is reflective of broader conflicting views among the Town's residents. I agree the Wendell residents share a strong ethic of land and forest conservation with regards to protecting land from development, but they do not appear to agree about how to manage protected forests. I believe that the recommendations in this plan should focus on topics on which the majority of the community agrees, as the document was produced for the benefit of all Wendell residents.

The general topic of designating reserve status to permanently protected local open space, as opposed to preserving the land as working landscape, became especially divisive in Wendell when the Town acquired the Fiske Pond Conservation Area and circumstances necessitated that this property be given reserve status. One result of this was that some members of the community directed a great deal of hostility toward the standing open space committee. In the years following the acquisition of Fiske Pond, the Wendell Open Space Committee has worked hard at reestablishing a positive relationship with local residents who were angry about the restrictions placed on the Fiske Pond property. If the new Open Space & Recreation Plan were to contain a recommendation favoring either reserve status or managed forest status it would likely have the impact of alienating proponents of the alternate arrangement. This could have the effect of undermining WOSC's ability to work with residents who support permanently protecting land, but differ as to how it should be managed.

Finally, a solid majority of the members of the Open Space & Recreation Planning Committee do not favor reserve status for the entire non-park portion of the Wendell State Forest. While the plan does not make any recommendation either favoring or opposing reserve status for the reasons mentioned above, as individuals most of us believe that sustainable forest management is compatible with preserving habitat for many species, a position shared by many prominent wildlife biologists. We support the continuation of the practice of allowing local residents to harvest wood from the state forest to heat their homes and policies that enhance rather than obstruct local residents from relying on local resources to meet our needs. We are also concerned that designating the forest as a reserve could lead to a number of logistical problems that could affect the Town negatively.

The forestry activity related to the Phelps tracts that are outlined in the plan is included in response to a historical rationale stemming from deed restrictions outlined by the donors in 1888. The action steps in the plan outline the steps required to carry out the actions described in the wording of the warrant articles approved at the 2008 annual town meeting. These articles state “such land shall remain a working landscape available for traditional uses and be managed for timber and firewood with attention to habitat protection for the benefit of local schools....” The Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee does not have the legal authority to overturn decisions made at town meeting. Ultimately, for practical purposes, decisions about if and when to continue forestry related activities on the Phelps lots will rest with the membership of the Open Space Committee and Conservation Commission.

Sincerely,

Marianne Sundell,

Chair Wendell Open Space & Recreation Planning Committee

**REASONS FOR MANAGING OUR FOREST
LANDSCAPE
WOSC**

- Before I proceed let me clarify my position on the issue of reserves. I am not totally opposed to the concept of forest reserves:
 - Reserves provide an important control area for comparison with managed landscapes.
 - Reserves provide important habitat for a small but important segment of our natural flora and fauna

- The Wendell Energy Committee has formed a Local Food Sub-committee with the mandate to decide how to best reduce our dependency on food imported from outside the region and how to best build up the pattern of local food production and exchange in the community. If this action is a good idea, why isn't also a good idea to manage our forest and produce as much of our forest products as locally as possible? USDA soil suitability classifications clearly show our landscape and soils are much better suited to the production of forest products than they are for farming.

- No one who is remotely familiar with private forest land would believe the statement that “private forest will serve as the engine for an invigorated local wood products industry and a supply of local forest products”. Most private forest land has been poorly managed and “high graded”. A forest rotation requires 80 to 100 plus years. With the current turnover in ownership, numerous different land owners over the course of one rotation are very likely. Keeping many different landowners focused on a long term goal is unrealistic and unlikely. **Long term public ownership has always been a strong a positive factor for state lands**

forest management at least before the move to “forest management by public consensus”.

- New England Forest Landowner facts: FACTS: Source NE Forestry Foundation Winter 2009 newsletter
 - ***85% of NE Forest is in private ownership.**
 - *Since 1990, fully two thirds of the Northern Forest has changed ownership.
 - *40% of the family forestland in NE, almost 5.5 million acres has owners 65 or older meaning we are about to witness the largest intergenerational transfer of land in our history. Much of this land is likely to be subdivided and no longer available as productive forest land.
- There hasn't been a forest landowner study done anywhere that concluded managing forest for the purpose of harvesting forest products was a priority of forest landowners. Regardless of where the study was conducted all studies indicated approximately 45% of forest landowners had no intention of ever harvesting forest product and that most owned their forest land for privacy and personal enjoyment. What this means is that both the Harvard Forest “Wildlands and Woodlands Report” and DCR’s Technical Steering Committee Report are based on an important false assumption that public lands can be essentially removed from production and that private lands will serve as a long term sustainable source for our forest product needs!
- A very recent publication titled “Social versus Biophysical Availability of Wood in the Northern United States” by Butler, Zhao Ma, Kitteredge and Catanzaro states that though family forest control 54% of the 7,685 million dry tons of wood in the region once constraints such as slope, size of holding, harvesting restrictions and ownership attitudes are applied wood availability is significantly reduced by nearly two thirds!

http://www.masswoods.net/images/stories/pdf/social_availability_njaf.pdf

- Whenever a timber sale occurs on DCR land **8%** of the sale revenue is returned to the town where the sale occurred. **30%** generally goes back into the land in the area of the management project. In the state forest lands of western MA timber sales have been the only historical source of maintenance revenue. Until recently Parklands Management needs, when they occurred, were incorporated into nearby timber sales to resolve problems on a “break even basis” at worst. In the recent past there have been at least two instances where in excess of 1 million dollars was spent in parklands accomplishing needed clean-up that could have been corrected using commercial timber sales. In light of the current economy, budgetary constraints and the ever mounting deficits there are no available funds to replace lost maintenance dollars provided through timber sales. There are many more competing demands for the available tax dollars that have far greater urgency. **Advocating low revenue producing state forest such as Wendell is placed in reserve** is advocating for the closing of Wendell State Forest. Warwick State Forest is similar to Wendell State Forest and has no staff attached to that Forest and it is very obvious that forest is being run by an absentee owner.
- The sizes of reserves as mandated by the TSC Report are unrealistic for a state with the population density of Massachusetts. I would like to see the placement of a 15,000 acre reserve in the Wendell area! 15,000 acres would nearly equal all the DCR land in two of the following three towns: Warwick, Erving or Wendell. The situation gets even worse from Worcester County east. With the dispersed settlement pattern of the area numerous households would be impacted by being surrounded by a forest reserve and subject to all the inconveniences and risks created by the level of stewardship allowed on a reserve. (i.e. Forest fire, Power outages, blocked

road access etc.) Over time in holdings would become prime candidates for a “taking” due to the expense and difficulty of maintaining services to the household(s) in question. I have never seen a suggested age class distribution for managed forest that exceeded placing more than 10-15% of the land base in a reserve status. For Wendell State forest that would mean a more reasonable acreage of 1,000-1200 acres of reserve.

- Forest Reserves as established by DCR are bogus reserves in every sense of the definition. Just about any use other than timber harvesting is allowed in a DCR Reserve. The value of DCR Reserves for scientific research is minimal due to the number of uncontrolled variables that are present in a reserve making true scientific study extremely difficult.
- Forest management is the most cost effective habitat manipulation tool we have at our disposal for both our native wildlife and for our native forest types. Lack of “early succession” or early seral habitat is the problem not the lack of mature forest habitat and is well documented in current publications and studies.
- Natural processes such as wildfire and floods can no longer be allowed to operate the way they functioned in pre-settlement times, due to our population density and settlement patterns. Management is a necessity not an option!
- Even though forest area is losing ground in Massachusetts, the volume of trees continues upward. The growing-stock volume of trees increased by 17% between 1985 and 1998 (Alerich, 2000). Our forest is ageing and we should be thinking of regenerating a large percentage of our forest stands. Large diameter trees are the most susceptible to insects, disease and catastrophic storms. Historical records prove the New England area has been hit by catastrophic hurricanes at approximately 100 year intervals. The last such occurrence happened in 1938. (**The hurricane was**

estimated to have killed between 682 and 800 people,^[2] damaged or destroyed over 57,000 homes, and caused property losses estimated at US \$306 million (\$ 4.72 billion in 2010 dollars) An estimated 2 billion trees were destroyed in NY and New England). The logic of advocating for a forest management policy that decreases forest type and age class diversity escapes me!!

- Given sufficient time reserves in the North Quabbin Region will eventually progress to a climax succession of Eastern Hemlock and American Beech. Both species have serious insect and disease issues.
- Massachusetts currently produces only 2% of the wood fiber that it consumes. This stems from a combination of increasing population and demand for wood products coupled with a shrinking sawmill industry (Damery and Boyce, 2003). The number of sawmills operating in the state has fallen by 55% from 1971 to 2001.

(<http://bct.eco.umass.edu/publications/by-title/landowner-driven-sustainable-forest-management-and-value-added-processing/>) **When there is no longer a MA Forest Industry how will we deal with severe forest issues??**

- As more and more of our forest are removed from production and our demand for forest products increase the need is most often met through the exploitation of lesser developed nations who lack environmental lawsa lose, lose situation for the global environment. As more and more wood is imported the threat to our native woodlands from insects and diseases increases. IE: Hemlock Whooley Adelgid, Asian Longhorn Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer and the list goes on and on.
- State Forest Management projects are planned forest disturbances with a management objective and a goal. Natural disturbance is random occurrence.

- State forest management is a temporary disturbance that doesn't disrupt the use of the forest for an extended period of time. Even logging debris with the exception of cull portion of logs will decompose and disappear in 6-7 years. Forest management activities make improvements to the landscape enhancing the potential for multiple activities. Forest management activities accomplish much needed infrastructure maintenance which otherwise doesn't occur.
- Natural disturbance can be catastrophic and in the absence of salvage operations may preclude the use of the land for other purposes for a very long extended period of years.
- State forest management activities provide much needed forest products for society. Natural disturbance in some instances provides no forest products or low quality forest products at best.
- Forest management activities generate revenue for the commonwealth the town and for the wood industry. Natural disturbance, when salvaged is an extremely dangerous and expensive proposition particularly when done through other means than a commercial timber sale. When no salvage of a natural disturbance occurs society is often faced with a serious safety problem as a result.

For a combination of the above reasons I believe the direction the DCR Technical Steering Committee has chosen to take with regard to Massachusetts forest land will implode in the next 10-15 years. The problem is when that occurs it will be impossible to push a button and reverse the damage that has occurred. Any losses in forest quality in the absence of management as well the loss of infrastructure is irreversible or extremely costly at best!

Submitted by
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