



October 7, 2020

Dear Representative:

We hope this finds you well. We greatly appreciate all the work you and your staff are doing, in what can only be described as an unrelenting and unprecedented crisis.

On behalf of the Green Budget Coalition, we are writing to respectfully request support for adequate funding of our environmental agencies in the fiscal year 2021 operating budget, with a particular focus on the four line items below.

Following the 2008 recession, Massachusetts' environmental agency operating budgets were cut significantly and have yet to recover to 2008 levels - and that is without factoring in inflation. Two of the most relied upon agencies during the pandemic, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), whose parks have seen a dramatic rise in usage (in some counties, over a 300% increase in the number of usual visitors), and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), which safeguards our drinking water and clean air, remain millions of dollars below 2008 levels:

- DCR's budget in FY09 was \$55,793,468 (combining 2810-0100 and 2820-0100 Urban Parks and Recreation, which have been combined since FY10); DCR's proposed budget in H2 is only \$47,635,283
- DEP's budget in FY09 was \$36,272,524. DEP's proposed budget in H2 is only \$33,646,687

Further cuts to already vulnerable agencies would have drastic impacts.

Department of Conservation and Recreation: State Parks and Recreation (2810-0100)

Green Budget Coalition funding request: Maintain H2 funding of \$47,635,283

DCR's responsibilities include stewardship, management, and safety of our parks, beaches, forests, trails, pools, skating rinks, and campgrounds. These properties are currently understaffed, with only three rangers for the entire Berkshires region and a Park Support Operations crew of only 15 professionals responsible for all DCR parks.

Impact: According to the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' (EEA) COVID-19 Community Mobility Report, DCR parks saw an average of 99% increase in traffic across the state, with a 300% increase in some counties. In an otherwise difficult year, parks, trails, and amenities have been a bright spot for communities, and a critical source of refuge and wellness for Massachusetts residents and visitors.

Department of Environmental Protection: Administration (2200-0100)

Green Budget Coalition funding request: Maintain H2 funding of \$33,646,687

DEP's responsibilities include ensuring clean drinking water, protecting critical wetlands, managing drought, compliance and enforcement, waste reduction and recycling, reducing toxics, cleaning up contaminated sites, emergency response, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions to comply with the Global Warming Solutions Act. At a time when the federal government has stepped back from longstanding environmental policies and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is declining to enforce regulations, we need DEP more than ever.

Impact: DEP is often our first (and only) line of defense against every day threats to human health and the environment. Funding for DEP will be critical to advancing our updated climate change goals, which are currently under review by the conference committee appointed to produce a final climate/energy bill. DEP is also tasked with implementing new, critical per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) regulations to protect our drinking water.

Department of Fish and Game: Division of Ecological Restoration (2300-0101)

Green Budget Coalition funding request: Maintain H2 funding of \$2,032,048

The Division of Ecological Restoration's (DER) responsibilities include restoring and protecting our rivers, wetlands, and watersheds to improve streamflow, protecting drinking water supplies, reducing flooding and storm damage, restoring fisheries habitat, and creating healthier, more resilient ecosystems and communities. DER plays a critical role in providing municipalities with technical assistance and funding to right-size culverts and remove failing, dangerous dams. The popular municipal assistance program for such projects is consistently oversubscribed. For example, last year, the agency received \$6.4 million in requests, but were only able to give out \$750,000 in grants. DER has more than 50 active river and wetland restoration projects in planning.

Impact: DER projects improve public safety and help people and nature adapt to climate change, and create jobs across the state. For every \$1 million spent, the average DER project generates a 75% return on investment and creates or maintains 12.5 full-time-equivalent jobs.¹ Demand for restoration assistance continues to grow across the Commonwealth, even during the last six months of the pandemic. As we look to rebuilding our economy, DER will be an important partner in green recovery efforts.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (2310-0300)

Green Budget Coalition funding request: Maintain H2 funding of \$154,222

The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program's (NHESP) responsibilities include protection, management, and restoration of the Commonwealth's most imperiled animals and plants and the sensitive communities and habitats on which they depend, including species listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA) and associated regulatory reviews. The state has

¹ Division of Ecological Restoration. 2017. Ecological Restoration Projects in Massachusetts: Summary of Three Phases of Investigation. Available at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/economic-benefits-from-aquatic-ecological-restoration-projects-in-massachusetts-summary-of>

provided a mere \$150,000 for this important program each year for the past 8 years, accounting for only 5% of NHESP's annual operating budget. Prior to FY04, NHESP received \$500,000 annually; they are running a significant operating deficit.

Impact: Over 400 native plant and animal species remain listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern under MESA. In the face of habitat loss, emerging diseases, invasive species, and climate change, this work is more important than ever – to conserve biodiversity and pollinator habitat, save legally-protected species, improve the health of natural systems, including fisheries, and stimulate the outdoor recreation industry.

Investing sufficient resources will enable our environmental agencies to carry out their missions. With adequate budgets, agencies can focus on:

- Providing technical assistance to communities to ensure their resiliency to climate change impacts.
- Ensuring consistent, predictable, and fair administration of critical environmental laws.
- Improving water quality so residents can access clean water to drink and healthy rivers, lakes, and ponds for recreation and wildlife.
- Managing pollutants that contribute to air and water quality, climate change and increasing the state's resilience to climate change impacts.
- Making sure our parks are accessible, safe, and clean and that facilities are well maintained and staffed.
- Protecting critical wetlands that keep our communities safe from flooding and serve as a significant carbon sink.
- Stimulating local economies and generating jobs across the state.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to ask any questions to Casey Bowers at cbowers@environmentalleague.org or 781.771.5404.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Mountain Club
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Audubon Society
Massachusetts Organization of State Engineers and Scientists
Massachusetts River Alliance
The Nature Conservancy
The Trustees of Reservations