

## **State Parks: Stewardship's Rightful Place**

What is the optimum stewardship required for New Hampshire's state park system, and what does this stewardship cost? The answer to these questions will reveal just how far out of alignment existing revenues to support state parks are from the amount needed to sustain optimum stewardship.

The Forest Society's interest in the future of the state parks system is rooted in our long history of land conservation in New Hampshire—particularly our work conserving several of the properties today managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) as state parks.

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

In June 2009 DPR released a draft master plan for the state parks. Withdrawn by Commissioner Bald after considerable public outcry, the plan suggested that nearly one-third of the 68 properties under DPR management failed to meet core state park values and should be considered for "alternative management strategies." One such strategy would be to dispose of the properties. This was interpreted by some to mean that these properties were headed toward the auction block, although this was not what the report actually said. The draft report did suggest that the entire park system would need a substantial capital infusion in order to meet current and future stewardship needs.

The DPR will submit a new draft master plan for public review later this year. The Forest Society has recommended that the new draft profile each of the 68 properties and outline the specific stewardship needs believed to be optimum for each. The profile should include the operating and capital expenses required to attain this optimum stewardship. We also recommended that a more thorough public engagement process be used to collect broad feedback from park users themselves. We suggested that DPR prepare an economic analysis detailing the financial returns of proposed operating and capital investments in the system, including returns to taxpayers, to park users, and to the many private businesses that benefit from such investments. Finally, we suggested that DPR confirm that it has clear legislative mandates to successfully attain the goals it sets in the new master plan.

We encourage all Forest Society members to weigh in on this issue with both the DPR (as it seeks public input) and with our elected state officials who ultimately provide the resources needed to sustain the state park system.

To review key documents associated with state parks, including Forest Society comments on the draft master plan, go to the Forest Society website Policy page at [www.forestsociety.org/issues](http://www.forestsociety.org/issues).