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Report Reveals Dire Condition of Massachusetts' Forests and Parks

BOSTON, MA — Today, the Forests and Parks Partnership is releasing a report titled “Our Forests and Parks in Crisis” outlining the deteriorating condition of our special places. The Partnership is comprised of representatives from five of the state’s leading environmental organizations: the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Environmental League of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Chapter of Sierra Club, MASSPIRG and Mass Audubon.

The research conducted by the Partnership reveals that Massachusetts’ forests and parks are in dire need of financial resources, sound stewardship and would greatly benefit from increased partnering with citizen groups and non-governmental organizations. Inclusion of these elements into a new vision for Massachusetts’ forests and parks will help the incoming administration to protect the unique natural and cultural resources and provide a safe and quality recreational experience for those who visit these special places.

“The Partnership has been working to identify the problems plaguing Massachusetts’ forests and parks and our report provides a number of recommendations,” said Appalachian Mountain Club Executive Director Andrew J. Falender. “We are calling on Governor-elect Mitt Romney and the Massachusetts Legislature to appreciate the environmental, recreational and economic interests at stake and to renew the state’s commitment to our forests and parks.

The report outlines the challenges facing Massachusetts’ forests and parks, but it also provides recommendations for Governor-elect Romney and the Legislature. Since 1990, forests and parks staff has decreased 35 percent -- funding cuts over the last 14 years have compromised the state’s ability to manage the land, ensure safe parks and enforce environmental laws. The report includes information about the value of forests and parks to the people of the Commonwealth. For example, forests and parks help filter our water, provide quality recreational opportunities, outdoor classrooms for educating our children, and wildlife habitat. Visitors to Massachusetts’ forests and parks seek out swimming holes and fishing streams, wildflowers, quiet hikes, and peaceful bird watching – they find all these experiences in our forests and parks.

“More than 12 million people visited Massachusetts’ forests and parks last year,” said the President of the Environmental League of Massachusetts Jim Gomes. “It is imperative that these irreplaceable resources receive adequate funding. We fully understand our state’s current budget problems, but the forests and parks have been suffering spending cuts for more than a decade. We are pleased that Governor-elect Romney, in his environmental platform, recognized the need for well-maintained, safe, and usable parks, and we look forward to working with him. Massachusetts’ forests and parks must be a priority for our state, and funding must be at least restored to the level it reached before the cutting began.” The Partnership estimates that \$63 million per year would be needed to achieve that goal.

Unfortunately, financial challenges are not the only obstacle to healthy forests and parks in Massachusetts. “Our report outlines the need for strong, efficient, and effective management of the current financial and human resources,” said Sierra Club, Massachusetts Chapter, Executive Director Jay McCaffrey. “In the future, the new administration must prioritize forests’ and parks’ stewardship plans that balance ecological resource needs with recreational use.”

One way the Partnership suggests that the new administration could better manage the state’s forests and parks is by including citizen groups and non-governmental organizations in identifying and solving problems. “It’s imperative that the new administration involve citizen groups and non-governmental organizations to effectively protect our forests and parks. Including other groups will increase the accountability of the Romney administration’s decisions to Massachusetts residents,” said MASSPIRG Executive Director Janet Domenitz. “Leveraging the resources and commitment of citizen groups and non-governmental organizations gives our forests and parks the best opportunity to thrive even during challenging economic times.”

“We urge Governor-elect Romney to develop and implement a long-term vision for our forests and parks. The legislature needs to recognize that these lands are irreplaceable public treasures and fund them appropriately, for the benefit of current and future generations,” said Mass Audubon President Laura Johnson. “We also recommend that the new administration provide meaningful opportunities for citizens to fully participate in the management of the forests and parks which are part of our legacy.”

For more information about the Forests and Parks Partnership or to obtain a copy of the report, visit <http://www.outdoors.org/conservation/massparks/ParkThreats.pdf>, <http://www.forestsandparks.org>, or send an email to info@forestsandparks.org.

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