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PATRICK-MURRAY BUDGET TO RECOMMEND MORE THAN \$100 MILLION FOR PARKS AGENCY**Governor says it's time to reverse past history of neglect**

BOSTON - Friday, January 18, 2008 - Governor Deval Patrick is proposing funding of \$100.6 million for the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) in his budget for Fiscal Year 2009 - an increase of \$7.7 million, or 8.3 percent, from FY 2008, and \$16.7 million, or 20 percent, from FY 2007.

"Our parks, beaches, and forests are among the Commonwealth's most valuable assets, enjoyed by residents and visitors alike, but unfortunately many of these facilities have weathered under decades of neglect," said Governor Patrick. "We've been working hard over the past year to lay the foundation and get the Department of Conservation and Recreation ready to steward these resources. Now it's time to build."

This budget proposal follows a year of reform and expansion at DCR, and supports continuing efforts to make targeted investments in maintenance and operations, boost accountability to the park-going public, and strengthen partnerships with volunteer groups focused on improving and maintaining state and urban park facilities.

In 2007, Governor Patrick named former Westfield Mayor Rick Sullivan as the Commissioner of DCR, directing the agency's management team to focus on the core mission of parks and beaches. Seasonal staff were hired weeks earlier than usual for spring spruce-up and summer maintenance. In May, Park Serve Day put 1,300 volunteers to work on projects in 50 DCR properties, planting 580 trees and flowers and hauling away of 48 tons of trash. Maintenance schedule for urban parks and beaches were posted on Web site for first time ever. At coastal beaches, 60 new hires will be made in FY 2008, including six or seven year-round beach managers, plus new equipment to improve maintenance.

Taken together with the beaches initiative this year, which built on the work of the Metropolitan Beaches Commission, the Governor's FY 2009 budget proposal will create more than 100 new staff positions, all devoted to improving the condition of the state's parks and beaches.

"DCR is on the move - working closely with the Legislature and delivering a better parks experience for the Commonwealth's citizens and visitors," said Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles. "With the investment being proposed by Governor Patrick, we will be well on the way to getting the parks and beaches the public expects and deserves."

The \$100 million funding proposed for FY09 will support an expanded maintenance and beautification program, building on the early spring clean-up performed last year. It will also provide for new park furnishings such as picnic tables, benches, water bubblers, and flagpoles, as well as faster response to facility repair needs.

In addition, the Governor's FY09 budget proposal for DCR will:

Add 10 more Rangers at state and urban parks, in addition to the 10 being hired this year through beach improvements efforts, doubling the Rangers in state and urban parks. Currently, there are only six Rangers in state parks - just one per region - and 15 in urban parks. With DCR Rangers spread so thin, parks are vulnerable to vandalism, litter, and illegal use of off-road vehicles. More rangers mean better security and enforcement at campgrounds, pools, and other facilities, and more assistance for park visitors who need help. This initiative will increase the number of Rangers deployed in state and urban parks from 21 to 41 over two years.

Put DCR staff back in visitor centers at our Heritage Parks, providing a welcoming presence and working with volunteers on educational programs and other activities.

Support a new Historic Parkway Tree Program, providing better care for the more than 10,000 trees that line the parkways of metropolitan Boston, and even more that stand near beaches, ball fields, and playgrounds, replacing contracted tree services that

deal with fallen limbs, etc., on call with year-round attention from two new teams of arboriculture experts.

"I could not be more thrilled with the confidence Governor Patrick has shown in me and the new team at DCR," said Commissioner Rick Sullivan. "We will work hard to live up to his expectations, and make the citizens of Massachusetts proud of the parks we all hold so dear."

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