



TOWN OF DOUGLAS

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April 4, 2019

The Honorable Leo Roy
Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02114

Dear Commissioner Roy:

Recent communication from your Department reminded us that we are overdue for the statutorily required annual meeting with you regarding the management of the Wallum Lake State Park and the Douglas State Forest. We respectfully request that we try to find a mutually agreeable date in April or early May for this important discussion. We have regularly scheduled meetings on April 16, May 7 and May 21, but will work around your schedule as needed.

As you may recall, an annual meeting between us is required by MGL Chapter 10, Section 35BBB regarding the use of monies held in the Douglas State Forest Maintenance Trust Fund. At our last meeting we felt we made progress on several issues of importance. Unfortunately, this has been a very disappointing year for the Town of Douglas in terms of the unsatisfactory lack of response, or provision of poor quality response, to our requests for attention to matters of mutual interest at our last meeting. The childish practice of saying whatever it takes to get the Town to agree to individual transactions, and then ignoring us after the closing, has to stop. We need to have a mature adult relationship based on mutual respect and cooperation over the long term.

Because of the recent pattern of poor treatment, the Town at this time declines to participate in any procedural matter that allows the Department to proceed with land purchases in Douglas. Further, the Town objects to the Department's moving forward. We thought we had an understanding that additional purchases of land for the Forest would trigger advance notice to the Town, but apparently the Department does not intend to honor its promises.

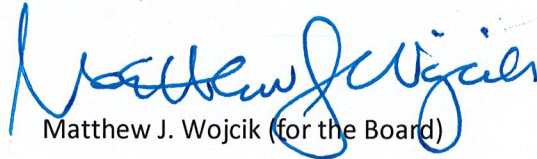
We realize that, in general terms, Douglas is a small town compared to all of the municipalities across the Commonwealth. But for the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Douglas has every right to expect to be treated as a priority. DCR owns over 24% of the acreage of Douglas, putting us at 23rd statewide on that measurement. In terms of acres owned, DCR holds over 5,800 acres of the Town, putting us 12th on the list in terms of real estate under your control. We certainly do not deserve treatment such as this:

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- In a letter dated August 15, 2018, the Town Administrator requested that DCR agree to release a mere \$1,950 to help the Town fund the purchase of the well-known CodeRed emergency notification service. The Town never received even the most basic courtesy of an acknowledgement of its request.
- We have tried for over a year to bring resolution to our ongoing maintenance problems with Ridge Trail, a right of way owned entirely by DCR with several Douglas residences located on it. The offer still stands that if DCR paves this road, the Town will accept all maintenance responsibility. Staff level conversations appear to go well but there is virtually no follow-through by DCR.
- We discussed our concern about the health of the Douglas State Forest at our last meeting. Over a year later, through correspondence received from our State House delegation, we were told that DCR is confident that forest fire risk has been mitigated thanks to the relatively wet fall and early winter months of 2018. This is not a well thought out response. If and when conditions favorable for forest fire arise, there is no guarantee we would jointly have the time and resources necessary at that point to address the fire hazard arising from the extraordinary tree losses caused by insects and drought over the last several years. If Rhode Island and National Grid are both making headlines about their plans to address the problem, why is DCR taking such a passive approach? We do not want to clear cut the forest. We are asking for a data-gathering and planning effort to be put in place to make strategic choices on a proactive basis that will mitigate – not extinguish – the risk of forest fire over a reasonable period of time.
- DCR continues to expand the State Forest through purchase of privately owned parcels. The Town owns land-locked parcels that are surrounded by or abut the State Forest. The municipality should take priority over private parties when it comes to your purchase plans. If you are going to spend your funds anyway, we should have a strong enough partnership where you realize the occasional purchase from the Town will offset the erosion of PILOT funding we receive from the State. We have specific parcels in mind and would like to discuss them with you.
- We have been told the balance in the Douglas State Forest Maintenance Trust Fund is \$33,857.83. On November 7, 2017 it was \$31,473.83 after 2 years of collections. We do not believe that only 2,384 cars came to the Wallum Lake beach for the entire summer of 2018. Does anyone have any explanation for this?

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We look forward to hearing from you to schedule a meeting to discuss these matters.

Sincerely,



Matthew J. Wojcik (for the Board)

Cc: The Honorable Ryan Fattman
The Honorable Joseph McKenna