

Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network

Principles of Operation

Mission Statement

The Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network serves as a resource to friends groups that want to strengthen their operation and efforts to protect and enhance Massachusetts' state forests and parks.

Principles of Unity – What is a friends group?

A friends group:

- Represents the interests of all legal visitors to respective forest or park properties under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
- Forms to preserve and protect the Commonwealth's forests and parks while helping to promote sustainable recreational use
- Works to build a core of volunteers who donate time and expertise to enriching our forests and parks and enhancing the experience of sanctioned visitors
- Identifies critical infrastructure and service needs and works with DCR to address
- Raises funds and otherwise advocates for ongoing local investment in public space

Why a Friends Network?

Effective stewardship of public forests and parks requires cooperation and the combined efforts of many individuals, organizations and state agencies.

Friends groups play an important role in stewardship because they focus on a particular forest or park, which the members of the group know well and love. However, organizing and building a friends group can be challenging.

Each forest and park is unique with its own set of user groups and issues. But much can be learned from the shared experience of friends groups and others that can make the job easier, more efficient and more effective.

By sharing information, helping one another, and working together on statewide issues of concern we can increase our potential throw growing membership and resources dedicated to helping protect our forests and parks, insuring that these lands will remain wonderful places to visit for generations.

What does the Friends Network do?

1. Support Friends Groups

The Friends Network will:

- Maintain the Friends Network web site (www.dcrfriendsnetwork.org)
- Help friends groups get started and help existing groups expand their reach and build capacity
- Facilitate sharing of ideas between friends groups on such topics as building membership, setting up a non-profit, creating programs, working with DCR, finding speakers and making the right contacts
- Share information about programs, grant programs and other available resources
- Inform friends groups on issues of interest or concern through e-mail, the Friends Network web site, social media, and other online discussion forums as appropriate
- Foster discussion on issues of interest or concern through e-mail, the Friends Network web site, social media, online discussion forums or meetings
- Facilitate communication between the Friends Network and environmental agency leaders, DCR, the press, municipal and state legislators and officials
- Work with friends groups to increase representation at statewide events such as, Volunteer Expo, Mass Outdoor expo, etc., and give feedback to those unable to attend
- Coordinate with friends groups for representation at DCR Stewardship Council meetings and State House hearings

2. Partner with Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

The Friends Network will:

- Facilitate communication between DCR and friends groups
- Partner with DCR to carry out public programs and conferences
- Help DCR build volunteer programs and advertise public programs
- Support each friends groups' efforts to prioritize projects and infrastructure needs within their park and leverage opportunities such as the Partnership Matching Funds program to complete critical work
- Advocate for balanced state and urban forests and parks funding across the Commonwealth
- Be a voice for the agency by advocating for sustainable funding of forests and parks
- Acknowledge DCR policies and programs which foster good stewardship
- Work to insure representation on ad hoc DCR committees which involve concerns of friends groups

3. Strengthen friends groups advocacy

The Friends Network will:

- Foster communication among friends groups and other advocates on behalf of our forests and parks
- Collaborate with friends groups to identify issues affecting Massachusetts' forests and parks
- Issue alerts regarding friends groups' concerns through the Friends Network
- Work with friends groups to develop positions on matters of mutual concern
- Provide information for effective action on statewide issues whether its writing a letter of thanks or confronting an issue of concern
- Circulate written public statements or documents carrying the names of individuals and organizations in agreement with the position
- Advocate for adequate funding for Massachusetts' forests and parks and DCR
- Promote programs that encourage Massachusetts residents to become stronger stewards of public lands

What the Friends Network won't do

The Friends Network will never attempt to direct the activities or actions of any individual or friends group. The Friends Network exists only to facilitate the effectiveness of friends groups' efforts for the betterment of Massachusetts' forests and parks.

How will the Friends Network be organized?

The Friends Network is an informal network with a non-incorporated structure.

A five-member facilitator team with a designated Director and a Secretary will:

- Identify established friends groups and DCR properties lacking friends support
- Invite friends groups' leaders, friends groups' members and other interested parties to join the Friends Network
- Identify advisors and resources pertinent to friends groups
- Maintain the website
- Promote the Friends Network
- Carry out the Friend's Network mission

Annually, representatives of friends groups will elect a new facilitator team within the twelfth month anniversary of the prior facilitator team being confirmed. Members identified as representatives of friends groups will have one vote.

How does networking work?

The facilitator team will create an e-mail list to receive and disperse information through the Friends Network. The Friends Network will also use the web site (www.dcrfriendsnetwork.org) to disseminate information. The facilitator team will determine what information and issues the

Friends Network will distribute to its members and to potential park visitors and interested members of the community who have expressed interest.

Members and others may submit issues of interest or concern to the facilitator team for consideration for network posting and/or action.

Each person receiving information through the Friends Network will decide what information to pass along to other individuals or to members of their friends group.

The Friends Network will work with member groups to develop positions on issues of concern. After careful consideration and with the acknowledged support of individual groups, the Friends Network will issue alerts as needed.

Based upon input from Friends Network members, DCR, other individuals or groups and its own research, the Network facilitator team may from time to time develop positions that come under the Friends Network's "key issues" designation (see "key issues" below). The facilitator team may occasionally create statements on key issues to distribute to Friends Network member groups or parties of interest for their consideration and possible support. Any and all Friends Network public statements on key issues will denote members and/or group agreement in particular and will not necessarily represent the Friends Network in general.

Any written public documents generated by the Friends Network regarding individual issues will carry only the names of those individuals and organizations that have agreed to support the position.

Who is eligible for membership in the Network and what does membership involve?

The Massachusetts Forest and Park Friends Network is open to friends groups as described above; i.e., a group formed to support a particular DCR property.

Friends Network membership is achieved by a friends group designating a representative to serve as the liaison between the friends group and the Friends Network. The representative will supply an e-mail address to the Friends Network and agree to receive e-mail information from the Network. The representative will control what information to share with his or her friends group.

All e-mail addresses and all communications received from Friends Network members, DCR staff, and other groups or organizations will be held confidential within the facilitator team. No information will be shared beyond the facilitator team without prior permission granted to the facilitator team by the Friends Network member, DCR staff or any other party sending communication.

All members will have one vote on any issue that arises.

A member may withdraw from the Friends Network at any time by requesting that their e-mail information be deleted from the Friends Network database.