

**THIS LAND IS YOUR  
LAND**



The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is charged with preserving and protecting **our** forests and parklands. DCR's Bureau of Forestry (BOF) is charged with managing **our** forests.

Over some period of notorious neglect, DCR failed to stop egregious damage to hill, slope, wetlands and brook in a biologically sensitive area of the Freetown State Forest, within the Southeastern Massachusetts Bioreserve, by their total failure to stop illegal off-road vehicle activity.

BOF is about to allow commercial logging in that area, despite the low value of the pine, ostensibly to hide the extensive damage to the forest, ridge, hill, and brook. From their description, the slash, root wads and other wood debris from the commercial logging operation will be strewn down the slope to fill the ruts. Damage to the brook will, obviously, continue.

**This is just plain wrong!**

BOF first held a public hearing. They held a hearing, but did not listen. They requested comments, but then dismissed them.

We sent a letter.



The young white pines, average 13.5" DBH, are barely merchantable. Those they want cut down they've marked with blue paint.

# Green Futures

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*“Citizen action for better communities.”*

Peter Church, Director of Forest Stewardship  
Bureau of Forestry  
MA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation  
51 Causeway St., Suite 600  
Boston, MA 02114

April 5, 2013

Dear Director Church,

After reading the Bureau of Forestry’s “Responses to Comments – Freetown Co-peace Forest Management Proposal” we are disappointed at the degree to which the Bureau of Forestry (BOF) dismissed the concerns we and others raised.

Specifically, the following three primary items of concern should have been fully addressed ...but weren’t! Below are the three simple actions we feel strongly about and that the BOF should undertake.

- 1- That the egregious erosion of the hillside above Rattlesnake Brook, caused by illegal OHV activity, is repaired before any logging is allowed and that the illegal OHV activity is halted now and a plan is put in place to prevent it in the future.
- 2- That when the BOF’s regional forester proposes an area of the Southeastern Massachusetts Bioreserve (SMB) for “timber harvest” he does so after consultation with the SMB partners and stakeholders. They are the folks with the “boots on the ground” that know the SMB intimately and best.
- 3- That the BOF’s regional forester in consultation with the other SMB Partners develop a long-range forest management plan for the SMB. If, like the BOF, every SMB partner randomly decided to log the property they manage, biodiversity would come out the loser. Biodiversity is the “product” ...”timber harvest” the by-product.

We realize funding is an issue in these difficult economic times, but two of the three actions, listed above, do not require much more than a few meetings with the SMB partners and stakeholders.

Funding for the erosion and brook remediation should come from the OHV penalty fund and from major funding DCR receives from the Federal Trails Program that is distributed by the US Department of Transportation. DCR must also have grant writers that could identify other funding sources ...maybe from major OHV manufacturers ...they are always looking for good PR ...that could be used for this project. Out-reach to other state agencies and private non-profit organizations for assistance should also be pursued.

The Sea-Run Brook Trout Coalition has Rattlesnake Brook listed as a “salter” stream. Involve them!

In short, we see scant mention, and no details, of a damage remediation plan that actually commits material and action ...along with a detailed, robust follow-up plan with severe penalties to keep illegal ATVs and dirt bikes out of fragile areas where they are not supposed to be.

BOF's responses to comments, such as, "*Joint "sting" operations with the issuance of citations and fines **will be considered***" lack commitment. "*Will be considered*" and "*if necessary*" are just equivocal "weasel words" used to avoid direct commitment.

Other responses to comments defend the BOF's "timber harvest" interests ...which we do not oppose when conducted for specific biodiversity purposes ...or simply lapse into the usual knee-jerk forestry jargon we've all heard before.

Here's one example of a "timber harvest" proposal we believe would be beneficial to the SMB. Timber becomes the by-product. The product is maintaining native species diversity. We would love to see the BOF adopt this approach in SMB forest management.

The Hartford or climbing fern (*Lygodium palmatum*) is listed by NHESP as a "Species of Special Concern." NHESP states there are only a few dozen colonies of this fern in Massachusetts. Hartford fern populations are rare and localized. To thrive, the Hartford fern requires a moist, very acidic, sandy soil with a sparse pine-oak forest and an understory that allows plenty of sunlight to reach the forest floor.

Within the Freetown State Forest is the only Hartford fern colony in the SMB. This colony is dying out as the adjacent forest trees mature and the canopy increases. A proposal, from the BOF, after consultation with a pteridologist, to conduct a timber harvest in the Hartford fern area would allow for timber extraction and create the ecological conditions necessary for the continued existence of the SMB's Hartford fern colony. Active management should be employed to save this unique species and creative "timber harvesting" could be a part of that.

Lastly, BOF's belief that the forest within the Bioreserve "generally consists of even-aged trees" is not entirely correct. Large areas of the Bioreserve, within the Freetown State Forest at Breakneck Hill, off Slab Bridge Road, areas off Cedar Swamp Road and Copicut Road were clear-cut for bio-mass and fuelwood after the death of thousands of oaks due to three years of defoliating gypsy moths, winter moths and forest tent caterpillar. Weakened survivor oaks were then finished off by two-lined chestnut borers.

These insect ravaged areas are now in an early successional forest stage. Are there some species we wish to encourage by creating more successional forest or will that further fragment the remnant forest and depress neo-tropical species and warbler recruitment?

Will further logging and early successional habitat also lead to more cowbirds that parasitize rare forest warbler species? This is just one more of the many things that should be considered when managing a forest for biodiversity. In a bioreserve biological diversity must come first. All other activities are secondary.

Please give serious consideration to these concerns.

Thank you,

Everett J. Castro  
Director of Community Affairs

Cc – "Co-Peace" Commenters  
SMB Partners

Our concerns and suggestions have been ignored! It is not their forest, it is our forest!

**As owners of the property we demand BOF cease all commercial logging in our forests and parklands until that forest or parkland has a comprehensive Forest Biodiversity Stewardship Plan in place.** Commercial logging on our property should only be done to maintain or increase biodiversity. BOF must realize biodiversity on our public lands is the “product.” If timber extraction is determined to enhance biodiversity, on a case by case basis, then the timber that is cut is the by-product.

**As owners of the property we demand DCR and BOF enforce the law and stop all future illegal off-road vehicle activity on our public lands ...immediately!**

**As owners of the property we demand that DCR, reach out and work with other state agencies and NGOs to restore the forest, hillside, wetlands and Rattlesnake Brook that they allowed to be destroyed.**

We need outrage ...an outcry ...to the Governor, Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs and the news media to stop ... put a halt to this abuse. If they can get away with this in Freetown, they can get away with this in a public forest or park near you!

# Before



Rattlesnake Brook has certainly seen better days. It was once vibrant, an important passageway between upland forest headwaters and the Wild and Scenic Taunton River. It teemed with life—from fish to waterfowl, and even river otter and mink.

# After



This section of Rattlesnake Brook has been almost destroyed by erosion caused by illegal off-road vehicle operators who trespassed onto this part of the forest to drive their vehicles up and down the brook and neighboring hillside, creating massive ruts that were only made worse by time, weather, and lack of attention from MA DCR.

# DCR negligence allowed this to happen . . .

The Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife classifies Rattlesnake Brook as 'Cold Water Fish Habitat.' It is the only water course in Freetown so designated. Rattlesnake Brook is the only perennial stream flowing from the Freetown State Forest section of the Southeastern Massachusetts Bioreserve that has sufficient flow to host unique species of fish, mammal and bird life not found in smaller streams.



Note the person standing in the rut.  
Some of the ruts are over 5 feet deep.



Rattlesnake Brook, flowing out of a mostly protected watershed, deserves better than what it is presently receiving from DCR.

**... DCR and BOF must fix  
this problem**

Rattlesnake Brook is the only perennial stream in the Freetown State Forest section of the Southeastern Bioreserve. It contains unique species of flora and fauna found nowhere else in the forest—



**Parula Warbler**



**Rainbow Smelt**



**Mink**



**Worm-eating Warbler**



**Salter Brook Trout**



**Alewife**



**White Perch**



**River Otter**









*When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.*

*- John Muir*



*It is horrifying that we have to fight our own government  
to save the environment.*

*—Ansel Adams*





## **DCR's Mission Statement**

*To protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources.*

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