

Minutes
Wachusett Reservoir Watershed Public Access Plan
Public Meeting
October 28, 2010

John Scannell, Regional Director opened the meeting at 7 p.m at DCR Headquarters with approximately 15 people in attendance. Mr. Scannell introduced DCR staff in attendance: Pat Austin, Environmental Quality Supervisor, Derek Liimatainen, Ranger Captain, Scott Murphy, Assistant Regional Director, and Kelley Freda, Environmental Quality Analyst. He then went through the agenda for the evening.

- Mr. Scannell explained the mission of the DCR/DWSP, and stressed the main objective, water supply protection and recreation as a secondary use, as DCR owns over 20,000 acres in the watershed. He also explained DCR is responsible for watershed management, and MWRA is responsible for the transmission of the water supply. He also talked briefly about the MWRA distribution system and watersheds.
- Mr. Scannell discussed DCR as a water supplier, and the requirement of a Watershed Protection Plan, which includes another plan on Public Access issues.
- Mr. Scannell reviewed the Public Access Plan Update process and again stressed that recreation is a secondary mission of DCR/DWSP. He explained the three public access management zones, based on proximity to the Cosgrove Intake, reviewed the current public access policies in place, and described the changes in policy from the original 1996 Public Access Plan to the 2003 Plan Update (most notable change was allowing hunting in the Tributary Headwaters Zone by permit).
- Mr. Scannell went through the steps and anticipated timelines of the plan update. He explained that this evening's meeting was the kick off and the process was beginning with this meeting. DCR will look at the current plan, policies, field observations and changes in recreation uses to update and modify the plan if needed. He explained there may be recreational activities we have not addressed before that we want to address. One activity that came to mind that has been increasingly popular was geocaching, and this had not been addressed in the 2003 plan. Goal is to find the balance between new and existing recreational activities and water supply protection. He also talked about DCRs goal in 2003 of improving public safety by allowing for more parking, not on main roadways. DCR has constructed small parking areas at Gate 8, 23 and 25 to meet this goal.
- Anticipated timelines for the updated plan: Fall/Winter DCR will be developing a draft plan to be completed in March 2011. Another public meeting will be held after the draft is completed and available for public review, and implementation of the plan is expected in June 2011.
- Mr. Scannell explained that as part of the process, DCR has developed a survey that is available online until January 15, 2011 and asked attendees to take a few minutes to give their input via this avenue. (www.mass.gov/dcr/watersupply.htm) . He also informed the public in attendance that if they would like to leave their e-mail address on the sign in sheet, they would be notified when the draft plan is available for review online.

Mr. Scannell asked if there were any PUBLIC COMMENT SAND/OR QUESTIONS:

Question: Does the Open Space map on display include all open space in the watershed or is there more?

Response (JS): The Public Access Plan will have a map showing all of the open space in the watershed (land trusts, Audubon, etc.). The map shown includes DCR land owned in fee, and also Watershed Preservation Restrictions.

Question: Why was parking removed/ fenced off from the area near the Rail Trail and Quinapoxet River?

Response (JS): The former parking area, located on DCR property in this area was within the Zone a (400 feet) of the West Boylston Water District's well. When they got a sample containing a small amount of petroleum, DEP worked with the Town, and one of their suggestions was to relocate all parking within 400 feet of the well (as well as the reservoir) for regulatory purposes. The WB Water District asked DCR for assistance, and the parking area was relocated outside of all 400 foot zones.

Question/Comment: Marion Larson- Sterling Open Space Committee. The Open Space Committee had received comments from DCR on their draft open space plan. They would like to work with DCR on maps as well as regulations on DCR property to be included in their plans and website. DCR will be hearing from committee members throughout the process. Is the Watershed Protection Plan in sync with the Public Access Plan? Is there only going to be an online survey? Concern with missing a fair amount of the "fair weather" users. One rumor she has heard is that DCR will be allowing bicycling along the entire North Dike.

Response (JS): DCR willing to work with the Committee. The WPP and Public Access Plan are not in sync, updates are completed in different years. The survey will also be available in print form at Town Halls, Libraries and made available to sportsmen's clubs. No policies have been discussed at this time. This is part of the update process. Any talk of DCR allowing bicycling in this area is a rumor.

Question: Frannie Hodge - Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust. Is there any possibility of continuing the Rail Trail through DCR properties?

Response (JS): The Rail Trail is an example of good public access that has proven to work but it is not an easy task to connect it all due to property ownership, road crossings and proximity to resources. DCR will continue to work with Greenways.

Question: Robert Kane, Clinton. How has the hunting permit process worked since lands were opened to hunting and is there any thought to opening lands East of Rte 190 for hunting? Concern with vehicle accidents with deer around reservoir. Opening more land leads to an increase in license sales, allowing the state to hold on to federal resources.

Response (JS): DCR does not have a lot of issues with hunting, although human sanitation is an issue for water quality due to the time spent in the woods. DCR has not looked at the expansion of hunting areas but will be reviewed through the process and will spend some time discussing the issue with DCR Natural Resources Staff and Bill Davis, MassWildlife.

Question: Why was DCR property that formerly allowed horseback riding (with bridge over stream) suddenly gated off and marked no trespassing in Jefferson?

Response (JS): Since it is in the Wachusett Watershed (Jefferson), horseback riding was never allowed, although it might have been ongoing illegally.

Question: Why was fencing placed along Mill Street at the area of the new bridge across the Stillwater River?

Response (JS): Illegal dumping had become an issue in this area and it was becoming a drain of resources to continually pick up these items from the small turn off. DCR already had the wooden posts, the only cost was staff time to install them.

Question: The reservoir is unfiltered, but does it get filtered somewhere between Clinton and Boston? Why did Clinton have to build a filtration plant?

Response 1 (JS): Referred to the EPA Court Case of late 1990s as to why the reservoir does not have full filtration.

Response 2 (Pat Austin): There are several conditions that must be met to have a filtration waiver. Clinton did not meet the contact time requirement.

Question: Are there any plans in the State Legislature for changes to water supply protection?

Response (PA): Not that we are aware of. Massachusetts has some of the strictest regulations in the country.

Question: Why are public access policies on watershed lands so different? i.e; City of Worcester no public access. Is it different philosophies?

Response (JS): Water suppliers would tell you the most protective water supply philosophy is no public access. JS believes that history has help shape much of the current access policies (example, boats on Quabbin). Worcester chose at some point in the past to restrict access, DCR did not, probably because there was always some historic use of watershed lands.

Question: Is there ever an intention to log Watershed Preservation Restriction properties? Logging should be a little more strict on DCR properties where wells and water can be affected.

Response (JS): DCR allows forest management (CH 132 Forest Cutting Act) and does not specifically prohibit it on WPR properties. DCR itself also has a land management program.

Question/Comment (in response to previous): Marion Larson- Implores DCR to continue forestry work that takes into account the watershed and sustainability programs; forestry that meets sustainable needs for wildlife and people's needs. It is important for scientific management of logging, not based on emotion.

Response (JS): DCR has plans for forest management and also hope it continues.

The Public Meeting ended at 7:55 p.m.
Minutes taken and submitted by Kelley Freda.