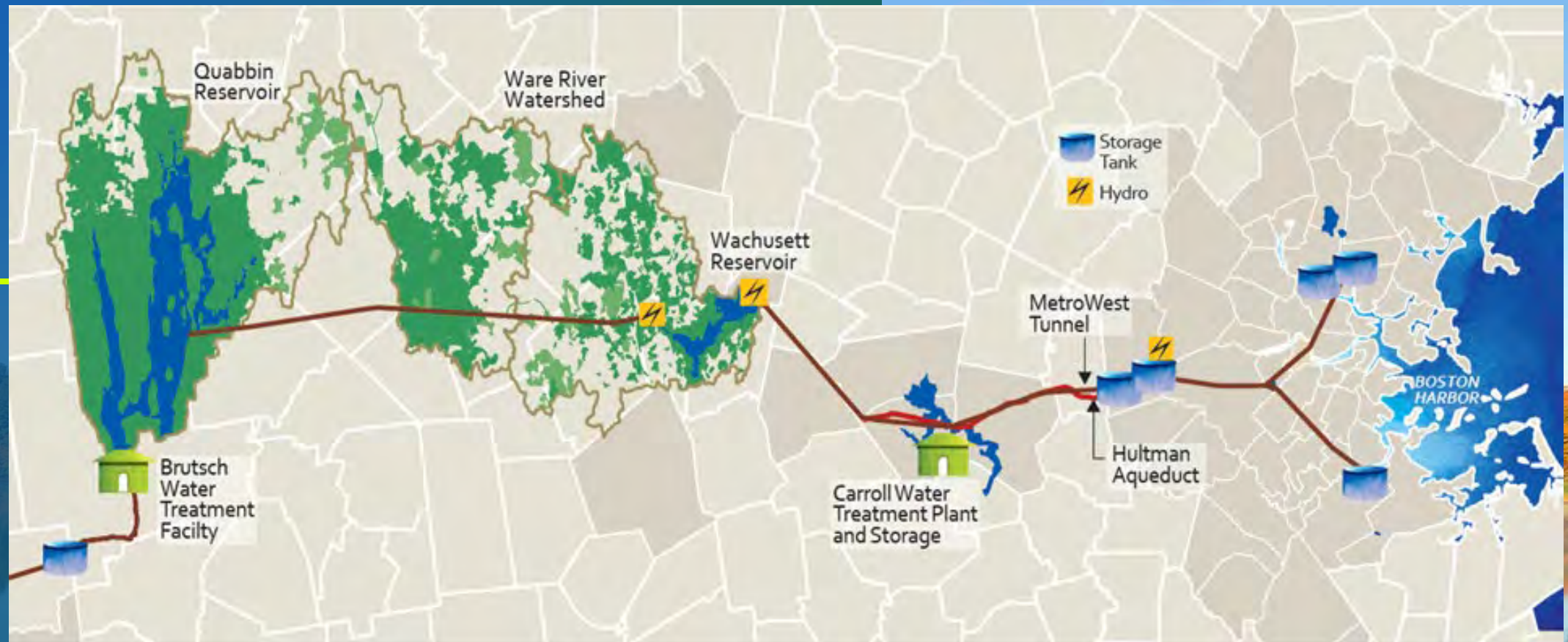

2023 Ware River Public Access Management Plan FINAL

WRWAC Meeting September 13, 2023





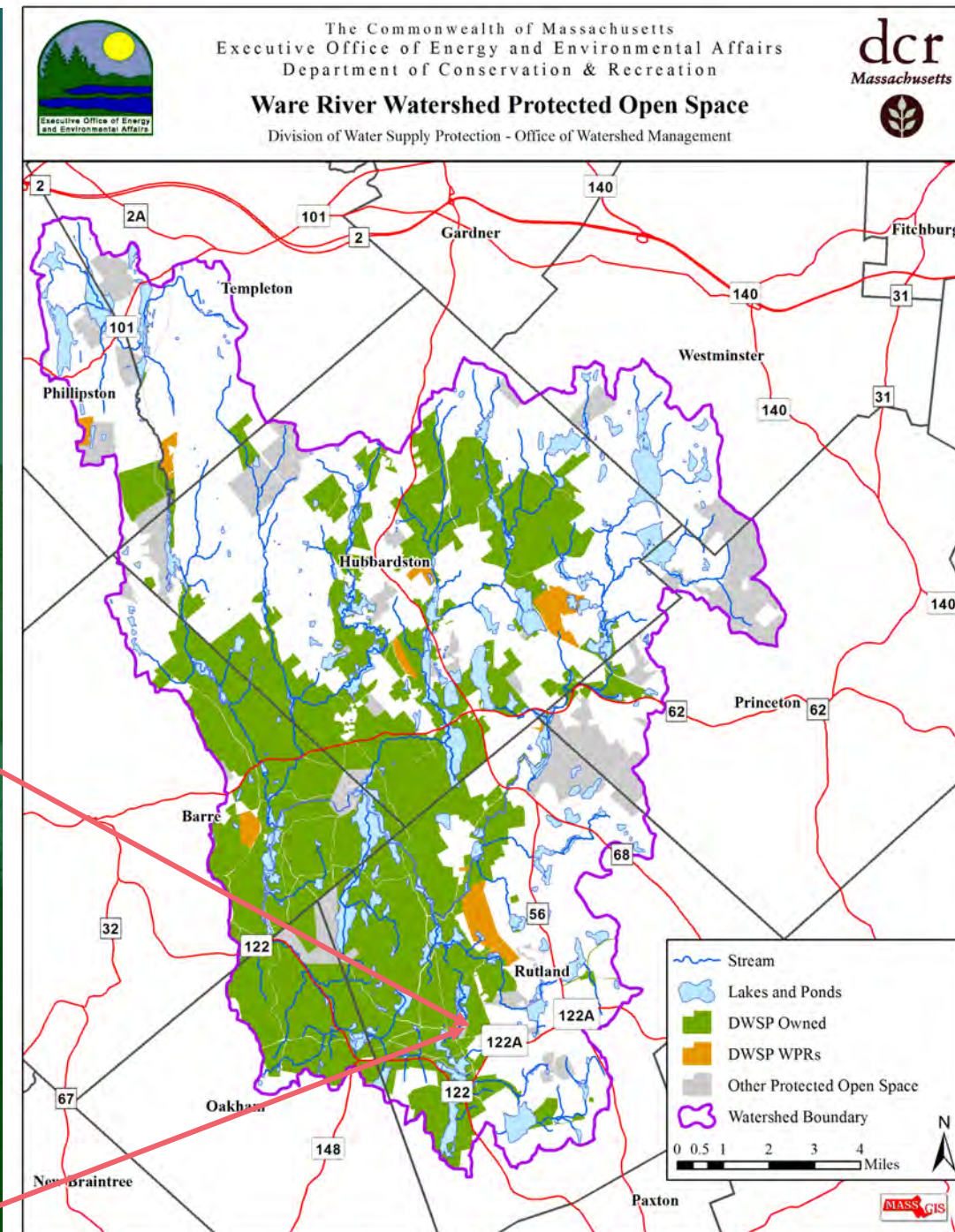
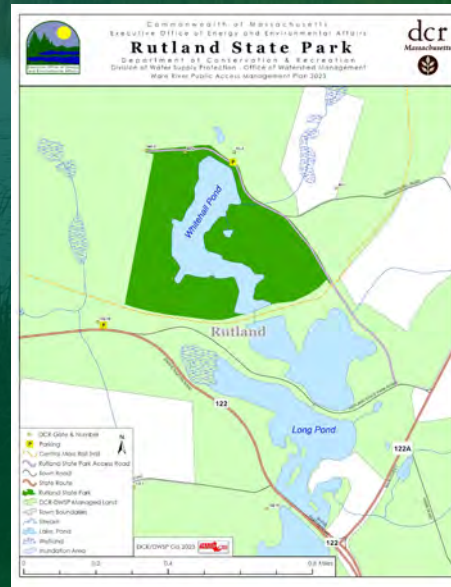
The Ware River watershed, Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs provide drinking water for over 3 million people in MA (43%).

High quality of water within the watersheds means it can be distributed without filtration – but watershed protection and management is critical.

Ware River Watershed

Active part of DCR/MWRA water supply system that provides unfiltered drinking water to over 3 million people.

- DWSP owns 24,000 acres of land
- DWSP controls development rights on 3,500 acres (WPRs)
- DCR State Parks manages about 300 acres of DWSP land as “Rutland State Park”, focused around Whitehall Pond



Public Access Management Plan Update

DWSP Goals

- *Improve watershed protection*
- *Maintain or Enhance recreational opportunities*
- *Adjust past policies that did not adequately provide watershed protection*
- *Meet DEP requirements for water supply*



Public Access Management Plan Update

Public Process to Date

- Kick-off meeting with Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) & Public – April 2018
- Presented *Watershed Management Principles* and *Public Engagement Plan* to WRWAC & Public – September 2018
- DWSP worked with stakeholder groups (e.g., mountain bikers, sportsmen/women, horseback riders, snowmobilers, etc.) to ID key issues – September to December 2018
- DWSP released a stakeholder survey and received over 900 responses – December 2018 to January 2019
- DWSP worked on solution analyses with stakeholders; proposed solutions to WRWAC & public – spring and fall 2019
- *Plan put on hold in March 2020, Re-start October 2022*
- WRWAC meeting on 11-17-22 to get feedback on new draft that incorporated public input from 2019
- Public meeting on 11-29-22 to receive comments.
- Public comment period through 2-28-23
- WRWAC meeting with DEP 2-24-23
- Secretary briefing on 3-9-2023
- March-June 2023
 - Undersecretary follow-up meeting
 - New Commissioner briefing
 - Several meetings with DEP regulators to discuss additional changes to access policies.



Recreation in the Ware River Watershed in comparison to other entities

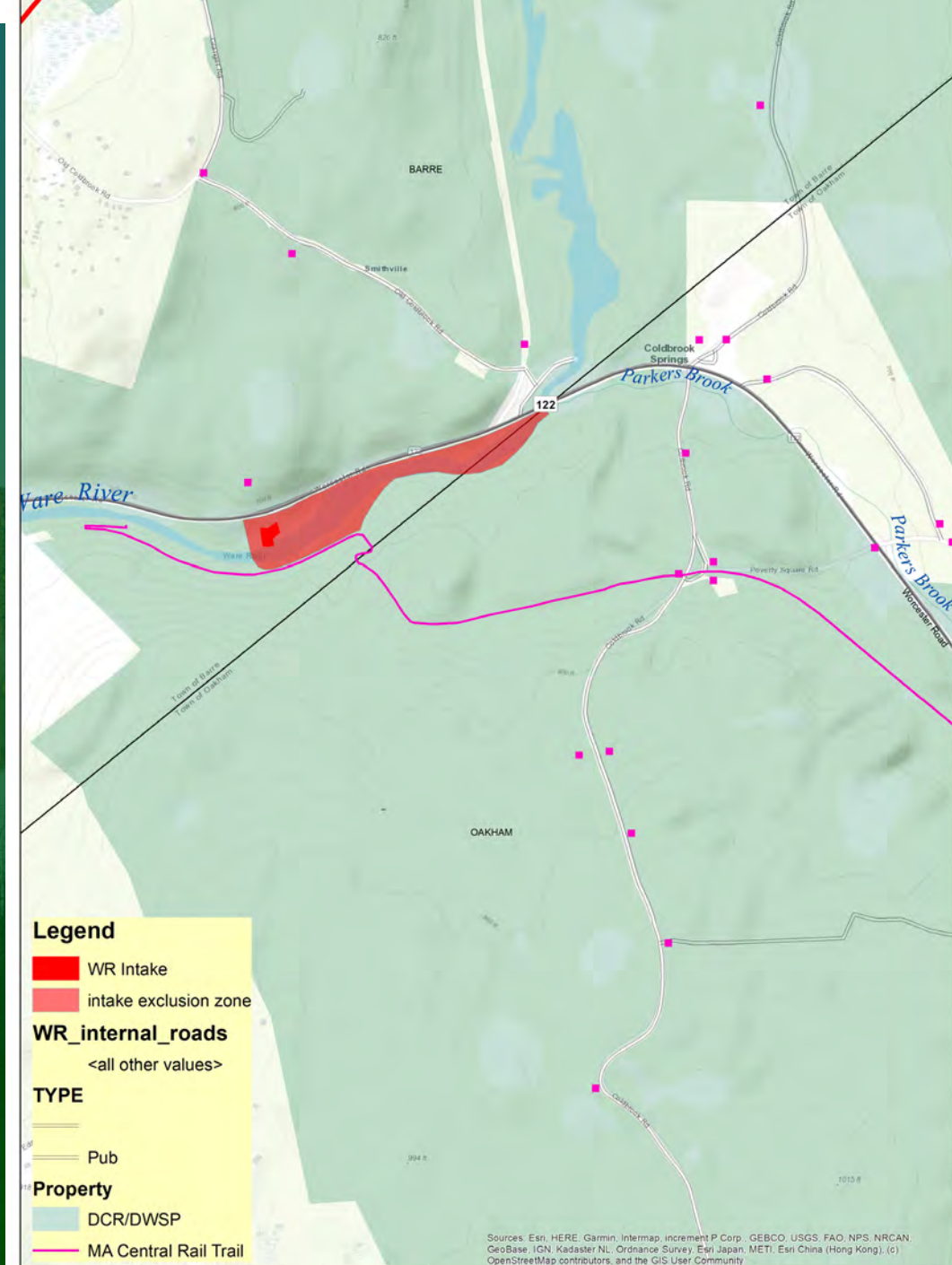
★ Exceptions

	MassWildlife	Mass Audubon	DCR State Parks	DWSP - Sudbury	DWSP- Wachusett	DWSP- Quabbin	DWSP-Ware River
Horseback riding	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Snowmobiling	✗★	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗★	✓
Single-track biking	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗★	✗	✓
Vehicle access	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Dogs	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗★	✗	✓
Pedestrian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Night Access	✗★	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗★

Key Elements

Intake Exclusion Zone

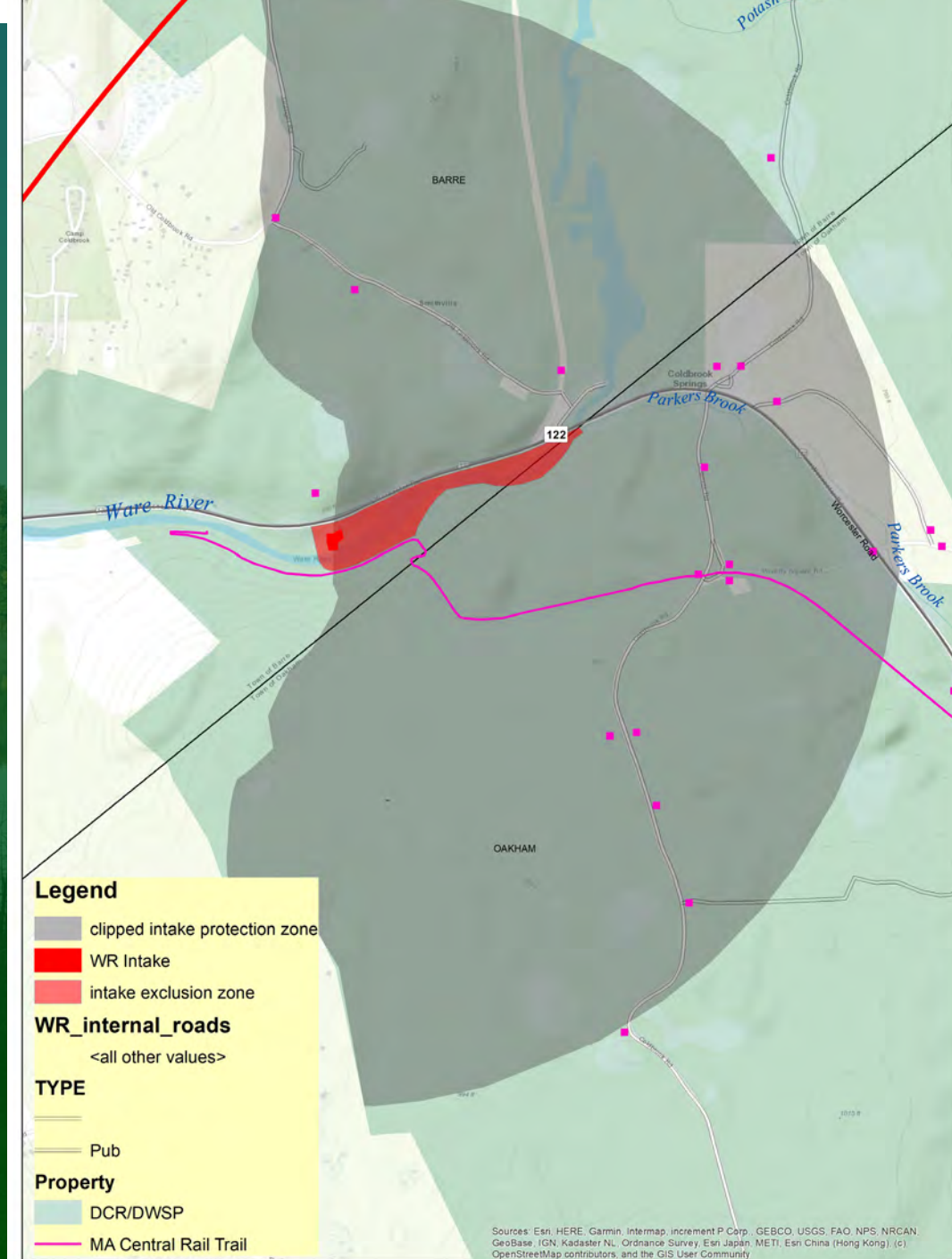
- 17-acre intake exclusion zone – no public access allowed
- Pre-existing: no change



Key Elements

Intake Buffer Zone *New

- Creation of 1-km (483 acres) intake buffer zone – pedestrian access only with some exceptions
- New element to shift activity away from Ware River Intake
- Public access to parking lot along west side of Ware River will remain open for canoe/kayak launching
- New barriers will be added to the parking lot to prevent vehicles from directly accessing the Ware River to improve water quality protection.



Route 122 River Access



Key Elements

Hours of Access

EXISTING POLICY

- All DWSP land in the Ware River open 24/7, leading to safety concerns

FIRST DRAFT POLICY

- DWSP Ware River watershed lands will be open for public access one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset mirroring other watershed lands and DCR Parks

FINAL POLICY

- DWSP Ware River watershed lands will be open for public access one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset mirroring other watershed lands and DCR Parks
- Snowmobile clubs can request group ride permits at night
- Night access permit process for hunters of specific species per MassWildlife regulations

Key Elements

Dogs

EXISTING POLICY

- Dogs were allowed on DWSP lands in the Ware River watershed with restrictions but not leashing requirements

FIRST DRAFT POLICY

- Dogs must be leashed on a 6' or shorter leash at all times on DWSP property except licensed hunters may have dogs off leash to hunt or train

FINAL POLICY

- Dogs must be leashed on a 6' or shorter leash at all times on DWSP property except licensed hunters may have dogs off leash to hunt or train

Key Elements

Trails

EXISTING POLICY

- Separate trails for different user groups
- No single-track bike trails

FIRST DRAFT POLICY

- Developed a set of well-defined multi-use trails
- Trails avoid wetland areas, emphasize connectivity
- Trails will be shared among pedestrian, bikers, horseback riders and snowmobilers (some exclusions)
- Allows for single-track mountain biking on specified trails

FINAL POLICY

- Developed a set of well-defined multi-use trails
- Trails avoid wetland areas, emphasize connectivity
- Trails will be shared among pedestrian, bikers, horseback riders and snowmobilers (some exclusions)
- Allows for single-track mountain biking on specified trails

Trail Network

Changes from existing plan to 2023 plan

	2010	2023	Difference
Bike Trails DWSP	29.8 miles	75.4 miles	+ 45.6 miles
ACOE	3.8 miles	3.8 miles	0
TOTAL	36.7 miles	78.9 miles	+45.6 miles

	2010	2023	Difference
Horse Trails DWSP	37.1 miles	54.7 miles	+ 17.6 miles
ACOE	3.8 miles	3.8 miles	0
TOTAL	40.9 miles	58.5 miles	+17.6 miles

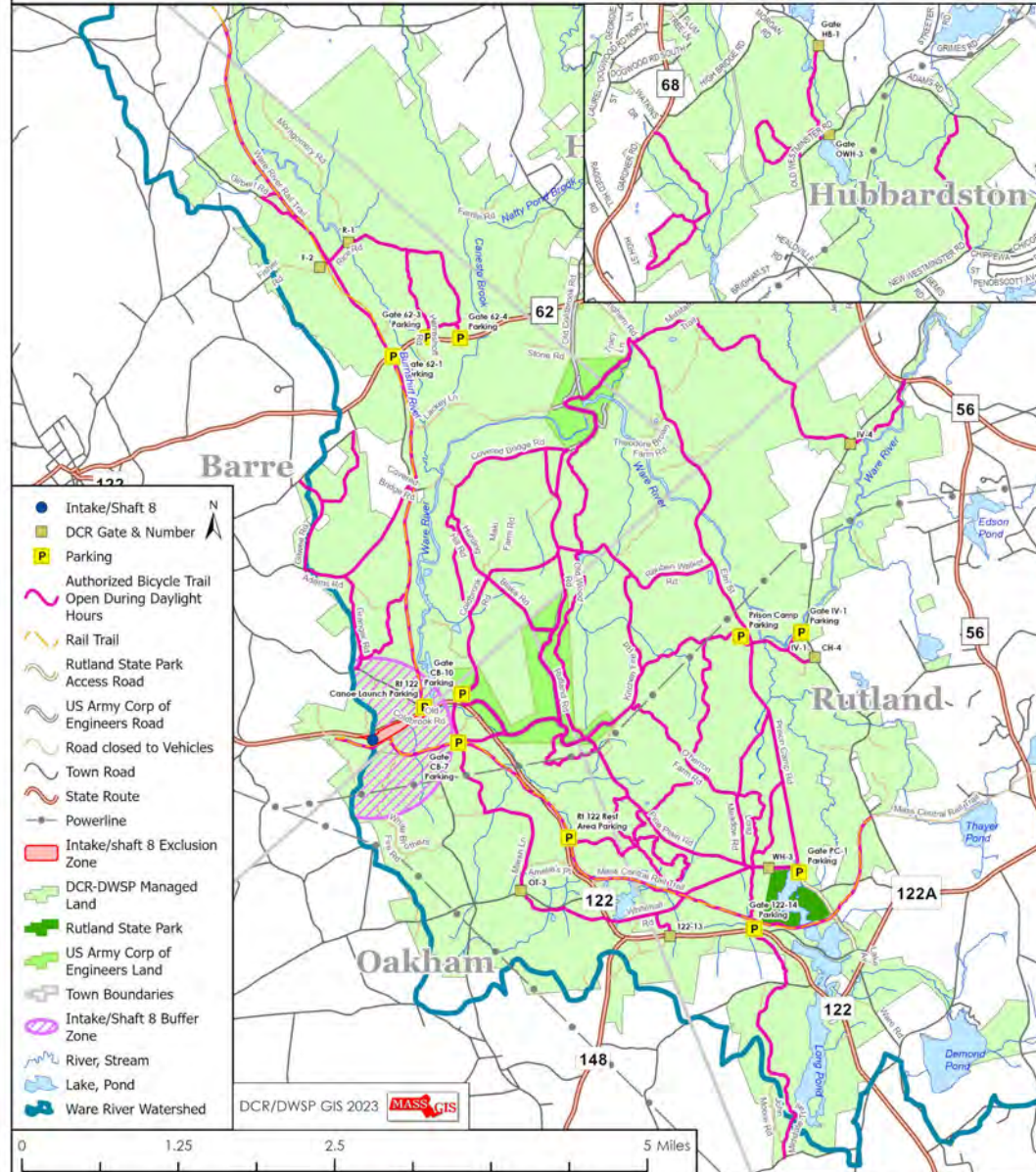
	2010	2023	Difference
Snowmobile Trails DWSP	20.9 miles	37.7 miles	+ 16.8 miles
ACOE	0.8 miles	1.1 miles	+ 0.3 miles
TOTAL	21.7 miles	38.8 miles	+ 17.1 miles



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Authorized Bicycle Trails Open During Daylight Hours

Department of Conservation & Recreation
Division of Water Supply Protection - Office of Watershed Management
Ware River Public Access Management Plan 2023

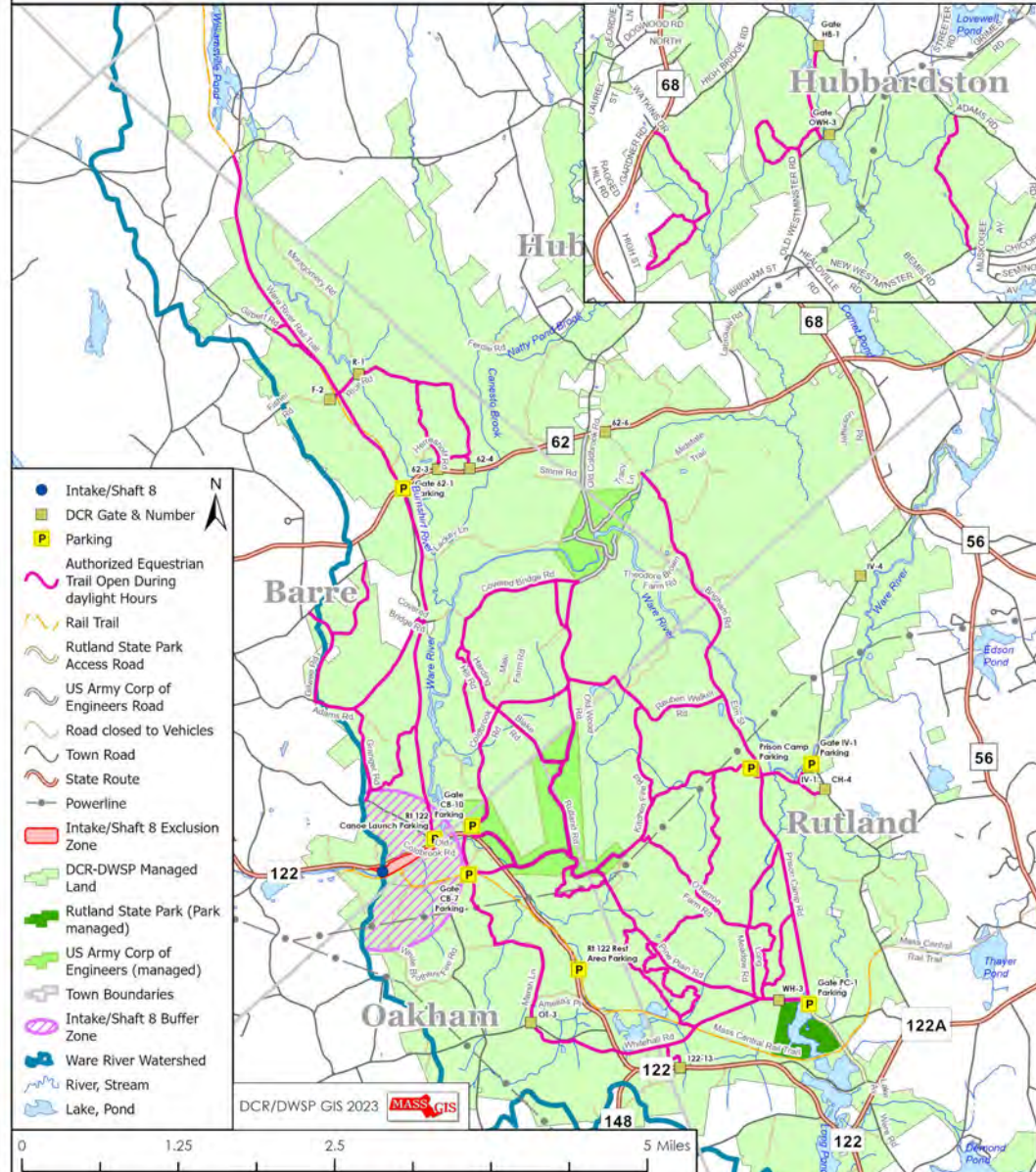




Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Authorized Equestrian Trails Open During Daylight Hours

Department of Conservation & Recreation
Division of Water Supply Protection - Office of Watershed Management
Ware River Public Access Management Plan 2023



Key Elements

Large-group horse permits

EXISTING POLICY

- Horses are allowed on designated routes under specific conditions, and large group (>25) horse permits were issued.

FIRST DRAFT POLICY

- All large group horse permits would be eliminated

FINAL POLICY

- Up to 2 large group horse permits will be issued per year
- Permit will allow DCR to review and approve/deny the route, require manure pick-up, and will have pre-and post-ride inspections by Watershed Rangers

Key Elements

Snowmobiles

EXISTING POLICY

- Snowmobiles allowed in specific Zones with restrictions (snow cover, timing, etc.)

FIRST DRAFT POLICY

- Snowmobiles allowed on specific trails, most of which will be multi-use
- Night access permits will be issued for trail grooming, etc.

FINAL POLICY

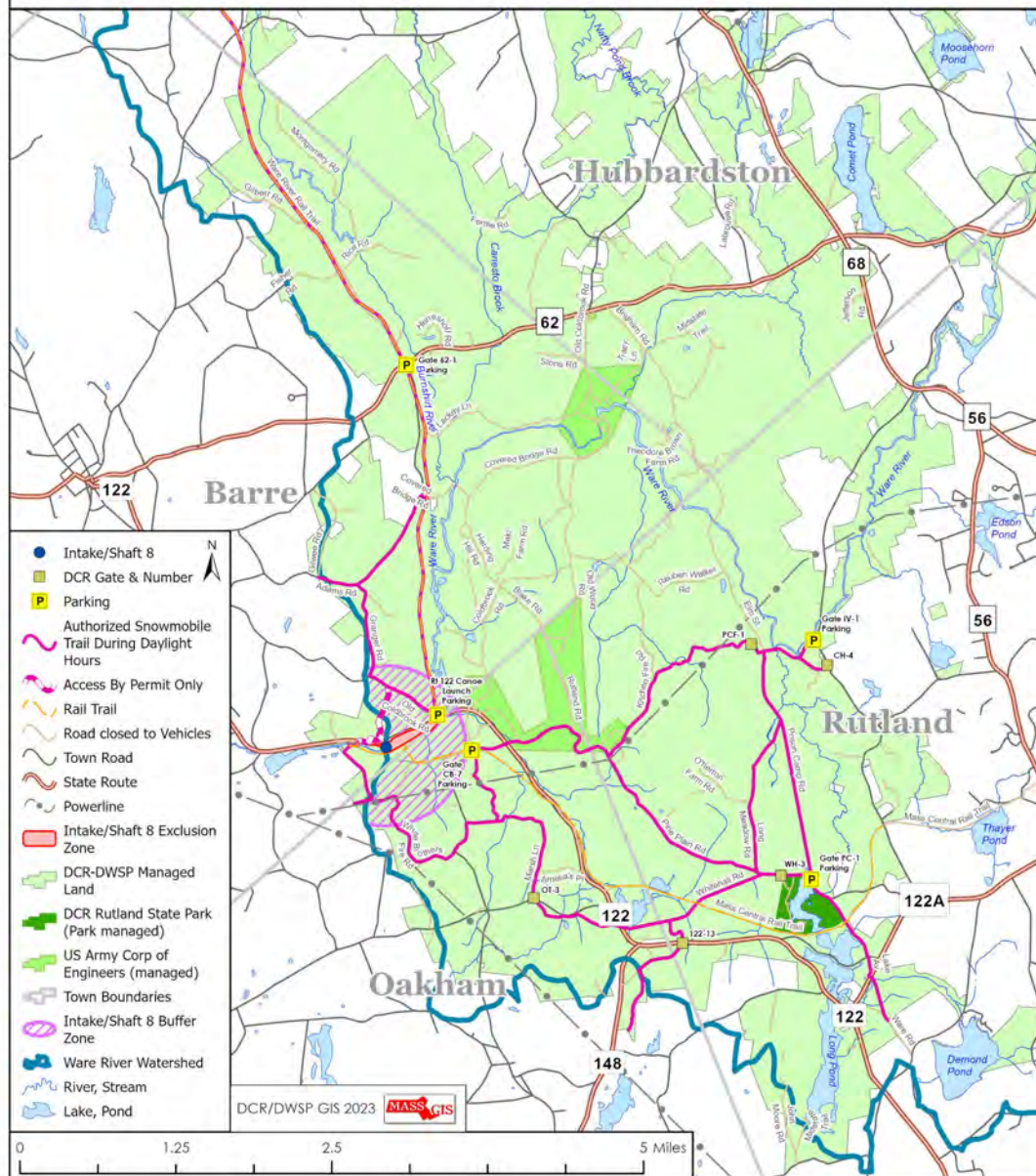
- Snowmobiles allowed on specific trails, most of which will be multi-use
- Night access permits will be issued for trail grooming, etc.
- Snowmobile clubs can request night access permits for organized rides



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Authorized Snowmobile Trails Open During Daylight Hours

Department of Conservation & Recreation
Division of Water Supply Protection - Office of Watershed Management
Ware River Public Access Management Plan 2023



Key Elements

DWSP Internal Roads

EXISTING POLICY

- All DWSP internal roads are open 24/7 April – December; roads are closed during mud season, except Coldbrook is year-round when possible

FIRST DRAFT POLICY

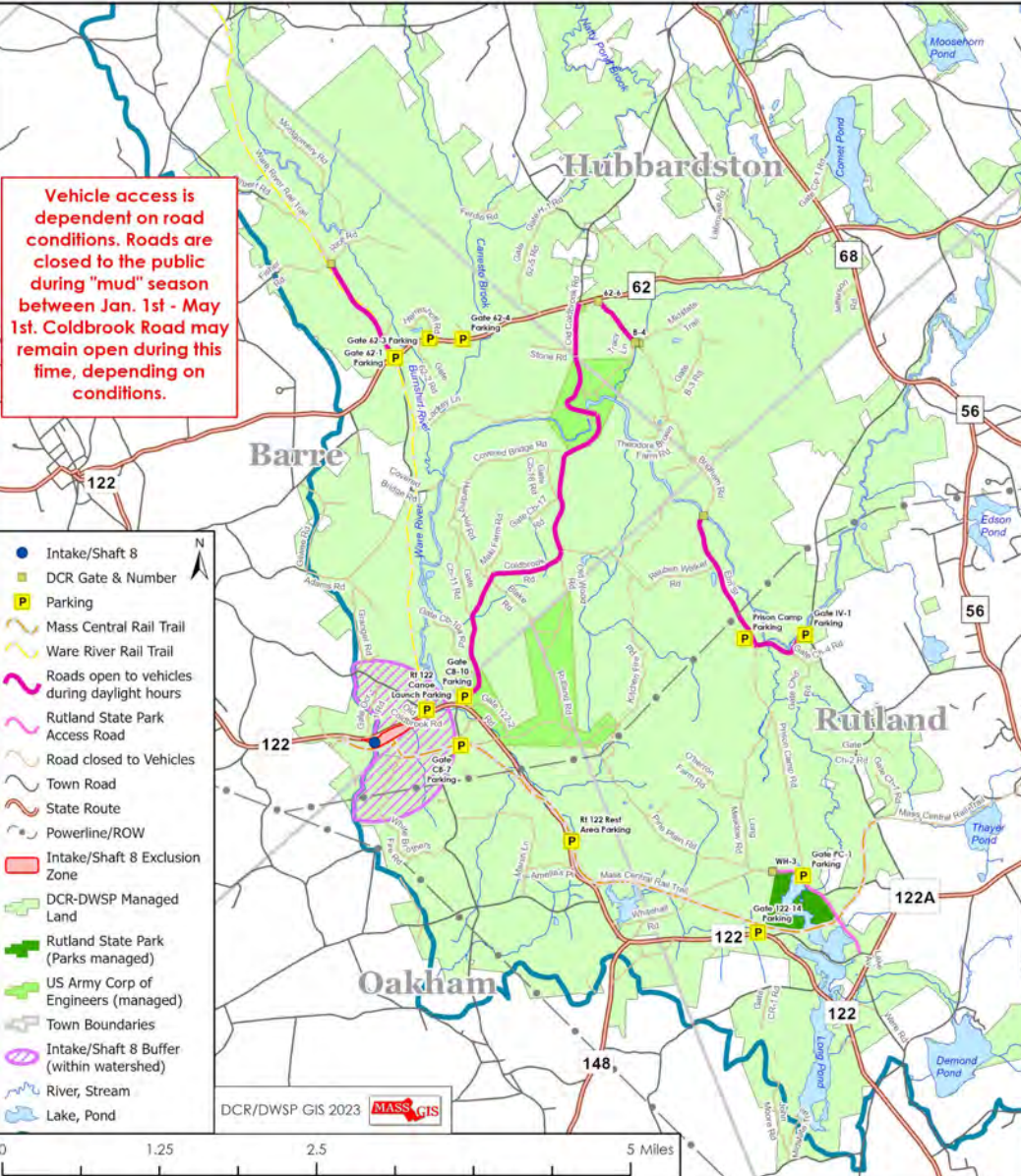
- All DWSP internal roads closed to unauthorized vehicle traffic except Coldbrook Road, which would be open from dawn to dusk
- Intervale Road would be open dawn to dusk to allow vehicle access specifically to the Prison Camps (~ 5 miles total)
- A series of DCR gates will be unlocked and open to permitted hunters in vehicles Oct-Dec

FINAL POLICY

- ~ 7 miles of roads open to vehicles (includes Coldbrook, Intervale and others) from dawn to dusk, prioritizing access to hunting, fishing, and historic sites
- Allows for periodic review of road network to see if network meets access needs; adjustments (without expansion) will be considered
- A series of DCR gates will be unlocked and open to permitted hunters in vehicles Oct-Dec



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Roads Open To Vehicles During Daylight Hours
Department of Conservation & Recreation
Division of Water Supply Protection - Office of Watershed Management
Ware River Public Access Management Plan 2023



Key Elements

Long Pond

EXISTING POLICY

- Large motor permits given out – no cap on the number of permits

FIRST DRAFT POLICY

- Large Boat Motor permitting will be eliminated
- Boats must comply with 20/25 hp motor restriction
- DEP requirement of no water skiing/tubing

FINAL POLICY

- 2024: 50 large motor permits issued by lottery
- Require permit applicants to identify use of pond on application (fishing, water skiing, both)
- Pond usage study (observations of boating activity throughout season, e.g., boat motor size; usage; follow-up user survey)
- Make determination if further restriction of permits or boat size warranted

Key Elements

Comet Pond

EXISTING POLICY

- Open water swimming allowed
- No defined entry/exit point

FIRST DRAFT POLICY

- Per DCR-wide policy, no “Distance Swimming” is allowed due to safety concerns
- Permit program will be developed to allow larger outboard motors for existing Comet Pond residents
- Designated for Paddleboarding; consistent with a public swimming beach on the pond

FINAL POLICY

- An open water swimming entry point will be identified east of boat ramp; distance swimming will not be restricted
- Signage similar to Walden Pond will be installed at the entry point
- Permit program will be developed to allow larger outboard motors for existing Comet Pond residents
- Designated for Paddleboarding; consistent with a public swimming beach on the pond

Other Key Elements

Procedural

- DCR will provide reasonable notice to Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) for temporary trail, road closures, etc.
- Changes to trail network can be submitted annually through WRWAC sub-committees and committee to DWSP for final decision
- DWSP will rely on Friend group and user groups to help educate about and reinforce the rules among their constituencies
- DWSP will reserve the right to become more restrictive if access issues arise and cannot be resolved



Next Steps

- Post Final Plan on DCR website
- Begin Plan implementation:
 - Make changes to the road network (new gates, etc.)
 - Erect vehicle barrier to river on Route 122 parking lot
 - Update trail network signage
 - Update other signage to reflect new policies