# **March Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Jennifer Wilson, Dicken Crane, Melissa Harper, Dennis Smith, Phil Doherty, Kevin O’Shea

Council Members Absent: Ted Dooley, Susan Smiley, Vivian Ortiz, Jeff Collins, Ann Canedy

DCR Staff Attendees: Matt Perry, Nick Connors, Doug Rice, Peter Hoffman, Lisa Little, Jacqui Kluft, Elizabeth Laver Kacergis

Public Attendees as Registered

**In Person:** Chris Egan, Chuck Anastas, Buzz Constable, Kathi Anderson, Sarah Walker

**Virtual:** Bill Boles, Alexi Conine, Karen Mauney-Brodek, Chris Redfern, Sarah Freeman, Jun Lee, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Cathy, Mike Toomey, Judy Jacobs, Elizabeth Roche, Louise Johnson, Juliet Trofi

## Call to Meeting, 9:15am – Chair Jack Buckley

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors. He welcomed everyone to the meeting and spoke about the standing nominating committee discussion that would come later in the meeting. He said he has asked Matt Perry to create a matrix on council activities over the course of the year and to present a modest legislative report at the meeting. Chair Buckley then asked councilors if they would be able to meet with the Mass Fish and Wildlife board prior to the June meeting at the MFW headquarters in Westborough. He noted that public comment would only be taken by those in attendance.

## DCR Report – Doug Rice, Commissioner

Commissioner Rice thanked the Council and chair for inviting him to speak. He also thanked the staff at Walden for hosting the meeting and suggested that everyone take a walk to the pond after the meeting concluded. He then gave an update on DCR activities over the prior month.

### Welcome New EEA Staff

Commissioner Rice announced the hiring of EEA chief of Staff Kathleen Skarin and Undersecretary of Environmental Justice & Equity María Belén Power.

Ms. Skarin comes to EEA after serving most recently as Senior Engagement Officer for RIZE Massachusetts where she led government affairs, communications, board relations, and public affairs for the statewide organization that works to end the overdose crises. Prior to RIZE, she worked as Director of Strategic Partnerships for the New England Aquarium, and Chief of Staff to Middlesex County Sherriff Peter Koutoujian. Kathleen has also served in legislative roles in the Massachusetts State House and with former City of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley.

Ms. Power will oversee the training of EEA agency staff and focus on establishing environmental justice principles in the work of the secretariat, which oversees state energy policy, public lands, and environmental policy. She also will work with external stakeholders on community outreach and engagement to ensure that historically marginalized communities. Prior to joining EEA, Ms. Power served as Assistant Executive Director for GreenRoots, a community-based organization dedicated to improving and enhancing the urban environment and public health in Chelsea, East Boston and surrounding communities.

Commissioner Rice also announced that former Acting DCR Commissioner Stephanie Cooper will be serving as Undersecretary of Environment. As it has in the past, this role includes overseeing the work of the environmental agencies and the EEA policy team. Stephanie most recently served as Deputy Commissioner for Policy & Planning for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. Stephanie joined MassDEP in 2015, serving as Chief of Staff prior to assuming her current role in December 2017.  Other positions held by Stephanie within the EEA portfolio include Assistant Secretary at the Executive Office, and Chief of Staff for the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

### State Budget

Commissioner Rice informed the council that Governor Healey’s budget recommendation released on March 1 included increased funding to EEA and DCR. He noted that the Governor’s policy priorities are growing the clean energy economy and promoting environmental justice, two things that align with the mission of the Executive Office and our agency and said that DCR is excited about this good news and is prepared to be part of the larger investment in combatting climate change.

### Capital Investment Plan Presentation

Commissioner Rice met with EEA staff to present the DCR capital investment plan. The plan, which was spoken about at last month’s council meeting, is part of the Strategic Readiness Initiative and includes hiring a consultant to help with capital projects. EEA is very supportive of this plan, and we are excited to be moving forward.

### Winter Storm Response

The DCR Storm Center was activated on February 27 and 28 for the snowstorm that swept across the region. Although it was not as severe as originally predicted, the storm did drop significant snowfall, caused icy road conditions, and led to parking bans on DCR parkways. Commissioner Rice thanked the staff who took care of snow removal operations and kept roads and properties accessible and safe.

### February Vacation Events

Parks held events for kids and families over February school vacation. Over 1000 people attended the 67 programs held at parks across the Commonwealth. Feedback from the parks has been that the events were exciting and engaging for all those who attended. Commissioner Rice thanked DCR’s Interpretive Staff for coordinating and for making these opportunities available to families statewide.

### Park Serve Day

Commissioner Rice reminded the council that Park Serve Day will be held on April 22, 2023, which is also Earth Day, adding that Park Serve Day is DCR’s annual day of stewardship which encourages people to volunteer in participating parks to get them ready for the summer and that everyone is encouraged to come out and participate on the day. Matt Perry is helping to coordinate this event and will be in touch with councilors with more details as they become available.

### Lifeguard Recruitment

Applications for lifeguards opened and DCR is offering an early sign-on bonus of $500 to candidates who submit a complete lifeguard application by Monday, May 1, 2023, and $250 for candidates who submit a complete application by Saturday, July 1, 2023. Additionally, the agency is offering a $500 retention bonus that will be provided to lifeguards who commit to working for the department through Sunday, August 20, 2023, and an additional $250 for those who work through Monday, September 4, 2023.

To be considered for a DCR lifeguard position, applicants must be at least 16 years of age by the date of hire, must complete lifeguard training, and must be certified in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The agency offers free training classes and certification to lifeguards who commit to DCR summer employment prior to the opening of designated swimming areas.

### Maple Sugarin’ at Breakheart Reservation

March is maple sugar season and on Saturday, March 11, Breakheart Reservation in Saugus hosted a sugaring event from 10:00am to 2:00pm. The tour included the history of maple sugaring, tree identification & tapping, wood splitting, and the evaporator.

### Watertown Dam

Because of an inquiry about the Watertown Dam, Commissioner Rice offered an update to the council.

The question of whether it is feasible to remove the Watertown dam has been asked for years.  DCR was supportive of answering the feasibility question and, from the start, asked that any study include an analysis of the hydraulics and hydrology of the entire Charles River flood control system, as well as the removal and transport of contaminated sediments. The initial study completed in June 2021 provides an outline of the areas that would need further analysis.

DCR has met with CRWA to discuss the additional information and analysis DCR requires in order for the agency to make an informed decision whether or not it supports removal. In November, DCR provided a scope of work outlining the additional analysis required before any decisions can be made including topographic and bathymetric survey; sediment analysis; hydrologic analysis of Charles River drainage area upstream of the dam and hydraulic analysis sufficient to evaluate spillway adequacy and determine required spillway modifications for removal or breach, and subsurface analysis to assess changes to ground water and potential impacts to adjacent properties and recreational resources. It is DCR’s understanding that CRWA is working to secure funding to undertake this work.

DCR looks forward to seeing the findings of this additional work to make the best determination on the future of the Watertown Dam.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Smith commented that years ago, there was a problem with recruiting lifeguards and as a result all sites could not be kept open. He said that what DCR has been doing is really good and it appears that they are on track to not have that problem in the future.

Chair Buckley said he would like an update about Capital Project intake. He also asked about the recent Department of Public Health (DPH) advisory about PFAs in lakes and ponds owned by DCR.

Commissioner Rice responded that DCR knew about the testing but were surprised when the report was released because DPH did not communicate that it was coming out. He said that DCR will put signs and do whatever else needs to be done to inform the public.

Chair Buckley asked if increased funding would be used for backlog of capital projects and if there was any word on a new Bond Bill.

Commissioner Rice responded that DCR was excited by the increased funding that EEA is receiving and that the agency provides a whole host of scenarios about how capital funding will be spent based on increase and decreases of funding and that they hope that the plans that show increased funding is what they will be funded for.

Chair Buckley responded by asking if the context of capital planning and how that will effect the billion dollars of deferred maintenance was brought up in the meeting about capital planning.

Commissioner Rice said that it was highlighted in the context of the overall plan.

Councilor Harper asked how much of an increase was given to DCR.

Commissioner Rice said $22 million.

Chair Buckley stated that they need to make sure that the legislature meets or exceeds the Governor’s budget.

Councilor Crane asked if the contract for the capital planning consultant has been finalized.

Commissioner Rice said that it is set to go back out for responses and that he will check in with Patrice for updates.

## Comments from Lisa Little, Park Supervisor at Walden Pond

Ms. Little welcomed everyone to Walden Pond and gave the history of stewardship at the property noting that 101 years ago the property was given as a gift from the descendants of Ralph Waldo Emerson to the Commonwealth. She noted how unique and special it is that it was given as a gift, and that it is a great example of land stewardship in the Commonwealth dating back to Henry David Thoreau and the time he spent there.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Crane remarked on the visitor center and asked if it was made with local materials.

Ms. Little said that it is and that it was made with renewable resources. She noted that the benches were made from trees that were felled to create space for the visitor center. It was built in 2016, exhibits were added in 2017 and is LEED Gold Certified.

## Legislative Report – Matt Perry, Manager of Stewardship Programs and Strategic Initiatives

Mr. Perry provided an update to councilors on bills HD233 – An act authorizing the establishment of old growth forest reserves, SD1804 – An act relative to establishing an office of partnership coordination within DCR, HD1617 – An act relative to the management of the Blue Hills Reservation, HD3866/SD1672 – An act authorizing the reorientation of the parcel of land occupied by the Riverside Boat Club of Cambridge.

## Regular Business I

### Presentation from Kathi Anderson of the Walden Woods Project

Ms. Anderson gave a presentation on the history and work of the Walden Woods Project, the official friends group of Walden Pond State Reservation and organization that works to support the conservation of the pond and its surrounding land.

### Approval of Minutes – December 8, 2022 Meeting

Councilor Smiley made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 8, 2022 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Canedy seconded the motion.

### Roll Call on Approval of Minutes

Councilor Smith moved to approve the minutes from the February 9, 2023 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor O’Shea seconded the motion.

Councilor Harper: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor O’Shea: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

The minutes were approved.

### Public Comment

[Guidelines for Public Comment are available on the DCR Stewardship Council website.](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dcr-stewardship-council-public-comment-guidelines/download)

Chairman Buckley invited members of the public for comment, which was offered by the following:

* Chris Egan, Mass Forest Alliance
* Buzz Constable, Lincoln Land Conservation Trust

In addition, Sarah Freeman of Jamaica Plain submitted a written comment to the council.

## Regular Business II

### Consideration of a Standing Nominating Committee

Chair Buckley spoke of the proposal to create a standing nominating committee which Councilor Smith would be chair of. The committee would only meet once or twice as it does now, but membership would be permanent.

Councilor Wilson moved that the council creates a standing nominating committee based on the charge provided.

Councilor Doherty seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

### Committee Updates

Finance

Chair Buckley reported that the Finance Committee did not meet this month but that they are planning a budget forum in May which will be posted as a public meeting. He said that it is an opportunity for councilors to join and hear from the public about what they think are important funding needs for DCR. He noted that the committee is ahead of the budget cycle having made comments on the budget in August.

Policy

Councilor Wilson reported that the Policy Committee met on February 28 and that Councilor Doherty is in the process of joining. The committee discussed creating a calendar that reflects its work that will be presented to the council. She also reported that Paul Cavanagh met with the committee to discuss RMPs and that there are some possible changes to the template and that there is an interagency dialogue happening on where state listed species can be included.

The committee discussed Strategic Oversight Plans and provided the council with two previous copies as examples. They are working on drafting a new one.

Stakeholders

Councilors Smith and Harper reported that the Stakeholders Committee held a meeting on February 24 and discussed how improvements can be made to the public comment period. They also discussed guest presenters and integrating the work of the committee with the people who work on partnerships at DCR.

Councilor Wilson asked if the written public comment guidelines were being adjusted.

Councilor Harper responded that they talked about better enforcement of them and seeing where enforcement can be made.

Councilor Crane asked about the bill regarding partnerships that Mr. Perry spoke about in his update.

Nick Connors said that DCR wants to reach out to the senator that filed the bill to update them on the work being done in this regard.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor O’Shea thanked everyone for their presentations.

Councilor Smith asked if bios have been put up on the website for the councilors yet and Mr. Perry told him no. Councilor Smith said that he feels everyone is working well together and that he commends the chair for his efforts.

Councilor Crane said that the Walden Woods presentation shows the length of time and continued effort that people put into preserving land for the public with DCR and other groups. He stated that so much work goes into protecting and enhancing the lands potential for the public.

Chair Buckley commented that people gave the Walden property to the Commonwealth and that it is a long-term legacy, adding that there is opportunity now for people to create their own legacy. He also asked for clarification on a logging moratorium, what it covers, and how it will be resolved.

## Adjournment

Councilor Harper made a motion to adjourn.

Councilor Wilson seconded the motion.

The councilor adjourned at 10:42am.

Please check the DCR Stewardship Council webpage for notice of upcoming meetings. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council>