# February 4, 2025 Policy & Conservation Committee Meeting Minutes

Policy Committee Members Present: Jennifer Wilson, Jeff Collins, Ann Canedy

Conservation Committee Members Present:Jeff Collins, Dicken Crane

## **DCR Staff Attendees:** Matthew Perry, Paul Cavanagh, Rob King, Peter Church, Jessica Rowcroft

## Public Attendees: Neil Good

## Call to Order and Welcome – Policy Committee Chair Jennifer Wilson

Chair Wilson welcomed the attendees and went over the meeting agenda.

## Approval of Minutes

Councilor Canedy made a motion to approve the November 26, 2024 policy committee meeting minutes.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

### ***Roll Call on the Approval of Minutes***

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Chair Wilson: Yes

The November 26, 2024 Policy Committee minutes were approved.

## Landscape Designations

Conservation Committee Chair Collins thanked Peter Church and Jessica Rowcroft for attending the meeting to discuss Landscape Designations. He said that the committee has been discussing the designations along with other topics like Forests as Climate Solutions, state biodiversity goals, and Resource Management Plans, and that Landscape Designations intersects and relates to all of them. He said that they would like to hear an update on the status of the designations and the roll out of the new Forest Science Advisory Council.

Mr. Church thanked the committees for having him and said that he would give an update on Forest as Climate Solutions (FACS) and how it goes with the Landscape Designations review. He said that Ms. Rowcroft will then talk about the next steps for Landscape Designations. Mr. Church said that the Landscape Designations hit their ten-year mark for review 3 years ago now, and that the process was started in earnest with a series of public meetings. He said that as the new administration began the FACS process, they paused to process to make sure that the designations align with the findings of FACS. Last summer, the FACS committee came out with their report and EEA working with DCR Forest and Parks, DCR Water Supply Protection, and Department of Fish and Wildlife came forward with a list of deliverables. They decided to continue to pause work on Landscape Designations so they did not get through a review of the draft and then have to make changes to it since there is still a working group that is creating criteria for reserves for each division. Mr. Church said that there are 3 different designations for DCR parks and forests which are reserves, parklands, and woodlands. For the reserve designation, the Forest Reserve Science Advisory Committee (FRSAC) was created as part of Landscape Designations to work with DCR. As part of FACS, EEA wants to expand the committee to meet the needs of the two other divisions, Water Supply Protection, and Fish and Wildlife. The word “Technical” has been added to the name of the committee, and seven of the eight members will continue on with new members being added.

Ms. Rowcroft said that Landscape Designations are integrated into many different things and the reason they are waiting for the completion of FACS and the expansion of FRSAC is to make sure that they are not in conflict with any of the work being done by EEA and FACS. Any inconsistencies can pose a problem since everything is so integrated. She said that once they reach a point where they can incorporate language and descriptions that are consistent, they plan to have a public meeting to share the current draft and then hold an information meeting where they talk about all of the updates that are in the new version. Since it is an almost 200-page document, Ms. Rowcroft said that this will give people an adequate amount of time to review and then take written comments on the designations.

Councilor Wilson asked about FRSAC and who they members are, what they represent, and how they came to be on the committee.

Mr. Church said that the members are subject matter experts so the member’s disciplines are all in the field of natural resources. He said that there are members that are experts in prescribed fires, silviculture, ecology, ornithology, and college professors that teach forestry. He said that when they created the committee, they tried to capture all aspects of any kind of management that they might bring forward to them. The members work at the Nature Conservancy, UMass Amherst, The University of Vermont, The US Forest Service, the Trustees of Reservations, the National Park Service, and the Eastern Native Tree Society. He said that with the expansion of the committee, the thought is that MassWildlife will be adding a biologist.

Councilor Crane said that he has heard from people in the forest products industry that there is no one representing management at that level on the committee and that he thinks that they should acknowledge that that is a level that should be considered. He said that FACS wants to expand reserves and asked how the committee is going to act to increase the number of reserves in the state.

Mr. Church said that when they originally formed the committee, they wanted to have a balance. He said that forest management is looked at from members that work at the US Forest Service and as college professors. He said that FACS is to look at 10% of the forested land across Massachusetts to try and create reserves, and that amounts to about 300,000 acres. He added that right now, MassWildlife and the Division of Water Supply Protection are looking at their properties for reserve potential, but that in the Division of State Parks, they have 120,000 acres in reserves already, which is 36% of all overseen by the division. Mr. Church said that part of EEA’s initiative is to look at private lands as well to get to the 300,000 acres. The new Forest Reserves Science Technical Advisory Committee (FRSTAC) will be looking at is the criteria for reserves, but as of now, he doesn’t believe that they will be involved in selecting the reserves for Division of Water Supply Protection or MassWildlife.

Ms. Rowcroft added that when FRSAC was formed, it was an outcome of rolling out the designations and management guidelines with the intent on advising on the reserves specifically.

Councilor Crane asked that if the committee is not selecting the reserves, will they be evaluating who does select the reserves?

Mr. Church said that he didn’t believe so, and that when the committee was put together, the reserves were already in place. He said that the Stewardship Council at the time of the first set of Landscape Designations wanted to just vote on the guidelines, not the reserves, and that the same went for FRSAC. Since the reserves were already in place, FRSAC just applied the guidelines in their advice to DCR.

Councilor Wilson said that this is a critical piece for the Stewardship Council, because although they don’t have the expertise to say what should be classified as woodlands versus reserves, these designations ripple through the RMPs, and that they need to be knowledgeable about it since it will inform them as they consider RMPs. She said that the council’s committees need to think about what they need to do to make sure they feel like they are doing their due diligence and fulfilling their responsibility. She suggested speaking with DCR’s General Counsel offline to make sure that they are satisfying their role. She said that the committees can be representatives of the council and report back to the full group, or the whole council can go through the process.

Ms. Rowcroft said that last time they worked closely with the Policy Committee and did a presentation on the modeling used to determine designations to them. She suggested that they could do that again at the next policy meeting.

Councilor Collins said that he thought it was a great idea to do that. He asked Ms. Rowcroft the timing of the public release and public comment period.

Ms. Rowcroft said that they are waiting on several others and will look to the administration on timing, but that they were hoping to finish by spring 2025.

Mr. Church added that they plan to have a meeting of the new FRSTAC meeting sometime in March or early April.

Councilor Crane asked if the new members would be appointed by that point?

Mr. Church said that they MassWildlife will be selecting new members and they are waiting on that to happen.

## Rodenticides

Councilor Collins welcomed Rob King, Deputy Commissioner of Operations and said that the two committees have questions on rodenticides, specifically Second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) and concerns that they have regarding bioaccumulation and effects on raptors, birds, and other public health issues. He said they recognize the importance of rat management and want to know DCR’s approach to it, and the roll of DCR developing integrated pest management to eliminate use of SGARs in management and how DCR can be a leader on this. He added that Eric Seaborn, Director of Natural Resources, had given the committees some information, but that they want to know more about whether there is a DCR wide policy, and how does the policy relate to practice.

Mr. King thanked the committees, and said that he joined DCR just over a year ago and in that time frame, he has started to learn what DCR does, and how they can work to improve a lot of the processes and protocols that are in place. He said that they started having conversations with the team in the late summer and early fall about what they do in relation to rodenticides and where they are used, and that they are currently only using rodenticides in the North Region, Boston Region, and a small portion of the South Region. The Central and West regions manage rodents with legacy traps, but what is done in those regions isn’t possible in other communities where DCR has property. He gave the example of Revere saying that they get requests to increase rodenticide use. Mr. King said that they are exploring options and that the City of Boston has been able to eliminate rodenticide use which led them to meet with the city’s Inspectional Services Department about how they implemented the program, what training was required, and what were the costs associated. Mr. King and other DCR staff left the meeting planning to talk to various contractors about what DCR can do in the Boston Region, and that they want to have a conversation with the city about setting up an Intergovernmental Service Agreement (ISA) with the intent of meeting to empower the city to support DCR at its locations in the city limits since the city of Boston is currently doing the work and has the knowledge. He said the second piece is they are trying to anticipate how to collect data and demonstrate success to expand to other communities. He said that without the data, they can expect a fair amount of pushback from communities that currently rely on rodenticides for rodent control, and that they don’t want to implement a new strategy and then have to revert back. He said that how to best collect data is a challenge and because of the alternative methods that are used, you don’t get numbers the way you might with methods that are currently used.

Councilor Collins said that he was really excited to hear about the City of Boston. He asked how much rodent control is directed on the ground by DCR staff versus by vendors, and that he understood there was a requirement to report rodenticide use to the Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) and whether that is something DCR does.

Mr. King said that none of the baiting or placement of traps is done by DCR staff, that vendors do all of the work. He said it is targeted with services being provided around the borders of buildings and in maintenance and labor yards. He said that three different vendors are being used in the regions. Mr. King said that he will see about the reporting requirement and will make sure that it is getting done by DCR.

Councilor Wilson said that she is very curious to see where things go with Boston, and that the Policy Committee has discussed in the past that they are eager to see DCR lead on this issue. She said that it would be great to have a policy even if it isn’t perfect or final, but that they would not want to push for something that isn’t ready or hasn’t been properly researched, asking what a reasonable time frame for gaining experience and data would be.

Mr. King said that he will be meeting with Boston in two days to discuss next steps, and if that conversation goes well, they will work to locate what DCR owns in the city and to make sure that they are ready for the spring when the rodent population will increase and that he’d love to have information by the spring or summer. He said that the hard part will be demonstrating success outside of 311 calls to the city.

Councilor Collins said that he’d love to check back in and hear about the conversation with Boston and opportunities that Mr. King is learning about. He said he is interested in learning about whether what the city is doing can be replicated in other communities.

Mr. King said that if they can demonstrate success and talk to their vendors about it, they can create a demand and become leaders on alternative methods.

Councilor Collins said that lots of communities are starting to ban SGARs and that he hopes vendors are adapting, saying that a DCR wide policy could help push vendors.

Councilor Crane pointed out that this is a community issue, and that neighbors practices can be a problem for controlling rodents on DCR properties, so if best management practices can be created, they can be adopted throughout the community.

Councilor Wilson said that Councilor Crane’s comment made her think of PSAs that DCR has done and how that could help this be successful.

## Resource Management Plans

Councilor Wilson welcomed Paul Cavanagh, Resource Management Planner to discuss RMPs. She said that the councilors feel like they didn’t have enough time at the last meeting to hear Mr. Cavanagh’s presentation, but that he did a great job with the time he had. She said that the Council will be voting at its next meeting on the Blackstone RMPs, and that the floor is Mr. Cavanagh’s to update them on anything that he has.

Mr. Cavanagh said that they will be launching RMPs for the Pittsfield Complex which is 12 properties north of the Mass Pike stretching to the New York border in Berkshire County. Dan Cushing and Mackenzie Greer are working on sending out announcements to stakeholders and they will be holding a virtual meeting on February 25 from 6pm – 7:30pm. He said he is also working with DCR’s new Indigenous Peoples Coordinator Leah Hopkins to identify tribal interests and engagement in the complex which will be an adjustment for the RMP program. He mentioned that looking over the complex, the Crane family’s name has come up a lot, and that he would like to talk to Councilor Crane about some of the properties and when they became protected. In addition to Pittsfield, Mr. Cavanagh said that they continue work on Belle Isle Marsh and that the Central Highlands RMPs continue to move forward.

Councilor Crane said that it would be helpful to push awareness to stakeholders about the upcoming meeting to increase the number of people who participate in the process.

Mr. Cavanagh said that they have identified a lot of stakeholders and will encourage them to share the invitation with other interested parties. In addition, they do a lot of municipal outreach, speaking with Town Managers, Planning Boards, Conservation Commissions, and Parks and Rec departments. He said he is always in favor of getting broader awareness out for these meetings, and that they do everything they can to reach out to identifiable stakeholders so they can bring awareness. Mr. Cavanagh said he will make sure that the Stewardship Council gets the meeting announcement as well.

## Councilor Comments

Councilor Crane said that he spoke with Commissioner Arrigo yesterday about his update to the council and shortening it a little bit.

## Public Comment

Chair Wilson asked if any members of the public attending had comments to make. Public comments were made by the following attendees:

Neil Good, Falmouth

## Adjournment

Chair Wilson thanked everyone for their attendance and adjourned the meeting.

*Please check the DCR Stewardship Council webpage for notice of upcoming meetings.* [*https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council*](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council)