# **February 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present In-Person: Jack Buckley, Jennifer Wilson, Dicken Crane, Melissa Harper, Jeff Collins, Dennis Smith

Council Members Present Virtually: Vivian Ortiz, Phil Doherty, Ted Dooley, Ann Canedy

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matthew Perry, Ilyse Wolberg, Chloe Gotsis, Brenna Galvin

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Doug Pizzi, Denis LaForce, Chris Redfern, Elizabeth Roche, Sarah Freeman

## Call to Meeting, 2:00pm – Chair Jack Buckley

Chair Buckley welcomed the council and everyone in attendance. He announced the members that were joining the meeting on Zoom and took a roll call for attendance. He reminded everyone that the joint meeting with the Fish and Wildlife Board will be taking place after the council meeting and that they will be hearing from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) on the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative. He said that he would like to shift the council’s focus from forestry, possibly to DCR stakeholders. Chair Buckley announced that the Stakeholders Committee will be having listening session on the February 26 at 6pm similar to the one that the Finance Committee has to get feedback from friends and partner groups. He welcomed Commissioner Arrigo to give an update to the council.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the council for having him. He apologized for giving the presentation virtually, but said he would be there for the joint meeting later in the afternoon. He then gave an update on recent activities at the agency.

### Fireside Chats at Breakheart

On February 7, Commissioner Arrigo was at Breakheart Reservation to kick off the new Fireside Chat series led by Visitor Services Supervisor Jessica Nargon- Hutton that offers visitors a unique opportunity to engage directly with DCR's staff experts and learn more about the agency’s work, with a specific focus on Breakheart. In addition to the public who attended, students from the Garfield Middle School in Revere were there and asked about what DCR is doing to combat climate change and how the work at Breakheart fits into the agency’s overall vision. The Commissioner thanked the entire Breakheart staff for their work to make this program a success.

### Friends of Myles Standish Meeting

The Commissioner was in Plymouth to meet with the Friends of Myles Standish State Forest. He said that they had a great discussion about the forest’s successes and some areas where we can do better, and that he looks forward to working with them to make the forest a place that visitors can enjoy for generations to come.

### Friends of Lynn and Nahant Beach Meeting

The Commissioner also met with the Friends of Lynn and Nahant Beach to discuss multilingual signage at King's Beach and an improved notification system to alert the public when it's unsafe to swim at King's Beach due to water quality issues. He said that there is an internal working group that has been meeting regularly to determine the best practices for updated and multi-lingual signage.

### Research Symposium

DCR held its second annual Research Symposium, focused on illustrating the role of science in supporting an evidenced-based strategy for achieving our mission. Commissioner Arrigo helped kick off the event with Secretary Tepper. The event featured a keynote address from Tony D’Amato from the University of Vermont Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources who spoke about “Learning from Massachusetts’ Forest Past to Address Current and Future Challenges.”

Following Professor D’Amato’s address, sessions were held by staff from DCR, MassWildlife, EEA, EPA, the National Parks Service, Zoo New England, DOER, and day two kicked off with a panel that featured the Stewardship Council’s very own Jeff Collins.

The Commissioner thanked Deputy Commissioner Priscilla Geigis, and Director of Research Don Kent for their work putting together the event.

### Shade Design Standards and Preliminary Design Public Meetings

DCR is taking action to address extreme heat by installing additional shade for our staff and visitors.

The project team will be holding public meetings to present the DCR Shade Design Standards project and solicit public comment.

### DCR Fire Control Collaborates with the Paraguay Air Force

In collaboration with the Massachusetts National Guard's State Partnership Program, DCR Fire Control, the Department of Fire Services, and MEMA met with the Paraguay Air Force for a series of comprehensive demonstrations and presentations at Myles Standish State Forest. Representatives from DCR’s Fire Control Bureau and the Department of Fire Service showcased effective wildfire response strategies, an overview of the Incident Support Unit command vehicle, and provided insights into DCR fire tower operations. The group conducted field tours at prescribed fire locations, offering a firsthand look at prescribed fire methods. Collaborative discussions focused on both wildfire and prescribed fire management techniques, as well as community mitigation assistance planning.

### Melnea Cass Recreation Center

Governor Healey, working with the City of Boston and DCR, converted the Melnea Cass Recreation Center in Roxbury into a shelter for migrant families. After surveying possible locations, it was decided to use DCR’s facility because it was suited for what was needed on such short notice. Commissioner Arrigo recognized how loved the Cass Center is in the community of Roxbury and how important its programming is and said that the Governor has committed to returning the Center back to DCR on June 1 in time for the pool to open for the summer season. DCR has worked closely with the City of Boston to find temporary new homes for the important programs that operate out of the Cass and at this point they have found new locations for 9 of the 10 programs and are close to placing the final one. The Commissioner thanked the community for their understanding and cooperation.

### Charles River Dam Locks, Pedestrian Access Closure

Due to high water levels from recent storms, the pedestrian path across the Charles River Dam locks needs to be closed at low tide to allow opening of the largest tide gate to allow for drainage.

To effectively do this DCR has closed the locks to pedestrians. They continue to assess the situation and will notify the public once the determination has been made that water levels have returned to normal, and the locks can safely reopen to the public.

### Salisbury Beach

Due to structural damage caused by storms this winter access points 9 and 10 at Salisbury Beach have been completely removed. Work on access point 8 has begun and it will reopen soon.DCR is working to safely restore beach access at these locations and are placing sand to help replenish the damaged dune systems. The Town also filed an emergency action enabling the residents along the beach to replace sand around their homes. Commissioner Arrigo said that they’ve been working with the town to educate residents, who are replacing sand on their properties, on the permitting process and have helped facilitate sand placement for private property owners to address erosion concerns, adding that they will continue to work closely with the Town, local elected officials, and the community on the ongoing climate-change beach erosion issue.

### Biodiversity Goals

Commissioner Arrigo joined the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) for an initial meeting to workshop goals and direction for the biodiversity executive order. Governor Healey signed a biodiversity executive order in September which directs DFG to conduct a review of existing biodiversity conservation efforts and establish goals and strategies to achieve a nature-positive future for Massachusetts in 2030, 2040, and 2050.  Goals will focus on sustaining Massachusetts plants, animals, and habitats to survive and flourish while providing equitable access to nature and ensuring a climate-resilient landscape for the future. Currently, there are over 430 species listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. Protecting biodiversity is a long-term investment in the health, economy, and climate resilience.

### Virtual Coffee Q&A

In the next few weeks, the Commissioner will be conducting virtual regional Q&A meetings with staff to understand their experiences at DCR and how we can be a better agency. The first with the Central Region happened before the council meeting. The goal of these meetings is to foster stronger connections with the DCR team. Each session will provide an opportunity for us to discuss current initiatives, share perspectives, and address any questions or concerns specific to our regional staff in the field or the agency as a whole. Commissioner Arrigo said that he can provide an update on these meetings at our stewardship council meeting next month.

### February Break Events

Saturday, February 17, DCR is kicking off its February vacation programming that will run through next Sunday, February 25. There will be81 free or low-cost engaging and educational programs, a total of 102 events at 22 state parks and water supply properties.The programming is part of DCR’s commitment to expanding access to Massachusetts’ State Park system, while also inspiring kids to get outdoors and fostering a connection with the environment. DCR is also waiving parking fees at the few parks that charge for parking and are offering programming next week and expanding public skating hours during the school vacation week at agency-managed rinks from 10 a.m. until 2:50 p.m. daily throughout the week.

### Campsite Reservations Go Live March 6

Commissioner Arrigo announced that reservations for camping at parks across the Commonwealth open to the public on March 6, 2024, at 9 a.m. Visitors can make camping reservations at one of DCR’s campgrounds up to four months in advance of their arrival date through ReserveAmerica.

Reservations are available at DCR’s campgrounds beginning in April and running through October.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Wilson asked for an update on the Middlesex Fells “Be Kind” initiative.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the work is ongoing and that they are creating signage that will be placed in the park. He said the idea is that they can start rolling out a bigger, broader initiative based on the pilot work that has been done at the Fells.

Councilor Wilson asked if social media and more enforcement will play a role in the initiative.

Commissioner Arrigo responded that they want to start with a soft touch and that enforcement is the next step that they have to queue up. He added that the social media team has been “on fire” recently with their ability to get information out to the public and that a lot of eyes are getting on the post and people are learning from it.

Councilor Wilson said that there is a strong incentive to make the Be Kind campaign to be as robust and successful as possible.

Councilor Harper asked if it was possible to get a list of programs that are being disrupted at the Melnea Cass center and asked if any additional support is being provided to the programs.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he can get them the list of programs and that DCR has been supporting the costs and that there is an emergency assistance program that the Governor has put into place and that improvements have been made with funding from Administration and Finance.

Councilor Smith thanked the Commissioner for the presentation and for including the pictures with it. He asked if the shade design standards include solar panels on all shades.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he doesn’t have an answer for that, and that he knows some shading is flexible and doesn’t have the capacity to support solar panels. He said he would get more information for the council.

Councilor Smith asked about the erosion at Salisbury Beach and the sand that is being brought in. He said he doesn’t think the government should be encouraging more development at susceptible locations.

Commissioner Arrigo clarified that DCR is supporting the permitting, not the financial cost and that no support for the town or homeowners is coming from the agency. He said that DCR allows people to get construction access permits to do the work that needs to be done, but the only agency commitment is to their access points and making sure that they are in working order.

Councilor Crane asked if wood products would be used for shade structures since it was mentioned in the Forest as Climate Solutions report about using local wood products.

Commissioner Arrigo said that it was a great point and that he would follow up on design protocols.

Councilor Dooley thanked Commissioner Arrigo for his attention to King’s Beach saying that it is appreciated locally.

Chair Buckley said that when in situations where people in government and DCR facilities come to the rescue like what is happening with the Melnea Cass center, he thinks it is important for decision makers to see what DCR is doing and that it is an opportunity for funding to be enhanced. He said that he hopes DCR is getting the recognition it deserves for this.

## Regular Business I

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 11, 2024 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

### Roll Call on Approval of Minutes

Councilor Harper: Yes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Dooley: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

The January 11, 2024 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:

* Denis LaForce, Sutton
* Doug Pizzi, Mass Parks for All

## Regular Business II

### Committee Updates

#### Finance

Chair Buckley met with Patrice Kish and the consulting group that DCR is working with to discuss the capital dashboard. He said that the project will be a long endeavor and will go through phases and offered that if there was interest from any other councilor that wants to talk with them, they can set up a meeting over Zoom. Its available to any interested councilor. He said the consultant was interested in the council’s outreach to the public at meetings and in the listening sessions for Finance and Stakeholders.

#### Policy Committee

Councilor Wilson reported that the Policy Committee met in January after break in December, and that Paul Cavanagh presented on status of RMPs that are in process. She said that there was a brief discussion about legislative amendments that this group approved back in 2020, and that it was reiterated that the important thing is to change length of terms from 7 years to 5 years.

#### Stakeholders

Councilor Smith reported that the Committee is finalizing the listening session on February 26 and that the meeting will be recorded for those who can’t make it. Councilor Harper said that the comments will be distilled down into actions that the Council can take.

#### Conservation

Councilor Collins said that the Conservation Committee drafted a letter that was submitted as a public comment for the Forests as Climate Solutions report.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Wilson commented that she loves coming to the MassWildlife building and that it is beautiful.

Councilor Smith asked for clarification on the recommendations from the policy committee regarding the Council’s language in statute. He suggested that they may want to make recommendations for future open seats to the Governor’s Office on Boards and Commissions saying that it has historically been difficult to fill these seats.

Councilor Harper asked where the new regional partnership positions were.

Mr. Perry said that they are moving forward.

Chair Buckley said that any issues that Councilors feel need raising can be sent to him because he has a standing call with the Commissioner.

## Adjournment

Councilor Smith moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

Councilor Buckley thanked everyone for joining 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>