# **January 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Jennifer Wilson, Dicken Crane, Melissa Harper, Susan Smiley, Vivian Ortiz, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty, Ted Dooley, Ann Canedy, Dennis Smith, Kevin O’Shea

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Matthew Perry, Sandra Libby, Ilyse Wolberg, A.J. Tourigny, Chloe Gotsis

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Paul Jahnige, Mike Duclos, Sarah Freeman, Denis LaForce, Karen Molloy, Chuck Anastas, Beth Walsh, Arah Schuur, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Patricia Russell, Dawn Titus Couture, Alan Moore, Andres Ripley

## Call to Meeting, 9:00am – Chair Jack Buckley

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors present. He thanked the council for their support in reelecting him as chair for a third year. He mentioned that the Forests as Climate Solutions report is out and open for public comment and said he would like to discuss having the Conservation Committee write a comment on behalf of the council to be submitted. Chair Buckley noted that he has asked Councilor Jeff Collins to serve as chair of the Conservation Committee. He also said that he was very happy that during the meeting the Council will be receiving a presentation from the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation. Chair Buckley said that he attended the Stakeholders Committee meeting the previous week, and that the committee will be holding a listening session for friends and partners on February 26, 2024. He noted that next month, the council will be holding a joint meeting with the Department of Fish and Wildlife board at the Fish and Wildlife building in Westborough on February 15. The Council will meet from 2:00pm to 3:30pm followed by a half hour break, and then the joint meeting at 4:00pm. He has been discussing the agenda with Fish and Wildlife Board chair Steve Sears. Lastly, Chair Buckley mentioned an article he saw in the Parks and Recreation magazine on park equity and the creation of a “library of things” at the Revere Public Library. He said the city has partnered with DCR and that if you check an item out of the library, you can get a complimentary parking pass to a state park or forest. Chair Buckley invited Commissioner Brian Arrigo to give an update to the council.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo wished the Council a happy New Year and thanked them for having him. He then gave an update on recent activities at the agency.

### First Day Hikes

Commissioner Arrigo said that the First Day Hikes held on January 1 were a great way to kick off 2024, with a record breaking 3,600 people welcoming in the new year with a hike in 13 of DCR parks from Mt. Greylock to Cape Cod.  He told the Council that First Day Hikes started in the Blue Hills 33 years ago with the hope of bringing more people into the parks in the winter. Four hundred people gathered in the reservation on January 1, 1992. The hikes went statewide in 2008, and became a national program in 2012. Hikes are now held in all 50 states and this year, DCR had the fourth biggest participation rate in the country.

Commissioner Arrigo and his family hiked at Walden Pond State Reservation’s annual celebration, and he said the weather was perfect for a hike through the woods. He said he enjoyed seeing the DCR staff at work and thanked them all for making the events successful.

Commissioner Arrigo also gave a shout out to Councilor Dennis Smith who participated in a First Day Hike while visiting family in France. Councilor Smith even brought his official DCR First Day Hikes hat with him on the journey.

### Winter Storm Response

DCR staff was out in full force during last weekend’s snowstorm, clearing roads and sidewalks and ensuring properties are safe. The agency also had its storm desk ready to respond to any issues caused by Tuesday/Wednesday’s storm and had crews ready across the state to address any fallen or damaged trees, icy conditions, and any other infrastructure needs.

Commissioner Arrigo reported that this season DCR is working with MassDOT to emphasize the use of liquid de-icers, including blended brine which is used to pre-treat roads. Liquid de-icers are used to pre-treat roadways and pre-wet road salt before it is applied. They help improve roadway conditions while minimizing the use of road salt that can spill into our reservoirs. Pre-treating roadways with liquid magnesium chloride can help prevent ice from forming and delay the need to apply road salt.

The DCR Communications team took to social media last week ahead of the storm to show the public how they can create their own environmentally friendly salt brine at home to treat their driveways. The video can be viewed on [the DCR Instagram page](https://www.instagram.com/reel/C1ujwtTuB-C/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFlZA==).

### Forests as Climate Solutions

On January 3, the Climate Forestry Committee released its report, making recommendations for Climate-Oriented Forest Management Guidelines. The moratorium has been lifted and paused projects are now being reviewed based on these new recommended guidelines. Looking ahead to implementation, EEA anticipates that incorporating the recommended climate-oriented guidelines to state agency land management will take a variety of forms including integration into management plans, standards, protocols, and procedures.

The committee is currently taking public comments on their recommendations, which can be submitted on [the state’s Forests as Climate Solutions website](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/forests-as-climate-solutions).

### Lynn Woods Conservation Restriction

DCR has entered into a partnership with Greenbelt, the Essex County Land Trust, to permanently preserve more than 2,100 acres of Lynn Woods in the City of Lynn and the Towns of Saugus and Lynnfield.  The conservation restriction on the parkland was gifted by the City and the Lynn Water and Sewer Commission, as part of a decades-long effort to permanently protect Lynn Woods from development.

This conservation restriction – one of the largest in the state – is a big accomplishment for DCR. It ensures that the park will permanently remain accessible to the public for outdoor recreation and that it will continue to be a supplier of clean water for the region.

This project was made possible with the efforts of a number of staff at DCR and Greenbelt but especially through the dedication and perseverance of Jim Comeau (retired Land Protection Specialist), Christine Berry (Land Protection Specialist), Sasha Auer (Conservation Restriction Stewardship Planner) and Marguerite Reynolds (Assistant General Counsel), and Vanessa Johnson at Greenbelt.

### Mohawk Trail State Forest Campground Reopening

Commissioner Arrigo announced the reopening the campground at Mohawk Trail State Forest for the 2024 winter camping season.  Reservations went live on January 11, and the campground will welcome guests for the first night of camping on January 18 at Mohawk’s six winter cabins.

The campground was closed last February and the remainer of the winter camping season cancelled after discovering algae in Mohawk’s water source. The campground remained closed through the summer season, while a new water system was installed, the campground’s roads repaved, roofs on the cabins and administrative buildings replaced, the bathroom facilities upgraded, and the chimneys in the CCC-era cabins repaired and restored. DCR has invested more than a million dollars into improving the campground’s infrastructure, improving visitor experience and ensuring the safety of campers.

### Alewife Brook Visit

Last month, Commissioner Arrigo joined Deputy Commissioner Zach Crowley, Arlington Town Officials, and residents of Arlington and Cambridge at the Alewife Brook in Arlington to discuss the future of the brook and the surrounding area.

The group saw the six combined sewer overflows along the brook and discussed their impact on water quality and accessibility of the surrounding area. They also talked about the ongoing work to increase climate resilience and potential opportunities for us to partner on these efforts going forward.

### Draw 7 Park and Amelia Earhart Dam

DCR has partnered with EEA, the Mystic River Watershed Association, and local elected officials to announce a $28 million ARPA investment in the Amelia Earhart Dam and Draw Seven Park in Somerville last month.  This funding will be used to raise the dam and redesign the park, improving climate resiliency and providing significant flood protection for the surrounding environmental justice communities.  The project will also create new recreational opportunities and protect an area that would otherwise be at significant risk of flooding due to climate change.

### Edgewater Drive

DCR is working to finalize the Order of Conditions with the Boston Conservation Commission for the Edgewater Drive project. Once we have obtained the necessary permit, we will be ready to advertise the project for construction in late spring with a planned groundbreaking for the late summer or fall of 2024.

### Neponset Trail Extension to Blue Hills

Commissioner Arrigo said that DCR is making progress on the Neponset to Blue Hills Trail Extension and its consultant is putting the final touches on the feasibility study.

Three potential projects have emerged from the study including:

* A major redesign of Truman Parkway all the way to Mattapan Square
* The trail extension from the end of Truman Parkway to Fowl Meadow and Route 138
* And a redesign of Neponset Valley Parkway west to Readville.

DCR’s transportation team is following up on the redesign of the Truman Parkway to Mattapan Square and the redesign of the Neponset Valley Parkway to Readville.

DCR Trails and Greenways hopes to launch a follow-up design and permitting process on the trail extension from Truman Parkway to Fowl Meadow on Rt. 138, with an eye to implementing the project in the relatively near future.

* The project would include an upgraded crossing at Truman Parkway/Neponset Valley Parkway, a new path and pedestrian/bike bridge over the river to a reconfigured parking lot at Fowl Meadow/Burma Road Trail, a pedestrian/bike crossing at that location, and a new shared use path along Neponset Valley Parkway out to Route 138.

### Stearns Building Dorchester

DCR is currently working with Historic Boston Inc to see if there is any reuse potential for the Stearns Building on Taylor Street in Dorchester.

### 9c cuts

Commissioner Arrigo spoke about the 9C reductions to the FY24 budget that the Administration announced, saying that the state has closely been monitoring revenue, following several months of below benchmark performance. December revenue just came in $138 million below benchmark – the sixth consecutive month of below benchmark performance.  Halfway through the fiscal year, that means that tax collections are running $769 million below benchmark. This represents about 45 percent of all tax collections for the year, with some of the largest and most volatile revenue months still to come.  Governor Healey took action to bring spending and investments in line with available resources. This includes 14 earmarks that are under the DCR line item for Special Projects in Parks and Recreational Areas. The amounts of these earmarks were cut by half, and none of the funding that was cut was for projects on DCR properties.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Canedy asked if DCR staff handles conservation restriction approval that comes from municipalities or if it is another agency within the administration.

Commissioner Arrigo replied that in terms of Lynn Woods, DCR worked with the city to finalize the restriction, and when DCR is the owner of the restriction, it goes through DCR, but there are other organizations that own conservation restrictions in the state.

Councilor Canedy replied that she is looking into the status of conservation restriction in the town of Barnstable.

The Commissioner said he would be happy to talk more after the meeting to assist with this.

Councilor Wilson commented that she has been impressed by how much news coverage DCR has been getting and how successful its social media campaigns have been. She said that all of the publicity has been very good and that the DCR is everywhere, adding that it lets people know the resources that DCR has, how hard the staff works, and allows people to advocate for DCR’s funding. She gave kudos to who has been doing the PR work because the hard work is showing.

Commissioner Arrigo gave credit to Communications Director Chloe Gotsis and her team for the great work that they are doing. He said that it has come from Governor down to be proactive in communicating what the agency does to the public.

Councilor Ortiz thanked Commissioner Arrigo for his report and said that it is great to be able to share this information with the community, so they know what’s happening with DCR. She asked for more definite information about the feasibility studies of Edgewater Drive and the Neponset to Blue Hills connection and how long the approval process might take from the Boston Conservation Commission.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the work that’s being done on the Neponset Trail extension should be wrapped up by early to mid-February, followed by a public process. He said he would look into where they are with the Boston Conservation Commission for the Edgewater Drive project, adding that he has a regular check-in with the city of Boston.

Councilor Ortiz also said that in the past there has been issues getting Blue Bikes on DCR property, and that the bikes offer a great opportunity for people to get out on trails, especially the Neponset Trail, and experience them if they do not have a bike. She asked for an update on the talks between the City of Boston and DCR about putting the bikes near or on DCR properties.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he has experience with this from his time as Mayor, trying to get Blue Bikes at Revere Beach, and that it is a priority for him.

Councilor Smiley thanked the Commissioner for the report and for the inclusion of slides. She expressed gratitude for the Mohawk Trail State Forest reopening for camping and for DCR making it a priority to get it back open and improved.

Councilor Dooley thanked Commissioner Arrigo for speaking with him about King’s Beach the prior week and for putting some resources behind signage to let people know about the issues there.

Chair Buckley asked if the Council could get a presentation on the agency’s emergency management response. He said it is a whole aspect of what DCR does in terms of public service that people may not know about.

Commissioner Arrigo commended Dennis Fitzpatrick who runs the DCR storm center for his efficient work in responding to weather events.

## Regular Business I

### Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation (MOOR) Presentation – Paul Jahnige, Director of MOOR

Mr. Jahnige presented to the council about MOOR and its work promoting outdoor recreational opportunities and the outdoor industry in the Commonwealth.

### After the presentation concluded, Councilors were given the opportunity for questions and comments.

Councilor Crane said that in some other states, groups, especially snowmobilers, have created a network of trails that draws in people from all over including other states. He said that there is a lot of opportunity to draw people in, but it requires landowners of all different types, public, private, and non-profit, to work together and agree that there should be many different networks of trails crossing lots of different properties. He said the challenge is to get all these groups together and to agree on a vision for the network. He said he hopes that the Stewardship Council can help.

Mr. Jahnige said that he appreciated the comment, and that part of the office’s job is to work with all of these groups and users to understand the importance of this. He said that there is an impressive network of snowmobile trails and work to make crucial connections for it.

Councilor Collins thanked Mr. Jahnige for the presentation. He said he is excited for the office and for him to be leading it. He asked about tensions that might happen with private landowners with trail networks like the ones created by mountain bikers and how marketing these trails in a positive way can help. He also made the point about focusing on long distance trails like rail trails and community pushback that might happen to help towns see the benefits of adding to these trail networks. Councilor Collins said he was excited to see the focus on transit-based access to recreation.

Mr. Jahnige said he excited to use the transit system to advertise recreational opportunities and noted the new organization called Keolis Mass Adventures that is focused on providing adventures along the commuter rail system. He said that the focus on communities and economic opportunities is very important.

Councilor Collins also mentioned climate when thinking about outdoor recreation especially with snow sports like snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. He said that snow availability is changing and the season is growing shorter, and he said the office can focus on in the long term how are we going to keep people on these trails and keep the trails sustained when there is less snow available.

Councilor Smiley thanked Mr. Jahnige for being there and said she is excited by the presentation and his enthusiasm. She asked about how he mentioned in the presentation that recreation will be changing in the state.

Mr. Jahnige said that the slide he had about that looks long term at things like passenger drones, but in the near term focuses on how winter recreation will change as the climate changes and how forest composition and species might change, and how the infrastructure can be built for resilience.

Councilor Smiley added that the Stakeholders Committee is happy to collaborate as Mr. Jahnige is building up the office and creating relationships.

Councilor Dooley thanked Mr. Jahnige for the presentation. He said that he grew up sailing at Hopkinton State Park and seeing the presentation brought back memories of that. He asked what the Stewardship Council can do to promote opportunities that DCR and MOOR facilitate in the public.

Mr. Jahnige said that the council is in a position to hear from lots of different people and to share the ideas they hear with DCR, and that they can also share with him. He said he will be looking at the expansiveness of outdoor recreation and how to make it easier for people to recreate.

Councilor Wilson said that they are used to sometimes hearing about conservation and recreation at odds with each other, and she said it would be great to embrace the idea that each benefits from the other. She said that there is an opportunity statewide for conservation and responsible recreation and she asked that MOOR make that point.

Mr. Jahnige said that DCR has a wonderful mission that is sometimes challenging. He said that many of the requests that come in to DCR are recreation focused, and he said it would be helpful for DCR to think about recreation opportunities and requests that come in and how they can be acted upon looking at both sides of conservation and recreation. He said that he gets to be the advocate for recreation, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t thinking about conservation.

Chair Buckley asked what the budget for MOOR looks like.

Mr. Jahnige said that there is a small budget for $250,000 this year. He said that he is advocating for more staff and more budget, and he hopes over time that he can bring more resources to the table and look for creative funding opportunities. He said there is a bill right now that would use the sales tax from outdoor recreation equipment as funding for this office. He also mentioned having health insurers recognizing the benefits of outdoor recreation to help provide funding.

Chair Buckley asked if he anticipates doing an annual report that can be used as a summary when advocating.

Mr. Jahnige said that it is not on the list of to-dos this year, but the Bureau of Economic Analysis releases numbers every year, and that a snapshot of numbers is a good idea going forward.

Chair Buckley asked about the office’s business outreach.

Mr. Jahnige said he has been reaching out and meeting with lots of different businesses including guides, retailers, providers like ski mountains, and recently there was a meeting of Outdoor Recreation directors from New England with different businesses. He said he hopes to facilitate a business alliance within the next year.

Chair Buckley said that he feels that the outdoor recreation business sector is under appreciated. He said that he thinks something that can be built into the office is user ethics and encouraging people to respect and appreciate the land they use.

Lastly, Chair Buckley said that they create a budget recommendation every year and that they can work to include a recommendation for the Office of Outdoor Recreation this year.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Wilson made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 14, 2023 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

### Roll Call on Approval of Minutes

Councilor Harper: Yes

Councilor Canedy: Abstain

Councilor Wilson: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Yes

Councilor Dooley: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Abstain

Chair Buckley: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

The December 14, 2023 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:

* Dawn Titus Couture, Canton
* Denis LaForce, Sutton
* Arah Schuur, Somerville
* Sarah Freeman, Jamaica Plain
* Chuck Anastas, Mass Parks for All
* Alan Moore, Somerville
* Andres Ripley, Neponset River Watershed Association

## Regular Business II

### Committee Updates

#### Finance

Chair Buckley said that he was contacted by Patrice Kish last week who is interested in the contractor working on Capital planning having discussions with individual members of Council. He said that councilors might have some thoughts on how to inform people about projects. If any councilors are interested in talking to the contractor, they should contact Chair Buckley and he will put them in touch with Ms. Kish.

#### Policy Committee

The committee did not meet in December and will meet again in January. They will be looking at RMP planning for this year and potential legislative amendments to the council’s statute. Councilor Wilson encouraged all committees to look at strategic oversight plan.

#### Stakeholders

The committee met with Deputy Commissioner Zach Crowley, Ombudsman A.J. Tourigny, and Director of Partnerships David Burnes. They will be holding a listening session for Friends and Partners on February 26. Councilor Smiley encouraged groups that were present to apply to present at an upcoming Stewardship Council meeting.

#### Conservation

The comments for the Forest as Climate Solutions public comment period are the primary thing on committee’s mind. Councilors Collins and Crane would like to generate a comment letter that can be submitted. The Committees first meeting will be held on January 18, 2024, at 9am. Councilor Collins asked if there were any objections to the committee creating a comment letter and sending it in as a public comment. He asked that the Council take a vote.

Councilor Canedy moved to allow Chair Buckley to prepare a draft of a comment letter on the report of Climate Forestry that will be reviewed by the Conservation Committee.

Councilor O’Shea seconds

Councilor Wilson asked if they can instead approve the Conservation Committee to draft letter and then anyone who wants to can attend the committee meeting, which will be a public meeting, to give input.

The Council approved the motion as amended by Councilor Wilson.

Councilor Smiley presented the meeting dates and locations for 2024. She made a motion to approve the dates and locations as presented.

Councilor Canedy seconded the motion.

The dates and locations were approved.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Ortiz shared pictures of damage to the Neponset River Trail as a result of recent winter storms and thanked DCR staff for their prompt response in clearing the trail and making sure the public stayed out of flooded areas. She encouraged people to share when these things happen and to thank DCR staff for their work.

Councilor Crane said that he is very excited about the Office of Outdoor Recreation and looks forward to having interaction with them.

Councilor Collins thanked the Commissioner and DCR staff for their work putting together first day hikes. He said he was not part of one of the planned hikes but did go to Walden in the afternoon for a polar plunge and invited the Commissioner and the rest of the council to join him next year.

Councilor Doherty attended the hike at Houghton’s Pond on New Year’s Day and was surprised by the number of people jumping in.

Councilor O’Shea hiked Blue Hill after the storm and was impressed by the work done by staff to clear the trails and make them safe for hiking.

## Adjournment

Councilor Smiley 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>