**January Meeting Minutes**

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

**Council Members Absent**: Vivian Ortiz

**DCR Staff Attendees:** Matt Perry, Nick Connors, Doug Rice, Julie Martin, Peter Church, Mary Cardwell, Ilyse Wolberg, Thomas Brule, Carolyn Assa

**Public Attendees as Registered:** Priscilla Lynch, Roderick McLean, Brian Hawthorne, B. VanHeynigen, Bill VanDoren, Charlie Thompson, Chuck Anastas, Erin Baker, Ernie Foster, Glen Ayers, Jane LaForce, Jonathan Parrott, Karin Paquin, Karl Dziura, Keith DiNardo, Ken Conkey, Kris Massini, Laura Mattei, Lizzie Roche, Mike, N. Anzuoni

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

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors. He informed the councilors that there is a schedule of meetings for 2023 and reviewed the dates, and also spoke about the one remaining open seat on the Council. He invited Councilor Phil Doherty to introduce himself. Councilor Doherty said that he is from Quincy and was interested in joining the Council because he spends a lot of time hiking in the Blue Hills with his two sons.

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**DCR Report – Doug Rice, Commissioner**

Commissioner Rice thanked the Council and chair for inviting him to speak. He then gave an update on DCR activities over the prior month.

*Welcome New Councilors*

Commissioner Rice welcomed Phil Doherty and Kevin O’Shea who were appointed to the council the prior week and were attending their first meeting. Councilor Doherty was appointed to the Norfolk County Urban Parks seat and Councilor O’Shea to the Boston resident seat.

*New EEA Secretary*

The Commissioner also welcomed Rebecca Tepper, the new Secretary of EEA. Secretary Tepper joined EEA after serving as the chief of the energy and environment bureau in the attorney general's office. Prior to that, Secretary Tepper was general counsel for the Department of Public Utilities.

*Lone Walk and Inauguration*

DCR rangers and staff assisted at the State House with the Lone Walk and Inauguration ceremonies on January 4 and 5. Both are important and symbolic ceremonies that DCR is honored to be a part of.

*First Day Hikes*

The annual first day hikes were held on January 1, with 2071 participants hiking over 3000 miles at the 10 participating parks across the Commonwealth. Councilors were sent the hats that were given to the staff and volunteers working the event. Commissioner Rice thanked everyone who worked hard to make this event a success, especially Hillary Treat, DCR’s Manager of Statewide Intiatives, who coordinated with all of the participating parks.

*Park Serve Day*

Park Serve Day will be held on April 22, 2023, which is also Earth Day. 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. We encourage everyone to come out and participate on the day of. Matt Perry is helping to coordinate this event and will be in touch with councilors with more details as they become available.

*Summer Nights*

The Summer Nights program will start preparations soon. The agency was proud to see Governor Baker mention it during his farewell speech. As he mentioned, what started small in 2015 has grown to have almost 100 programs and 70 local non-profit partner organizations in 35 Massachusetts cities.

*2022 Fire Statistics*

The Commissioner shared the following statistics on wildfires and prescribed fire operations during 2022 with the Council:

* 1,196 wildfires occurred through December for a total of 1,785 acres burned on state and private lands.
* Over 310 DCR wildfire responses for requests from municipalities for assistance.
* Over 1,095 Individual Truck and Engine Runs to wildfire incidents.
* 17 Prescribed Fire Operations on DCR Lands for 327 Acres treated for both habitat restoration and hazardous fuels reduction.
* 74 TOTAL Prescribed Fire Operations completed on all agency lands for 2,066 Acres treated where DCR supported with critical resource needs for habitat restoration and hazardous fuels reduction.
* DCR FIRE supported statewide prescribed fire efforts with 299 Individual Truck and Engine runs in support.
* 47 Wildfire Related Trainings conducted by DCR Fire Staff for 857 local and state firefighters trained in various wildfire response standard disciplines.
* 120 Wildfire Prevention / Smokey Programs delivered statewide by DCR Forest Fire Control Staff at various municipality events.
* 35 Volunteer Fire Assistance grants awarded to 35 local call/volunteer fire departments for a total of $ 90,000 in partnership with the U.S.D.A. Forest Service to assist with equipment and projects, which support rural wildfire response.
* Four Patrolmen (FFIII) were added to year-round staffing

*Councilor Questions and Comments*

Councilor Collins asked Commissioner Rice for an update on the lease extension for the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area that was included in a recent economic development bill.

Commissioner Rice stated that the lease extension was executed the previous week.

Councilor Collins suggested that in situations such as this one if there should be a process for the Stewardship Council to be made aware of legislation related to DCR.

Chairman Buckley agreed with Councilor Collins and said he will work with Matt and the DCR legislative team to keep the council informed on future legislation.

Councilor Collins added that in the future, it would be good to check with the Wachusett Mountain Advisory Council to make sure that commitments made in the lease are being followed through with.

Councilor Smiley asked if Commissioner Rice had a sense of the new administration’s priorities based on the initial meetings he has had with them.

Commissioner Rice replied that the initial meetings he has had are very high level, but that he made a point of talking about staffing and how important that is to DCR. He said that he will report the administration’s priorities to the council when he knows what they are.

Chair Buckley commended DCR for their work on fire prevention, management, and prescribed burning. He asked Commissioner Rice for an update on the Strategic Readiness Initiative.

Commissioner Rice reported that the an email about the agencywide customer service training was being sent to staff later that day, that the agency is continuing to work on hiring, and that they are currently seeking a consultant to assist with capital planning work.

Chairman Buckley responded that he would like to learn more about capital planning and deferred maintenance. He asked if something could be put together that shows what the extra $10 million in funding that DCR received last year was used for to be shared with legislators and advocates when talking about budget priorities.

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**Regular Business I**

*Presentation from Brian Hawthorne, Habitat Program Manager at the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife*

Mr. Hawthorne presented on DFW’s habitat restoration program and what is done to help rare and declining species by turning forested areas into open habitats.

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

Councilor Crane asked Mr. Hawthorne for an example of DFW and DCR working as partners on a specific project.

Mr. Hawthorne responded that the Myles Standish Complex in southeastern Massachusetts was a good example. DFW and DCR worked together to restore habitat by removing pitch pine to open up the canopy. As a result of this work, the land has become more habitable for rare species and less susceptible to catastrophic wildfire.

Councilor Crane then asked about land acquisition and how DCR and DFW work together when land they acquire may be more appropriate for the other agency’s mission.

Mr. Hawthorne agreed that habitats don’t follow property lines and there are some places where DCR owns land that can support rare species and that DFW owns many acres that are good for recreation. He said it is important to continue working together as sister agencies.

Councilor Collins made a note about DCR’s fire suppression and how that may conflict with the need to mimic natural processes. He also asked about the current condition of the state’s forests and how forests can become more resilient through active management.

Mr. Hawthorn stated that almost all of the forest he showed in a photograph was a result of post-agriculture second growth forest that results in a “sea of sameness.” This is a result of forest that has been harvested in the past. The trees are even aged, diminished in genetic diversity, and susceptible to disease and wind falling. He said that there needs to be some amount of management to increase the vigor of the forest, and that management is different across the state.

Councilor Wilson asked for more information on the land acquisition program and what its budget is.

Mr. Hawthorne responded that the program is funded through wildlife stamps that are purchased with hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses, and that it also receives money from bond bills passed by the legislature. He explained that each of the five DFW districts has a land agent that looks for land that fills holes or protects certain habitats. He said that the total budget is usually between $5 and $6 million a year.

Chair Buckley asked how Mr. Hawthorne deals with the public perception of forest and forestry activities.

Mr. Hawthorne says that he takes people on tree harvest walks before, immediately after, and several years after to show the changes in the landscape based on the work that was done. He said it is important to show people and to get them onto the land that was restored so they can see the results.

Chair Buckley thanked Mr. Hawthorne for his presentation and for taking the time to attend the meeting.

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Chair Buckley welcomed Councilor Kevin O’Shea to the meeting and gave him a chance to introduce himself.

Councilor O’Shea thanked everyone, saying that he works as the Government Affairs director for National Grid, that he is a former DCR employee that worked with the Stewardship Council during his time with the agency, and that he currently works with Save the Harbor Save the Bay and the Trustees on the Piers Park III project in East Boston.

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

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

Councilor Smiley stated that she felt the minutes were missing a portion where Chair Buckley speaks about the Council’s accomplishments over the past year.

Councilor Wilson moved to delay the minutes to approve with changes.

The minutes were not approved but will be reviewed again next month.

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*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:

* Jon Parrot, Chesterfield, MA
* Glenn Ayers, Greenfield, MA
* Ken Conkey, Belchertown, MA
* Laura Mattei, Sudbury Valley Trustees
* Charlie Thompson, Pelham, MA
* Karl Dziura, Conway, MA

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**Regular Business II**

*Committee Updates*

**Finance –** The Finance Committee met on January 6 and discussed its calendar of meetings and meeting topics for the upcoming year. They will start with a discussion on the capital budget and how it relates to deferred maintenance. At future meetings they would like to discuss the operating budget and income that is gained through forestry practices. The committee will also be holding a budget forum.

**Policy** – The Policy Committee has not met since December but will be holding a meeting later this month.

**Stakeholders** – The Stakeholders Committee will be meeting on January 27 and will set up a calendar of meetings for the rest of the year.

Councilor Wilson asked about the process for the two new members of the Council to join committees, what the ideal number of members of the committees and their descriptions are, and whether there should be terms for committee membership.

Councilor Smith suggested that the Council create a standing nominating committee that could begin considering officers for next year.

Councilor Buckley asked Councilor Smith if he would be willing to chair a standing nominating committee if it was created to which Councilor Smith replied yes.

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*Councilor Comments*

Councilor Crane suggested that the Council consider also adding a Natural Resources Committee and that this committee could be an asset when it comes to the Council considering RMPs and budgets.

Chair Buckley said that they will discuss a different committee structure in the coming weeks.

Councilor Smith said that he was doing research on Fisheries and Wildlife in preparation for this meeting and found biographies on the members of the DFW board. He asked if bios for the councilors can be added to the Stewardship Council website.

Chair Buckley said that it was a good idea and that everyone should send a short bio to Matt for the website.

Councilor Collins thanked Mr. Hawthorne for his presentation, welcomed Councilors Doherty and O’Shea, and noted that the second environmental seat is still open on the council and that the list of people nominated by the environmental organizations should be checked and updated.

Councilor Dooley thanked Mr. Hawthorne for his presentation.

Councilor Doherty thanked everyone for their welcome to the council.

Councilor O’Shea thanked everyone for the welcome and stated he looks forward to working together.

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**Adjournment**

The Council adjourned the meeting at 10:40.

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