# **March 2024 Meeting Minutes**

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

**Council Members Absent:** Melissa Harper, Jennifer Wilson

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

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Caleb Slater, Buzz Constable, Chuck Anastas, Denny LaForce, Elizabeth Roche, Michael Norton, Mike Duclos, Sarah Freeman, Suzanne Gall Marsh

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

Chair Buckley welcomed everyone to the meeting and did a roll call of councilors present. He spoke about the joint meeting that was held last month with the Fish and Wildlife Board, saying he thought it was successful and that the meetings should be held regularly. He thanked Mr. Perry, Sue Sacco from Fish and Wildlife, Steve Sears, Chair of the Fish and Wildlife board, and Assistant Secretary Kurt Gaertner who gave a presentation on the EEA Forests as Climate Solutions report. Chair Buckley also attended the Stakeholders listening session on February 26 and said it was a great success and that Councilor Smiley will talk more about it.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked the Council for having him. He then gave an update on recent activities at the agency.

### Cass Center Programs

Commissioner Arrigo reported that all 10 programs that were running out of the Cass Recreation Center have been confirmed to operate from alternate locations while the facility is being used as a temporary migrant shelter.

* The BASE baseball program is now being hosted at the City of Boston’s Holland Community Center
* 24 hr. Fitness is now at the Reggie Lewis Center
* Boston Unity Soccer is at Curtis Hall in Jamaica Plain
* CPR is at our own Roxbury Heritage State Park
* Boston City Youth Tennis is at Boston University and the Menino YMCA in Hyde Park.
* Harlem Lacross is at the Vine Street Boston Center for Youth and Family
* Senior Walkers has moved to the Reggie Lewis Center
* The Handball Association is at UMass Boston, the Boston Latin Academy, and Starland Sports
* Boston United Track is at the Reggie Lewis Center and Madison Park High School
* And Franklin Park Tennis is at the Roxbury YMCA and the Reggie Lewis Center.

### Lifeguard Recruitment

Last week, DCR kicked off its annual recruitment campaign for lifeguards, swim instructors and other waterfront safety staff to work at our beaches and pools across the state this summer. DCR beaches and pools are popular places for people of all abilities and backgrounds to enjoy as they cool off from the summer heat. Staffing these places with qualified lifeguards is part of our ongoing effort to ensure visitors to our properties feel safe and welcome.  Commissioner Arrigo said that ensuring DCR has enough qualified lifeguards is a matter of public health and equity – which is why last year, the Administration raised the hourly rate for our water safety staff to its highest rate ever - $22-$27 depending on position and qualifications. DCR is also offering up to $1250 in early sign on and retention bonuses for qualified water safety staff who remain in good standing and stay through Labor Day - the end of the season for DCR’s coastal beaches. DCR lifeguard applicants must be at least 16 years old by their date of hire, have completed lifeguard training, and be certified in first aid and CPR. DCR offers free lifeguard training classes through May for candidates who commit to working prior to the start of the summer season.

### Universal Access Programs

DCR’s Universal Access Program focuses on programs like adaptive hiking and skating in the winter months, showing how they’re committed to fulfilling DCR’s mission of ensuing everyone can access our natural, cultural and recreational resources. The DCR communications team created a video on social media which offers a quick insight into all UAP does during the winter season. [Winter Sports for All! | Universal Access Program (youtube.com)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKaFzIMvgzM) The UAP team recently held a program with our partners at All Out Adventures that made it possible for visitors of all abilities to enjoy the snow-covered landscapes at Dunn State Park and Wendell State Forest before the arrival of spring, using specialized equipment. Utilizing adaptive snowshoes, sit skis, or other assistive devices, the team worked to make sure everyone had the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the winter scenery.

### Camping Reservations

Commissioner Arrigo reported that camping reservations went live at 9am on March 6 for the 2024 season. DCR received over 10,000 reservations in the first 24 hours – nearly double what we took in the year before. Director of Camping Pat Lee has been fielding calls and emails from the public and working closely with ReserveAmerica, the DCR Communications Team, legislative affairs staff, and Community Relations Coordinator Bill Hickey, to handle any issues or questions that have come in.

### Gays Hill Barrens Restoration Events at Quabbin

Commissioner Arrigo noted that over the last month, Gays Hill Barrens on Quabbin Reservation in New Salem has been full of excitement.  On February 17, staff welcomed students from the UMass "Femmes in Forestry" group for a special barrens restoration tour led by DCR-DWSP Natural Resource Specialist Ginny Dautreuil and Forester Helen Johnson. The visit was impactful, with all of the group members expressing that the event provided them with a vision for their future in forestry and natural resources.  He said that programs like this play a crucial role in cultivating the next generation of stewards, while also contributing to the expansion and diversification of the DCR workforce.

On February 22, after more than a year of planning by Ginny Dautreuil and others, weather conditions allowed a prescribed fire at Gays Hill Barrens. DCR Chief Fire Warden Dave Celino and DCR Fire Program Coordinator Alex Belote oversaw the fire as Burn Boss and Burn Boss trainee, respectively. More than 30 people showed up for the fire crew, including 16 folks from DCR Fire Control and the DCR Division of Water Supply Protection, one from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and 13 firefighters from municipal fire departments in New Salem, Petersham, Warwick and Wendell.

### February Break Wrap Up

DCR had nearly 3,000 visitors join us at our February Break events throughout the state. From guided hikes to animal tracking, craft making, and maple sugaring, families had a blast at over 100 awesome programs with DCR’s terrific staff.  Commissioner Arrigo commented that it's fantastic to see so many people getting out to the properties and enjoying all that they have to offer. He thanked everyone who participated, planned, and supported these events and made them a huge success.

### Maple Sugaring at Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park

Commissioner Arrigo highlighted the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, which welcomed more than 400 visitors for the annual Maple Sugaring Weekend event during February break. Visitor Services Supervisor Sherine Hamade led the event, with assistance from park staff Ray Longvall, Joe Taylor, and Pat Brown, as well as rangers Jason Hunt and Rebecca Baronoski, and Regional Interpretive Coordinator Matt Villamaino.  He thanked the dedicated staff and volunteers from the Blackstone Heritage Corridor whose hard work and enthusiasm have made this event a favorite among visitors.

### Breakheart Maple Sugarin’

Commissioner Arrigo was joined by Secretary Tepper, Undersecretary Cooper, and hundreds of members of the public for the annual Maple Sugarin’ event at Breakheart Reservation. His boys and their new puppy, Bella, went with him, and had a great time learning about the history of maple sugaring, watching the sap boil and become maple syrup, and even using an old pull saw to help cut a log to put into the fire.

He said that we are lucky to have two parks that put on great events related to a great cultural tradition in New England and he thanked the staff at Breakheart, especially Brett Power and Jessica Narog-Hutton who worked hard to organize this event and make it a success.

### Summer Nights

The Commissioner announced a new streamlined process for organizations to become a youth programming partner. Through a Request for Responses process, DCR will award organizations the opportunity to be part of a “Master Contract.”  Once a vendor is awarded a master contract, they will be able to submit proposals for various youth programming opportunities at DCR including DCR’s Summer Nights Program. All partners who previously participated in DCR’s Summer Nights program and any new organizations that would like to apply must follow this new process.

### Coffee Q and As

Last month, Commissioner Arrigo wrapped up his regional Virtual Coffee Q&A chats, where he sat down (virtually) with staff from across the state to discuss current initiatives, share perspectives, and address any questions or concerns about DCR. He said these were a great opportunity for him and DCR’s senior team to learn from the staff on the ground about the issues they are experiencing and how they can improve and become a better DCR. He said that these are the first of many conversations he’ll be having like this and that they hope to do them quarterly.

### Park Serve Day

Park Serve Day is just around the corner, happening this year on Saturday, April 20, and in a few parks on Sunday, April 21. This year, 35 properties will be participating, with volunteers collecting trash, raking leaves, planting, weeding, painting, and more to help get ready for our busy spring and summer seasons. Last year, almost 4,000 volunteers turned out across the Commonwealth, and they hope to see even more this year. Park Serve Day is one of DCR’s signature stewardship initiatives. It inspires visitors to help us maintain our precious natural resources. More information about the participating locations and registration are available on the Park Serve Day website.

### Damage Collection Tool

Commissioner Arrigo said that with the increase in severe weather events over the last six months, DCR is launching an online tool, available to all staff, to gather information about damage to DCR assets and resources, resulting from a wide range of causes to streamline our repairs process. This not only includes floods and storms, but it also has the capacity to collect data related to accidents, structural failures, and anything else that could impact the operation of facilities. The information we are seeking to collect includes the damage type, severity, operational status, and estimated and eventual costs of repair. Communicating this information to operations and other staff (via maps and dashboards) will help us track the overall status of outages, support repairs and operations, and, eventually, help managers determine the extent and cumulative costs of damage to our assets.

### Eclipse Programming

There will be a partial solar eclipse happening in Massachusetts on April 8. To celebrate, our parks staff are putting together programming and watch events to experience this unique event. Six parks, Blackstone Heritage, Blue Hills Reservation, Borderland State Park, Great Falls Discovery Center, Halibut Point, and WBNERR, will be holding events with interpretive staff that will help explain and view the natural phenomenon. The parks will have eclipse viewing glasses and staff will be on-hand to help visitors have a great time and safely observe the eclipse. Events will be taking place from 2:15 – 4:40 p.m. with the eclipse peak happening at 3:30 p.m.

### Canopy 2024 Conference

On March 21, EEA, DCR, and DFG will host Canopy 2024: The Forests, Climate, and Innovations Forum. This inaugural event will bring together current and future forest owners, professionals, business leaders, educators, and policymakers to discuss forests, climate change, and the innovations within the forestry industry. Canopy 2024 will include educational sessions for landowners, those currently in the forest industry, and future forest land managers. It is being held in the Olver Design Building at UMass Amherst which is the largest and most technologically advanced academic contemporary wood structure in the United States.

The day will include remarks from Commissioner Arrigo, Commissioner O’Shea, and Secretary Tepper, and will feature host Tom Bodett as the keynote speaker. It will also feature remarks from Councilor Dicken Crane.

### Park Madness

The DCR communications team is working on a “Park Madness” bracket based on the popular March Madness basketball tournament. This campaign ran for the first-time last year and saw great engagement over social media. This year’s bracket will feature 16 parks.

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Ortiz asked if the new damage reporting tool would be in real-time.

The Commissioner said yes, noting that the training for the tool still needs to happen. He said that the idea is to have the updates happen in real time and as close as possible to when events occur.

Councilor Ortiz said that she is really happy to hear that and that she has built up great relationships with staff reporting damage along the Neponset trail.

Councilor O’Shea said that he is happy to hear that all the programming at the Cass Center has been transitioned to other locations. He asked if there were fees involved with the new locations and if transportation was an issue for those who attend the programs.

Commissioner Arrigo replied that DCR covered the cost for displaced programs, and that to the best of his knowledge, they worked with the programs so transportation wouldn’t be difficult, noting that the relocation efforts centered in the area around the Cass Center. He said that in many instances, the partners taking programs in were willing to make it work for the short amount of time that they need to be displaced.

Councilor O’Shea asked if there was still a plan to renovate the center after the departure of the inhabitants.

Commissioner Arrigo said yes, that priority number one is to get the pool ready to go for the summer. He added that as the shelter use starts to diminish towards the end of May, DCR wants to be ready to go for the capital improvements that they want to make that they’ve heard from the community about. He said they are focused on listening to the community and working with them about the improvements they would like to see.

Councilor O’Shea said that he would appreciate regular updates on the topic.

Councilor Collins commented about the severe weather reporting tool and that most of these severe weather events are climate related and that he hopes that repairs are made through a resilience lens and that things are removed from the path of damage that they know will be becoming more frequent. He noted that last month the Commissioner spoke about Salisbury State Beach and repairing some of the access points, and the recent headlines in the Boston Globe about the sand that was brought in to build dunes being washed away. DCR had permitted access for the property owners to make repairs and that they are looking for additional support to repair the damage. He said that he believes DCR investment on private land would not be appropriate, and that generally damage to property on the coast is becoming more common and that allowing the coast to be wild and respond naturally is the best way to go instead of trying to hold back the tide.

Councilor Crane commented about the Greylock Glen project and concerns he is hearing from people in the Berkshires. The project involves the lease of DCR land to the town of Adams and a company that will be building a campsite that is right in the center of the trail system. There is concern that this was not part of the original plan, and that there is not ongoing communication between DCR and the town of Adams. He said he thinks it is important for DCR to be involved with this and that he is concerned that DCR doesn’t seem to be weighing in.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he can connect with people who have concerns about the project.

Councilor Smiley noted that Mr. Perry recently drafted a response about the Greylock Glen in response to concerns raised at the Stakeholders Committee meeting.

Councilor Buckley commented that he was struck that 10,000 people tried to make camping reservations in a 24-hour period, and that he would like to see the agency push that out as a news item especially to the legislature. He said that it is always impressive when something like that happens at a concert and that it gains attention, and although DCR may not be as popular as Taylor Swift, it is important to push information like that out.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he agrees.

## Regular Business I

### Trout Stocking Presentation – Caleb Slater, Chief of Hatcheries, MassWildlife

Mr. Slater presented to the council about the state’s trout stocking program focusing on DCR lands where the fish are stocked.

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

Councilor Smith said that he received a letter about what DCR does with the stocking of trout. He said that at the beginning of Mr. Slater’s presentation, it sounded like what he said is that stocking is not to increase population, but to have people catch them. He asked if the purpose at Nickerson State Park for all of the stocked fish to get caught.

Mr. Slater responded yes that it is not the intention to create or enhance populations of trout. He said they want people to catch the fish and take them home and eat them. He noted that in deep ponds, a certain percentage of trout will survive, but that just means they get bigger and can be caught next season. He said that there is a healthy population of wild trout in Massachusetts and that they don’t need to increase it with stocking.

Councilor Crane asked if Mr. Slater knew how many stocked fish are eaten by other wild animals before there is a chance for the public to catch them.

Mr. Slater said that in the hatcheries, they struggle to keep them out of the hands of the birds and otters, but that once they are out in the wild, they are up for grabs.

Chair Buckley thanked Mr. Slater for the presentation, and said it is a good example of two agencies working together. He said that people are attracted to DCR properties because of the stocking, and that recreational fishing is one of many outdoor activities that generates a huge amounts of tax revenue for the state.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 15, 2024 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

### Roll Call on Approval of Minutes

Councilor Canedy: Yes

Councilor Smith: Yes

Councilor Ortiz: Yes

Councilor Crane: Yes

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Smiley: Abstain

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Councilor O’Shea: Yes

Chair Buckley: Yes

The February 15, 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. There was no public comment given.

## Regular Business II

### Review of Stakeholders Committee Listening Session

On February 26, 2024, the Stewardship Council Stakeholders Committee held a listening session on Zoom for DCR’s friends and partners. Councilor Smiley recapped the session for the Council.

Councilor Smiley said that they were pleasantly surprised by the amount of people who showed up to participate in the listening session and that they were grateful for having staff from DCR and EEA there.

A summary was created by Councilor Harper that will be posted, and Councilor Smiley said the key takeaways were that there was positive feedback about the agency, its staff, and the willingness to work with partners. The other feedback was that there can be an improvement in communication and closing the loop on questions. The general feedback was that people want to know more about events, have an improved website experience, and to interact more with the agency.

Recommendations from the Committee include being better about public announcements, holding celebrations and recognizing milestones, giving updates on the Strategic Readiness Initiative progress, increasing staff, and creating a structure where feedback can be understood.

Councilor Smiley said that another listening session will be held sometime in the summer.

Councilor Smith said that twenty-four people commented at the listening session, and that may be why the council did not get any public comments today.

### Committee Updates

#### Conservation

The Conservation Committee has reached out to Deputy Commissioner Geigis to discuss the committee and how it can be helpful to DCR. Following the meeting with her, they will outline a plan for the committee’s work. Councilor Collins said that for the open environmental seat, Mr. Perry has been in touch with the Governor’s Boards and Commissions office and they are moving through the list of nominees.

#### Policy Committee

The committee did not meet in February. They will be looking at paring down updates to the legislation that was discussed by full committee several years ago.

#### Stakeholders

The committee will be sending a thank you note to those who participated and offered comments at the listening session. They will be discussing holding an in-person meeting with friends and partners and will be meeting on April 5 at 8am.

#### Finance

Chair Buckley said that he spoke with Patrice Kish and met with the consultants that are working on the capital projects dashboard. They would like to talk with more members of the council and any councilor who is interested should contact him.

Councilor Doherty expressed interest.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor Smith said he did not know that the council was looking at drafting legislation and ask if the whole council will be able to give input.

Councilor Collins responded that it will be discussed by the full council first. The intent was to discuss what was brought up a few years ago, especially the term lengths being seven years and staggering the terms since half of the council’s term ends in 2025.

Councilor Canedy clarified that legislation is a work in progress that started several years ago and didn’t go anywhere. She said that the changes they are trying to make are the “low hanging fruit”.

Councilor Collins commented that in regards to appointments, since there are terms ending next year, it is not too early to start talking with those who may be interested in joining the council and getting the word out.

Councilor Doherty asked about lifeguard staffing last year and whether if it was difficult to recruit.

Commissioner Arrigo said the goal was to hire 700 lifeguards and pool safety staff and were able to exceed that last year. He said the increase in pay and bonus helped, along with the additional outreach. This year, they are doing outreach earlier and this year they are again targeting 700 lifeguards and water safety staff.

Councilor O’Shea said that he would be interested in hearing from someone at DCR about traffic enforcement in urban zones. He said he is concerned with what he has been seeing on DCR roads in the city and wants to know more about how DCR works to ensure pedestrian and bike safety.

Chair Buckley said he would work with Mr. Perry to get that presentation and said he would also follow up on Save the Harbor, Save the Bay.

Councilor Crane said that he was talking to someone from DCR in the Berkshires and he commented about how well the hiring was going but said that there should be some kind of dashboard for the public and DCR employees to see whose who so people can know who does what at the agency.

Councilor Smiley commented that in additional Councilor O’Shea’s suggestion, she would also be interested in DCR’s work with MEMA and roadways. She also said that she would be interested in talking with the consultants about the dashboard.

Chair Buckley said that they can get a presentation about the functional aspects of the DCR road network and how they manage it.

## Adjournment

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>