



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
WATER RESOURCES COMMISSION  
100 CAMBRIDGE STREET, BOSTON MA 02114

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**Meeting Minutes for December 10, 2015**

100 Cambridge Street, Boston, MA, 1:00 p.m.

*Minutes approved February 11, 2016*

**Members in Attendance:**

Kathleen Baskin	Designee, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
Linda Balzotti	Designee, Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
Anne Carroll	Designee, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
Douglas Fine	Designee, Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Catherine deRonde	Designee, Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR)
Todd Richards	Designee, Department of Fish and Game (DFG)
Thomas Cambareri	Public Member
Raymond Jack	Public Member

**Members Absent**

Todd Callaghan	Designee, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM)
Paul Matthews	Public Member
Bob Zimmerman	Public Member

**Others in Attendance:**

Michele Drury	DCR
David Manugian	Town of Ashland
Linda Hutchins	DCR
Peter Weiskel	U.S. Geological Survey
Richard Verdi	U.S. Geological Survey
Erin Graham	DCR
Jen Pederson	Massachusetts Water Works Association
Julia Blatt	Massachusetts Rivers Alliance
Pam Heidell	Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
Marilyn McCrory	DCR
Duane LeVangie	MassDEP
Shi Chen	MassDEP
Sara Cohen	DCR
Lexi Dewey	Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee
Andreae Downs	Wastewater Advisory Committee
Laila Parker	DFG-DER

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Baskin called the meeting to order at 1:09 p.m.

**Agenda Item #1: Executive Director's Report**

Baskin introduced Erin Graham of DCR to provide an update on the hydrologic conditions for November 2015. November precipitation was below normal, except for the Cape Cod and the Islands region. Precipitation in the Central and Northeast regions reached the advisory level in the percent-of-normal index. Streamflows were below normal for the Central, Northeast, and Southeast regions, triggering the advisory level for the streamflow index in the *Drought Management Plan*; streamflows were in the normal range in the western part of the state.

Groundwater levels were below normal in the Central and Northeast regions and normal elsewhere. Reservoir percent-full values were generally normal; values reported in the Central region were below normal and triggered the Watch level in the *Drought Management Plan* reservoir index.

Baskin invited further comment on current drought conditions, noting that three drought parameters had been triggered in some regions. Hutchins explained that staff are closely tracking all seven drought parameters in the *Drought Management Plan*. She reviewed each of the parameters, noting that some are close to being below normal, and explained that some of the indices must be below normal for two of three consecutive months to trigger the threshold for the advisory level or above. She added that a meeting of the Drought Management Task Force may be scheduled in January 2016.

Comments, questions, and responses:

- Water suppliers sometimes deliberately draw down a reservoir as part of their normal operations. Is this considered when collecting data on reservoir levels? Response: Yes, information is requested on other factors that may affect the report.
- What are the implications when drought conditions occur during the winter season? Response: A winter drought declaration would serve as an alert, affecting planning for activities in the spring.

**Agenda Item #2: Vote on the Minutes of November 2015**

Baskin invited a motion to approve the meeting minutes for November 12, 2015.

V	A motion was made by Richards with a second by Jack to approve the meeting minutes for November 12, 2015.
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The vote to approve was unanimous of those present.	

**Agenda Item #3: Presentation: Proposed Request from town of Ashland for an Interbasin Transfer of Water from the MWRA System and Request for Additional Information**

Baskin introduced Michele Drury of DCR to provide an overview. She also welcomed David Manugian of the town of Ashland and invited him to offer comments. Manugian thanked the commission for entertaining its application and commended WRC staff for their expert assistance throughout the process. Drury acknowledged Pam Heidell of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA).

Drury provided background on Ashland's proposed request for an interbasin transfer of water. She reviewed Ashland's water supply sources adjacent to the Hopkinton Reservoir and the reasons the town had decided to seek water from the MWRA through an interbasin transfer request. She noted that the capacity of the town's existing wells is limited by the capacity of its water treatment plant. She also noted that potential alternative in-basin water sources are problematic environmentally. She explained that the town is seeking to purchase up to 1.6 mgd from the MWRA to supplement its existing sources in the Concord River Basin.

She described the Interbasin Transfer Act application process, noting that the town must complete the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) process before the Water Resources Commission considers the request for an interbasin transfer. She outlined the town's

submittals to date, noting that the Certificate from the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs on the town's draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) outlines the scope for the final EIR, including additional information required in the final EIR, including a written water conservation plan. Drury outlined the next steps and timeline for review, public hearings, and a decision by the Water Resources Commission.

Richards noted an interest in maintaining streamflows downstream of Hopkinton Reservoir and encouraging minimal use of the town's sources in the summer months. He also encouraged consideration of information in a USGS/DFW report on habitat associated with the reservoir.

Drury commented that staff will keep the commission informed on the progress of the final EIR.

**Agenda Item #4: Update: USGS Budget and Monitoring Network**

Baskin introduced Linda Hutchins of DCR and Richard Verdi and Peter Weiskel of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to provide an update on the USGS Cooperative Program, particularly the program's hydrologic monitoring network and budget.

Hutchins noted that this is an annual update, requested by the commission, on the cooperative program's activities, accomplishments, budget status, and needs in the coming year. She provided an overview of how the data are used by various entities, including for emergency management and flood forecasting; engineering calculations such as septic system and bridge design and flood zone mapping; landslide forecasting; and environmental monitoring, including climate change. She noted that the Massachusetts network of gages has been in place for more than one hundred years.

Verdi and Hutchins highlighted important elements of the program, including the USGS stream gage network of 57 real-time gages; the USGS groundwater network, consisting of 92 observation wells; the network of precipitation and meteorological stations; tide gages; a landslide warning system; and interpretive studies (funded through other sources). They noted that the groundwater network helps in tracking changes in water resources over time, serving as the climate response network in Massachusetts.

Hutchins and Verdi discussed potential changes to the various networks, costs associated with each activity, and considerations such as the need to fill data gaps, the desirability of a long period of record, changes in technology, and the need to replace deteriorated wells to ensure data integrity and validity. Hutchins and Verdi discussed the anticipated FY2017 budget for the hydrologic monitoring network and other elements of the cooperative program. They also highlighted specific funding needs, including replacing about 45 wells in the groundwater network. Other ongoing work by USGS with other agencies includes updating the equations used by the Sustainable Yield Estimator tool, flood frequency equations, and flood inundation mapping. Baskin noted that, historically, interpretive studies have also been funded through the cooperative program, but these have not been funded through this program in recent years.

Questions and discussion addressed concerns about quality assurance and quality control of data before it is used in a policy setting; the high cost associated with real-time monitoring wells; coverage of the groundwater well network, particularly on Cape Cod and in western Massachusetts; the importance of continuing the data set so that it is available for long-term

trend analyses; potential ways to achieve efficiencies without compromising data; and potential sources of funding. In response to several comments about the Environmental Bond as a source of funding, Baskin commented that she would raise the issue of funding needs, particularly for the estimated one hundred to one hundred fifty thousand dollars needed for repairs to wells in the groundwater network. Baskin explained that the Environmental Bond is a policy document that indicates on what and at what level the legislature will allow spending to occur, but does not provide actual funding.

Jack commented that, given the significance and implications of the program's activities, a high priority should be given to securing adequate funding in the near term. Baskin responded that she would bring up funding needs with senior leadership at EEA, noting that this is a matter of interagency concern.

Meeting adjourned, 2:30 p.m.

**Documents or Exhibits Used at Meeting:**

1. WRC Meeting Minutes for November 12, 2015
2. Correspondence dated November 6, 2015, from Water Resources Commission to MEPA Office regarding Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)/Interbasin Transfer Act (ITA) Application for the Town of Ashland's Supplemental Water Supply
3. Memorandum dated December 12, 2015, from WRC Staff to Water Resources Commission regarding Ashland's Interbasin Transfer Application, Request for Admission to the MWRA: Request for Additional Information
4. 2016 Meeting Schedule, Water Resources Commission
5. Interbasin Transfer Act project status report, November 19, 2015
6. Hydrologic Conditions in Massachusetts, November 2015 Summary (available at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/water-res-protection/water-data-tracking/precipitation-composite-current-conditions.html>)
7. Map of Town of Ashland's Existing Water Supply Sources and Investigated Sources.
8. Presentation by Linda Hutchins and Richard Verdi: Update and Status of the USGS/MA Cooperative Hydrologic Monitoring Network

*Compiled by: mjm*

*Agendas, minutes, and meeting documents are available on the web site of the Water Resources Commission at [www.mass.gov/eea/wrc](http://www.mass.gov/eea/wrc) under "MA Water Resources Commission Meetings."*