# Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present: Jennifer Wilson, Jeff Collins, Phil Doherty

**Committee Members Absent:** Ann Canedy

**Other Councilors Present:** Dicken Crane, Jack Buckley

DCR Staff Attendees: Matthew Perry, Paul Cavanagh

## Call to Order and Welcome – Committee Chair Jennifer Wilson

Chair Wilson welcomed the attendees and went over the meeting agenda.

## Approval of Minutes

Councilor Collins made a motion to approve the October 31, 2023 meeting minutes.

Councilor Doherty seconded.

### ***Roll Call on the Approval of Minutes***

Councilor Collins: Yes

Councilor Doherty: Yes

Chair Wilson: Yes

The October minutes were approved.

## South Coast RMPs

Paul Cavanagh, Resource Management Planner at DCR was welcomed to the meeting by Chair Wilson to discuss the South Coast Resource Management Plans (RMPs) that will be considered for approval at the December 14, 2023 meeting.

Mr. Cavanagh said he was available for any questions that the Councilors may have.

Chair Wilson said that she had some minor edits that she would send to Mr. Cavanagh concerning grammar and formatting.

Councilor Collins asked about the parts of plans dealing with Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) usage, unapproved trails, and the impacts of those issues on rare species. He noted that in the plans, it says that the issue has to do with capacity because given the size of parks and the staffing available, it is hard to address these concerns. He asked what the pathway to making sure these issues are addressed is.

Mr. Cavanagh responded that there are currently attempts happening to address these problems. He said that when mountain bike technical features are found and reported like banked turns or jumps, Rangers take them down and remove all materials from the park. He said that this recently happened in Acushnet Cedar Swamp and is particularly dangerous because the public may think that the features may be endorsed by DCR or up to a certain standard when they are not. He also said that similar issues are happening at Freetown/Fall River State Forest and that this is a larger issue that needs to be addressed agency wide.

Chair Wilson said that she spoke with Chris Redfern of Friends of the Middlesex Fells and he wanted to know who to connect with to expand the “Be Kind!” program to the parks in the South Coast.

Mr. Cavanagh said that he has spoken with Chris a number of times about the Fells and RMPs and that he could do a good job helping with some of the issues being faced at parks.

Chair Wilson noted that the “Be Kind!” program is new, and that the Fells has compliance issues that the program is trying to address.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the South Coast also has compliance issues, but that there are lots of passionate friends groups in the area that can be engaged and utilized.

Councilor Collins said that this conversation reminded him of the presentation the Council Received from Eve Schluter of MassWildlife about the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. He said that part of the law is that all agencies must support rare species and prioritize rare species habitat, adding that trail use is impacting rare species and that it is important to say not only how the issues with illegal trails and OHV are being balanced, but what is being done to protect rare species in this setting. He also said that the plans mention a review of illegal trails and how they are going to be closed or integrated and that he advises not to integrate them because it may encourage those who build these trails.

Mr. Cavanagh said in regards to the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, every plan is reviewed by MassWildlife and they respond with how to best protect rare and endangered species. He said for integration of illegal trails, this is standard language that has been developed by DCR’s Trails and Greenways team and that if the illegal trails meet DCR’s standards and do not disturb sensitive habitats or cultural resources, they will be considered for integration into the park.

Councilor Buckley said that trails are complicated and that it might be a good discussion to have when meeting jointly with the Fish and Wildlife board and that they could have a discussion with the Attorney General’s office about what can be done.

Chair Wilson said that looking at the role of the council, approval of the recommendations made in the RMPs are one piece, and the next piece is monitoring the implementation of the plan. She said that this is the piece the council doesn’t get to, and that even though it is not part of the mandate, it should be part of the approval process.

Councilor Collins said that after reading them, he felt that there needs to be a way to adequately look at the OHV issues and address them. He added that he would like there to be more specific language about what the recommendation is and to illuminate what standard DCR follow up to these cases are.

Mr. Cavanagh suggested that the Council request an update two or three years after the approval of the plans to check in on progress. He said that there is standard language in each RMP about getting the recommendations into DCR’s Capital Asset Management Information System (CAMIS) and that within the system, there is a specific code to identify RMP recommendations.

Councilor Collins asked if there will be any changes to the RMPs before the vote on December 14.

Mr. Cavanagh said that it is the current iteration that the council was presented at the November 9 meeting are what will be going for an up or down vote. He said that he welcomes comments but is not looking to restructure things. He said that if there are things that need to be changed, the six RMPs from the Blackstone Complex present the opportunity to move things in a different direction.

Councilor Buckley said that moving forward, the Council could ask to give special attention to issues that will affect every RMP such as unauthorized trails.

Mr. Cavanagh said that there are a number of issues that are brought up in RMPs that they are ahead of the agency on and find that there is no structure in place to address them.

Chair Wilson noted that the council just got a presentation on trails but that because they didn’t know this was an issue, they didn’t get to discuss it.

Mr. Cavanagh said that he recently saw a YouTube video of someone riding on an unauthorized trail on a DCR property. He contacted staff throughout the agency who went out and disassembled it before it became popular. He said that with so many properties and so many people willing to build their own trails, they can only address it as they encounter it.

Councilor Collins said that the council should keep this subject in mind for the next conversation about the budget and in conversations with the Commissioner.

Councilor Buckley said that there should be a way to give penalties that make people pay attention, and that the Department of Fish and Wildlife face many of the same problems.

Councilor Doherty asked if signs could be put in the parking lot as a deterrent for these activities.

Mr. Cavanagh said that he was not aware of an effort to do that, and that in the past it has been more common to work directly with the community rather than to put up signs.

Councilor Buckley said that there is a lot of energy in the trails community and can be directed in the right direction.

Councilor Doherty said that electric trail bikes may become an issue that adds to this problem.

Councilor Collins said that friends groups can work to go through the process of trail building and to curtail folks from building them illegally.

Mr. Cavanagh said that the people who engage with DCR are the ones who want to see the process done correctly and are not affiliated with the issue.

Chair Wilson said that since the Stewardship Council has approval authority, if there is something that they feel strongly about, they can choose to not approve the plan and to have it come back with changes for reconsideration.

## Councilor Terms

Chair Wilson said that as part of drafting the Strategic Oversight Plan, it brought the issue of terms back up. Previously the committee had approved amendments to the legislation that included staggering terms and changing the length of terms from seven years to five years. She said that she has had discussions with the Governor’s office on Boards and Commissions, and that although they are aware of the situation, there isn’t anything they can do to change it. The change will have to come legislatively. She added that they also want to have the groups that nominate the environmental seats on the council to be more representative of all friends groups.

Councilor Buckley said that they could find a sponsor to have the terms changed in a supplemental budget, but that they might want to split that from the environmental seat issue.

Chair Wilson asked if Mr. Perry had any updates on the second environmental seat that needs to be filled.

Mr. Perry said that he has not heard anything but will follow up with EEA and the Governor’s office.

Councilor Crane suggested that Representatives Paul Mark and Natalie Blais might be able to help with the needed legislation.

Councilor Buckley said that the committee should agree on language first and then they can find out the best way to get a sponsor for legislation saying that this should be a light lift for a legislator.

## Other Business

Chair Wilson asked for committee members to give her thoughts on other topics that they think would be good for the committee going forward into 2024.

Councilor Crane said that there is talk about inviting the Stewardship Council to a meeting in March regarding the EEA Forests as Climate Solutions initiative.

Councilor Buckley said that he feels like the Stewardship Council has barely been included in the process other than getting invited to the public meetings. He said that given the council’s closeness to DCR and their activities, he feels like they should have been more involved.

Councilor Crane said that Josh Rapp from Mass Audubon has been a part of the stakeholder committee that is involved in the project and that he may be able to give an update.

Councilor Collins said that he has been in touch with Mr. Rapp, and that he agrees with Councilor Buckley that it would be great to get an update from EEA.

Councilor Buckley said that based on what EEA has said, the moratorium on logging will have been lifted by the next council meeting.

Chair Wilson suggested inviting them to the next meeting to give an update.

Councilor Buckley said that Mr. Perry might be able to get an update for the council at the next meeting.

## Adjournment

Chair Wilson thanked everyone for their attendance 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*](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council)