

Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
December 13th, 2021
7:00 PM

Location: DCR Quabbin Visitor Center, 100 Winsor Dam Road, Belchertown, MA 01007

Members: (members in **BOLD** were present)

Massachusetts Council of Sportsmen: **Tom Berube (chairperson)**

Alternate:

Trout Unlimited: **Jerry Eves**

Alternate: Joe Babineau

Quabbin Fisherman's Association: **Larry Gates**

Alternate: Bill Martell

Worcester County League of Sportsmen: **Ronald Komar**

Alternate:

North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association: **Tony Brighenti (vice chairperson)**

Alternate: **Tom Barnes**; Dennis Duguay

Mass Audubon: **Tom Lautzenheiser**

Alternate:

Swift River Valley Historical Society: James Boyko

Alternate: Jane Peirce

Massachusetts Wildlife Federation: **Bill Pula**

Alternate:

New England Sierra Club:

Alternate:

Friends of Quabbin, Inc.: **J.R. Greene**

Alternate: Gene Theroux

General Public: **Ralph Lapinskas**

Alternate:

DCR staff present: Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor

Members of the public present: William Kimball III, Mike Laprade, Scott Robinson, Bob Sagan, Clayton Sydla

Meeting Start Time: 7:03 PM

Approval of Minutes of Meetings on June 28th and September 20th, 2021

J.R. made a motion to accept the minutes from the QWAC meetings held on June 28th and September 20th, 2021. Tony seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

2021 Fishing season report

Dan detailed the Quabbin Fishing Program's 2021 Annual Report. To request a copy of the full report, email Justin at justin.gonsor@mass.gov. Highlights from the report are as follows:

- The foreman in charge of the program, Jim Budness, was out all season with an injury. Paul Lapierre was able to fill in for Jim. If Jim isn't back next year, a new plan will need to be crafted. Boat launch area (BLA) attendants also stepped up in Jim's absence.
- Cash sales are still the dominant form of payment at the BLA's as opposed to credit sales. To facilitate more credit transactions, a cell service upgrade is planned for BLA2 before next season. Dan asked for helping to spread the word about credit card sales within the fishing community.
- Season pass sales are now all done online. More season passes were sold in 2021 than ever.
- There was a total of 39,112 visitors to the 3 BLA's. Revenue generated by the fishing program was \$193,617. Revenue generated by season pass sales was \$29,945. The combined total was \$223,562.

Larry asked about getting a breakdown of BLA users by state. Dan answered that data might be available for next year's report; Dan would investigate it.

J.R. asked about including a year-to-year comparison of revenue in next years report. He asked for a breakdown by county within the state as well. Dan updated the report to include year-to-year comparisons. Dan indicated he would investigate the feasibility of reporting by county.

A member of the public proposed implementing a reservation system for rental boats in the future. The current system doesn't allow for reservations and is first come first served. Dan answered that DWSP does not currently have that capacity. There are companies that could be contracted out for this purpose; the

idea will be investigated internally. The pros and cons of a reservation system was discussed among the committee members. It was mentioned that any company used may charge a service fee per reservation.

Ralph suggested if a reservation system is not implemented, that the boat program dashboard, which has a real time live count of boats on the water and available to rent, be posted on Quabbin's web page that could be viewed by the public.

Preliminary deer hunt update

Dan briefed the committee on Quabbin's preliminary deer hunt numbers for 2021.

The zones of Hardwick, Pelham, and New Salem were open for walk-in hunting inside Quabbin gates during the 2-week shotgun season, which ran from Nov. 29th – Dec. 11th.

Eventually, there is a plan to update Quabbin's hunting regulations to make them a little broader and allow for a longer season and additional harvest methods, such as bow hunting. Currently, only shotgun hunting is allowed for deer at Quabbin.

Hunters are asked to fill out a form that indicates where they harvested their deer. Quabbin staff then get that data from MassWildlife. Confirmed harvests up to this point are as follows:

- Pelham: 2 deer
- Hardwick: 5 deer
- New Salem: 4 deer

A full summary of Quabbin's 2021 deer hunt program will be presented to the committee at a later meeting in 2022.

Quabbin was also host to the annual paraplegic hunt. It occurred over 3 days. 1 deer was harvested as part of that program.

Summary of Senator Comerford's visit to Quabbin

Dan briefed the committee on a visit/tour that was given to state senator Joanne Comerford and her staff this past season. One of the goals of the visit was to

educate the legislature on the various management objectives at Quabbin, and how those objectives are met. It is also good to foster personal relationships with policy makers across the state. Senator Comerford represents Hampshire, Franklin, and Worcester counties.

As part of her visit, she was shown a forest management plot in New Salem and DWSP's silviculture methods were explained in detail. Feedback from the senator and her staff were positive.

State representative Jacob Oliveira was also given a similar tour a couple weeks after Senator Comerford. He appreciated being given a first-hand look at management of the watershed. The goal is to get other representatives and legislators out to Quabbin in the future.

DCR has a new acting commissioner, Stephanie Cooper. She took over from Jim Montgomery, who recently stepped down.

Dan also talked about a house bill making its way through the state legislature. It is titled 'Bill H.912: An Act Relative to Forest Protection.' If passed, it effectively would end forest management on water supply lands. Currently, DCR State Parks has three designations for their lands: parks, reserves, and woodlands. Commercial forest management is not allowed in parks or reserves. As currently written, Bill H.912 would shift water supply lands to a park or reserve, disallowing forest management. The Bill is currently in discussion in the Agricultural, Natural Resource committee of the legislature.

Tom Lautzenheiser mentioned that MA Audubon's position on the Bill is that it would need serious modification before they would support it. MA Audubon has submitted testimony regarding the Bill and signed on to a letter from The Nature Conservancy that is in favor of continuing to allow forest management on state lands.

Tony made a motion that QWAC formally does not support Bill H.912 as currently written. Bill seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. Tom Lautzenheiser abstained from voting.

Bill volunteered to draft a position letter on behalf of QWAC that details the potential problems the committee sees with Bill H.912. The letter will be sent to the appropriate senators, legislators, and representatives across the state.

A member of the public asked about the fire breaks around the perimeter of the watershed that have been allowed to grow in over recent history. He would like to see those fire breaks maintained better.

Quabbin's filtration waiver was discussed. The waiver is based on DWSP's ability to manage the forest/watershed. Bill H.912, as written, would potentially jeopardize the waiver.

Dan talked about carbon storage on watershed lands and how it has increased over time. A good portion of the added carbon storage has come from additional land purchases through the years.

Quabbin park cemetery update

Dan updated the committee on recent Quabbin Park Cemetery operations.

The plan is wrap up all outstanding infrastructure work during the current fiscal year. This includes completing restoration of the cemetery office.

An update was given on the status of broken/damaged gravestones. They have been salvaged and moved to a secure location. The plan is to locate the grave site, based on the stone, and move the gravestones back if they are in good enough condition. For partial gravestones, direction was given from the state cultural resource office. Grave sites will be located where the pieces are supposed to go, and the gravestone pieces would be buried there in a shallow manner; records regarding these activities would be documented and saved. This process is set to begin in spring of 2022.

Member Issues

J.R. asked about potential vacancies to be filled at Quabbin. Dan answered that legislation recently passed freeing DWSP from the state hiring freeze within DCR. We are allowed to get back to a full staffing level. All current vacancies have been drafted to be filled. Implementing the filling of these positions will take some

time. The goal is to post and fill all available vacancies. It is unclear whether future vacancies will also be able to be filled as quickly.

Larry Gates informed everyone that he is stepping down as the primary representative of the Quabbin Fisherman's Association (QFA) on QWAC. QFA is set to appoint Clayton Sydla as Larry's replacement on QWAC.

Meeting End Time: 8:08 PM

Upcoming QWAC Meetings:

- Monday, March 21st, 2021, at 7PM – DCR Quabbin Visitor Center, 100 Winsor Dam Road, Belchertown, MA 01007