

Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
March 18, 2024
6:30 PM

Location: DCR Les and Terry Campbell Quabbin Visitor's Center, 100 Winsor Dam Road, Belchertown, MA 01007

Members: (members in BOLD were present)

Massachusetts Council of Sportsmen: **Bill Pula**

Alternate: Robert Sagan

Trout Unlimited: Richard Taupier

Alternate: Joe Babineau

Quabbin Fisherman's Association: **Clayton Sydla (Vice-Chair)**

Alternate: **Mike Laprade; Bill Kimball**

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

Alternate: John Root

North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association: **Samantha Robinson**

Alternate: **Tom Barnes; Mike Polchlopek**

Mass Audubon: **Tom Lautzenheiser**

Alternate:

Swift River Valley Historical Society: Elena Palladino

Alternate:

New England Sierra Club:

Alternate:

Friends of Quabbin, Inc.: **J.R. Greene (Chair)**

Alternate: **Gene Theroux**

General Public: **Ralph Lapinskas**

Alternate: **Eric Weiss**

DCR staff present: Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell

Members of the public present: Darren Cadieux, Derek Gagnon, David Korash, Rebecca Lincoln, Jim Martell, Andrew Robinson, Scott Robinson, Moussa Siri

Meeting Start Time: 6:32 PM

Approval of minutes from meeting on December 18, 2023

Tom L. made a motion to accept the minutes from the QWAC meeting held on December 18, 2023. Clayton seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Update on improving vistas at Observation Tower, Enfield Lookout, and Pelham Lookout

Dan spoke on recent improvements to various vista lookouts around the watershed.

Improvements were made to the vista at the Quabbin Hill/Observation Tower area. A mulching machine was used up to the tree line and some additional trees along the tree line will be removed to improve the view.

The Enfield Lookout is more challenging to improve. They have larger trees that are farther away, impeding the view. Ken Canfield has identified some trees near the bottom of the Enfield Lookout that if removed, should improve the view. Those trees have been marked to be cut and will likely be done by DCR staff. It is unclear yet if removing these trees will improve the view or if a larger timber harvest is needed.

Pelham Lookout have the hardest vista to improve and still needs to be more thoroughly evaluated.

The New Salem Lookout was asked about. There was discussion on who manages that vista and whether it is DCR or the town. DCR has no current plans to improve that location.

Update on Pottapaug Pond; plans for 2024 season

Dan updated the committee on plans for Pottapaug Pond for the upcoming 2024 fishing season.

A quick refresher, during the 2023 season an aquatic invasive species (swollen bladderwort) was found in Pottapaug Pond in Hardwick. DCR mobilized a response, private boating on the pond was shut down and a survey was conducted. This survey was done late in the season of this plant's life cycle which made it difficult to determine the scope of the problem. Every August, an outside contractor conducts a general invasive species survey throughout the watershed. Their report from 2023 is that they found swollen bladderwort at O'Loughlin Pond in New Salem in addition to Pottapaug Pond in Hardwick.

The proposal is to close Pottapaug Pond and O'Loughlin Pond to all boating (private and rental boats; canoe and kayak rentals) for the full 2024 fishing season. Additional plant surveys and removal efforts (hand harvesting) are scheduled for both ponds during the 2024 fishing season. A main goal is preventing the spread

of this plant outside the ponds it has been discovered in. This plan can be easily spread by fragments. Boat motor props, paddles, oars, etc. can cause the plant to fragment, and these stem fragments can resprout into new plants.

DCR aquatic biologists are set to survey O'Loughlin Pond in the coming months to verify that the plant is in the pond. If it is not found, it is possible O'Loughlin could re-open to boating at some point in the 2024 season.

Clayton commented that he was disappointed that it took DCR until now to make their decision. The extent of the survey done on Pottapaug Pond was discussed. Dan mentioned that the plant has been found in most of the shallow coves. The survey to be done this coming season should give a more accurate picture of the situation since it can be done before/during when the plant is flowering.

Clayton asked if Pottapaug Pond could be opened mid-season if the upcoming surveys don't find any swollen bladderwort. Dan answered that the most conservative approach to controlling and preventing the spread of the plant would be to eliminate all boating from the ponds for the full season, regardless of the survey findings.

Mike Laprade asked if the pond closures could continue into 2025. Dan answered that it would have to be evaluated on an annual basis and decisions made on that timeline. Much more should be known about the extent of the infestation by end of the 2024 growing season.

Ron Komar asked if there are biological or chemical means of controlling the plant. Dan answered that there are other mechanical means of eradicating the plant other than hand pulling, such as DASH (diver assisted suction harvesting), but the Pottapaug coves seem to be too shallow for other methods. There are no plans to incorporate the use of chemical controls.

The recent proliferation of swollen bladderwort seems to highlight a limitation of the annual pond surveys being done in August, when it would not be flowering. It was identified prior to August in 2023 when it was flowering. It is possible that it could have been in the pond for years prior without being detected.

Multiple questions were asked about hypotheticals for the 2025 fishing season. Dan was reluctant to speak about the 2025 fishing season in any specifics but promised to keep the committee updated as information comes in. Decisions will be made on an annual basis.

Tom L. spoke about the exponential growth potential of invasive species. They can go unnoticed and then suddenly it can seem to be everywhere, depending on when surveys happen, etc. He spoke about different species flowering/blooming at relatively different times of the season. He commented that completely eradicating a newly found species within a year's time is very difficult and probably a rare occurrence.

Update on watershed forestry program

Dan updated the committee on the status of the watershed forestry program.

A brief refresher, the governor's commission filed a report on various state agencies forestry programs. EEA with help from its agencies have since been drafting the responses to the report, based on what the report recommended.

If the watershed forestry program is restarted quickly enough, a new set of lot proposals could be presented to QWAC in June. But the timeline is still not certain.

Possible Project – tree removal below Winsor Dam

Dan updated the committee on a potential project that could happen below the Winsor Dam.

There is currently an 'island' of trees within an area of field/grass below the dam. The idea is to remove this stand of trees (about 13 acres), mostly Pine, to solidify the continuous block of non-forested habitat. It would be a commercial timber sale and go out to bid. There are multiple options for the proposed patch of land other than trees.

Access roads at gates 8 and 43

Clayton asked if the annual maintenance of the gate 8 road was set to take place this year. Dan answered that the usual maintenance will happen. A roller has been rented to go over the road, with plans for DCR to buy their own roller for future years.

Dan updated everyone that the repaving of the gate 43 is still on schedule to begin on May 6. The hope is to get the paving done within 3 weeks. Signage will be posted at gate 43 as well as on the website to anticipate the closure.

Possible demolition of two buildings on Blue Meadow Road

J.R. spoke about the 3 buildings located on Blue Meadow Road. The former forestry office and ranger station are set to be demolished while the Blue Meadow Conference center will remain intact.

The ranger station was decommissioned and abandoned last October.

J.R. commented that he took issue one of DWSP's statements that was sent to the MA Historical Commission that stated, essentially, that QWAC expressed support for demolitions. J.R. mentioned that no official vote was taken by the committee regarding the buildings.

The ranger station was discussed. Renovations have been done to the building over the years and its shell/foundation seems to be the only thing left on it as original. The merits of leaving the building standing, but not in use by anyone, were discussed. The ranger station is the only original building still standing from before the reservoir was created.

Clayton asked how long the rangers had been using the building. The exact date wasn't known but appears they have been using it since the 1990's. There are currently 8 rangers on staff at Quabbin. Various problems regarding the building's infrastructure were discussed. Clayton commented about the possibility of a future administration disallowing work-from-home and then DWSP needing more space for their employees.

Clayton made a motion that QWAC supports leaving the ranger station standing and not have it demolished. Samantha seconded the motion. The motion passed. Tom L. and Bill P. abstained from voting.

Dan assured everyone that there are no plans to do anything with the ranger station prior to June.

Setting up a QWAC site visit to the ranger station was discussed. It appears the site visit will happen at the beginning of the next (June) QWAC meeting. Details will be forthcoming.

Member Issues

Gene Theroux gave a presentation to the committee about recent Friends of Quabbin (FOQ) projects and activities.

A Patriots Monument will be placed at the Quabbin Park Cemetery (QPC) prior to this year's Memorial Day services. It has 43 names that will be on a bronze plaque: the largest plaque with the greatest number of names of Revolutionary War veterans in Massachusetts.

The Enfield Soldier monument as well as other bronze plaques in QPC have become corroded and could be restored. FOQ is looking to raise funds for this purpose. Estimated total cost to restore the Enfield Civil War Sculpture and affixed Plaques, Dana Honor Roll plaque, Honor Roll plaque on QPC administration building, Hosea Ballou plaque, and James Madison Stone plaque would cost \$32,500.

FOQ funded (\$15,000) an expert back in 2022 to evaluate the failing Keystone Bridge and give potential options for what can be done with it. Dan updated the committee that permitting was recently completed to remove some trees near the bridge. This should help prevent roots from further damaging the bridge.

The Quabbin observation tower has been closed since 2020. It is estimated that the total cost for needed safety improvements to the tower would be over \$2 million. The FOQ feel that getting the tower reopened should be a major priority to DWSP. Gene encouraged engaging legislators and local community organizations for fundraising support.

Clayton asked about the permanent restrooms at the tower and when they would be reopened. Dan answered that the janitorial staff is currently short staffed. Until they are back to full staff there is no plan to open those restrooms. Bathrooms at the fishing areas will be open and operating as usual.

Meeting End Time: 7:46 PM

Upcoming QWAC Meetings:

- Monday, June 3, 2024, at 6:30 PM – DCR Les and Terry Campbell Quabbin Visitor Center, 100 Winsor Dam Road, Belchertown, MA 01007