

Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
March 21st, 2022
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: **Robert Sagan**

Trout Unlimited: Jerry Eves

Alternate: Joe Babineau

Quabbin Fisherman's Association: **Clayton Sydla**

Alternate: Mike Laprade; **Bill Kimball**

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: Dave Celino, Dan Clark, Virginia Dautreuil, Justin Gonsor

Members of the public present: Mark Brighenti, Lexi Dewey, Dan Hammock, Mike Polchlopek, Andrew Robinson, Samantha Robinson, Scott Robinson, Bruce Spencer

Meeting Start Time: 7:01 PM

A moment of silence was recognized at the beginning of the meeting to commemorate the recent passing of Bill Martell, a long-time member of QWAC.

Approval of Minutes of Meeting on December 13th, 2021

Tony made a motion to accept the minutes from the QWAC meeting held on December 13th, 2021. J.R. seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Presentation: Dave Celino, DCR Chief Fire Warden, Prescribed Fire on Watershed Lands

Dave Celino and Virginia Dautreuil gave a presentation about the benefits of using prescribed fire as a management tool in general and specifically its usage on watershed lands. The details of their presentation are as follows:

- What is prescribed burning? Prescribed burning is fire...
 - Applied in a skillful manner
 - in a definite place
 - to achieve specific results
- Prescribed fire objectives:
 - Hazard fuel management
 - Ecological restoration
 - Fire training
- Reasons for prescribed fire in forest and grassland management:
 - Reduce hazardous fuels
 - Dispose of logging debris
 - Prepare sites for seeding or planting
 - Improve wildlife habitat
 - manage competing vegetation
 - control insects and disease
 - improve forage for grazing
 - enhance appearance and access
 - perpetuate species and communities that require fire
- Hazard fuels mitigation

- No major 'landscape level' fires in Massachusetts over the past 20+ years has led to tremendous build-up of vegetation/forest fuels.
- Urban 'build-out' has happened in areas with history of major wildfires, often referred to as the Wildland/Urban Interface.
- Ecological restoration
 - Many of the Commonwealth's most ecologically significant natural areas require active management to conserve, protect, and enhance open habitats that support a diversity of endangered, threatened, and/or declining species.
 - Ecological restoration objectives: enhancement of priority natural communities, enrichment of biodiversity, and restoration of early successional habitat.
- Fire Training
 - DCR and Municipal Department will also utilize prescribed fires for valuable fire training.
 - Firefighters will learn behavior, firefighting tactics, and use of specialized wildlife equipment as well as the Incident Command System.
 - This type of training CANNOT be duplicated in a classroom and is a very valuable tool.
- Various photos were shown of prescribed burns that have happened across Massachusetts. Before/after photos of treated areas were also highlighted.
- Managing the prescribed burn
 - Every site has a comprehensive Burn Plan
 - Every Burn Plan differs in objectives, burning prescription, and smoke management challenges:
 - Weather; fuels; smoke receptors + distance to SSA; natural and cultural resources
- The Burn Plan is standardized and has 16 elements:
 - 1. Location
 - 2. Sources of emergency assistance
 - 3. Permits and notification
 - 4. Neighbor notifications
 - 5. Burn unit description
 - 6. Justification
 - 7. Complexity analysis (risk, potential consequence, technical difficulty, safety)

- 8. Predicted fired behavior
- 9. Fire behavior narrative
- 10. Smoke management plan
- 11. Crew organization
- 12. Equipment
- 13. Burn duration
- 14. Burn management
- 15. Documentation
- 16. Legal considerations
- Smoke management
 - DCR Forest Fire Control Personnel are highly trained in smoke management techniques to minimize the impact smoke on surrounding communities.
 - Each prescribed burn has a stringent Smoke Management Plan that is adhered to throughout the burning process.
 - DCR uses computer smoke modeling, observation towers and roving smoke monitors to advise of any negative smoke impacts.
 - In the event of any negative impact from poor smoke dispersion, the prescribed burn will be terminated immediately.
- Fire techniques/patterns
 - Strip head fire
 - Generally, produces more emissions than any other burning technique
 - Used when winds are forecasted to stay within a 45-degree range
 - Fire movement is fast – large blocks can be burned
 - Can be used when RH is high and high actual fine fuel moisture
 - CAUTION MUST BE USED
 - Point source fire
 - Generally, produces less emissions than strip head fire
 - Used when strip head fires are too intense (as burn site gets drier)
 - Spacing of 'dots' dictates fire behavior
 - The 'product' is a mix of all ignition patterns: head fire, backing, and flanking
 - Backing fire

- Generally, produces less emissions than all other firing patterns
 - Excellent results if fuels are dry
 - Used in heavy fuels/vegetation
 - Very slow moving
 - Will not burn well if fine fuel moistures are above 15%
- Summary of Massachusetts wildfire occurrence in 2021
 - Number of fires: 1,134
 - Acres burned: 1,676
 - Resident homes threatened: 306
 - Resident homes damaged: 15
 - Other structures impacted: 102
 - Number of DCR fire responses: 230
- Summary of Massachusetts prescribed fires in 2021 (most burns happened on Cape Cod, but more are being set up for the central part of the state as well)
 - MA DCR: 4 burns 117 acres burned
 - MA Div. of Fish & Game: 26 burns 772 acres burned
 - MA Army National Guard: 2 burns 94 acres burned
 - Municipal: 2 burns 54 acres burned
 - Non-Gov Agency: 1 burn 8.5 acres burned
 - U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: 5 burns 80 acres burned
 - Dept. of Defense: 5 burns 532.9 acres burned
 - Private: 2 burns 18 acres burned
 - Total: 47 burns 1,676.4 acres burned
- Use of prescribed fire in the Quabbin watershed
 - Current land management activities consist of mowing and brush-hogging to maintain open habitats; deer management and timber harvests to promote age and species diversity in forests.
 - Moving forward, DWSP has started integrating the use of fire to assist in reaching landscape diversity goals.
 - Over time, fire exclusion ha led to increases in shade-tolerant species and fire-intolerant species, limiting oak regeneration. One objective is to reintroduce fire to these sites to support oaks.

- Another use of fire would be on our restoration sites. This would include fire dependent barrens habitats which are heathlands, inland grasslands, oak and pitch pine woodlands.
- The Barre Heath land in the Ware River Watershed was detailed. It was identified as a degraded heath habitat back in 2005.
 - In 2021 prescribed fire was implemented on the first half of the heath. Fire effects were on target, reducing the generalist species such as white pine, reducing some leaf litter, while promoting warm season grasses and the ericaceous shrubs that define a heath.
- A plan is being formulated for maintaining the fields on the Prescott Peninsula. The fields were previously burned in the mid-2000's.
 - Benefits over mowing are reduced thatch, allowing for better seed to ground contact, increased diversity of herbaceous plants including warm season grasses, decreasing woody vegetation, and decreasing invasives.
- Being a large watershed, wildfires are always a concern. Climate change projections of warmer winters, resulting in longer growing seasons, as well as more extreme cycles of drought and increases in rainfall, could increase wildfire risk.
- Recent research out of South Carolina has shown that managed watershed that included prescribed fire had better water quality than those that did not include prescribed fire.
- There is also research showing the prescribed fire decreases jumping worm populations/viability.

Ron Komar asked if seeds are spread after a prescribed burn. Virginia answered that seeds aren't planted, the plants already there are allowed to sprout out and drop their own seeds.

J.R. asked if there are currently any specific burn plans for Quabbin. Virginia answered that they are being formulated. It will be based off areas identified in the current land management plan. The plan for the Prescott fields is almost completed.

Bruce Spencer commented on the difficulty of using prescribed burns as a management tool, especially depending on the type of land you are planning to burn on. Dave Celino agreed that it can be a labor-intensive process, but also very beneficial to the landscape. Tom Lautzenheiser spoke about his concerns over burning in the forest versus other habitat types, such as fields, heath, pitch pine, etc. He also mentioned concern over the scale of how much prescribed fire will be used on watershed forest land. Virginia added that the focus won't be on burning maple stands but prescribed fire would be used on areas of well drained soils and other habitat types that thrive after fire.

The history of fire suppression in the state, leading to build up of fuels in the forest, was discussed.

Ron Komar asked about how a landowner of club that owns land would be about seeking out prescribed burning as a land management tool. Dave Celino answered that there is federal money available through NRCS. The Bureau of Forest Fire Control and Forestry in Massachusetts can be consulted as well. The fire chief for the town in question would also need to be involved in the process.

Gate 43 paving discussion

Dan updated the committee on the road conditions inside gate 43.

There are some rough patches leading to BLA3. To repave the entire road from gate 43 to BLA3 would be cost prohibitive, several hundred thousand dollars. The goal will be to approach the repaving in sections, starting with the areas of most concern. There is some extra money in the budget for this fiscal year. A meeting with a vendor is planned for next week to get a quote to repave the section most in need. If the paving does happen, it would be done during the fishing season and the area would probably have to be closed for a couple days.

A member of the public asked if there is an ongoing plan in place for periodically paving the BLA roads. Dan answered that there is currently an internal roads management plan that is being created, it is currently in draft form. When the plan is finalized, it will allow for more systematic approach in evaluating/maintaining the roads.

2022 Fishing Season Preparations

Dan updated the committee on preparations for the 2022 fishing season.

- Changes to boat launching times
 - Boat launch times will not be changing from what they were in previous years. Launch times will remain the same.

DCR as an agency is moving to credit/debit only sales at their facilities across the state. With Quabbin being part of DCR, it will be moving in that direction as well. This change will be implemented over the following year. Plans will be in place in the short term to accommodate people who only have cash. DCR is also developing a process for people don't have a credit/debit card. No one will be turned away at Quabbin's fishing areas who only have cash.

A real time dashboard (updated every 15 minutes) is being developed for the website that will show people how many rental boats are available at any given time during the day at each BLA.

Massachusetts Legislature Bill H.912 update

Dan updated the committee on Bill H.912.

Bill Pula drafted a position letter on behalf of QWAC. It was sent to senator Comerford.

Member Issues

Tony Brighenti, longtime QWAC member, will be resigning from the committee. He also mentioned that Dennis Duguay is also resigning. They both represented the North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association. The group has voted in Samantha Robinson to replace Tony as the primary member on the committee. They also voted in Mike Polchlopek to replace Dennis as an alternate on the committee.

Tony was the vice chairperson for QWAC. With him resigning, Ralph made a motion to nominate J.R. as vice chairperson. Tony seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. J.R. is the new vice chairperson.

J.R. asked about a new process set to happen at Quabbin Park Cemetery for some gravestones that were found discarded in the forest just off the cemetery. The goal is to locate gravesites the stones are associated with. If the stone is whole

and there is no headstone at the gravesite, it will be reinstalled. If the stone is in pieces or there is already a headstone at the gravesite, the stone will be partially buried at the location.

Tom Barnes noted that this year will be the 70th year that Quabbin has been opened to boat fishing. He noted that roughly \$100,000 has been spent on new motors, rental boats, paving, etc. since Dan has taken over as Director at Quabbin. He asked about a rumor going around that the current administration is looking to close the fishing areas. Dan answered that it is false, there have been no discussions to close or dramatically alter how the fishing program operates at Quabbin.

Meeting End Time: 8:13 PM

Upcoming QWAC Meetings:

- Monday, June 27th, 2022, at 7PM – DCR Quabbin Visitor Center, 100 Winsor Dam Road, Belchertown, MA 01007