

**Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**June 03, 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; **Jerry Eves**

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, Virginia Dautreuil, Austin Gelinas, Justin Gonsor, Brian Kevan, Ken MacKenzie, Christian Smith

**Members of the public present:** Senator Joanne Comerford, Judith Eiseman, Dave French, Dan Hammock, Dave Korash, Dana MacDonald, Mike Magee, Colleen Rizzi, Andrew Robinson, Scott Robinson, Katie Ronan, Steve Ward, Representative Aaron Saunders

**Meeting Start Time: 6:31 PM**

### **Approval of minutes from meeting on Monday, March 18, 2024**

Ralph made a motion to accept the minutes from the QWAC meeting held on March 18, 2024. Bill Pula seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

### **Discussion – house bill H.897 regarding equity for Quabbin region towns**

MA Senator Jo Comerford commented on the house bill regarding equity for Quabbin region towns. She represents towns to the north and west of Quabbin. She filed the bill along with state representative Aaron Saunders. The bill is still in committee and seeks to do 4 things:

1. Add 2 seats from western MA to the MWRA trust board
2. Update the PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) payments to watershed communities
3. Set up a monetary fund for Quabbin communities to be administered at the town's discretions
4. Set up a long-term study related to potable water sources/access for western MA towns

She also spoke about a recent housing bond bill filed in the House of Representatives that would expand access to the Quabbin for eastern MA towns, she would like western MA towns to have these opportunities as well.

State Representative Aaron Saunders spoke in support of the Bill as well. He also thanked the committee for their support and efforts in getting the road to BLA3 repaved.

PILOT payments, and whether they are adequate, was discussed.

Mike MaGee commented that he his opposed to the bill. He is concerned that if western communities begin using Quabbin water, they will end up failing to invest in their own watersheds. He also spoke about the concern of pfas chemicals showing up in eastern MA communities' water, and those communities potentially searching for new water sources in the future.

### **Discussion – house bill S.447 regarding MWRA expansion study**

Colleen Rizzi, director of Environmental and Regulatory Affairs for MWRA, spoke about their most recent expansion study.

MWRA water comes from Quabbin Reservoir, Ware River Watershed, and Wachusett Reservoir. Demands on the MWRA system have dropped substantially

from 1985 (330 million gallons/day) to today (200 million gallons/day). This can be attributed to conservation measures and national trends toward water conservation.

Three feasibility studies were completed in 2022 and 2023 to look at whether MWRA could supply these communities:

- Ipswich River (12 communities); requested by the Baker-Polito Administration
- South Shore (10 communities); directed by the legislature
- MetroWest (21 communities); requested by the communities

A fourth feasibility study will also be conducted for Quabbin communities in response to the proposed Senate Bill.

Although 43 communities were included in the completed studies, only a small fraction are interested in Quabbin water:

- Communities that have received approval to pursue admission from governing body
  - Hopkinton, Lynnfield Center Water District, Natick, Wayland, Weymouth/Former Naval Air Station
    - Total demand ~12 million gallons/day
- Communities in various stages of decision-making process
  - Avon, Billerica, select South Shore communities (Hingham, Norwell, Hanover, Abington, Rockland, Scituate, Cohasset), North Sherborn Water and Wastewater District (proposed), select MetroWest communities, Walpole

The Quabbin study area will include 12 communities: Barre, Belchertown, Hardwick, Ludlow, New Salem, Orange, Pelham, Petersham, Phillipston, Shutesbury, Ware, Wendell.

Study objectives are as follows:

- Quantify MWRA's existing system capacity available to serve new customers
- Identify critical infrastructure needed to add capacity and deliver to new communities
- Identify potential water supply alternatives, such as surface water intake and treatment or groundwater supply
- Provide planning-level cost estimates for alternatives

This information will allow the MWRA to better understand the infrastructure needed to supply water to the Quabbin Reservoir watershed communities.

Study components include:

- Analysis of community water demands and system assets
  - Population
  - Water demands, domestic, firefighting
  - Water distribution infrastructure
  - Community expansion or development plans
  - Review annual statistical reports
- Water quality considerations
  - Existing known water quality issues (if any)
  - Blending between systems
- Evaluate community water demands in relation to MWRA supply capacity and prepare conceptual alternatives for water supply
  - Geographical considerations
  - Proximity to existing MWRA infrastructure
  - System modifications
  - New intakes from Quabbin
  - Groundwater sources
  - Transmission and distribution mains
  - Pumping facilities
  - Treatment facilities

MWRA is seeking the following technical information regarding each community's water system/water supplies:

- Presence of public water supply
- Population served/demands
- Water distribution system maps/GIS
- Master plans
- Water quality data

Study schedule is as follows:

- MWRA engaged Hazen and Tighe & Bond – March 2024
- Information session with community staff – April 12, 2024
- Public meeting to present results – prior to final report
- Final report – end of 2024

Next steps for study:

- Communities to submit data requests to MWRA
- MWRA to schedule meetings with individual communities

Contact information:

- Colleen Rizzi, Director of Environmental and Regulatory Affairs
  - [Colleen.rizzi@mwra.com](mailto:Colleen.rizzi@mwra.com)
- Hillary Monahan, Project Manager
  - [Hillary.monahan@mwra.com](mailto:Hillary.monahan@mwra.com)

Web address for completed studies:

<https://www.mwra.com/02org/html/expansion.html>

Bill Pula commented that the smaller communities around the reservoir don't have much of a public water supply at all in place. He asked about the possibility of MWRA helping watershed towns to get their water supplies tested.

Judy Eiseman of the Pelham Planning Board supported the idea of MWRA assistance for water testing. She also asked about instituting restrictions on water use during droughts for eastern communities. She supports fixing problems that existing user communities in the east before adding new communities to the system from that part of the state.

Mike McGee asked if public meetings would be held in the western part of the state. Colleen answered that the plan will be to hold a public meeting for the 12 communities in the Quabbin study area. Mike also expressed skepticism about the logistics involved with expanding water access to communities that surround the reservoir.

The Ipswich study was discussed, specifically the infrastructure costs. The full estimate on the build out was on the order of 1.2-1.5 billion dollars.

### **2023 Deer Management Plan results and proposal for 2024**

Ken MacKenzie presented results from the 2023 Quabbin deer management plan as well as plans for the upcoming hunt in 2024.

2023 Quabbin deer hunt 2-week shotgun hunt results; 603 hunters selected

- Harwick
  - 14-15 deer taken

- New Salem
  - 14-22 deer taken
- Pelham
  - 7-10 deer taken

#### 2023 Quabbin deer hunt 2-day controlled hunt results

- Petersham; 204 hunters attended
  - 41 deer taken
- Prescott; 276 hunters attended
  - 40 deer taken
- Quabbin Park; 72 hunters attended
  - 37 deer taken

#### 2023 Quabbin Park harvest details (first year ever hunted):

- Antlerless deer permits were critical to the success of the first year of this Quabbin Park hunt
- Sevens hunters harvested two antlerless deer (could have shot more if they had more permits)
- Hunters observed groups of up to 10 deer while out hunting
- Most deer taken were 2.5 years or older
- The largest deer taken was 145 lbs.
- The average weight of 2.5 and >3.5 year-old females was 101.2 lbs.

#### 2024 Proposed Quabbin hunting plan:

- Regulation changes are still pending, and adoption is unfortunately not expected prior to the 2024 season. Quabbin regulations currently state that the hunt must be shotgun only. It is a goal to get the regulation updated to allow archery and primitive seasons as well.
- Shotgun season will continue in Pelham, Hardwick, and New Salem
  - No cap on number of hunters
- Two-day controlled hunts in Prescott, Petersham, and Quabbin Park zones will continue in 2024
  - Applications will be available July 1<sup>st</sup>; close August 31<sup>st</sup>
  - Lottery held in September/October
  - Up to 4 people can apply on an application
- Antlerless permits in consultation with DFW
  - 1 antlerless permit for Prescott and Petersham
  - 2 antlerless permits for Quabbin Park

One of the main reasons for the Quabbin deer hunt is to address lack of regeneration in the forest.

- Quabbin Park forest regeneration study:
  - 2018: 56 plots studied (harvested in 2003)
    - 53% and 17% with zero regeneration
    - More than 94% white pine
  - 2023: 28 plots studied (harvested in 2008)
    - 32% of plots with zero regeneration
    - 80% white pine

The hope is that regeneration/forest diversity will increase as Quabbin Park is hunted and the deer herd reduced.

Clayton asked about the deer herd estimate in Quabbin Park. Ken responded that pre-hunt pellet count surveys estimated the range was 39-103 deer/mi<sup>2</sup>. Current science states about 20 deer/mi<sup>2</sup> before you see effects on forest health and regeneration.

Clayton asked if a 3-day has been considered at Prescott. Ken answered that it has been done in the past but there are no immediate plans to do a 3-day controlled hunt at Prescott.

Clayton commented that he is in favor of expanding the Quabbin deer hunt to allow primitive arms and archery. Ken reminded everyone that the regulations would first need to be updated/changed in conjunction with MassWildlife.

### **Quabbin Park fire management**

Virginia Dautreuil briefed the committee on future plans to reintroduce fire management in Quabbin Park. Fire was last used in the park around 2004, and we are seeing the decline of some of the natural communities due to lack of fire.

- Why introduce fire to the park?
  - There are several fire-dependent natural communities
    - Pitch pine – oak woodland
    - Inland sandpiper grassland
    - Oak – hickory woodland
    - Pockets of scrublands comprised of scrub oak
  - Existing rare species and potential for restoring more
    - Two state listed endangered plants that benefit from fire
    - Watch listed plant-wild lupine

- Expansion of some grasslands could provide needed habitat for state listed grasshopper sparrows and eastern meadowlark
- Suite of Lepidopteran species that depend on these communities

Areas in the park where fire management could occur are as follows:

- Quabbin Tower area and surrounding woodlands (within special management consideration areas)
  - Proposed area acreage: 917
  - Quabbin Hill
    - Widely recognized rare pitch pine-oak woodland, with scrub oak
    - Last fire was conducted in 2004
  - Surrounding woodlands
    - Oak-hickory with scrub oak pockets, some red oak woodland
  - Fire intervals
    - 8-10 years, or 10-20 years based on response
    - More degraded areas and pockets of scrub oak likely 3-5 years, but this is adaptive based on response.
  - Specialist Lepidopteran species depend on these vegetation communities.
- Hank's Meadow
  - Approximately 19.2 acres
  - Area includes rare sandplain grassland with lowbush blueberry, little bluestem, and other fire adapted species
  - Fire interval estimated 2-4 years
- Goodnough Dike woodland restoration and grassland (out of special management consideration area)
  - 59 acres
  - Pre-fire management will take place
    - Oak woodland already proposed, ready for marking and sale
    - Grasslands would need invasives treatments
  - Fire intervals
    - Woodlands: 3-5 years introductory; 8-10 maintenance
    - Grasslands: 2-4 years
  - Benefits two state listed endangered plant species and rare inland sandplain grassland
- Winsor Dam, Spillway, and adjacent woodland
  - Areas identified in CLMP (total area in CLMP is 143 acres), proposed area is 84 acres.
  - Pre-fire management will take place

- Eastern area adjacent to spillway (45.5 acres) – thin by removal of white pine and other generalist tree species to restore to an oak woodland
  - Western area adjacent to spillway, below Winsor Dam (31 acres) – island of white pines, 6.7 acres, to be removed. Area under white pines is heavily infested with invasives
  - Spillway (5.5) acres – spillway needs all woody vegetation removed mechanically (in progress)
- Fire intervals
  - Eastern woodland: introductory 3-5 years; maintenance 8-10 years
  - Western grassland: 2-4 years
  - Spillway: 1-4 years
- Benefits two state-listed bird species: grasshopper sparrow (state-listed threatened) and eastern meadowlark (state-listed special concern). Also watch-listed plant species, wild lupine
- Continuation of sandplain grassland
- Administration fields
  - Prescribed fire only
  - Area across from the forestry building
  - Pollinator area near admin building
  - Fields lining entrance
  - Fire interval: 2-4 years
  - Increase acreage of rare inland sandplain grassland and pollinator habitat
  - Public and staff education opportunity

Tom Lautzenheiser asked for more information about the grasshopper sparrow and eastern meadowlark population in the park. Virginia answered that a biologist with natural heritage stated that they aren't currently seen at the park but could be a good location for them in the future if the fire management takes place.

Steve Ward asked if the burn plans would be posted online. Virginia answered that burn plans aren't currently published on the state's website. Posting a summary of the project and/or Virginia's PowerPoint presentation online was discussed.

### **Forest Stand Improvement (FSI) Program**

Christian Smith briefed the committee on the FSI program which was started November 2023.

- What is forest stand improvement?
  - A form of pre-commercial forest management used to improve vigor, composition, productivity, and quality of forest stands at the sapling stage of regeneration.
    - Ensures tree species diversity in a forest stand by reducing competition.
    - Desired tree species: oaks, hickories, sugar maples, and other hardwoods.
    - Without intervention and removal of competition, these species are more likely to become suppressed and die.
    - Oak and hickories: valuable trees for many species of local wildlife (expected to become even more important as the changing climate causes them to expand their range northwards).
- Why do our watersheds need FSI?
  - Regeneration goals include diversity of tree species.
  - Harvest regeneration sampling dominated by black birch, white pine, and red maple.
  - Began in collaboration with white oak sapling release study conducted in Ware River by Jeff Ward.
- FSI site assessments
  - Sites harvested 8-20 years prior are assessed by DWSP foresters to determine if FSI is warranted.
    - After 20 years of growth, overstory composition is mostly determined.
  - Patch cut openings between 0.5 and 2 acres.
  - If FSI is warranted, a 'diversity improvement recording' point is dropped in ArcGIS Field Maps.
    - These points allow field staff to collect FSI data such as stems released, invasive plants present onsite, date of fieldwork, hours worked, watershed, and any relevant site notes.
- Methods
  - Once a tree or group of trees is selected to be released, competing saplings encroaching the crown from the sides are felled.
  - Released trees must be above deer/moose browse height, vigorous, stout, and free of deformities, disease, or insect infestation.
  - Tree species to be felled include common species like white pine, red maple, and black birch. These abundant, fast-growing species often outcompete other species.

- Other species cut include interfering native vegetation such as witch hazel, grape vines, and mountain laurel.
- After undergoing chainsaw safety training sponsored by DCR, a team of 2-3 experienced DCR employees use electric chainsaws to fell small trees, typically 8” in diameter and under.
- Felled trees remain onsite to decompose and provide food, cover and/or habitat for various species of plants, animals, and fungi.
- No heavy equipment is required to cut or remove brush from debris site.
- The FSI team
  - Christian Smith: Forest Resiliency Coordinator
  - Austin Gelinas: Forestry Assistant
  - Patrick Maher: Forestry Assistant
- Results for Quabbin Reservoir
  - 4,258 stems released in total across Quabbin Reservoir
  - 96% of stems released are oaks, hickory, and sugar maple
  - 4% of stems released include other species to improve site diversity
- Crew statistics for the winter 2023 season: Wachusett and Quabbin Reservoirs (overall stats as of 3/15/2024; last day of winter season)
  - Total fieldwork days: 51
  - Total acres covered: 125.5
  - Total person hours: 628.25
  - Total working/cutting hours (crew): 221.75
  - Work rate for crew: ~0.56 acres/hour and ~47 stems released/acre
  - Total stems released: 5,961
- What’s next?
  - FSI: is intended to be a continuous component of DWSP Forest Management
    - Over time, the number of locations requiring FSI will catch up as fewer harvests enter the 8–20-year window for FSI.
  - Experiment with FSI in opening younger than 8 years for white oak resilience.
    - Often suppressed with poor form by the time of FSI at 8-20 years.
  - Incorporate invasive plant control, removal of interfering native vegetation, coppice thinning, and sanitation cuts into FSI activities (non-commercial forest management/improvement).

### **Forest As Climate Solutions (FACS) update**

In June of 2023 the Healey-Driscoll Administration convened a 12-person committee of experts and engaged with stakeholders and the public to inform the development of climate-oriented management guidelines that increase carbon storage and resilience to climate change.

On January 3, 2024, the Healey-Driscoll Administration released the [report of the Climate Forestry Committee](#) (CFC): Recommendations for Climate Oriented Forest Management Guidelines.

The committee agreed it was paramount for Massachusetts to “keep forests as forests” by supporting efforts to reduce land conversion and increasing permanent land conservation. The recommendations include enlarging forest reserves, applying practices for maintaining carbon stocks when managing actively, and implementing passive management strategies to realize older forests and increase carbon stocks.

### **Terrestrial Invasive Species Plan update**

Brian Keegan briefed the committee on plans to update to the Terrestrial Invasive Plant Strategy Plan.

- Forest as Climate Solutions (FACS):
  - Climate Forestry Committee (CFC): committee identified the importance of controlling the establishment and spread of invasive plants.
    - Utilizing chemical treatments when necessary and in accordance with recommended best practices.
    - The Committee suggests prioritizing intervention and treatment based on the invasives curve, focusing on initial infestations and areas with over 30% invasive plant cover.
    - The Committee suggests limiting the introduction or sale of non-native plant species.
  - EEA strongly agrees with the Committee on the significant of monitoring and managing invasive plants.
    - Supports initiative on DWSP lands:
      - “to more effectively address the impact of invasive plants on our watershed forests with an emphasis on climate-oriented, passive management techniques that make a forest more resilient.”

- There will be an update to the DWSP Terrestrial Invasive Plant Strategy by fall of 2024.
- The goal is to integrate the state-wide Invasive Species Response and Management Plan by December 2025.
- Terrestrial Invasive Plants – upcoming actions
  - Incorporate effective integrated vegetation management approach
    - Manage invasive and interfering plants.
    - Integrate with cutting/mowing
      - Minimize amount of herbicide needed
      - Spot treatments
    - Follow all laws/regulation and labels
  - Summer/seasonal projects
    - Continue habitat follow-up treatments with EEA Stewardship funding
    - Focus: forestry, landings, pre/post-harvest openings
    - Continue early detection-rapid response (EDRR)
      - Stiltgrass, corktree, tree-of-heaven, Japanese aralia
    - Japanese knotweed/hayscented fern control trials will take place

Bill Pula expressed concern about using herbicides on watershed lands at Quabbin. Brian Keevan reiterated that all laws, regulations, and best management practices would be used when applying herbicides. Bill suggested that a discussion regarding using herbicide on watershed lands be an agenda item at a future QWAC meeting.

### **Discussion – condition of roads inside gates 8 and 43**

Dan updated the committee on the roads inside gates 8 and 43.

The paving at gate 43 is finished was completed within the allotted time. BLA3 was reopened on Memorial Day weekend.

The gate 8 road continues to be monitored. There are plans for DCR to purchase their own roller for the road. The same management plan that has been used for the road over the past couple seasons will be used for the upcoming season.

### **Discussion – improvement of vistas at Pelham and Enfield lookouts**

There were no updates on this item since it was discussed at the last QWAC meeting.

It appears a commercial forestry job would be needed to improve the vista at the Pelham Lookout.

### **Status of Bladderwort at Pottapaug Pond**

Dan updated the committee on the status of bladderwort at Pottapaug and O’Laughlin Ponds.

There was a report from last year of bladderwort being seen at O’Loughlin Pond. That report was confirmed this spring. O’Loughlin Pond is currently closed to the public. The contract to control the bladderwort at Pottapaug Pond allowed for some contingency dates, some of those days will be used to survey/remove bladderwort at O’Loughlin.

The focus is on removing bladderwort at Pottapaug Pond. 15 days of harvesting have been scheduled. The most effective harvesting method is to carefully pull it out by hand. It is a floating plant and if any fragment breaks off, that piece of vegetation can reproduce and spread. Anything that has a chance to break up those plant fragments, such as oars, paddles, or motors, has the potential to spread it.

Clayton asked if there was any chance the ponds could be reopened during the current fishing season. Dan wouldn’t speculate on whether the ponds could be reopened during the current season since removal efforts are still ongoing and results from the removal are still unknown.

A member of the public asked if there are specific conditions that need to be met before the ponds can be opened. Dan responded that a focus for the current year is get as accurate a survey as possible completed, and then to eradicate as much as possible from the ponds and then reassess. Feedback will come from the contractors removing the plant as well as DCR-DWSP aquatic biologists.

### **‘Ghost’ anchor cables at fishing area 1**

Dan recently reached out to the State Police Marine Unit for a status update. They had a dive date scheduled for April that was cancelled and not yet rescheduled.

Investigating/retrieving the reported ‘ghost’ anchors has not yet occurred but is on the State Police’s list on tasks to be completed.

### **Status of opening the restrooms at the Observation Tower**

Dan updated the committee on plans to reopen the restrooms at the Observation Tower. They have been closed since the pandemic in 2020.

The janitorial department has recently been brought back up to full staff. The plan is to reopen the bathrooms after some minor improvements are conducted. Necessary repairs will be made this summer and then the restrooms reopened. They will only be reopened during 'normal business hours' (7 days a week, 7am-3pm). In the past, vandalism occurred outside those hours when the doors to the restrooms were kept open.

### **Member Issues**

Dan Hammock spoke about the watershed rangers not having any real law enforcement authority due to legislation changes over the years. He suggested that the committee show their support that the rangers be given more enforcement capabilities.

Bill Pula made a motion that QWAC send letters to the DCR, MWRA, MWRA Advisory Board, local Senators and Representatives, to request and recommend their support for development of legislation, or regulations to adequately train watershed rangers to allow them to request identification, to issue verbal and written warnings and citations for violations, and recording all actions taken. Ralph seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Bill Pula made a motion that QWAC send letters to the Select Boards, city councils, etc. of every town directly surrounding Quabbin Reservoir advising them of this issue of watershed rangers lacking enforcement capabilities, of our concerns, and asking them to contact their local Senator and Representative requesting support for developing legislation or regulations to resolve the situation. Ralph seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Ron Komar mentioned an upcoming Hamilton Rod and Gun Club event. The event is being put on by Whitetail unlimited and is scheduled for August 16, 5-10pm. There will be a live and silent auction following dinner as well as raffle packages. Call the Hamilton Rod and Gun Club at 508-347-3389 to make a reservation

Ton Lautzenheiser thanked DCR and Dan Clark for embracing forest stewardship, FSI, and updating the invasive plant strategy plan.

Gene Theroux expressed appreciation for the Quabbin Park Cemetery staff, Dan Clark, Mike Kennedy, Maria Beiter, and the rest of the DCR-DWSP staff for putting on a great Memorial Day program.

Tom Barnes asked why Wachusett has a longer shore fishing season than Quabbin. Dan will investigate the issue and get an answer.

**Meeting End Time: 8:59 PM**

**Upcoming QWAC Meetings:**

- Monday, September 16, 2024, at 6:30 PM – DCR Les and Terry Campbell  
Quabbin Visitor Center, 100 Winsor Dam Road, Belchertown, MA 01007