Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
June 6th, 2016
7:30 PM

Location: DCR Quabbin Visitor's Center, Belchertown, MA 01007

Members Present: Tom Barnes (North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association – Alternate), Tom Berube (MA Sportsmen's Council) Elisa Campbell (Sierra Club), Craig Cortis (Worcester County League of Sportsmen), Dennis Duguay (North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association - Alternate), Larry Gates (Quabbin Fisherman's Association), J.R. Greene (Friends of Quabbin, Inc.), Ralph Lapinskas (Public at Large), Tom Lautzenheiser (MA Audubon Society)

DCR Staff Present: Derek Beard, Dan Clark, Herm Eck, Justin Gonsor, Ken MacKenzie, Bill Pula

Public Attending: Rosemary Charron, Laurie Pray, Randy Stone, Clayton Sydla, Steve Ward, Heidi Waugh

Superintendent's Report

Meeting Start Time: 7:32 PM

Approval of Minutes of Meeting on March 14th, 2016

Elisa Campbell made a motion to accept the minutes from the QWAC meeting held on March 14th, 2016. Tom Berube seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Quabbin FY17 Forestry Lot Proposals

Herm Eck gave a presentation detailing the 16 forestry projects proposed for sale in the Quabbin Watershed for FY2017. A summary and description of those lots are as follows:

- Shaft 12 Lot – Hardwick, MA - 97 acres
    - Red pine, oak/pine, oak/hardwood types
    - 0.3-3.5 acre openings
    - Harvest primarily red pine and poorly formed white pine
    - Vernal pools on site

    - Partially constructed historic railroad bed on site
- Gate 25 Lot – New Salem, MA - 94 acres
    - Hemlock/hardwood forest type
    - Harvest primarily declining hemlock, trees with poor stem structure and areas with advanced regeneration
    - 2 acre openings will be used
    - Cultural Resources on site
    - Vernal pools on site
    - Unusual species (spleenwort) on site
- Rattlesnake Hill Lot – New Salem, MA - 76 acres
    - red pine, white pine/hemlock, and red oak forest types
    - Harvest most of the red pine plantation. In other forest types, openings up to 2 acres in size will be located in declining hemlock, groups of poorly formed stems or areas with advance regeneration.
    - No treatment in areas dominated by healthy well formed oaks.
    - NHESP habitat (Acidic rocky outcrop natural community) on top of hill will be enhanced by the reduction of the white pine component.
- Harris Hill Lot – New Salem, MA - 80 acres
    - White pine and red pine forest types
    - Red pine and low quality white pine will be harvested in groups up to 2 acres in size releasing advance regeneration
    - NHESP habitat
    - Area heavily used by walkers and road bycyclists
- Blackington Road Lot – New Salem, MA – 57 acres
    - White pine/hemlock and white pine/hardwood forest types
    - Forest openings up to 2 acres in size will be created in poorly formed white pine, declining hemlock and areas with advance regeneration.
- Gate 4 Lot – Belchertown, MA – 80 acres
    - White pine/hardwood, oak/hardwood and red maple forest types
    - Openings up to 2 acres in size will be created in areas dominated by poorly formed stems or advance regeneration
    - Vernal pool on site
    - Cellar holes on site
- Griswold Brook Lot – Prescott Peninsula – 113 acres
    - Red pine, white pine and oak/hardwood forest types
    - Removal of the 10 acres of declining red pine plantation is planned, pending approval of the DCR commissioner

    - Releasing advance regeneration in openings up to 2 acres is also planned
- Observatory – South Lot – Prescott Peninsula – 29 acres
    - Red pine/white pine plantation forest type
    - Declining red pine will be harvested in openings up to 5 acres
- Observatory Lot – Prescott Peninsula – 6 acres
    - Red pine/white pine plantation
    - One 5 acre opening is planned to salvage declining red pine

The former observatory site on Prescott Peninsula is currently being maintained as open field.

- Mount Pleasant Road Lot – Prescott Peninsula – 13 acres
    - Red pine plantation
    - Openings up to 5 acres are planned to salvage declining red pine
    - Black bear rub trees in section B
- Gate 20 Lot – Prescott Peninsula – 11 acres
    - Red pine plantation
    - Openings up to 5 acres are planned to salvage declining red pine
    - Cellar hole on site
- Egypt Brook Lot – Prescott Peninsula – 73 acres
    - Mixed oak, red oak and oak/pine forest types
    - This project proposes about 10 acres of thinning (primarily in the red oak type) as well as openings up to 2 acres (primarily in the mixed oak and oak/pine type)
    - Openings will be placed in areas with poorly formed stems and/or advance regeneration
    - Stream crossing on site
- Gate 40 Lot – Petersham, MA – 158 acres
    - Hemlock, mixed oak and white pine forest types
    - Openings up to 2 acres are proposed in areas with declining hemlock and/or poorly formed stems of oak and pine
    - Some thinning between openings is also proposed
    - Vernal pools on site
- Gate 37 Lot – Petersham, MA – 76 acres
    - White pine, oak/hardwood, hemlock/hardwood and red pine forest types

    - Openings up to 2 acres are proposed for areas with declining red pine and hemlock and white pine/oak areas with poor form/vigor or advance regeneration
    - Stream/wetland complex functioning as a vernal pool on site
- Birch Drive Lot – Petersham, MA – 35 acres
    - Oak/hardwood and hemlock/hardwood forest types
    - Forest health concerns include hemlock wooly adelgid, hemlock elongate scale, nectria canker, beech bark disease and ash decline
    - Openings up to 2 acres are proposed for areas with forest health issues and advance regeneration
- Pelham Red Pine Salvage Lot 3 – Pelham, MA
    - FY-16 Proposal
    - Originally proposed as openings up to 5 acres
    - Now proposed as openings up to 16 acres, pending DCR Commissioner approval

In 2012, a Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) reviewed the Massachusetts DWSP Watershed Forestry Program and submitted a list of recommendations. That list is as follows:

- Produce illustrated plain-language summaries of Land Management Plans to increase their accessibility to the general public
- Explore new approaches and continue to enhance source water protection on the Wachusett Reservoir watershed
- Re-start active forest management using methods that eliminate the geometric patch cut approach in favor of irregular-shaped regeneration opening and specialized thinning techniques. Consider creating both early successional and old growth conditions on limited areas
- Monitor the effectiveness of Best Management Practices using established protocols and post time-sequence photography online
- Monitor hydrologic and water quality effects of forest management above and below, and before and after harvesting operations

In 2013, DCR-DWSP responded to the STAC report by detailing how they planned to move forward:

- Produce accessible land management plan (LMP) summaries, per recommendations
- Continue to build watershed protection for Wachusett Reservoir
- Continue to refine lot review process and public awareness, via public meetings, online postings, and on-site tours and signage

- Plan to restart forest management primarily using small, irregularly shaped regeneration openings, with green retention in larger openings
- Is working to implement USDA Forest Service Best Management Practices (BMP) monitoring protocol and will establish photo points on some harvest lots, and post images online
- Committed to a greater level of routine water quality monitoring within harvest areas, and is refining both short and long-term monitoring programs
- Released Terrestrial Invasive Plants Management Stategy, online at http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/water-res-protection/watershed-mgmt/plans.html

Tom Berube asked if cutting the amount of red pine proposed would result in increased sediment loading/runoff into the reservoir. Herm Eck answered that there shouldn't be any irregularities detected in water samples taken near forestry operations.

Craig Cortis asked about tree diseases affecting local forests. Herm Eck answered that the list of invasive forest pests and diseases is growing. There is a long list of insects currently being monitored in the state. There was discussion on mapping/updating areas where invasive species occur on the watershed.

Steve Ward asked if the forestry lot proposals would be available to view online; and how much pertinent information they contain. Herm Eck answered that the cutting plan for each proposed lot will get put online. There was discussion about the level of detail described in the cutting plans and whether or not they are specific enough. Tom Lautzenheiser agreed that putting the full cutting plans online would be a good idea; the more information available to the public the better. Justin Gonsor will email the link to committee members when they get posted online. Complete lot proposals for Quabbin FY2017 forestry projects have been posted online at: http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/watersupply/watershed/fy17quabbinforestryproposaldetail.pdf.

Elisa Campbell requested the committee members be sent a map, or multiple maps, detailing forestry lots that have been completed on the Quabbin Watershed over the years to provide context to the current proposed projects.

A public tour of the proposed forestry projects on the Quabbin Watershed was scheduled for Monday, July 18th at 3PM; meet at the New Salem Field Office. At a

later date, the tour was rescheduled due to scheduling conflicts for Monday, August 15th; same time and meet up location.

Quabbin Deer Hunt Changes

Ken MacKenzie presented results from the 2015 deer hunt as well as detailed some of the changes set to take place for the 2016 hunt.

In 2015, 48 deer (27 bucks; 21 does) were harvested during the Quabbin hunt. 1,101 hunters were selected and 865 hunters showed up; 78% attendance. Temperatures were unseasonably warm during the hunt. That coupled with an above average mast crop lead to a lack of overall deer movement.

Over the past decade harvest data has projected the deer density at Quabbin. However, things like bad weather, presence or absence of snow cover, availability of mast (such as acorns) and the distribution of both deer and hunters can impact annual harvest. The Quabbin herd averages 10 deer/mi^2. It is important to balance a suitable density that allows for successful hunting and continued support by hunters, as well as a density that allows for adequate regeneration of desired tree species.

DCR is currently using two harvest-independent indices to help better understand what is going on with the deer population: forest impact monitoring and deer/moose pellet count surveys.

Regeneration has been monitored by our DCR foresters and described in their Regeneration Monitoring Reports since 1989. Since 2006, Quabbin has continued to meet its management goal of 2,000 stems/acre above 4.5 ft. (generally considered to be above deer browse height). This year we will be starting a new way to measure the deer impact of the forest, and therefore water quality; looking at LGS (little green stuff) that serve as indicators of forest health. We think of deer as shrub and small tree browsers, but deer feed extensively on herbaceous plants and even fungi. Now, not only are we going to continue to monitor the woody species, but also look at some indicator species such a Rubus (blackberries and raspberries), Canada Mayflower, Trillium, Solomon's seal, and Viburnum.

DCR Natural Resource and Forestry staff began a pilot study in 2015 to investigate whether a Pellet-Group County Survey on watershed lands could provide insight into the number of deer and moose using DCR property. Last year, Pelham, Quabbin Park, and the Ware River were surveyed. Deer densities for the study area ranged from 7-18 deer/mi^2. The Pellet County density estimate provides a nice secondary measure of our deer density. This year's transects were walked from February through mid-April. 116 miles were collectively walked. Areas covered included Petersham and Prescott at Quabbin, as well as locations at Wachusett and Sudbury. Deer densities in Petersham were estimated at 16-27/mi^2 while Prescott was estimated at 2-6 deer/mi^2. Moose densities in Petersham were estimated at 8-11 moose/mi^2 while Prescott was estimated at 5-8 moose/mi^2.

A new change for 2016 will be the antlerless deer allocation system. In the early years we required every Quabbin hunter to purchase an antlerless permit, with the opportunity to purchase two. In 2012, hunters were only allowed one antlerless permit, and in 2013 we made antlerless permits optional. But for the last 3 years, over 95% of hunters were still hunting with antlerless permits. Quabbin lands are centered within wildlife management zone (WMZ) 6; managing the Quabbin hunt area similar to Zone 6 has been discussed in the past with MassWildlife. This year, roughly 500 antlerless permits will be issued to Quabbin hunters.

Since 2006, we have been collecting information on moose observations during the Quabbin hunt based on sightings by hunters. The population of moose on the watershed appears to be relatively stable; bull:cow ratios have been very close to 1:1, which is indicative of an unhunted population.

DCR also continues to work with the Mass. Coop. Unit on an experimental exclosure study. A dissertation, examining the first 5-6 years of the exclosure research was just completed and will be available soon. The presence of moose has added to the browse effect of the deer. The research showed that no species of woody plants were eliminated from any of the plots by browsing, but the plant's rate of growth and growth form were altered by browsing by moose and deer.

Additionally this year we have moved to an online only application system for the hunt. As a result, there is now no application fee and it is free to apply. Hardwick will be the rested segment in 2016 and we will continue to maintain a hunter density of 1 hunter/35 acres. The classroom orientation video is set to be updated this year as well and we will be keeping the online orientation available for returning hunters.

Member Issues

Bill Pula gave an update on the Quabbin fishing areas. Dawn Metcalf who formerly worked out of area 3 was recently hired as a Quabbin watershed ranger; there are multiple new seasonalal workers at the fishing areas this year. A couple dozen new motors were purchased for our rental boats this season as well.

Elisa Campbell asked for a status update on hazardous tree removal at Quabbin Park Cemetery. Bill Pula answered that there is money in the budget to continue cutting down problem trees and limbs from the cemetery this year.

J.R. Greene talked about the Pelham Lookout on Rt. 202 and how the view has become compromised as trees have grown taller over the years. There was discussion on how to best preserve the views at that location.

Tom Lautzenheiser asked for an update on the status of unauthorized single track trail construction and riding in the Ware River Watershed. Bill Pula answered that it is a continuing concern. Signage has been placed at illegal trailheads and the Student Conservation Association (SCA) is set to come out in the coming weeks for the second year in a row to help close/decommission unauthorized trails. Tickets have been written for people observed riding on unauthorized trails as well. Wachusett Reservoir has recently also been dealing with the problem of single trail riding on unauthorized trails in their watershed; signage was put up but was subsequently vandalized. There was discussion about whether or not single track riding on watershed lands is an appropriate use of the land.

Craig Cortis made a motion that QWAC does not support the expansion of any single-track/off road trails on watershed lands. Elisa Campbell seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Bill Pula mentioned that a new state record for heaviest lake trout was recently set at Quabbin. William Roy of Palmer recently caught the 25 lb. 7 oz. lake trout; the fish was 33" long and had a girth of 26".

Craig Cortis commended Justin Gonsor on his professionalism in typing up the meeting minutes over the past few years and his diligence in getting those detailed accounts of the meetings out to the committee members.

Tom Berube talked about MassWildlife's Teaching with Trout Program which introduces students grades K-12 to the concepts of ecosystems, fisheries biology, freshwater ecology, water quality, and habitat conservation. Students raise Brook Trout from eggs during the winter then release them into approved cold water streams and lakes in the spring. If anyone is interested in the program they can get additional information by calling Caleb Slater, Anadromous Fish Project Leader at 508-389-6331 or caleb.slater@state.ma.us.

Meeting End Time: 9:23 PM

Upcoming QWAC Meetings:

- Monday, September 19th, 2016 at 7:30 PM – DCR Quabbin Visitor Center, 485 Ware Road, Belchertown, MA 01007

Upcoming Quabbin Watershed Public Tours of Proposed Forestry Lots:

- Originally scheduled for July 18th; Rescheduled for Monday, August 15th, 2016 at 3PM. Meet at the DCR New Salem Field Office located at 21 Elm Street, New Salem, MA 01355.