

Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
September 19th, 2016
7:30 PM

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

Members Present: James Boyko (Swift River Valley Historical Society), Elisa Campbell (Sierra Club), Jerry Eves (Trout Unlimited), 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: Justin Gonsor, Bill Pula

Public Attending: Ellen Hopman, Brad Miner, Laurie Pray, Gretta Tucker, Larry Tucker, Steve Ward, Heidi Waugh

Superintendent's Report

Meeting Start Time: 7:35 PM

J.R. Greene acted as chairman for the meeting in the absence of Tom Berube.

Approval of Minutes of Meeting on June 6th, 2016

J.R. Greene made a motion to accept the minutes from the QWAC meeting held on June 6th, 2016. Larry Gates seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mill Valley Snowmobile Club – Trail Proposal by Larry Tucker

Larry Tucker gave a presentation on behalf of the Mill Valley Snowmobile Club with a proposal to create a corridor trail for snowmobiles between Belchertown and Shutesbury. The group originally presented the proposal to the committee at the September 15th, 2014 QWAC Meeting. They were invited to return with a more comprehensive proposal including a more defined location of the trail and additional details regarding the trail.

The Mill Valley Snowmobile Club would like to partner with DCR to create a connecting trail on 'off-reservation' lands on the western side of Rt. 202. Some

considerations the club has taken into account include locating the trail away from houses, avoid cutting any trees over 3"-4" in diameter, and to stay away from any water, if possible. Since the 2014 meeting, the club has hiked, mapped, and scouted for the most efficient route with a minimal footprint. In total, the trail proposal would utilize between 4.5-5 miles of DCR Off-Reservation property; the rest would be on other private and public land. The proposal would ask that the trail only be open two months out of the year (snow providing). The Mill Valley Club would be willing to put up signs and erect gates where approved by DCR. Any new alternative ideas are also welcome.

Several University-level studies were cited which conclude that snowmobiling does not impact water quality or the land. Snowmobiling was compared to other existing uses and practices in and around the Quabbin Reservation; logging, automobiles on Rt. 202, chemical salt used on Rt. 202, and the boating and fishing program at Quabbin. It was mentioned that since 1969, local snowmobile clubs have had historic and positive relationships with landowners, public entities, towns, land trusts, fisheries and wildlife, etc.

Elisa Campbell asked about how long it would take someone on a snowmobile to ride the complete trail. Larry Tucker answered that it should take around 2-3 hours to travel the trail one way from Belchertown to Shutesbury.

J.R. Greene asked for clarification on the term off-reservation land. Bill Pula answered that it is a designation given to those parcels of land and waters within the Quabbin Reservation Watershed System which are generally outside of the bounds of the Routes 9, 32, 32A, 122, and 202, with some exceptions. Off-Reservation land is managed less stringently; hunting is allowed per Mass Division of Fisheries and Wildlife regulations, snowmobiling is allowed on certain closed roads, etc.

A member of the public asked if cross country skiers would be able to use the proposed trail. Larry Tucker answered that it would ultimately be up to DCR, but the snowmobile trails in Belchertown are generally multi-use.

Jim Boyko commented that with the state currently in a drought that there is an obligation to protect the water supply.

A member of the public asked if the legality of putting boats on Quabbin changed due to the drought; or if any other public access has been altered. Bill Pula talked about the origins of the boating program at Quabbin which started in the 1950's. In the past, the fishing areas have been closed when fire danger has been extremely high. Quabbin is regulated by the Department of Environmental Protection which has been against allowing increased recreation at Quabbin in the past.

Tom Lautzenheiser asked for a quick summary on how much of the proposed trail would be new trails as opposed to existing roadbeds, etc. and how many bridges are proposed for construction. Larry Tucker answered that there would be 6 bridges set for construction. The ratio of new trails to existing trails was unclear at this time; but less than a mile of cutting was estimated.

J.R. Greene asked the Mill Valley Club to come up with a figure for how much new cutting is proposed on DCR Off-Reservation land.

Larry Gates made a motion to give the committee time to consider the proposal and continue the discussion at a later date; committee members not present should be sent the powerpoint presentation of the proposal. Tom Lautzenheiser seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Airplane Incident

Bill Pula talked about the plane that was forced to make an emergency landing on a sandbar at Quabbin near gate 22 back in August. It was a small, single engine plane. DCR Environmental Quality Staff, Quabbin Rangers, and the Massachusetts State Police were all on site to manage the situation. Other federal agencies were also involved. The plane was ultimately airlifted to the Orange airport via helicopter. No negative water quality effects were observed.

Member Issues

Bill Pula gave an update on how the drought has been affecting Quabbin's water level. The reservoir is currently down about 9 feet and is around 83% full, still within normal operating conditions.

Larry Gates was concerned about the Gate 43 boat launch. There seems to be confusion at the launch site regarding parking and unloading. People showing up

to rent boats are blocking the ramp for other people looking to launch their private boat. Larry Gates suggested adding another set of stakes/ribbons to make parking areas more visible and clear. Bill Pula will pass the information on to the boat launch area foreman. He also mentioned that the rental boat launch site needed to be moved due to low water conditions.

A member of the public asked for information about QWAC; how someone would join and what powers the committee has. Bill Pula talked about how QWAC was legislatively founded and set up in the 1980's. The committee is an advisory board which gives recommendations to DCR. Agenda items can be submitted via QWAC members or by calling the Quabbin Visitor Center to inquire about the process.

Adjournment

Jim Boyko made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Elisa Campbell seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Meeting End Time: 9:04 PM

Upcoming QWAC Meetings:

- Monday, December 12th, 2016 at 7:30 PM – DCR Quabbin Visitor Center, 485 Ware Road, Belchertown, MA 01007