

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, June 20st, 2019
7:00 PM

Location: Rutland Free Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543

Members: (Members in **BOLD** were present)

Massachusetts Council of Sportsmen: William Lebel

Alternate: Mike Moss

Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs: **John Root**

Alternate: Dave Papale

Trout Unlimited: **Jeffrey Schaaf (Chair person)**

Alternate:

A Rod and Gun Club: Joe Cataldo

Alternate: Bryan Waterman

Barre Selectboard: Martha Varnot

Alternate: **Edward Yaglou**

Hubbardston Selectboard:

Alternate: **Cindy Schlener**

Oakham Selectboard: Thomas Hughes

Alternate: Phillip Warbasse

Rutland Selectboard: **Charles R. Williams**

Alternate: **Brett Russ**

Barre Historical Society: **Margo Petracone**

Alternate:

Hubbardston Historical Society: Robin Langer

Alternate:

Oakham Historical Society: Bill Mucha

Alternate: **Lee Dougan**

Rutland Historical Society:

Alternate:

Massachusetts Wildlife Federation: (group disbanded)

Alternate:

Massachusetts Audubon Society: **Martha Gach**

Alternate:

Sierra Club: Matt Hopkinson

Alternate:

Upper Ware River Watershed Association: (group disbanded)

Alternate:

General Public: Mark DuBois

Alternate: **Dave Small**

DCR Staff Present:

Dan Clark, Sara Cohen, Herm Eck, Justin Gonsor, Lisa Gustavsen, Brian Keevan, Jenna Perschka, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present:

Lydia Barter, John Bloud, Christine Berian, Anthony Craig, Paul Dearden, Francisco Gago, Denise Kellicker, Paul Kreswick, Chris Palin, Kes Roberts, Peggy Rott, Diana Walther, Doug Walther, Mike Wikader, Marianne Wojcicki, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:06 PM

Approval of minutes from meetings on Thursday, January 17th, 2019 and Thursday, March 21st, 2019

Dick Williams made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on January 17th, 2019. Dave Small seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Dave Small made a motion to accept the minutes from the WRWAC meeting on March 21st, 2019. Dick Williams seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

FY20 forestry lot proposals

Brian Keevan detailed how to navigate DCR's watershed forestry webpages and find the detailed harvest proposals online. One method is to google 'MA DCR water supply forestry' and clicking the first link that comes up; it brings you to DCR's Watershed Forestry Program webpage. From there, click the link on the right side of the screen for 'DCR Watershed Forestry Projects'. Scroll down the next page until you reach the 'projects proposal' section. There you can click the 'FY2020 DWSP Forestry Proposals for Quabbin Reservoir, Ware River, and Wachusett Reservoir Watersheds' link that will bring up the detailed harvest

proposals for FY2020. The direct link to the proposals is as follows:

<https://eoeaa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=308b040375974ea1b4c69af87fbb8a73>

The public comment period will remain open through August 2nd. The website to submit comments can be found at: <https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>

Herm Eck presented the three FY2020 proposed forestry projects for the Ware River watershed (WRW) to the committee.

The first lot (WR-20-4-1) is bound by Rt. 122 to the north, Rt. 148 to the west, and completed lot #4390 (WR-16-4-2) to the south and east. The lot covers 8 acres. This lot is comprised of a residual red pine plantation that has been thinned twice. The goal of this proposal is to complete the final removal of red pine plantation overstory from this shelterwood. There are no wetlands, streams, or vernal pools present within the proposal area. Skid trails will be spaced as much as possible to protect regeneration. There are no harvesting limitations on this lot. No known cultural resources exist on the site. If applicable, DWSP will follow any additional recommendations from DCR's archeologist regarding protection of potentially sensitive sites. No known rare species or priority habitats exist on site. DWSP will ask the state DPW about cutting in the buffer zone. It is allowable to cut 50% of the basal area in a buffer zone every 5 years.

Dean Zuppio asked if there is a snowmobile trail that runs through the lot. Herm answered yes, but that the trail should remain open through the project; work won't be done directly over the trail.

The second lot (WR-20-8-2) is bound by Rt. 122 to the south and the northern, western, and eastern boundaries are Park Brooker and other associated wetlands. The lot covers 11 acres. A variable filter strip will be applied to the stream/wetland to the north per DWSP policy. Good quality white pine, red maple, hemlock, red oak, and black birch seedlings are present. Heavy beaver activity is reducing the amount of hardwood regeneration. The red pine stands will be removed. The goal will be to remove all the remaining overstory red pine, which will require permission to exceed the visual buffer threshold along Rt. 122, particularly in the smaller red pine stand which is directly adjacent to Rt. 122. There are no harvesting restrictions or known cultural resources on this site. No known rare species or priority habitats exist on the lot.

The third lot (WR-20-40-3) is in Phillipston. It is bound by Williamsville Road to the west (also the property boundary line), property boundary lines (stone walls) to the north and south, and the north/south rail trail and the old 'Javenpaw' gravel pit to the east. The lot covers 255 acres. Gypsy moth eggs are present, heavy in spots, in the oak stand. There are no obvious areas of mortality, but recon of the area took place leaves had dropped. The site will be evaluated this summer to see if salvage harvesting is warranted. There is a band of wetlands that bisect the lot north-south. Most of the proposed work will take place west of that band, so that it will not need to be crossed. If extensive salvage in the oak/hardwood stand is needed, a landing may need to be established east of those wetlands and the access road leading to the old gravel pit may need to be upgraded. Within the white pine/hardwood stand the previous openings will be expanded upon wherever possible. The expansion openings will be up to 2 acres, but will probably average closer to 1 acre due to wetlands and the road/property line which limit expansion possibilities. Two new openings of up to 5 acres will be established. Some steep slopes are present in the oak hardwood stand and will be avoided. No known cultural resources exist within the proposal area. Stone walls will be flagged and avoided as much as possible. Existing barways will be used where feasible and harvest layout will protect walls as much as possible. One possible vernal pool was surveyed in the center of the lot and determined to not be a vernal pool. Three other verified vernal pools are in the very southeastern portion of the lot. Those pools would only be potentially impacted if salvage harvesting in the oak stand is necessary. One stream will be monitored for any impacts from this operation (the stream crossing the gravel pit access road in the northern portion of the lot). The other proposed crossing is very rocky and the flow at the location is seasonal. Williamsville Road may need some work to access the southern landing if necessary.

Separate from the three lot proposals, oak salvage was discussed. A combination of stresses from a multi-year drought, repeated gypsy moth defoliation events, and outbreaks of native boring beetles has resulted in widespread oak mortality throughout the Quabbin and Ware River forests. While a large amount of the dead oak will remain in place to add to wildlife habitat and forest structural diversity, DWSP intends to temporarily shift its forest management focus to harvesting in areas of significant oak mortality. All DWSP standard management policies apply to these salvage operations. The DCR Commissioner will need to

approve any salvage work that will create openings >5 acres as is the case for other DWSP silvicultural operations. There will be an accelerated proposal and sale schedule of these areas.

A public tour of the proposed Ware River watershed forestry projects was scheduled for Thursday, July 18th at 6PM. Everyone will meet at the DCR office in Oakham.

Update on Public Access Management Plan: Report-out by DCR on certain draft plan elements to address identified concerns

Dan Clark updated the committee on what has happened since the last meeting regarding the update of the Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan (WRWPAMP).

Meetings occurred between DCR and representatives of various user groups: Midstate trail, AMC, snowmobile clubs, Worcester County League of Sportsmen, and equestrian groups. The goal of the meetings was to discuss some of DCR's ideas on areas that may need to be restricted going forward.

A draft version of the goals for the 2018-2019 update to the WRWPAMP were discussed. Those goals are as follows:

1. Enhance water quality protection by moving public access activity away from the most sensitive areas, including the Ware River Intake (a.k.a. Shaft 8/Lonergan Intake), streams, ponds, and wetlands (except at designated beach and boating areas).

The 2010 public access plan has a restricted zone around the Ware River intake of about 100 acres where no activity is allowed. The original idea for the new plan is to create a 1-mile buffer around the intake. There was also a suggestion of creating a 1-kilometer buffer around the intake instead.

Parking areas were also discussed. The main concern is the parking area on Rt. 122 across the street from the intake. The goal will be to move people away from that area with the understanding that a new parking area would be created in the general vicinity. Jeff Schaaf added that the parking area also serves as a canoe/kayak access point. Dan answered that DCR is currently investigating alternative access point that will allow people in that same general vicinity. Construction of a new boat ramp has not been discussed. There is currently a

gravel ramp at the Rt. 122 parking area. Multiple people commented that they would like to see new parking areas opened before the old ones are shut down.

Margo Petracone asked about the Coldbrook Springs parking area. Dan answered that it is located within the 1-mile buffer, but no decisions have been made if access will be limited at that area. Cindy Schlener commented that the new parking lot should be in the open on a public way (preferably Rt. 122) for security purposes, women walking alone, etc.

There was discussion about the rail trail passing through the buffer zone around the intake. A member of the public asked if hunting and fishing would be excluded in the buffer zone. Dan reiterated that the focus is to eliminate concentrated, organized activities and trails within the buffer zone. One way to accomplish that is to remove the Rt. 122 parking area and construct a new one outside the buffer zone; general access in the buffer zone won't be prohibited. John Scannell added that DCR is looking to limit, not eliminate, activities within the 1-mile buffer zone, with the realization that certain existing infrastructure such as the rail trail will need to remain in that zone.

2. Maintain the recreational experience, protect natural resources, and reduce noise pollution by replacing dense trail networks with a more dispersed trail network that prioritizes connectivity over larger areas.

Cindy Schlener suggested expanding the trail/parking access network in the northern parts of the watershed to help shift access away from the intake.

3. Support a sufficient range of access for different authorized uses while avoiding significant expansion of total trail mileage by adopting a shared-use approach to most trails.

Feedback from user groups has been that they are generally in favor of sharing trails.

A member of the public asked if increased erosion or trail closures is expected on multi-use trails. Dan Clark answered that not all trails will be multi-use, and that problems should be able to be avoided with good trail planning and maintenance.

4. Promote safety and protect natural resources by applying sustainable trails management principles to the design, construction, and maintenance of trails.
5. Reduce illegal activity – including littering/dumping, unauthorized use, dangerous activity, and habitat destruction – through improved signage

and outreach, road access restrictions, partnerships with user groups, and increased, monitoring and enforcement.

Currently, many roads in the Ware River watershed are open year-round to vehicles, 24 hours a day. This is in stark contrast to the other watersheds in the system. Limitations on vehicle access will be discussed as part of the access plan update. The idea will be to close most roads to vehicles apart from the deer hunting season.

6. Support dispersed deer hunting through road access during deer season.
7. Reduce user conflicts and increase user and pet safety by requiring dogs to be leashed at all times in all locations, except when licensed hunters are in the act of hunting or hunt training (compatible with MassWildlife regulations).
8. Improve public awareness of allowable uses, restrictions, access locations, and some of DCR's highly visible Land Management Practices through:
 - Improved signage (clear, consistent, strategically located)
 - High quality maps of designated trails with an emphasis on digital availability
 - Publication of lay-friendly fact sheets summarizing DCR's timber harvesting practices and beaver management practices, as codified in DCR's 2018 Land Management Plan (LMP).
9. Promote a shared-stewardship model of watershed management through partnerships with user groups that can assist with:
 - Trail maintenance and repair
 - Outreach and education
 - Reporting illegal activity
10. Address multiple concerns related to Comet Pond (note that this goal is in the early stages of development)
 - Cindy Schlener suggested adding an access point to the pond closer to the parking area. People looking to swim long distances can't depart from the beach as they are confined to the area within the buoys.

Dan Clark added that discussions between DCR and the user groups will continue as the access plan update process continues. John Scannell added that the goal is to have a draft version of the plan completed by the fall, with a final version by the end of the year.

Brett Russ asked if it would make sense to add language to the access plan regarding new trail suggestions and how the process would work. John Scannell agreed that it would be a good idea to make sure the plan is able to address changes/requests between the official 10-year updates.

T3 trail closure/reroute discussion

Cindy Schlener asked if someone from DCR could be assigned to flag/mark the official reroute of T3. It was closed due to erosion issues. She would like the process process of rerouting and fixing the trail to begin. Local equine clubs have volunteered to help with this process. John Scannell answered that he doesn't want to commit an official reroute of T3 until the access plan update is closer to being completed.

Cindy will email John at the end of August in the hope that a point person for the T3 trail will have been identified. This person would be encouraged to attend the September WRWAC meeting.

Public access discussion regarding DCR's new bridges in WRW

Dan Clark updated the committee on the new bridges that are set to be installed in the WRW.

The bridges were purchased to facilitate forest management, ranger access, and other DCR personnel. Decisions on what types of access will be allowed to use the bridges will be discussed during the public access plan update.

Cindy Schlener commented that the bridge over Fisher Road would help users avoid crossing in the water. Dan recognized that the bridges would provide for a new level of access.

Member Issues

Martha Varnot and Ed Yaglou will be leaving the committee as soon as the Barre selectboard finds replacements for them.

Jeff Schaaf commented that there are no updates on the legislation that will expand and update the list of groups represented on the committee. He will contact Anne Gobi before the next meeting.

Dick Williams asked for an update on how diligent the farmers have been at mowing the fields in the watershed. Herm Eck answered the prison camp fields will be a problem; they didn't get mowed last year. Current permits run out after this summer; bids will then go out for new mowing permits. Restrictions in the permits don't allow for mowing before August to avoid nesting birds.

Dick also voiced concern about lilies and other plants/weeds overtaking the water surface at Long Pond. Dan will ask our aquatic biologist to investigate the issue and try to determine if the plants are native or invasive.

Meeting End Time: 8:32 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, September 12th, 2019 at 7 PM – Rutland Free Public Library (downstairs), 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543