

**Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, November 20, 2025
7:00 PM**

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

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

Massachusetts Council of Sportsmen: **Laurie Pray**

Alternate: Mike Moss

Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs: **Steve LaRivee**

Alternate: John Root

Trout Unlimited: **Jeffrey Schaaf (chairperson)**

Alternate:

A Rod and Gun Club: Vincent Kotowski

Alternate: **Dennis Guberski**

Barre Selectboard: **Mike Wood (vice chairperson)**

Alternate:

Hubbardston Selectboard: **Cindy Schlener**

Alternate: Dave Marsh

Oakham Selectboard: **Thomas Hughes**

Alternate: Phillip Warbasse

Rutland Selectboard: Darren Ross

Alternate:

Barre Historical Society: **Dave Flick**

Alternate: **Margo Petracone**

Hubbardston Historical Society: Robin Langer

Alternate:

Oakham Historical Society: **Andrew Noone**

Alternate: **Lee Dougan**

Rutland Historical Society: Eric Van Reet

Alternate:

Massachusetts Audubon Society: Martha Gach

Alternate:

Sierra Club: Matt Hopkinson

Alternate:

General Public: Mark DuBois

Alternate: **Brett Russ**

DCR Staff Present: Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present: Duane Pray, Rusty Savignac, Marianne Wojcicki

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:02 PM

Approval of minutes from meeting on September 18, 2025

Tom Hughes made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on September 18, 2025. Dave Flick seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mike Wood asked that the draft version of the minutes be sent to WRWAC members in a timely manner after meetings are held. This makes it easier for the members to report back to their respective groups they represent on the committee.

Discussion of House Bill 1048 and the 'reserve lands' designation on DWSP properties

It was clarified that house bill 1048 is regarding MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife managed lands. There are another two bills making its way through the legislature that would apply to DCR managed lands. House Bill H.953 (and its Senate equivalent S.488) proposes to designate a significant portion of DCR forest lands as parks or reserves to address climate and biodiversity challenges. House Bill H.903 (and S.535) authorizes the establishment of old-growth forest reserves on state-owned lands. Both bills that could affect DCR have already had hearings.

John Scannell commented that DCR would not be looking to designate lands as 'reserve' that don't meet agency goals. DWSP goals include managing for a diverse forest that acts as a natural filter. DWSP is not looking to limit recreation, hunting, or fishing when selecting areas to set as reserves. DCR-State Parks went through a similar process back in 2012

where they designated reserve lands on their properties. All their lands were given 1 of 3 designations (parkland, woodland, reserve).

What definition of and activities that would be allowed on reserve lands were discussed. Currently, there doesn't seem to be a standardized definition for reserves.

It was mentioned that many bills are introduced into the legislature each year that end up going nowhere. Interested parties were encouraged to keep track of the progress of the mentioned bills.

It was stated that DCR is not authoring any of the house bills.

It was decided that several members of the sportsman's and trail's subcommittees (Mike Wood, Brett Russ, Dennis Guberski) will draft a position letter on behalf of WRWAC to be sent to the local house representatives. The letter will advocate for clear definitions, that the committee's responsibilities be outlined in detail, and what the appeals process would be. The letter will also detail the committees support for the watershed forestry program and not limiting public access.

Discussion of additional access requests as part of the biennial review process

Brett Russ detailed the four requests that the trails subcommittee has for the biennial review:

1. Snowmobile bypass at Rutland State Park
2. Connection of Barre Falls to Riis Farm over Stone Road
3. Change to the Old Turnpike Road Crossing of Marsh Lane
4. Resuming discussions with Army Corps and DCR-DWSP about the area formerly known as T7.

A unified document with the four requests has been sent to Dan Clark for review.

Dennis made a motion that the committee accepts and supports the trails requests as proposed. Cindy seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mike Wood detailed the sportsman's subcommittee's two requests for the review:

1. The reopening of Prison Camp Road, south from Prison Camp area, for vehicle travel to accommodate the spring turkey season, beginning one week prior to the published date for the youth turkey hunt through the remainder of this season.
2. Open all hunter access roads commencing one week prior to the published date of fall bear hunting season (which is typically held in the beginning of September).

Regarding the first request, the subcommittee is only requesting a single gate be opened, specifically the new gate PC2C on Prison Camp Road just south of intersection with Intervale Road. This gate is located within the Prison Camp area and limits access for travelling south, towards Long Meadow Road and the Oak Hill portion of MA F&W WMA. It is important to note the committee is not requesting that Gate PC1, located near Whitehall Pond, be opened as this would create a 'drive through' road which DCR has clearly and repeatedly state that they are opposed to. The subcommittee feels strongly that this modification would facilitate reasonable access for turkey hunting within an estimated 1,200+ acre area. Also, the committee feels that during DCR's decision making process regarding turkey hunting, seasoned hunters were not afforded opportunity to provide their experienced input. They would now like to take this opportunity to offer DCR some of that experienced input on the importance of turkey hunting within the watershed.

Dennis spoke of an established, albeit loose symbiosis between turkeys and deer. Anyone who has spent time in the field will attest to the cohabitation of turkey and deer in the same area. The turkey with its keen eyesight and color vision will raise alarms when a predator or hunter approaches. Deer with their advanced sense of smell will reciprocate and raise alarms whenever they sense a hunter or predator. Therefore, any additional hunting or management pressure applied to turkeys will indirectly impart pressure on deer and assist in the control of deer overpopulation and thereby assist in DCR's goals relative to healthy forest management.

In addition, Mike Wood commented that the training of the next generation of hunters often begins with the youth turkey hunts. This is where the basic core knowledge of silence, stillness, and stealth are taught. These skills are essential for development of the next generation of successful deer hunters. The committee feels that all efforts to get today's youth 'back in the hunt' is well worth DCR's consideration and the Sportsman's

Subcommittees' repeated efforts to retain reasonable access. Without the next generation of trained, skilled hunters the deer population will increase to unhealthy levels and have a significantly detrimental impact on forest health. To utilize sportsmen as a tool in deer/forest management is a wise decision by DCR. But they should consider the long term, 'big picture' as well, and work with sportsmen to help foster the next generation of sportsmen.

Third, there are a variety of disease- causing organisms, found in turkeys, including: cryptosporidia, salmonella, toxoplasmosis, psittacosis, along with west nile virus. Thus, hunting turkeys within the watershed helps to prevent the introduction of these organisms into the watershed and spreading of these ubiquitous pathogens to humans and other species.

Therefore, the subcommittee believes that the opening of this single gate, PC2C, to accommodate spring turkey hunters will assist DCR with its long-term management efforts for an established 1,200+ acres, while also limiting traffic and 'joy rides' through the watershed.

Regarding the second request, the subcommittee believes that the bear population within the Ware River watershed has expanded in the past 25 years, as it has throughout the state. Opening all these hunting gates in advance of the first bear season in September instead of October 1st, will improve bear hunter's access in the entire watershed. Thus, allowing these bear hunters to more effectively aid MA F&W with their goal of harvesting more bears. More bear/human interactions are happening all the time, due to an expanding bear population, and some bears are becoming problems in rural and suburban neighborhoods. MA F&W and the Wildlife Board are considering having one continuously running bear season, instead of 3 fragmented seasons presently. MA F&W and the Wildlife Board are also considering expanding the deer season, with both a possible earlier start to the season and possible later end to the deer season. All these proposed, possible hunting season changes are being considered to more effectively harvest more bears and deer.

Therefore the subcommittee would like to suggest that DCR consider opening all the hunting gates that are typically opened for deer hunting beginning Oct. 1st to just a few weeks earlier, in advance of the beginning of the bear season. This minor adjustment in access would allow DCR to partner with sportsmen, both young and old, and MA F&W to better

manage this expanding black bear population within the watershed and in central MA and better position hunters to assist in managing the deer population and their impact on the forest, now and in the future.

The WRWAC Sportsman's Subcommittee would like to thank DCR Commissioner LaChapelle, District Director John Scannell and Dan Clark for consideration of the 2 items towards modifying the Ware River Watershed 1- year Public Access Plan during this period of biennial review.

Dennis made a motion that the committee supports the letter and it being forwarded to DCR for consideration. Dave Flick seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Member Issues

Jeff Schaaf updated the committee on recent membership updates on WRWAC. Bill Mucha has stepped down as the primary member of the Oakham Historical Society. The group has voted to appoint Andrew Noone as the new primary member.

It was noted that the legislation states that new primary members need to be approved by the DCR commissioner before they are officially on the committee.

Cindy made a motion that the committee accepts and supports Andrew Noone as the new primary member for the Oakham Historical Society. Mike Wood seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mike Wood announced that John Root has stepped down as the primary member of the Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs. The group has voted to appoint Steve Larivee as the new primary member and to move John to the alternate position. Steve is also the president of the Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs.

Mike Wood a motion the committee accepts and supports Steve Larivee as the new primary member for the Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs. Cindy seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Brett Russ expressed interest in becoming the general public's primary member on the committee, he is currently the alternate. The general

public's primary member, Mark Dubois, hasn't been to a meeting in recent memory and seems to be unreachable. It was determined that Jeff will draft a letter on behalf of WRWAC to DCR requesting that Brett be moved to the primary position.

There was discussion about moving Dennis Guberski from the alternate position to the primary member for the rod and gun club group on the committee in the coming months.

Mike Wood asked for additional information regarding a recent shooting accident near the Prison Camp area. It was reported that someone was accidentally hit with bird shot but exact details are unknown or still being investigated. Environmental Police are aware of the issue. It was mentioned that the person who was hit was not wearing orange and was out of the line of sight from the hunter who took the shot; it was only a minor injury. The hunter left the scene.

Name tags for committee members were requested. Justin will make name tags for everyone by the next meeting.

New Business

N/A

Meeting End Time: 8:18 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, January 29, 2026, 7PM: Rutland Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543 (downstairs; large meeting room)