

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

Thursday, January 30, 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: **John Root**

Alternate: Dave Papale

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: **Bill Mucha**

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: Ken Canfield, Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell, Russ Wilmot

Members of the Public Present: Ernest Benoit, Paul Dearden, Beth Gosentra, Brian Green, John Havachek, Denise Kellicker, Steve Larivee, Joy Larrabee, Dave Morin, Duane Pray, Moussa Siri, Matt Urban, Marianne Wojcicki

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:05 PM

Approval of minutes from meeting on November 21, 2024

Thomas Hughes made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on November 21, 2024. John Root seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mike Wood requested that draft minutes from meetings be sent out to WRWAC members in a timely manner so that they can accurately convey meeting details to their constituents.

Public Access Management Plan annual review proposal from DCR

DCR's review proposal and procedure document is attached at the end of these minutes.

It was clarified that the proposal is not for an annual review, but biennial (every other year).

Whether the committee should submit changes/updates to the access plan in the spring or fall was debated. It was determined that spring would be best. There will be a WRWAC meeting this April where the committee formally presents their access requests.

It was clarified that WRWAC is simply an advisory committee, ultimately DCR controls their watershed lands and makes final management and access decisions. The committee advises and gives suggestions. There has been a spirit of cooperation between the committee and DCR in the past.

Mike Wood made a motion to accept and support DCR's biennial review procedure, with the first review to take place in the spring of 2025 and any changes to be implemented would take place in the fall of 2025. Darren seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Forest Management Project Update – Barrens restoration (DCR)

Ken Canfield updated the committee on the upcoming barrens habitat restoration project that is set to take place near Rutland State Park.

A map of the project area is attached at the end of these minutes.

Barrens habitat description: specific type of ecological community; provides specific habitat; driven by excessively drained soils and a history of fire influenced species; dry.

This area in the WRW has been identified in DCR's Land Management Plan as being suitable for barrens restoration. It was a proposal from FY23 and has already gone through the public review process. The project area has been marked by DCR foresters already as well.

The plan is for the project to go out to bid in March. Whoever wins the bid typically has two years to then complete the project. Seasonal conditions on the ground determine when harvesting will occur.

There are recreational trails that cross through the project. Trails will be protected as much as possible by the harvesters. Once the harvest is done, prescribed fire would be used in the following years to maintain the barrens habitat type.

Ken offered to give a tour of the project site. Anyone interested should email him (Kenneth.canfield@mass.gov).

In general, the area/trails are not closed off to the public when the project is occurring. Signage is placed along the project perimeter to alert the public. More caution is also taken when trees are actively being harvested to make sure the public are not in the area or at risk.

Darren asked if stumping would occur. Ken answered that the stumps will be left behind. Typically, whole trees will be harvested for this project. Most material will be removed and chipped. Since prescribed fire will be used on this land in future years, less dead standing trees will be left behind than on other forestry operations.

A member of the public asked if the loggers are required to provide a performance bond. Ken answered that performance bonds are always required, and the amounts vary depending on the operation.

A member of the public asked about which wildlife species are expected to benefit from the project. Ken answered that many natural heritage and endangered species, upland species, and pollinators rely on barrens habitat. Both game and non-game species would benefit.

A member of the public asked if invasive plant monitoring occurs. Ken answered that yes, whenever a harvest occurs considerations are made regarding invasive species.

A member of the public asked for details on what the markings on the trees mean. Ken answered that trees marked blue are to be cut. Trees marked orange are to be kept and protected. A tree marked with a horizontal line it has been identified as a sawlog. DCR foresters mark the trees.

Brett thanked Ken and DCR for their considerations and doing their best to protect the trails in this forestry operation.

Update on the Prison Camp (DCR)

Dan updated the committee on recent watershed maintenance crew activities and restorations at the prison camp.

The tunnel basement structure had been identified as a safety hazard. It was a confined space that could be entered by someone from the public. DCR, in collaboration with the Rutland Historical Commission, decided to collapse the roof and fill the chamber with sand/gravel. The structure is still there but the safety hazard has been abated and excess brush cleared from the site.

The structural integrity of the root cellar roof had been in question. Years of trees and roots growing above the ceiling had become a concern. The watershed maintenance crew has removed all the problem trees, and the plan is to keep the area clear of woody vegetation going forward. The hope is that this will increase the longevity of the root cellar.

An update was given on the gates that were placed around the prison camp by the Rutland Historical Commission last year. Soon after being put out in the field, they were stolen, and most were never found. Rutland Historical Commission is aware of the issue.

It was noted that there are functioning security cameras in operation at the prison camp. The Rutland Police Department has identified individuals who put up graffiti, it is expected that they will be charged with vandalism. The people who stole the gates have not been identified.

Any time an issue comes up at the prison camp, Dan keeps the Rutland Historical Commission in the loop via email to Peter Pasierb.

Member Issues

Multiple members of WRWAC members drafted a letter on behalf of the committee. The letter is an official request to reopen Ruben Walker and Prison Camp Roads since the draft of the Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan was first presented to the public. The committee would like DCR to consider this change to access separately from the biennial review that is set to take place in April. Darren made a motion to officially enter the letter into the minutes of the meeting. John Root seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. This letter is attached at the end of these minutes.

Darren asked about a bill he had submitted to DCR on behalf of the Rutland Fire Department that helped put out a fire in the WRW last year. John Scannell answered that a response will be forthcoming.

Tom Hughes asked about the recent Long Pond survey study and if a decision had been made as to how many large motor permits will be given out in 2025. John answered that it was determined that people who are using their permit to fish would be given an expanded time during the day in which they could use their permit. Dan added that the number of permits

given out will be the same as in 2024, capped at 50. If more than 50 applications come in for large motor permits, a random lottery will be conducted. Dan clarified that the study was simply an email survey of usage to gauge what the pond was being used for. If the committee would like DCR to reconsider the number of large motor permits given out they can submit that request as part of the biennial review in April.

Brett commented that the trails subcommittee would like to give a report at the next meeting to summarize their efforts in the watershed over the past year. The 2024 trails subcommittee report will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

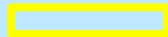

Meeting End Time: 8:14 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

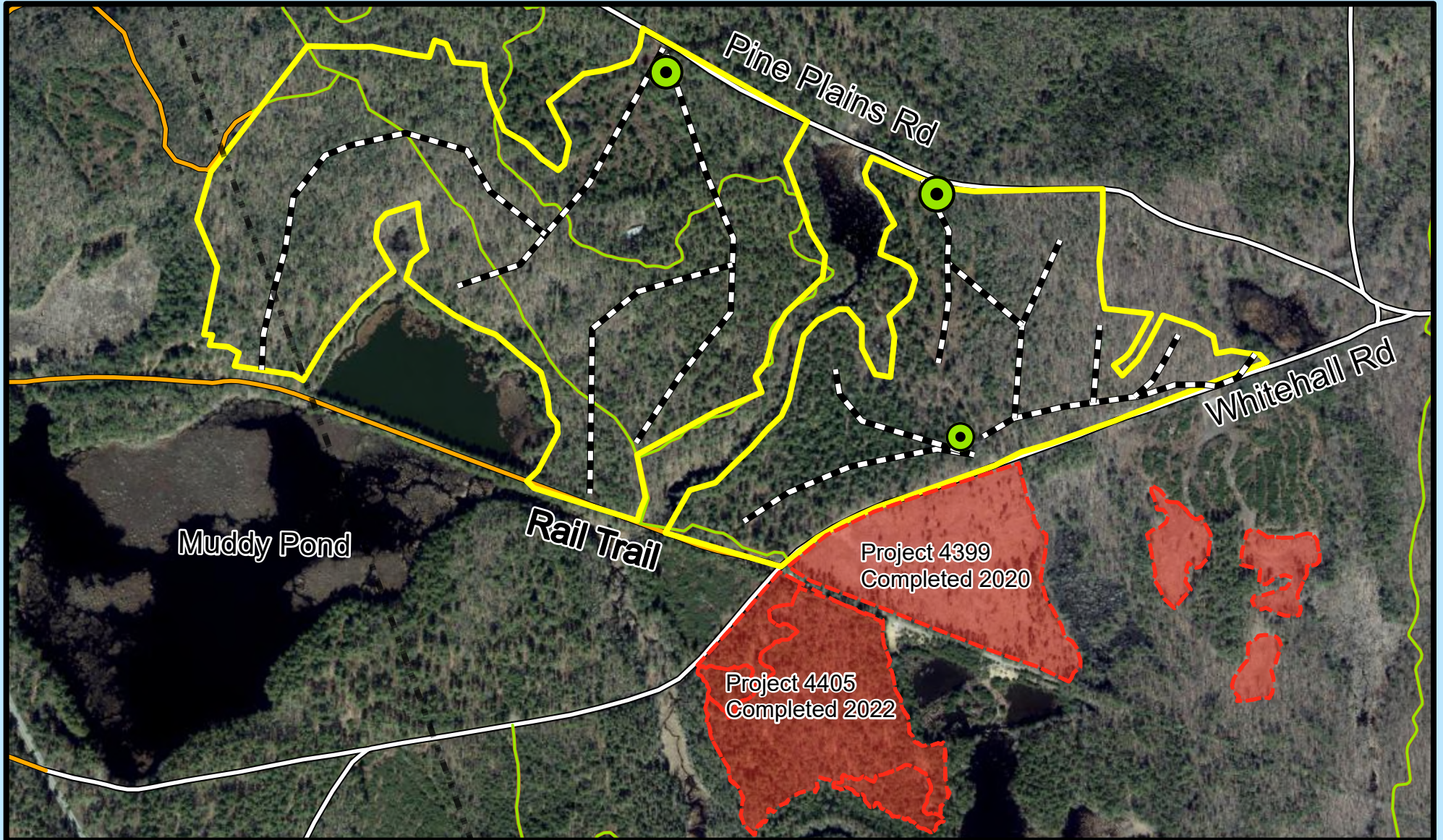
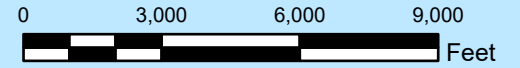
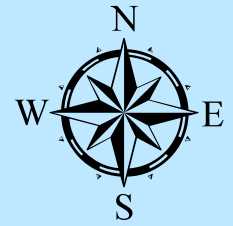
- March 20, 2025; 7pm – Rutland Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543

DCR DWSP Barrens Restoration Project



-  Restoration Area (123.4 Acres)
-  Landings
-  Recent Past Projects
-  Haul Roads

-  Forest Roads/Trails
-  Trails





DCR-DWSP Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan (Plan)

Review Procedure

January 2025

Purpose: The purpose of the DWSP's Access Plan review is to allow for a biennial assessment (every 2 years) of the Plan between 10-year Plan update periods to allow for implementation adjustments within the plan that are not meeting the intended goals.

Scope of Review: The 2023 Public Access Management Plan update included significant public input, specific suggestions and review as well as review, input, and approval by the watershed system regulator, MA DEP. The scope of the biennial review will be limited to items that need clarification, to adjust policies that are not performing as intended or to provide minor revisions to existing activities. The biennial review is not intended to add, alter or eliminate entire policies or lead to significant expansion of public access. This is because the level of access provided in the 2023 Plan has been deemed appropriate control of the watershed per DEP regulations 310 CMR 22.20A(2)(b).

It is DCR's expectation that any proposed changes to the trail network or vehicular access roads will not significantly increase the overall networks. All proposals must be accompanied by specific justification for the change and how the change would provide access for a specific purpose or to a specific destination that is not readily available with the existing networks.

Some specific examples of proposed changes during the biennial review include:

- Expansion of an existing parking lot because current lot is undersized
- New authorized trail that provides a unique connection to a specific location or other existing trail
- New authorized vehicular road to provide access to a specific destination currently not serviced

Process:

1. The process will begin with a review in Spring 2025, and biennially, thereafter.
2. The Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee will provide DCR a list of issues to be reviewed. DCR will also provide any as needed.
3. DCR will investigate. If DCR agrees with the concern, they will discuss potential remedies with the committee. If DCR disagrees with any of the proposals, no changes will be made to the Plan.
4. A brief summary of changes (if any are adopted) will be published following the review and posted on the DWSP's website.
5. During the 10-year plan update, all changes made during the biennial reviews will be summarized in the updated plan.

January 23, 2025

The Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) reviewed the proposed 2023 public access plan for the referenced watershed during their October 2023 meeting and voted to unanimously approve the proposal. However, the committee noted several items that they still considered outstanding, chief among these were the vehicular access to important areas of the watershed.

The current access plan caused the closure of gates preventing vehicle access for the period May 1st thru October 1st for the following roads:

- 1) Whitehall road from State Route 122 to Gate WH-3 located at the Whitehall pond public parking areas including Pine Plains road from Whitehall to Pine Plains road gate PP3.
- 2) Prison camp road from Whitehall road (Gate PC-1) to a new (Gate PC-2B) installed at the intersection of Prison Camp Road and Intervale Road.
- 3) Reuben Walker road from Brigham road (Gate B-1) to Colebrook road (Gate CB 15)
- 4) Granger Road from Fisher road +/- to the Barre public road portion of Granger Road

Historically, these areas were open to daytime vehicle traffic from the end of "mud" season thru December 31st.

The closure of items 2 and 3 above have created a large section of the watershed to become "off limits", only accessible by horseback, bicycle or vigorous hiking for several miles.

For example, the closure of Reuben Walker road (item 3) makes a primary fishing area of approximately 1.5 miles of waterway inaccessible. This waterway begins at gate RW-1 and empties into a branch of the Ware river. In addition, this is an extremely important area for wildlife viewing. This road closure also remains an impasse for inter-connecting key sections of the watershed.

The closure of item 2 (Prison camp Road) impedes access to a similar area for wildlife viewing, specifically, Oak Hill, an area designated and managed by MA Fish and Wildlife as a wildlife management area and the T6 trail network. Again, a very long hike, bicycle or horseback ride is the only way the public could access this area. The loss of these two roads is NOT "reasonable access" for the less athletic, aging and people with limited mobility within our community.

In 2024, the Spring turkey hunters and September bear hunters were essentially kept from these historically hunt-able areas as were people interested in wildlife viewing in these habitat managed areas.

The committee feels strongly, that both these roads should be restored for vehicle access, but agree that the Ruben Walker Road is essential to provide reasonable access to key areas for everyone. By our vote tonight, the committee feels that restoration of access from Prison camp road continuing thru Reuben Walker road to Colebrook road, be implemented in 2025. This action will restore this internal road network and facilitate access to the key areas of the watershed for the public to enjoy. Further, restoring these roads should not be offset by removal of any roads currently accessible for vehicle travel. As you are aware we have made these requests repeatedly since seeing the access plan in its draft form. In response to DCR's recent letter regarding the Biennial review we now formalize these requests.

Sincerely, on behalf of the entire WRWAC

Jeff Schaaf Chairman & Mike Wood Co-Chairman