

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, February 9, 2023
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**

Alternate:

Hubbardston Selectboard: **Cindy Schlener**

Alternate: **Dave Marsh**

Oakham Selectboard: **Thomas Hughes**

Alternate: **Phillip Warbasse**

Rutland Selectboard: **Charles R. Williams**

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:

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: **Brett Russ**

DCR Staff Present: Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor

Members of the Public Present: Beverly Abramson, Peter Abramson, Lydia Barter, Dan Bushnell, Anthony Corazzini, David Corazzini, Bill Dobson, Bruce Ebbeson, Alexandra Gmyrek, Mark Gmyrek, Lynne Goodnow, Denise Kellicker, David Morin, Rusty Savignac, Jeanne Scigliano, Enzo Simmarano, Mike Stoll, Brian Trimby, Michelle Van Reit, Leah Whiteman, Marianne Wojcicki

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:01 PM

Approval of minutes from meetings on Thursday, September 15, 2022 and Thursday, November 17, 2022

Tom Hughes made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on September 15, 2022. Bill Mucha seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Tom Hughes made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on November 17, 2022. Phillip Warbasse seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Updates to changes to the Ware River Public Access Plan that have been proposed to DCR by WRWAC members and subcommittees

Brett updated everyone on the trail subcommittee activities since the last meeting. The subcommittee has 23 members. They had a meeting with DCR, asked questions, had some of the questions answered in the meeting, while others answers are still pending. T8 still needs some additional research to be done in the field. Bicycling on the Mid-State Trail was mentioned. The subcommittee unanimously supports the change in the plan to allow bicycles on the Mid-State Trail. The subcommittee is looking into the availability of grants to support Ware River Watershed trail projects, specifically to restore a bridge on Covered Bridge Road for recreational and other purposes. They will put together a proposal for DCR in the future.

Mike Wood updated everyone on the sportsmen/women subcommittee activities since the last meeting. They also met with DCR and requested that additional roads remain open to what DCR originally presented in the plan:

- Prison Camp Road going north to Brigham Road and continuing to the pedestrian bridge
- from Rt. 62 to the pedestrian bridge
- Prison Camp Road south to Rutland State Park
- Ruben Walker Road connecting the Prison Camp area to Coldbrook Road
- Gilbert Road to the Burnshirt River

There was also discussion about the desire to keep roads open that lead to areas of historical significance. Mike asked when DCR would get back to the subcommittee with answers to their road closure concerns. Dan answered that it wouldn't happen before the public comment period has passed.

Matt Hopkinson reminded everyone that the public comment period for the Ware River Public Access Plan was extended to February 28.

A member of the public commented on when MWRA is allowed to divert water from the Ware River Watershed to Quabbin, which is between December and April.

Multiple committee members expressed concern over losing the ability to distance swim at Comet Pond and lack of an evidence-based rationale for the change. Dan clarified that DCR isn't proposing banning distance swimming on the pond, but banning people from entering/leaving the pond from DCR property. It was mentioned that the only public access entry to the pond is on DCR property. The above restriction came directly from the DCR commissioner's office, not DEP.

Jeff asked if DWSP made DEP aware of how controversial some of their recommendations would be with the public who use the watershed. Dan answered that they were made aware of the controversial nature of some of the recommendations. He also talked about the desire to get different watershed properties managed with similar policies where possible. Dan will send Jeff contact information for people at DEP.

A member of the public asked where information on the committee and upcoming meetings can be found. All information related to the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee, such as upcoming meetings, meeting minutes, etc. can be found online at <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/ware-river-watershed-advisory-committee-wrwac>. You can also get in contact with Justin Gonsor to get put on the mailing list to receive upcoming meeting agendas and copies of approved minutes. He can be reached directly at 413-213-7920 or by email at

justin.gonsor@mass.gov. The committee is subject to Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Mike asked about the ability to review road/gate closures on an annual basis. Dan answered that a provision was included in the draft plan to address trail suggestions/changes on an annual basis. However, there is no plan to review other aspects of the plan on an annual basis, only trails. Mike commented that he would like to see all watershed activities allowed to be reviewed on an annual basis. Dan clarified that the agreement was to allow for proposals for small tweaks to the trail network on an annual basis, rather than having to wait 10 years for a new plan; which is different than revisiting policies on an annual basis.

There was discussion about the proposed night closures to the watershed. It was clarified that DCR is recommending closing the property at night, not DEP. This proposal would put the Ware River Watershed in line with when other DWSP watershed properties are open. Reasons to close the area at night were discussed. How night closures would affect sportsmen/women and snowmobilers was discussed. Jeff commented that he would like to see DCR make similar provisions to night access that MassWildlife has in place in their wildlife management areas. Dan listed other properties that are also open sunrise to sunset, with exceptions: MassWildlife, Mass Audubon, DCR. Cindy suggested a compromise of locking gates at night to vehicle access but allowing pedestrian access inside those gates at night.

Discussion about where the WRWAC stands on the plan at this point and how we want to proceed with the public access issues

Dennis Guberski commented that he had previously asked for a representative from DEP to attend the current meeting to answer questions related to certain proposed changes in the Public Access Plan. Multiple committee members agreed with wanting a DEP representative to attend a future meeting.

Mike Wood listed seven recommendations DEP gave DCR at a meeting in March of 2022. They are as follows:

1. Supports the idea of a multi-use trail system with clearly identified trails and uses
2. Prohibit water skiing on Long Pond
3. Eliminate large groups of horses; existing permit process allows for 50 animals in a group
4. Road access should be at least as restrictive as what is allowed on other DCR properties such as state parks and other watersheds

5. DWSP properties should only be open daylight hours
6. DWSP's watershed protection control plan for the Ware River Watershed should be comparable to the program for the Quabbin Reservoir Watershed
7. DWSP staffing and other resources must meet the demand of public access to water quality

They also commented that the MA DEP western regional office had granted an extension to DWSP to August 31, 2022 to submit an updated draft of the public access plan.

The incoming administration EOEEA administration was discussed. It is unclear if a new DCR commissioner will be named or not. Either way, DCR commissioner approval is needed to finalize the public access plan and replace the old one.

In addition to the public comments that can be submitted online. Multiple committee members are compiling letters/comments from sportsmen's clubs, the public, town select boards, etc. and they plan to deliver those documents to the Quabbin Administration building before the public comment period ends.

Dennis Guberski made a motion that the committee will not support approving the Ware River Public Access Plan until a representative from DEP attends a WRWAC meeting to answer WRWAC questions regarding evidence-based justification for the 7 DEP recommendations included in their letter to John Scannell dated July 13, 2022. Tom Hughes seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Tom Hughes made a motion that the committee request DCR delay submitting the Public Access Plan to the DCR commissioner until it is determined whether or not Governor Healey's office is planning to announce a new commissioner, and if so, delay submission until the new commissioner is seated. Mike Wood seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

The committee discussed what their member can do between now and the end of the public comment period to drive a groundswell of public input. Suggestions included:

- members of the town select boards of watershed towns draft letters to the DCR commissioner and other relevant parties
- user group represented on the committee work together in submitting letters to town select boards and contacting officials

Brett spoke about possibly forming an official Friends group or non-profit. The group could be an umbrella for all user groups of the watershed. Users could join the group and the group could negotiate as a Friends group for special access permits for their members (such as night access). Dan commented that there is a process in place for an organized group to request special access.

Member Issues

Dick Williams asked about a forestry update. Dan answered that Herm Eck, previously chief forester, retired last year. Ken Canfield is the new chief forester. Russ Wilmot was recently hired as a Ware River Watershed forester. The Secretaries office asked DWSP for some information related to the forestry program. State Parks and MassWildlife also provided forestry information. The governor had campaigned on shutting down forest management on public lands pending a scientific review. As of now, active watershed lots are continuing but new lots are not being sold.

Meeting End Time: 8:36 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, February 23, 2023, at 7PM - Rutland Free Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543