

**Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 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, Herm Eck, Justin Gonsor, Lisa Gustavsen

**Members of the Public Present:**

Lydia Barter, Chris Berian, Gary Brigham, Leslie Choquette, Bill Dobson, Dennis Guberski, Denise Kellicker, Rich Kende, Brian Kennedy, Paul Kreswick, Fred Meyer, Mike Priffi, Brian Trimby, Joseph Warrington, Marianne Wojcicki, Dean Zuppio

**Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Start Time: 7:10 PM**

**Approval of minutes from meeting on Thursday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

There weren't enough members present to reach a quorum. Approval of the January 17<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes will be postponed until the next meeting.

**Progress regarding update of the Ware River public access management plan – public survey results**

Lisa Gustavsen presented the Ware River public access management plan public survey results to the committee.

From September of 2018 through March of 2019 DCR has conducted in-depth issue identification to determine the key issues to be addressed by the plan update, guided by the public access management principles. One of the public sources of input during this phase was the 2018 stakeholder survey. Roughly 900 responses came back from the 19 question survey. The results are as follows:

Q1. In what town do you live?

Hubbardston: under 30%

Rutland: under 20%

Barre, Oakham, Phillipston, Princeton, Templeton: under 10%

Non-watershed town: under 40%

Q2. What is your age?

18-24: just over 0%  
25-34: under 10%  
35-44: under 20%  
45-54: roughly 25%  
55-64: under 30%  
65-74: roughly 15%  
75 or older: just over 0%

Q3. Are you a landowner abutting DCR-DWSP lands in the Ware River Watershed?

Yes: just over 30%  
No: just under 70%

Q4. Are you a recreational user of DCR-DWSP owned land or water in the Ware River Watershed?

Yes: just over 90%  
No: just under 10%

Q5. On average, how frequently during the year do you access DCR-DWSP lands/waters?

Every day/multiple times a week: roughly 25%  
2-4 times a month: roughly 40%  
Once a month or less: roughly 35%

Q6. When do you mostly access DCR-DWSP lands or waters? (respondents were allowed to check multiple answers)

Weekend nights: less than 10%  
Weekend days: over 70%  
Weekday days: under 50%  
Weekday nights: under 20%

Q7. Where on DCR-DWSP lands/waters in the Ware River watershed do you recreate most often?

The question was open ended. Respondents answered that they recreate in the following locations (in approximate order by number of times mentioned): rail trail, Rutland, Barre Falls dam, Rutland State Park, Hubbardston, Barre, hiking trails, Comet Pond, Mt. Jefferson, Oakham, Demond Pond, single track trails, fire roads, horse trails, Ware River, Prison Camp, bike trails, Coldbrook, abutting personal property, and the Mid-State Trail.

Q8. What recreational activities do you engage in on DCR-DWSP lands or waters? You may indicate more than one activity, if needed.

The question was open ended.

Between 71-80%: hiking/walking

Between 41-50%: mountain biking

Between 31-40%: dog walking

Between 21-30%: snowshoeing, bird watching, fishing, non-motorized boating

Between 11-20%: driving, road biking, fat tire (winter) biking, cross country skiing, hunting, horseback riding

Between 0-10%: snowmobiling, motorized boating, geocaching

Q9. Do you experience any recreational conflicts with other users while on DCR-DWSP lands in the Ware River watershed? If you responded yes, what types of conflict do you experience?

No: 83%

Yes: 17%

For those who answered yes, the prominent themes were as follows (in approximate order by number of times mentioned):

- Aggressive driving, noise, and smell of ATV's/4-wheelers/snowmobiles/dirt bikes
- Pond users not following rules (litter, outside proper areas for recreation, speeding and oversized boats, unauthorized types of recreation, destruction of vegetation and erosion, lack of boat washing); much concern about danger of boat/swimmer collisions
- Hikers afraid of danger from hunters; hunters feeling harassed
- Concern about unleashed dogs
- Concern about horse waste
- Dangerous driving and parking
- Trespassing on private property

Q10. Below is a list of things that the lands and water managed by the DCR-DWSP provide. Please rate how important or unimportant each item is to you using the following scale (from 0 "not at all important" to 5 "extremely important"):

Between 4-4.5: high quality drinking water, solitude/wilderness, healthy forest, public access/recreation opportunities, natural beauty, wildlife/rare and endangered species

Between 3-3.5: privacy (for abutting landowners)

Between 2-2.5: vehicle access

Q11. When you access DCR-DWSP lands/waters, do you do so with a formally organized group/event or informally?

Informally: roughly 90%

Formally, with a group: roughly 10%

Q12. To help DCR collaborate with key organizations, please list any recreational groups you know of that DCR should be working with.

The question was open ended. The following organizations were mentioned most frequently: NEMBA (New England Mountain Bike Association), Barre Riding and Driving Club, Coldbrook Snowmobile Club, Wachusett Greenways, Mass Audubon, Boy Scouts, Bay State Trail Riders, Seven Hills Wheelmen, Comet Pond Association, Friends of the Ware River, Asnacomet Pond Association, and Demond Pond Watershed Association

Q13. If you have encountered any significant problems while using DCR-DWSP lands, please describe them.

The question was open ended. 40% of respondents stated that they experienced no significant problems. Of those who did, the prominent themes were as follows (in approximate order of number of times mentioned):

- Lack of access/restrictions for: biking, ATV, swimming, geocaching, horseback riding
- Trail and natural resource impacts
- Boating concerns
- Swimming concerns
- Trail usability problems
- Beavers
- Rangers/personnel
- Hunters/hunting
- Parking and road conditions
- Trespassing

Q14. If you think there are any activities or locations of activities in the Ware River watershed that are detrimental to water quality, wildlife/natural resources, public enjoyment, or abutters, please describe them.

The question was open ended. Motor bikes/ATV's/off-road vehicles were mentioned more than twice as much as any other activity. A list of the other activities mentioned are as follows (in approximate order of number of times mentioned): allowing motor vehicles, littering/dumping/campfires, logging, myriad of concerns regarding Comet Pond, horses (erosion and manure), motor boats/jet skis, dogs (including off leash), snowmobiles in general, hunters, boats allowing aquatic invasives, not respecting private property, new houses/development/road runoff, snowmobiles in areas they are not allowed, mountain bikes, cutting new trails.

Q15. DCR-DWSP would like to better understand the nature of unauthorized activities on its lands in the Ware River watershed. This survey is completely anonymous. If you are willing to say, please tell us what illegal or unauthorized activities you are aware of people engaging in on DCR-DWSP lands in the Water River watershed.

The question was open ended. The following activities were most frequently mentioned (in approximate order by number of times mentioned):

- ATV's/dirt bikes/4-wheelers
- Dumping of trash/littering
- Unauthorized trail cutting and trail use by mountain bikers
- Partying/fires
- Snowmobiling
- Public drinking/underage drinking/drug use
- Illegal and dangerous swimming
- Failure to clean boats of invasive aquatics
- Dogs off leash
- Oversized boats
- Horseback riding outside designated areas
- Hunting Sundays/out of season

Q16. When looking for information about DCR-DWSP lands, where do you try to find answers?

DCR website: over 80%

DCR signage: roughly 45%

DCR watershed rangers: roughly 15%

DCR-DWSP kiosk: roughly 25%

Facebook: roughly 25%

Twitter: just over 0%

Other social media: under 10%

Other visitors: roughly 15%

Other sources of information: 10%

Q17. If DCR-DWSP were to offer programming in the Ware River watershed, what type of program would you likely attend in the future?

History talk: just under 50%

Guided hike: roughly 55%

Environmental education: roughly 55%

Other: just under 20%

Q18. While you are on DCR-DWSP lands in the Ware River watershed, is it clear to you what public access activities are allowed where and which are prohibited?

Yes: just over 60%

No: just under 40%

Q19. How did you learn about this survey?

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee: roughly 15%

Postcard from DCR-DWSP: under 30%

Town website: over 10%

Town library: roughly 0%

DCR website: roughly 5%

DCR twitter: roughly 0%

Word of mouth: just over 40%

Looking ahead to the spring/summer of 2019 DCR's next steps will be to engage in focused, solution-oriented discussions to address the key public access management issues identified. Key stakeholders (e.g. user groups, land holders, partner organizations/agencies) will be invited to participate in the appropriate collaborative sessions. DCR's watershed management principles will direct the search for solutions. Outcomes will not necessarily be consensus decisions, although consensus will be sought, where possible. The goal is to complete the draft version of the Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan during autumn of 2019.

A member of the public asked if the survey results would be posted on the DCR website. Lisa Gustavsen answered that the results would be published in the appendix section of the updated Public Access Plan.

Cindy Schlener asked how the survey results will be used. Dan Clark answered that they will be used as part of a broad look at all watershed activities and issues holistically.

A member of the public asked if DCR's watershed management principles are publicly available. Dan Clark answered that a draft version can be found online. The web address is:

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/10/16/wrwpampmanagementprinciples.pdf>.

Dan Clark added that since the last meeting, DCR has begun meeting with organizations that have a presence in the Ware River watershed (WRW): Army Corps. of Engineers, MassWildlife, Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA), Wachusett Greenways, and the chiefs of police in watershed towns. Similar meetings occurred earlier in the year with WRW user groups to get their perspectives.

A member of the public asked if any decisions have been made on how large the buffer zone around the Ware River intake will be for recreational activities. Dan Clark answered that discussions have occurred with MWRA but no specific determinations have been made yet. The goal is to propose specific numbers within the next couple months. Cindy Schlener stated that a portion of the rail trail and Rt. 122 is located right next to the intake. Dan added that since the location of the highway isn't going to change, discussions will revolve around how to best manage activities on watershed lands. There was discussion about possibly constructing fencing along the rail trail near the intake.

Cindy Schlener suggested DCR bring maps to the next meeting to help highlight areas that are being considered for recreation restrictions.

Lee Dougan commented that the area around Muddy Pond has signage stating, 'area closed to all users.' A member of the public stated that at a previous WRWAC meeting it was decided that those signs should be changed to clarify that hiking is allowed in those areas. Dan Clark agreed that a revamping of the signage should occur. Brett Russ suggested waiting to update the signage until after the access plan update process is completed. Walking is supposed to be allowed in all places within the watershed as long as it is not a restricted area.

### **Next round of user group meetings with DCR - discussion**

N/A

### **Member Issues**

Dean Zuppio asked for an update on the status of the asian long-horned beetle (ALB) and other invasive species in the WRW. Herm Eck answered that the ALB has never been found in the WRW. Gypsy moths are beginning to hatch again this season. In the past 4-5 years they have defoliated many oak trees. There was roughly 2,000 acres of oak mortality in 2018. It was noted that the hemlock



woolly adelgid has not been progressing through the watershed as quickly as anticipated in the past.

A member of the public mentioned a professor named Lynne Adler from UMass, Amherst who was part of a research group that recently published a paper in the journal Nature. It shows that the pollen from sunflower seeds can help bees and other pollinators survive against bee pathogens. The paper can be found online at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-32681-y>

A member of the public stated that multiple red pines have recently fallen across the T7 trail and need to be removed. They are located about 150 yards into the trail. Herm Eck thought the area in question might be on Army Corps. of Engineers land. He will coordinate with them to determine whose responsibility it is to clear the trail.

Ed Yaglou asked for an update on the three bridges set to be installed in the WRW at the next meeting; who will be allowed to use them. Dan Clark mentioned that one is located over Twin Hill Road, another over Rice Road, and the third over Burnshirt Road. No determinations have been made on if user groups will be allowed access over bridges. There is a plan to set up a fourth over Brigham Road to be open to vehicles.

Dan Clark updated the committee on some recent DCR activities. Habitat restoration (field/orchard reclamation) was done at Twin Hill. Preparations for a prescribed burn at the Barre-Heath lot have begun; this will help establish inland heath habitat. The remaining trees surrounding a decrepit well in Reese Hill have been removed. Fencing will be constructed around the well.

Dick Williams asked for a WRW logging update. Herm Eck answered that salvage of some oak mortality near Harding Hill was completed this past winter. Bids open on March 26<sup>th</sup> for a few of the forestry projects that were proposed last year. Tree mortality from gypsy moths has shifted the forestry staff's focus from their normal, annual lot proposals to salvage work. A wet spring is needed for a certain fungus to proliferate and be able to control the gypsy moth population, which hasn't happened the past couple seasons.

Dick Williams asked about a dam located on Rt. 56. There is a proposal to install a culvert of sluice line (dam) in the area. He stated that a map shows DCR owns a sliver of property that abuts a Mr. Warrington's land. His house was built over a stream. He asked is DCR would be able to take a look at the site and give their input on whether or not a culvert or additional dam should be constructed in that area. Dan Clark answered that his staff will investigate the issue. Dave Small added that the Department of Ecological Restoration would also be a good agency to contact regarding the issue.

Brett Russ commented that a chaise lounge chair was illegally dumped on the pullover just west of East Hill Road gate. He also noticed two ATV tracks in the snow at the mid-state trail crossing. He reminded DCR staff that there was a silt fence breach at the Intervale Road bridge site. It was unclear if the issue had been dealt with yet.

**Meeting End Time: 8:18 PM**

**Upcoming WRWAC Meetings**

- Thursday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at 7 PM – Rutland Free Public Library (downstairs), 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543