

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, April 17, 2025
7:00 PM

Location: Rutland Council on Aging, 53 Glenwood Road, 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: Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present: Wayne Adams, Ernest Benoit, Stephen Benoit, Sean Blood, Gary Brigham, Jamie Ceila, Paul Dearden, Dick Gaffney, Denise Kellicker, Joy Larrabee, Paul McNeil, Dave Morin, Duane Pray, Rusty Savignac, Matt Urban, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:01 PM

Approval of minutes from meeting on March 20, 2025

Thomas Hughes made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on March 20, 2025, with edits. John Root seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Discussion regarding potential reopening of Reuben Walker and Prison Camp Roads

John Scannell stated that after meeting with the DCR commissioner's office as well as other DWSP staff, the agency has made the decision to make no changes to the road network; vehicle access will remain as detailed in the current version of the [WRW Public Access Plan](#). A letter from the DCR Commissioner was given to the committee along with materials related to the decision not to make changes to the current roads that are closed to vehicles.

Jeff Schaaf asked about open gates along Route 122 near Coldbrook Road; he viewed trucks driving on the roads. It was determined that the roads in question are not on DCR-DWSP property but are owned by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Cindy Schlener asked about the possibility of opening the two roads for turkey season only.

Mike Wood asked for more information on why they won't reopen the two roads to vehicles. He cited letters from multiple watershed towns that were sent to DCR which advocated for the reopening of the roads. He also commented that multiple user groups of the WRW would like to see the

roads reopened: sportsmen, fishermen, people with limited mobility, senior citizens, etc.

John Scannell answered that one main intent of the public access plan update was to limit the amount of vehicle traffic on the watershed roads, and in particular, through roads. Opening the two roads would create additional through ways in the watershed. The decision to keep the roads closed is based on protecting the land and water quality while taking into consideration the desire to allow some recreation. Simply having vehicles driving on watershed property is a potential impact to water quality. John also mentioned that the two roads in question run very close to water and at times water floods over the roads. Since the roads have been closed, DWSP staff reports that incidents of dumping, fire pits, and other unauthorized activities have been reduced.

Dennis spoke about the differences between the WRW and the other watersheds in the system such as Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs. The main difference being that the WRW does not have a surface reservoir in it. It was also noted how water from the WRW first flows to Quabbin, then circulates for multiple years before it leaves Quabbin via the aqueduct where it then heads to the Wachusett Reservoir. John Scannell answered that from a regulatory perspective, the various watersheds are required to be managed similarly.

Jeff Schaaf also commented that the WRW is unique and different from the other watersheds in the system, the WRW not being a primary source. He expressed desire for the allowance of regulations in the WRW to be different than the other watersheds. He doesn't believe closing the two roads in question to vehicles is stopping unauthorized activities or improving water quality in a measurable manner. He expressed desire for a compromise on opening the two roads to vehicles.

Cindy Schlener expressed concern that public access will continue to be limited with each additional update of the public access plan. The public access plan is officially updated every 10 years. She asked about the possibility of DCR guaranteeing they won't curtail public access in the future, unless scientifically proven. John Scannell answered that DCR would not make that guarantee. He added that barring any unforeseen circumstances, there are no plans to make any changes to the current

public access plan. DCR has also agreed to the biennial review (every other year) of the public access plan.

A member of the public expressed a desire to see hard data on the reduction of unauthorized activities since the two roads were closed to vehicles. He also commented he would rather see night patrols than gate closures to prevent unauthorized activities. He suggested the decision to close the gates to vehicles was based more on saving money than watershed protection. He would like to see DCR explore more avenues to curtail unauthorized activities than simply closing gates to vehicles. Mike Wood commented that he has previously suggested DCR collaborate with local law enforcement from WRW towns to come up with ideas to control unauthorized activities. It was noted that watershed rangers cannot currently issue tickets and/or conduct other enforcement actions that the police are able to do.

John Scannell cited a previous meeting between DCR and WRW user group representatives from WRWAC after the draft of the WRW public access plan was presented. At that meeting there was collaboration where DCR did compromise on their road plan after user groups pointed out certain areas where they desired vehicle access.

Cindy Schlener commented that since it appears that DCR has made a final decision on keeping the two roads closed, that it may be best to move on from that issue and focus on other access requests, such as opening roads for turkey hunting season, etc. Mike Wood noted that WRWAC had previously voted to support the plan, but had 6 caveats:

1. Ability for other user groups apart from the trails subcommittee to be allowed suggest annual modifications to the access plan in between the regular 10-year updates.
2. Cryptosporidium and giardia language addressed on page 65 of the plan.
3. Consider giving watershed residents priority to Long Pond large motor permits.
4. Consider opening Ruben Walker Road from the end of mud season to October 1st.
5. Two agreed upon trails were missing from the final plan and should be added to it: trails around Muddy Pond and T7.
6. Consider giving out a special use permit for night access to the watershed.

Mike Wood commented that the Long Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located roughly a mile inside one of the locked gates in the watershed. Vehicle access for people who have mobility problems was discussed.

Dennis Guberski commented that one of the main reasons DWSP supports increased vehicle access during deer hunting season is to help improve the forest conditions and water quality via the deer harvest.

The gates that are open to vehicles in the WRW were discussed. Seasonal conditions dictate when the gates can be opened following the spring mud season. The goal each year is to open them by turkey season (April 28th).

Potentially opening certain gates during turkey season or installing additional gates closer to areas of interest were discussed.

Darren Ross made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike Wood seconded the motion. The merits of the motion were discussed. The motion carried 5-4.

Trails subcommittee 2024 report

The meeting was ended before this agenda item was addressed.

Suggestions for biennial review topics

The meeting was ended before this agenda item was addressed.

Member Issues

N/A

Meeting End Time: 7:52 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- To be determined