

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, May 18, 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: Ken Canfield, Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell, Russell Wilmot

Members of the Public Present: Peter Abramson, Lucy Allen, Lydia Barter, Betty Buteau, Debra Carlson, Jason Clark, Chuck Coppolino, Ann Degnan, Mark Gmyrek, Dick Hutchings, John Morgan, Paul Morrison, Michela Oster, Shawn Paul, Scott Ray, Mike Stoll, Michael Wetherbee, Frank Whitney, Marianne Wojcicki, Geoffrey Yaglou, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:01 PM

Dan Clark made a comment clarifying an error in the February 9 meeting minutes. MWRA is authorized to divert water from the Ware River during October 15-June 15. It is only done when the river discharge is above 85 million gallons/day. The preference is to divert when the water temperature has been below 10 degrees Celsius for 30 days to help control aquatic invasives. The February 9 meeting minutes had the dates wrong, but since they have already been approved, cannot be edited.

Approval of minutes from meeting on Thursday, February 23, 2023

John Root made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on February 23, 2023. Dick Williams seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Brief update of the Ware River Watershed Public Access Plan status and the next steps involved in the review process with anticipated dates

John Scannell updated the committee on the status of the Ware River Watershed Public Access Plan.

The public comment period for the plan was extended to February and is now closed. The new DCR Commissioner, Brian Arrigo, has been briefed on the plan. It was suggested that he be invited to attend a future WRWAC meeting and/or to tour the WRW. It was mentioned that a new DEP commissioner, Bonnie Heiple, has also been named. Until a new plan has been approved, public access will continue as specified under the previous plan.

Discussion about raising the PILOT payments or finding other sources of funding for the Ware River Watershed towns

Dennis Guberski spoke about PILOT payments and plans for the MWRA to expand water services to additional communities in the Commonwealth. He stated that the PILOT payments to watershed towns have not increased in years; over the last decade the percentage of the towns budget from PILOT payments has dropped from 3% to 2%. Quabbin and Wachusett capacity is roughly 300 million gallons/day, currently water users consume 200-210 million gallons/day. He stated that MWRA is looking to market the remaining 90-100 million gallons/day of water. He referenced two studies that have been done, one for the south shore and one for the north shore (42 million gallons/day), and a third that is underway for metro west. He feels as though WRW towns should be compensated better. Rutland has received \$525,000/year in PILOT payments over the past 4-5 years, which has been unchanged. In 2011, that amount was \$439,000 when the entire town budget was \$14 million, 3% of the operating budget for the town. He encouraged everyone to speak to their town representatives about these payments going forward. He suggested someone from the watershed town should have a seat on the MWRA trust board.

There was discussion about WRWAC forming a subcommittee of folks to coordinate with watershed town representatives and brief them on the PILOT payments as well as MWRA's plans to increase water services to additional towns. WRWAC members could contact local representatives who could then contact statewide representatives.

Dennis made a motion to form a finance subcommittee of 5 to brief the selectmen in the watershed towns (Rutland, Barre, Hubbardston, Oakham) on the PILOT program; WRWAC chair will appoint the subcommittee members. The goal is to have the towns unite and contact state representatives and senators to further the process. Cindy Schlener seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. The subcommittee members are Dennis Guberski, Cindy Schlener, Tom Hughes, Mike Wood, and Darren Ross.

John Scannell detailed the PILOT program. It is a Department of Revenue program but requires MWRA to make the payments that go to the watershed communities. PILOT exists in the state for other reasons as well. Compared to other state lands, the PILOT payments for watershed lands are higher than others, the amount to be paid can never go down. Other PILOT payments can be subject to changes in the state legislature. PILOT payments are not based on being a

percent of the towns budget, but on the state's process for valuing land. A PILOT payment for a town could go up if the value of the town's land were to go up.

It was speculated that new communities to get Quabbin water would have their property values go up.

John Scannell clarified the relationship between DCR and MWRA. DCR is responsible for protecting the watersheds. The MWRA is responsible for treatment and transportation of the water to the communities that use the water. DCR's DWSP budget is paid for by MWRA. MWRA is governed by an 11-member board of directors. The state's watershed PILOT program website is as follows: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/watershed-payments-in-lieu-of-taxes-pilot#:~:text=Money%20for%20the%20PILOT%20program,each%20community%20in%20the%20program.>

A reminder was given that each member on WRWAC should be going back to the group they represent on the committee after each meeting to relay any relevant information from the meeting to them.

Darren Ross from the finance committee in Rutland spoke. He agreed that getting someone to represent the WRW towns on the MWRA trust board is important.

Forestry management discussion – harvest plans, controlled burns, the general health of the WRW forest and cutting around the fields and roads

Ken Canfield, chief forester for Quabbin and WRW, updated the committee recent watershed forestry operations.

Russ Wilmot was recently hired as a new Ware River forester, replacing Ken's old position.

A couple harvests were recently completed off Granger Road. There are currently no active lots. New forestry operations are on hold while the program is evaluated by the governor's office. A pause has been put on selling new woodlots. There is not a pause on marking woodlots, it is still occurring, they just can't be put out to bid.

DWSP is working creating prescribed burn plans for each of the WRW towns.

Cindy asked if anyone is haying the fields near the prison camp. Ken answered that no one has bid on them. Cindy will pass on contact information to Ken for someone who may be interested in haying those fields.

The timing on when fields get mowed were discussed. Mike Wood stated that the MassWildlife wildlife management areas (MWA's) were mowed at the wrong time last year. It was determined that the ideal time to cut would be towards the end of August to accommodate ground nesting birds. Although, the fields do have competing interests on when the best time to mow would be. It is not DCR's goal/priority to manage the fields for hay. It is very difficult to lease a field for haying and protect birds at the same time. Dan suggested DWSP may need to pay someone to hay the fields at very specific times of the year.

Jeff Schaaf asked about forest health of the watershed in general, citing seeing lots of dead oak trees. Ken answered that the dead oaks are probably residual die off from the Spongy Moth infestations from a few years back. Over the past couple years, the emerald ash borer seems to be making headway in the state, killing ash trees. Invasive species, such as buckthorn, continue to be a threat to native communities.

A member of the public asked for information about the revenue generated from watershed forestry operations. Ken answered that there are generally 3-4 lots/year that get proposed for cutting. Revenue generation is not a goal of the watershed forestry program. Further, revenue that is generated from watershed forestry does not come back directly to DWSP. A main goal of the forestry program is to create a more diverse forest.

A member of the public asked about what type of equipment is typically used on forestry projects. Ken answered that it depends on where the job is located. Generally, the crews who bid on our forestry lots are fully mechanized crews that use a skidder or forwarder. Limitations on what equipment can be used are specified.

Ken spoke about two upcoming forestry walks sponsored by DCR:

- Saturday, June 3, 10AM-12PM: Establishing young forest habitat in the Ware River Watershed.
- Saturday, July 15, 9AM-11AM: Barrens habitat restoration on Barre heathland: How can forest management and prescribed fire programs support rare plant and animal habitats.

Discussion about setting up a joint meeting between DCR and the towns that have historical properties within the WRW

Dick Williams spoke about some improvements the town of Rutland has been making at the prison camp. It was noted that the Rutland Historical Society has two openings on WRWAC, both their primary and alternate representatives on the committee are unfilled.

Dave Flick mentioned that Barre Historical Society has a list of historic sites in Barre. It was suggested that the other WRW town historical societies put together their own list of historic sites for their towns.

Member Issues

Dick asked for a map of Rutland that shows all the DCR-owned properties in the town. John Scannell answered that DCR has given those types of maps to each of the watershed towns in the past. A new hard copy/digital version will be generated for Rutland, and possibly other WRW towns, and brought to the next meeting.

Brett Russ updated everyone on recent trails subcommittee activities.

- The trails subcommittee has signed an official volunteer stewardship agreement (VSA) with DCR. This allows the group to perform volunteer work on watershed lands.
- T8, a longtime legacy equestrian trail, was successfully rerouted with DCR's help and assistance. It was built on April 29 with 20 volunteers. This was the group's first trail project. Public response has been enthusiastic.
- The subcommittee is currently polling its members to see who is interested in continuing to serve.
- The subcommittee is planning to divide into four teams, each to focus on a different section of the WRW, to come up with a prioritized list of needs for each area.
- The subcommittee has asked DCR about the possibility of re-establishing a bridge on Covered Bridge Road near Riverside Cemetery; also, potentially building a small canoe/kayak launch at the site.

Dave Flick asked about the Water Access subcommittee that was formed last year. Jeff answered that the subcommittee hasn't been active yet.

Dan Clark briefed the committee on upcoming changes (this fall) to DCR's watershed hunting permits. For years, 5-year hunting permits have been issued for people hunting in the Wachusett, Sudbury, or Quabbin (off-watershed) lands. The

WRW is going to be rolled into that same process. It is a free permit, you apply online, and is good for up to 5-years. There is no cap on the number of permits to be given out. It is a good was for DCR to have database of watershed hunters and easily communicate and survey with them.

Meeting End Time: 8:57 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, July 27, 2023, at 7PM - Rutland Free Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543