

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, May 24th, 2018
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 (Chairman)**

Alternate:

A Rod and Gun Club: Joe Cataldo

Alternate: Bryan Waterman

Barre Selectboard: **Martha Varnot**

Alternate: **Edward Yaglou**

Hubbardston Selectboard: **Thomas Bratko**

Alternate: **Cindy Schlener**

Oakham Selectmen: Thomas Hughes

Alternate: **Phillip Warbasse**

Rutland Selectmen: **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: Helen Viner

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, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present:

Lydia Barter, Christine Benau, Anthony Craig, Bill Dobson, Mark Fauteux, Lisa Ferro, Becky Kalaghen, Denise Kellicker, Will Kirousis, Paul Kreswick, Colleen Melanson, Larry Miller, Mike Nogueira, Mike Priffi, Brian Trimby, Diana Walther, Heidi Waugh, Marianne Wojcicki, Tyler Wolanin, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:06 PM

Maps and trails discussion

Ed Yaglou asked for details on the three new bridges set to be installed in the ware river watershed. He feels that if there is a desire to move recreation pressure away from the intake, it would be helpful to allow the public to use those bridges. Herm Eck answered that one of the bridges is set to be installed on Rice Road in Barre, one on Brigham Road in Huabardston, and one on Twin Hill Road in Hubbardston. Margo Petracone stated that she felt the bridge at Rice Road would be most useful for people using trails, specifically equestrian users. John Scannell noted that the original intent of the bridges were for emergency/DCR staff access for work purposes; public access usage has not yet been considered.

A DCR-Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP) draft trail evaluation criteria document was distributed to committee members in advance of the meeting. Brett Russ noticed that the standards were adopted from a document created by DCR-MassParks and asked if anything had been edited or added in the DCR-DWSP draft. Dan Clark answered that wording was added regarding a trail's proximity to an outstanding water resource, proximity to water supply infrastructure, soil type

along the trail, historic/cultural resource impacts, and proposed obstacles (ramps, bridges, jumps).

The committee discussed the DWSP trail evaluation guide. Tom Bratko asked for more specific guidelines and criteria for an acceptable trail, such as preferred soil types, buffer zones around water sources, etc. He would like more information from DCR on what they deem unacceptable regarding a trail. Given said criteria, he suggested user groups walk the trails to determine which would meet DCR's standards, then to submit a list of proposed trails. John Scannell agreed that a more specific set of guidelines is needed before individual trails can be assessed. Martha Varnot suggested DCR also submit guidelines for when it would be appropriate to close a trail.

Mapping the unauthorized trails was discussed. It was suggested that each user group (bicyclists, horseback riders, etc.) map the trails they believe will be sustainable and come up with a list to submit to DCR. There was debate on whether or not most or all of the trails in the watershed are already mapped at this point.

Brett Russ suggested that representatives from each user group sit down with DCR in the near future to discuss specific trails. Dan Clark added that DCR has GIS software that can run analyses of mapped trails against their trail criteria and guidelines; this could be a quick first step to determine if a specific trail may be acceptable or not. Brett also talked about setting up a data exchange with DCR as he believes he has most/all of the unauthorized trails mapped throughout the watershed. DCR could then run a GIS analysis of those trails and begin to define the specific criteria the committee is looking for; buffer zones, etc.

Various free apps available to the public for mapping trails were discussed. Anyone who maps a trail that they believe has not yet been documented can send that file along to Tom Bratko (tom.bratko@yahoo.com). A free app named 'viewranger' was mentioned as a good tool to map trails with.

There was discussion on the most efficient process of getting user group trail data to DCR. Brett Russ suggested setting up a shared dropbox account. Cindy Schlener suggested forming smaller subcommittee that could meet outside of the WRWAC meetings to discuss maps and trails. Tom Bratko will be the point person

for equine riders to send their trail data to. Brett Russ (bruss@alum.wpi.edu) will be the point person for bicycling. Dean Zuppio (dazuppio@gmail.com) will be the point person for snowmobiling. Matt Hopkinson (matt.hopkinson@state.ma.us) will be the point person for skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, hunting, and fishing. Brett Russ added that people can sign up with the Friends of the Ware River Watershed via their website (<http://warewatershed.org>) or facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/warewatershed/>). Jeff Schaaf commented that he anticipates the trails subcommittee to meet with DCR by late September/October.

Cindy Schlener asked if the currently marked and existing horse trails would meet the standards of the new trail criteria. John Scannell answered that they would need to be reevaluated. The criteria are meant to be a guideline and help determine if existing trails are sustainable going forward as well as to assess the viability of newly proposed trails. Cindy also asked if DCR would consider allowing user groups to fix small issues on individual trails rather than simply denying any trail that has a potential problem. John answered that alternatives for specific trails could be looked at.

A member of the public asked if existing trails in the watershed are found to have problems, could part of the process be to find a solution to the problem (rerouting, erosion mitigation, etc.) as opposed to simply getting rid of the trail. John Scannell answered that it would be a possibility. Part of that process would be to meet with user groups to determine what maintenance needs to be done, and who would be in charge of that work.

John Scannell stated that a crew from the Student Conservation Association (SCA) is currently working to reroute T6 with the plan to reopen the trail when work is completed. The SCA crew was in attendance, introduced themselves, and explained their work; the crowd gave them a round of applause. John Scannell added that the crew will also be installing crosses at the prison camp cemetery. The Rutland Historical Society had paid for the wood and DCR carpenters made the crosses.

Matt Hopkinson requested that the T-trails be renamed, or that better maps be made when the public access plan is updated that have the trails clearly marked and visible. John Scannell noted that more detailed maps will be produced as part of the access plan update.

Cindy Schlener brought up unauthorized ATV usage in the watershed and asked about how it can be controlled better; she noted that specific roads (Williamsville and Hale) are being ripped up by them. Jeff Schaaf added that it has been a problem for decades. John Scannell noted that when he is in communication with other managers of public lands, unauthorized ATV usage is usually the first complaint he hears.

Cindy Schlener asked about potential parking issues that could arise from moving public access farther away from the intake where there seems to be fewer options for parking. She suggested possibly creating a parking area on Rt. 62. John Scannell answered that as DCR works through the process of updating the public access plan, the goal will be to meet with individual user groups to get their input on these types of issues and concerns (parking, trails, etc.).

Bill Dobson asked about item 12 on the trail evaluation document which states that any work done within 200 ft. of a stream or river or within 100 ft. of a wetland resource needs input from the local conservation commission. He asked if this statute would only apply to new trails, or if it would also include recently reopened trails. John Scannell clarified that before any work could be done to maintain or create a trail that is within 100 ft. of a wetland or 200 ft. within a stream or river, the local conservation commission would first have to be consulted; it is a statewide regulation.

A member of the public asked about the process for getting mountain biking included as an allowed activity on trails in the watershed; in the current public access plan bicycles are only allowed on watershed roads. John Scannell acknowledged the desire for bicyclists to have access to trails and mentioned that those changes will be considered when the public access plan is updated. He also talked about the challenge of proving to DWSP's regulators that DCR is maintaining control over their watersheds; introducing new uses or expanding existing uses can raise red flags.

John Scannell stated that updating the Ware River watershed public access plan is roughly a 1.5 year long process that is set to begin towards the end of the summer. The first step is usually to put out a public survey and accept comments.

Multi-user trails were discussed. Brett Russ stated that up until 2014 mountain bikers, hikers, and equine users had coexisted peacefully in the watershed and asked if shared usage (multi-use) trails could continue in the future. John Scannell answered that those details would be discussed as part of the access plan update. Matt Hopkinson talked about user conflicts that can occur on multi-use trails; users whose activities are more passive or take up a smaller footprint can be crowded/pushed out of an area by the users whose more aggressive activities take up a larger footprint. He cited the 2010 public access plan which instituted 'quiet zones' in northern parts of the watershed that kept snowmobiles off the trails in that area as an example of separating users. He mentioned that the trail evaluation document doesn't address issues that can arise from multi-use and that they should be investigated as part of the access plan update. Cindy Schlener talked about her positive experiences riding horses/cross country skiing on snowmobile trails in the winter; she hasn't noticed user conflicts. She is in support of having more multi-user trails. Jeff Schaaf added that the 'quiet zones' were put in place to avoid user conflicts. He believes expects certain areas will be multi-use, and some will not. A member of the public gave an example on how to decrease user conflicts on multi-use trails; he puts a bell on his dog to be more noticeable to other users. He noted mountain bikes can be fairly silent when riding through the forest and suggested making noise vocally as a way to alert other users of your presence and decrease the chance of startling people.

Dean Zuppio commented that it would be helpful to get feedback from DCR on the areas they feel are too sensitive to allow public access. John Scannell answered that DCR has not specified any new areas where they are looking to close all public access. With the upcoming access plan update, DCR would generally like to shift access away from the intake and tributaries.

Cindy Schlener commented about trails that were impacted by the 2008 ice storm and are still impassable today. She mentioned that they were good trails before the storm damage and could become good loop trails in the future if reestablished.

Jeff Schaaf asked about closed trails; if they are closed to all uses or if hiking would still be allowed on closed trails since walking can be done anywhere in the watershed. The 2010 public access plan states that hiking, walking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing is allowed with general restrictions (Ware River intake)

within the watershed. John Scannell commented that he thought a trail closed sign indicated all users should stay off that specific section of trail that is marked closed, even though certain uses are generally allowed throughout the watershed, barring the intake. However, exceptions will be made over the summer to allow users to walk closed trails for mapping purposes. He added that the signage needs to be worked on and updated to add explanations and give more clarity.

Ed Yaglou mentioned a parking area located between Gilbert Road in Barre between Rt. 62 and Williamsville Road that is managed by DCR-MassParks. He suggested it could possibly be developed into a larger parking area that could accommodate trailers. Dean Zuppio felt that the road is too narrow to increase parking capacity. Brett Russ suggested first deciding on trail locations and then figuring out the parking situations second.

Ed Yaglou expressed his appreciation to DCR commissioner Leo Roy regarding a letter he sent the committee alerting them that T6 will be rerouted and subsequently be reopened.

Meeting End Time: 8:21 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, September 13th, 2018 at 7 PM – Rutland Free Public Library (downstairs), 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543