

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, July 10, 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: Becky Austin, Rebecca Aust, Dennis Bergen, Sherry Bergen, Matthew Broderick, Ellen Carpenter, Bill Dobson, David Eves, Evelyn Eves, Stephanie Hallberg, Lisa Killick, Paul Kreswick, Aaron Langlois, Pete Mahoney, Dave Morin, Sarah Petersen, Dick Pray, Gail Pray, Barbara Pucci, Rusty Savignac, Mike Stoll, Susan Turnbull, Dick Williams, Steve Wentzell, Barbara Weschensky

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:04 PM

Approval of minutes from meeting on April 17, 2025

Dave Flick made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on April 17, 2025. Cindy Schlener seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Trails subcommittee presentation by Brett Russ

Brett Russ presented the Ware River Watershed Trails 2024 Report to the committee. The report was prepared by the trail's subcommittee of the WRWAC. Details of the presentation are as follows:

- Trails subcommittee introduction
 - The trails subcommittee seats are represented by:
 - 4 town's open space committees
 - Historical
 - All user groups (hiking, biking, equestrian, snowmobiling)
 - The entirety of the trail network, a mix of woodland trails and roads, is popular across all authorized user groups
- 2024 WRW Trails Volunteer Stewardship
 - Accomplishments:
 - Maintained approximately 18 miles of trails
 - Including collaboration with AMC Midstate Trail Committee
 - Installed 20 foot french drain on the Camel's Hump Trail
 - Created over six recommended routes for DCR-DWSP led hikes

- Inspired and supported two municipal WRRT road crossing projects
 - Many trail cleanups
 - Build AMC MST bog bridges
- In 2024 total volunteer hours were estimated to be 90. 2024 volunteer time and donations for 2024 were estimated to a total value of \$4,2370.30
- Update: Hubbardston WRRT crossing funded, completed in 2024
 - A thank you goes out to Mark Kresge and Kristofer Munroe for their work with the Town of Hubbardston to bring this safe WRRT crossing to Williamsville Road, enabled by ARPA and MassTrails funding
- Update: Barre WRRT crossing at Hubbardston Road (Route 62)
 - A request was presented at a Selectboard meeting
 - The Town of Barre assumed the project, but it was delayed from originally intended schedule
- Trails subcommittee partnership with DCR, retrospective – what went well
 - Trail marking and focus by ranger staff
 - Good communications
 - Great willingness to collaborate
 - Field visits, materials assistance, gate access for trail work needs, widening gate passages, parking and road improvements at Cemetery Bridge, Rice Road bridge repair response
- Trails subcommittee partnership with DCR, retrospective – what didn't go as well
 - Trails subcommittee wasn't included in discussions about DCR-DWSP trail projects
 - Walker Burial Ground
 - SCA projects
 - Trail naming – mutual miss
- Trails subcommittee partnership with DCR, retrospective – improvement that could be made
 - Communication
 - Set intended deadlines for action, with as much notice as possible
 - Improve cross-communications about trail efforts and goals

- Planning
 - All requests are ad-hoc today – neither of us (DWSP and Trails Subcommittee) are aware of each other's wants and needs
 - A long-term trail plan would help us all
- Forestry and Trails
 - Could we consider a trail presence and treatment section in forestry proposals?
 - Could we consider post-harvest connectivity options enabled by forestry operations?
- Biennial review requests
 - Resume project to reconnect Lower T7 trail in partnership with USACE
 - Discuss connection options with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 - Connect Barre Falls to Riis Farm via Stone Road
 - The eastern half of Stone Road is maintained today
 - If we can open the western half, it's a short connection to Riis Farm from there
 - [Trailforks – Stone Road Trail](#)
 - Establish Rutland State Park pavement-bypass trail for snowmobile connectivity leveraging legacy powerline
 - Request for snowmobiles to connect Prison Camp Road to Whitehall Road along the powerline corridor to bypass plowed pavement along park entrance
 - Audit snowmobile route along/crossing of Old Turnpike Road
 - Seeking site visit to consider improvements
 - Road crossing and safety alignment
 - Grade sustainability
 - Culvert
 - [Trailforks – Old Turnpike Alternative](#)
- Conclusion: Celebrating the results of the partnership
 - Many thanks for this outcome – the trails subcommittee loves the WRW
 - The subcommittee has not heard a negative comment yet
 - Positive feedback has come back about the Riis Farm Loop
 - It's the only trail network that serves all abilities, especially beginner/intermediate (which are most users)

- Offers a rare opportunity to experience the wilderness close to home
- An upcoming trails workday is being planned for August

Discussion regarding Oakham lithium-ion Battery Park proposal adjacent to the Ware River Watershed land

Phillip Warbasse spoke about a proposed [Battery Project](#) in the town of Oakham. The proposal is currently under review by the state's Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB). He encouraged the various state environmental agencies to investigate the project.

The town of Oakham's Planning Board has sent letters to DCR, MWRA, DPU EFSB, and the Monson Town Administrator detailing the project. Copies of those letters can be requested from Phillip Warbasse, Chairman of the Oakham Planning Board.

Dennis Guberski commented that he is in support of having the WRW towns get representation on the MWRA board. He advised the committee to work with the watershed towns in the coming years to make it happen.

John Scannell spoke about DCR-DWSP's jurisdiction with the project. Based on current regulations DWSP would only be able to give input if the project was within 400 feet of a regulated stream. Most of the project is not on the Ware River watershed, and the portion of the project on the watershed is outside DWSP's regulated jurisdiction. It was noted that air pollution is not under DWSP's jurisdiction.

What designates a 'regulated stream' by DCR was defined. The legislation goes back to the 1990's. USGS maps were used to identify streams under DCR's jurisdiction. Those designations are still used today. There are no DWSP regulated streams inside the proposed project zone.

Multiple members of the public spoke in opposition to the project. A list of their concerns is as follows:

- Air pollution from a potential chemical fire
- The project's proximity to the WRW and other water streams
- Potential for a large forest fire
- Potential soil and stream contamination
- The road into/out of the project is near a stream

- Concern over property values decreasing if the project is completed
- Concern that the site for the project is already contaminated and simply construction/development of the land could stir up pollution/chemicals already in the soil. The proposed site was a former auto recycling facility, and it was alleged that the site was never properly decommissioned.
- Concern that the battery storage park will be there forever

Mike Wood commented that the town of Oakham had, within the past couple years, created a bylaw to prohibit the project. It was clarified that the state's EFSB can approve the project and supersede the town's bylaw. There was also discussion on how to persuade the developer for the project that local sentiment is against the project.

Mike Wood made a motion that the WRWAC shows support to the town of Oakham in their effort to stop the proposed lithium-ion battery park storage project (358 Coldbrook Road, Oakham) and any other similar project. Cindy Schlener seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

It was determined that the chair will draft a formal letter to all appropriate parties on behalf of the committee detailing their opposition and specific concerns about the project.

A member of the public asked at what point the project would become a concern to DCR. John Scannell answered DCR would not get involved until something happened that caused pollution on watershed land.

Discussion about WRWAC's advisory role, the direction which the committee should take in the future and striking a less adversarial tone with DCR

There was discussion about the necessity of committee members being able to argue a point, or give constructive criticism, in a respectful manner, to DCR.

There was discussion about the committee moving on from focusing on the Public Access Plan and other access related issues at most meetings and discussing other watershed topics. Cindy Schlener mentioned that the road closure discussion has been going on for roughly two years. The merits of continuing to advocate for a particular issue were discussed.

Jeff Schaaf spoke of his concern over how adversarial the committee's relationship with DCR has become.

Dennis Guberski commented that he would oppose any future public access changes without scientific justification. He also reiterated that he would like to see a representative from the WRW towns be appointed to the MWRA Board. It suggested that the town select boards collaborate on how to best get someone appointed to the board.

There was discussion surrounding what the role of the committee should be going forward. The legislation that established the WRWAC states, "The purpose of the committee shall be to advise the division on its policies and regulations regarding recreational activities, land use and environmental, wildlife and habitat matters within the Ware River watershed."

Mike Wood emphasized that the committee represents a wide stakeholder base.

Discussion of formally submitting requested changes to the public access plan as part of the biennial review

The timeline for submitting requested changes was discussed. Requested changes should be submitted by Autumn of this year (2025).

Mike Wood suggested that the reopening Ruben Walker and Prison Camp Roads to vehicles be added to the biennial review.

It was determined that this topic should remain on the agenda and continue to be discussed at the next meeting.

Member Issues

A potential tour for committee members of the intake building on the Ware River was discussed. Potential dates that the committee picks should be sent to Dan Clark.

Water diversions from the Ware River to Quabbin Reservoir are permitted between October and June. Diversions are only allowed when the river's flow exceeds 80 million gallons per day (MGD). There is also a minimum water temperature requirement for diversions as well.

New Business

N/A

Meeting End Time: 8:42 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, September 18, 2025, 7PM: Rutland Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543 (downstairs; large meeting room)