

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, July 27, 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: Dan Clark, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present: David Corazzini, Joseph Ethier, Dick Hutchings, Pete Mahoney, Duane Pray, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:01 PM

Approval of minutes from meeting on Thursday, May 18, 2023

Dave Flick made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on May 18, 2023, with edits. John Root seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

DCR update on progress made toward the final WRW Public Access Plan

Dan presented to the committee about the WRW Public Access Plan update process up to the current point and when it is set to be completed.

DWSP goals for updating the public access management plan are as follows:

- Improve watershed protection
- Maintain or enhance recreational opportunities
- Adjust past policies that did not adequately provide watershed protection
- Meet DEP requirements for a water supply

The public comment period for the plan went as follows:

- A public meeting was held on November 29, 2022. At the meeting, DWSP presented an overview of the draft plan and listened to verbal feedback from the audience, which consisted of approximately 200 people. Information about how to submit a written comment was provided to the public.
- DWSP staff attended WRWAC meetings held on November 17, 2022, February 9 and 23, 2023, and May 18, 2023. Feedback from the committee was provided to DWSP at these meetings. DWSP reminded all participants to provide their comments in writing by February 28, 2023.
- DWSP met with the following groups (written and verbal feedback was provided to DWSP at these meetings):
 - Trails subcommittee on January 11, 2023
 - Representatives from the sporting community on January 26, 2023
 - Representatives from the historical resource community on February 16, 2023

- A comment portal on DCR’s website was active from November 29, 2022 until February 28, 2023. The public could submit written comments through this portal. In addition, written comments were directly handed to DWSP staff at various meetings.
 - 211 comments received through the online portal
 - Comment letters received via mail/in- person came from:
 - 2 citizens
 - One each from the select boards of Barre, Hubbardston, Oakham, and Rutland
 - One each from the Barre and Rutland Historical Societies
 - 11 sporting clubs
 - A 488-person petition was submitted to stop DCR’s proposed road policy
 - General themes from all the comments are as follows:
 - WRW lands provide high-quality access to nature; critical to mental health and quality of life
 - Pressure to slow the decision-making process; allow new administration to review plan
 - Emphasis on recreational users as the ‘eyes and ears on the ground’ and a resource for watershed protection
 - Belief that demonstrating water quality impacts or public safety issues should precede any additional restrictions
 - Some resentment of state control and questioning of state’s authority
 - General areas of support from the comments are as follows:
 - Single-track mountain biking access
 - Buffer zone
 - Annual trail review policy
 - Shift to multi-use trail network
 - Physical barriers to prevent driving directly into the river
 - Summary of main concerns from the comments are as follows:
 - Large group horse permits: ~40 comments disagreed with DCR’s policy change plus written letters from equestrian clubs and town of Hubbardston
 - Large motors at Long Pond: 1 supporter; ~15 comments in opposition
 - Open water swimming: 1 supporter to DCR’s policy change; ~60 in opposition

- Night access: ~30 online comments in oppositions to DCR's policy change, plus letters from Town of Hubbardston and Barre Sportsman's Club
- Road closures: 3 supporters; ~40 in opposition to DCR's policy change, plus written letters in opposition from:
 - Barre and Rutland Board of Selectmen
 - Barre Historical Society
 - Historical Commissions of Barre and Rutland
 - Letter representing 11 sporting clubs
- Dog leashing: 1 in support; 2 in opposition of DCR's policy change

DWSP's process to respond to comments went as follows:

- DWSP met with DEP in February 2023 to explore options for large group horse permits
- DCR met with EEA on March 9, 2023 to review the plan and consider public feedback
- DWSP met with new DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo on May 16, 2023 to discuss the plan and public concern
- DWSP and DCR commissioner's office met with EEA and DEP on June 27, 2023 to consider specific proposals resulting from public feedback and discussions

Next steps to finalize/implement the plan are as follows:

- Prior to releasing the plan:
 - Written summary of public comments will be provided
 - Written summary of the process used to address concerns will be provided
- Present final plan at next WRWAC meeting
- Post final plan on DCR website
- Post document outlining public engagement process
- Final plan expected to be presented by early September and plan implementation to follow

Potential dates/locations for the next WRWAC meeting (where the final public access plan will be presented) were discussed. Dave Flick is going to contact Ruggles Lane Elementary School in Barre to see if their cafeteria is available to be reserved. Potential dates for the meeting are September 13, 14, 21, or 25.

Cindy commented about Comet Pond. She hopes the new access plan will allow for the use of DCR land to go in/out of Comet Pond for distance swimming.

Presentation and discussion of 5-year hunting permit program and DCR's new hunting app

Dan provided the committee with an overview of the DCR's 5-year hunt permit program.

DWSP is rolling the Ware River watershed into the existing 5-year hunting permits that already exist for the other DWSP managed watersheds. It is an expansion of an already existing permit program. It is an online application and can be found on DCR's watershed hunting website. The link to the application is as follows:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/e37bb4f381ab4f029a759bbbb6d4f55>

The motivation behind this program is to capture hunter information and allow DCR's natural resource sector to use that information to communicate with hunters and pass on any relevant information to them.

Permits are emailed to hunters after they submit their application online. There is no limit to the number of permits given out. If you already have one of the 5-year hunting permits, you do not need to apply for a new one for the WRW, your existing permit would also cover hunting in the WRW. Hunters should reapply when their 5-year permit expires. Hunters are given a permit for the dashboard of their car and one for their wallet.

People will not be penalized for not having one of these permits. Watershed rangers will focus on educating hunters in the field about the new permits.

Dan also briefed the committee on a new map app that now exists for watershed users. The plan is for this map to eventually include all the DWSP-managed watersheds along with all allowed activities, hunting and fishing areas, trails, etc. The map will be interactive and allow users in real-time to show them where in the watershed they currently are.

Member Issues

Mike Wood continued discussion from the previous meeting related to the timing of when DCR's wildlife management area (WMA) fields get mowed. Since the last meeting he has met with someone from the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and noted that they have offered to mow the WMA's on DWSP lands. Mike will have someone from MassWildlife contact Dan to work out the details.

John Root brought up House Bill 4420 that has to do with controlling firearms in the commonwealth. The bill can be viewed here: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/HD4420>

A member of the public asked about Intervale road in the prison camp to be repaired (where a jeep got stuck). Dan answered that the water is currently too high, but the road will be repaired when conditions allow.

Mike Wood asked about damage on Gilbert Road along the river. Dan confirmed that there have been multiple washouts throughout the watershed, and they will all be repaired eventually. A member of the public expressed appreciation for the work DCR did to repair Coldbrook Road.

Dan commented that Jenna Perschka is leaving her position as head ranger in the WRW and transitioning to an Environmental Analyst position at the Quabbin watershed. Quabbin and WRW ranger staff are grouped together as one unit, with four rangers patrolling the WRW when fully staffed.

Dan updated everyone that a new parking area was recently built at the Prison Camp. DCR staff also installed interpretive signage (purchased/produced by Rutland Historical Commission) at six different locations around the camp.

Dan followed up on a request from Dick Williams at the last meeting and provided the committee with hard copy maps of all WRW towns and the DCR owned lands within those towns. Digital versions of these maps are available to committee members by request as well.

Meeting End Time: 8:06 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Wednesday, September 13, 2023, at 7PM – Quabbin Regional High School auditorium, 800 South Street, Barre, MA 01005