

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, July 8th, 2021
7:00 PM

Location: Barre Town Hall, 2 Exchange Street, Barre, MA 01005

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 (chairperson)**

Alternate:

A Rod and Gun Club:

Alternate: Bryan Waterman

Barre Selectboard: Martha Varnot

Alternate:

Hubbardston Selectboard: Cindy Schlener

Alternate: **Dave Marsh**

Oakham Selectboard: Thomas Hughes

Alternate: **Phillip Warbasse**

Rutland Selectboard: **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:

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:

DCR Staff Present:

Ken Canfield, Dan Clark, Herm Eck, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present:

Maggie Butryim, Dylan Clark, Jason Clark, Dennis Fleming, Nathan Hayes, Dick Hutchings, Robert Kane, Denise Kellicker, Chris Kennington, Greg Koenig, Joy Larrabee, Greg O’Sullivan, Elizabeth Petrosis, Donald Rich, Rusty Savignac, Brian Shepard, Lynn Shepard, Jeff Stillings, Brian Trimby, Matt Urban, Bill Valardi Jr., Bill Valardi Sr., Edward Valardi Jr., Stu Ziemba

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:06 PM

Approval of minutes from meeting on Thursday, February 20th, 2020

Phillip Warbasse made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on February 20th, 2020. John Root seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Update on legislation revising membership of the WRWAC

Lucas McDiarmid, District Director for state senator Anne Gobi gave an updating regarding legislation that would revise and update membership of the WRWAC. It is Bill S541 and is currently sitting in committee being reviewed.

He also brought up an amendment that will soon be up for a vote that would allow DCR-DWSP hiring to be set by their approved annual work plan. He expects it to pass in the state house and senate and mentioned that there should be the votes to override the governor if he was to veto it.

Discussion of proposed project at Rutland Prison Camp

Mr. McDiarmid spoke about an amendment that was passed in the Massachusetts House of Representatives earlier this year. It would provide no less than \$50,000 for the preservation, protection, and signage at the Rutland Prison Camp.

Dan Clark stated that the prison camp proposal is currently on hold. John Scannell added that the DCR commissioner is reviewing the proposal.

A member of the public spoke of some dangerous hazards at the prison camp. One spot, just south of the solitary confinement cells, has an area that appears to be collapsing.

A member of the public suggested using funds from the previously mentioned, potential amendment to be used for signage alerting the public of dangerous areas rather than closing them off. There was additional discussion on how the money could potentially be spent. John Scannell added that since DWSP has not yet been allocated the money, no internal discussions have happened as to how the money would be spent. A member of the public asked if the \$50,000 is ultimately awarded to DCR, would DCR then detail how they plan to spend the money. John Scannell answered that if the money is acquired, they would brief the committee on plans to spend it.

A member of the public asked if there have been any reported injuries or rescues at the prison camp in the past. Dan Clark answered that nothing like that has been reported, but the goal is to avoid those things from happening, and that there are several spots in the prison camp where there is potential for danger.

Jeff Stillings, member of the Rutland Historical Commission and Rutland Historical Society, spoke about the situation at the prison camp up to the current moment. DWSP met with the Rutland Historical Commission this past spring to discuss a proposal to demolish some ruins at the prison camp. The historical commission investigated safety concerns with Rutland dispatch and determined there were zero calls for service over the past two years related to the prison camp. When they searched back four years, they found four calls for service over that timeframe. Both the Rutland Historical Commission and Rutland selectboard unanimously voted that the town of Rutland is vehemently opposed to the demolition of any of the prison camp ruins, except for safeguarding an open pit. They both sent letters to DCR describing their position on the matter. Rutland

Historical Commission is actively involved in the application process for adding the prison camp ruins to the Massachusetts State Registry of Historic Landmarks and be given historical registry status. Sheriff Evangelidis has guaranteed Jeff Stillings that his community corrections crew will paint away graffiti at the prison camp whenever necessary, as often as needed.

A member of the Barre selectboard stated that their group drafted a letter to local senators and legislators that the prison camp should not be shut down. He feels as though DCR should be able to clean up the graffiti and maintain the prison camp safely on their own. He also expressed concerned about gate closures in the area.

A member of the public asked for more information about the process of adding the prison camp to the Massachusetts State Registry of Historic Landmarks. Jeff Stillings answered that the Historical Commission is working in tandem with the Historical Society as to why it should be designated a historic landmark. There is then an application is submitted to the state. To make it a national landmark, it must first be approved by the state commission.

A member of the public asked if the prison camp land was ever federal property. It was determined that since the land was taken, it has been state property.

A member of the public asked if the open application for making the prison camp a historic site would protect it. Jeff Stillings responded that he assumed having an ongoing application to make the prison camp a historic site would put any potential projects in that area on hold.

A member asked if there are any archaeological remains at the prison camp. Jeff Stillings answered that there are two cemeteries at the base of prison camp.

Brett Russ asked if Mass Historical initially supported DCR's proposal. Jeff Stillings noted that although they did support DCR's initial proposal, Mass Historical seems to have failed to reach out to Rutland Historical before giving their support to DCR. Since hearing from Rutland Historical, Mass Historical is supportive of making the prison camp a historic landmark. John Scannell added that as a state agency, to proceed on a project that involves a historic resource, there is a requirement to file a project notification form with Mass Historic. Mass Historic's

response was a notice of non-significance, which allows for the project to proceed without any conditions.

A member of the public expressed hope that DCR recognize that it's an oversight that the prison camp is not already listed as a historic landmark.

Discussion on restarting the hearings regarding the update of DCR's Ware River Watershed Public Access Plan

Jeff Schaaf inquired about restarting DCR's update of the Ware River public access plan. John Scannell answered there have been communications with the DCR Commissioner to set up a meeting to discuss the history of public access in the Ware River and review the proposed updates to the plan. Ultimately, the commissioner is the last person to sign-off on the final plan. Jeff Stillings asked that senator Gobi's office be briefed after DCR meets with the commissioner on how the public input process will proceed.

Until a new access plan is finalized, no new policies will be established in the Ware River watershed. All rules and regulations in the current public access plan will continue to be enforced.

A member of the public who is part of the power boater stakeholder group on Long Pond asked to be included in the discussion phase of updating the access plan. John Scannell agreed with the sentiment.

Jeff Stillings brought up a set of 2,000 signatures that he helped gathered in 2020, it is comprised of people opposed to changes in gate access in the Ware River watershed. He also spoke about a position paper that all four select boards (Barre, Hubbardston, Rutland, Oakham) from the Ware River have signed off on. The letter details their support for the continued, lawful access of the prison camp; specifically, they don't want additional gates locked. This is separate from the annual closing of gates due to mud season.

A member of the public suggested investigating what the original agreement/purpose was for keeping the old town roads in the Ware River watershed open.

FY22 Ware River Watershed proposed forestry lot proposals

Herm Eck, forester for DCR-DWSP, presented the FY22 proposed forestry lots for the Ware River watershed (WRW). Detailed descriptions for each of the 5 lot proposals can be found online at DCR's watershed forestry projects website:

<https://mass-eoeea.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=e12cdd08ec6b45f5bb00edc3489fb5df>

Public comments can be submitted until August 6th online at:

<https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>

A member of the public asked about pines are being targeting in some of the lots. Herm answered that they tend to be older, poorly formed trees, that can become difficult to manage if not harvested.

A member of the public asked about the prevalence of invasive species in areas disturbed by forestry. Herm talked about how any disturbance is a chance for invasive species to become more established or multiply. Logging equipment is thoroughly cleaned when moving from site-to-site.

A member of the public asked how the forestry operations would affect local wildlife. Herm answered that one of the goals of the forestry operations is to create more diverse habitats, which in turn should allow more species of wildlife to thrive. There are many species of wildlife in Massachusetts that depend on disturbance and early-succession habitat.

A rumor regarding hessian remains somewhere on the watershed was briefly discussed.

A public tour of the proposed forestry lots was scheduled for Thursday, August 19th, 2021. The tour will begin at 6pm and everyone will meet at DCR's Oakham field office, 578 Old Turnpike Road, Oakham, MA 01068.

Member Issues

Brett Russ asked if Oak Hill will continue to be mowed. Dan Clark answered that it will be mowed on a semi-annual basis.

Dick Williams asked about DWSP's two skid steer grinders and if they're being used to their full extent. He'd like to see them used more. Dan Clark answered that the one for the Ware/Quabbin region has been used at Quabbin extensively. The Ware River watershed maintenance crew is down two staff now.

Dick Williams brought up pond lilies at Long Pond, he indicated that they're taking over.

Meeting End Time: 8:22 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, October 7th, 2021, at 7 PM – Rutland Free Public Library (downstairs), 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543