

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, September 13th, 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:

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:

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, Sara Cohen, Justin Gonsor, Lisa Gustavsen, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present:

Chris Farragano, Mark Fauteux, Dennis Guberski, Paul Kregwick, David Madrigal, Tom Murphy, Douglas Walther, Marianne Wojcicki, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:00 PM

Approval of minutes from meetings on Thursday, May 10th, 2018 and Thursday, May 24th, 2018

Dick Williams made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on May 10th, 2018. Dave Small seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Dick Williams made a motion to accept the minutes from the WRWAC meeting on May 24th, 2018. John Root seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. Dave Small abstained from voting as he did not attend the May 10th meeting.

Welcome and introductions

DCR staff person Sara Cohen opened the meeting and acted as facilitator and moderator for the evening. Throughout the night she tracked key issues, areas of agreement, questions that will need to be answered, issues that need to be dealt with, and the next steps moving forward.

For the first part of the meeting DCR will present their set of public access management principles for watershed lands. These principles are intended to help frame discussions with stakeholders through the Public Access Management Plan update and beyond.

For the second part of the meeting DCR will present their proposed public engagement plan. The goal is to ensure effective and ongoing communication and collaboration with user groups as part of updating the access plan.

Present DCR's watershed management principles for the Ware River, so that all stakeholders have a common understanding of DCR's goals and constraints governing public access

Dan Clark presented a set of 10 DCR/DWSP public access management principles. These principles are used to inform decisions related to the operation of lands/waters owned by DCR for drinking water protection and are as follows:

1. Ensure DCR/MWRA's eligibility for an ongoing waiver from filtration requirements by maintaining high water quality in the Ware River and its tributaries (a tributary is a stream that feeds another stream). Below, points A-E highlight how DCR tries to maintain the best water quality they can before it enters the system:

Dan Clark added that the Ware River watershed is critical piece of the larger water supply system that includes the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs. In order to maintain the filtration waiver, DCR must demonstrate that the watershed is being adequately protected to preserve the existing high quality water. As the watershed manager, one of DCR's top responsibilities is to maintain the filtration waiver.

A member of the public asked about additional information on the filtration waiver. Dan Clark answered that it is a federal waiver but the agency that oversees it is at the state level. Annual inspections are conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), who is the local regulator that enforces the federal regulations.

- A. Protect tributaries from potential contaminants such as bacteria and turbidity (turbidity is a measure of the murkiness or stirred-up sediment water).
- B. Avoid expansion of activities including significant increase in total number of trail miles relative to current conditions.

A member of the public questioned why the rail trail was allowed to be constructed (roughly a decade ago) if expansion of activities and trails is discouraged. Dick Williams commented that during the time when the trail was approved, increased access may not have been as big an issue as it is now and/or management objectives may have changed from 10 years ago.

Robin Langer asked if there has been a proven correlation between increases in trails over a given area leading to negative water quality effects. He questioned whether or not the number of trail miles is the best criteria to use. John Scannell commented that regarding public access, one of the first things MassDEP asks about are trail miles in the watershed, amount of usage, changes in usage, expansions of usage, etc. Dan Clark added that in general, increasing the number of trails also increases the potential points of access, which would seemingly lead to more public access.

Brett Russ commented that as an example, 1 mile of bad trail could be worse than having 30 miles of good trails. From reading MassDEP reports he sees their public access concerns as relating to impact, control, and impacts (which must be tied back to science/field reporting). He also asked if 'avoiding expansion of activities' will preclude discussions about expanding road bicycling into off-road (trail) bicycling in the watershed. There was discussion about the original intention of the statement 'expansion of activities' and whether or not off-road bicycling would be considered a new activity. No final determination was made.

Jeff Schaaf asked if it is possible for DCR to push back on some of MassDEP's concerns regarding certain activities and trails expansion. John Scannell answered that it is up to DCR to come up with an access plan that is reasonable. It is expected that MassDEP wouldn't have any issues if DCR can defend what is in the plan and why.

John Root asked how many miles of authorized trails are currently in the watershed today versus 10 years ago. Lisa Gustavsen answered that no new authorized trails have been created in the past 10 years, but that the number of unauthorized trails has largely increased over the same time period. Hiking trail mileage is not quantified in the 2010 Ware River public access plan.

John Scannell added that the guideline of not allowing a 'significant' increase in total trail miles allows for some degree of flexibility regarding trail additions and location changes. A member of the public commented that since the word 'significant' can be used as a statistical measure, it should be changed. The word 'substantial' was suggested to be substituted in its place.

- C. Reduce unauthorized access.
- D. Use effective barriers, where necessary.
- E. Provide appropriate surveillance to assure compliance with rules.

Robin Langer commented that reducing unauthorized access, using effective barriers, and conducting appropriate surveillance is incredibly difficult in the watershed. He feels that unauthorized ATV usage (that is very difficult to stop/control) is much more of a potential threat to water quality than adding more miles of trails in the watershed. Sara Cohen added that it can be helpful to think of points C-E as management goals and principles that are challenging and constantly ongoing, but not promises. Dan Clark commented that a bridge is set to be installed near Rice Road to facilitate additional surveillance by DCR in that area.

- 2. Ensure safety and security of public drinking water supply watershed lands and waters – especially near shaft 8.

Shaft 8 is located off of Rt. 122 in the town of Barre. Phillip Warbasse asked for information on the draw down above shaft 8 that happens annually. Dan Clark answered that it is being done this year as an invasive species control mechanism. John Scannell added that general inspection/maintenance is also conducted annually during the draw down. Dick Williams asked if sediment removal could be done during the draw down. John Scannell answered that turbidity isn't currently a problem at that location but it could be an option if it was determined to be needed in the future.

John Root asked how much water is taken in from the Ware River intake annually. John Scannell answered that it varies from year to year and that it is not a significant amount compared to the system at large. When water is taken from the Ware River it is sent to Quabbin Reservoir.

3. Support public enjoyment of watershed land through multiple modalities to the extent possible while meeting all the other management principles herein.
4. Avoid having trails cross streams (i.e. use constructed roads for stream crossings).
5. Avoid concentrating use in erosive locations, considering factors such as slope, soils, vegetative cover-land cover classification, proposed uses, etc.
6. Protect sensitive/protected environmental resources and areas of concern (e.g. natural heritage species zones, rare species habitats and populations, unique natural communities or landscape features).
7. Ensure public access accommodates necessary forest management and infrastructure maintenance activities.

A member of the public asked if the proposed logging operation in the Harding Hill area would affect public access this fall. Dan Clark answered that since it is still in the proposal phase, no harvesting will be happening in the coming months.

8. Prevent unintended impacts on adjacent public and private properties due to DCR access policies.
9. Protect cultural resources on watershed lands.
10. Ensure well-coordinated and defined maintenance and upkeep of approved trails, signage and points of access with groups and DCR-parks.

A member of the public commented that he would like to see the access plan detail specifically how trails will be rehabbed when/if the need arises. He noted that volunteer groups have offered to help fix trail issues in the past, free of charge. The offer is still on the table.

Robin Langer asked about who will be in charge of maintaining the approved trails as well as who the public should alert if they see a trail issue/problem. John Scannell answered that those issues will be addressed as part of updating the public access plan. Robin also commented that he has noticed many of the approved trails in the watershed are currently impassible. He feels these trails need to be looked at to determine if they can be rehabbed; if not, they should be taken off the map.

Brett Russ reminded the committee that at the previous meeting, various user-group subcommittees were formed. He would like to see representatives from each group meet with DCR to discuss and determine where new areas for trails could be located, as well as where trails could be decommissioned. The hope would be that this would not result in a large net increase in total trail miles across the watershed.

Propose a public engagement plan for discussion, to ensure effective ongoing communication and collaboration with stakeholders

Sara Cohen reviewed the current and future processes going forward to engage the public as part of updating the Ware River public access plan, which is done roughly every 10 years.

The public engagement process started at the WRWAC meeting held back in April where DCR presented a review of their watershed management priorities and gave context for the plan revision, began to establish a common understanding of trails and trail names, and captured the initial range of concerns and interest from WRWAC and other user groups. This process continues at the September WRWAC meeting with DCR presenting their watershed management principles for public access as well as their public engagement proposal for the access plan update.

From September through December DCR will work with all stakeholders to identify the key issues to be addressed by the plan update, guided by the public access management principles. Public sources of input during this phase will include:

- Surveys of watershed user conducted by field staff
- Targeted outreach to abutters/landowners in the watershed
- DCR “office hours” in Belchertown or Oakham to meet with user group representatives, by appointment (user groups are invited to select up to three representatives for these appointments)
- Online comment portal, posted at town halls, on town websites, and disseminated through the WRWAC

During this phase, DCR will also reach out to internal staff and other stakeholders, such as the MWRA, MassDEP, MassWildlife, the Army Corps. Of Engineers, etc.

Robin Langer commented that the issue identification process seems to rely on people coming forward to voice their concerns. He stated that many users don't submit comments and suggested potentially using trail cameras to tally the number of users in a given area.

There was discussion on the different user groups that use the watershed: hunters, people who fish, birders, hikers, dog walkers, equine users, bicyclists, snowmobilers were all mentioned. A member of the public asked if a comprehensive list could be put somewhere on the website. Lisa Gustavsen commented that the public access plan does not have a list of all user groups, but that it does include a list of activities that were considered during the most recent update. She added that the WRWAC is intended to represent a large percentage of the user groups.

A member of the public noted that tapping maple trees for maple syrup production is allowed in the Quabbin watershed and not the Ware River. This is a potential user group that the survey might miss. Sara Cohen encouraged the public and committee members to encourage anyone they know who uses the watershed and/or has a use they would like to see allowed on the watershed, to participate in the survey or submit their comments to DCR.

Brett Russ commented that he feels the most contentious issues revolve around trail-based activities, specifically snowmobiling, bicycling, horseback riding. He believes the most efficient process moving forward would be to have representatives from those three groups meet with DCR together as a whole, rather than separately. John Scannell added that he would like to see both types of meetings: separate discussions with individual user groups as well as discussions with all user group representatives in the same room together.

Over the winter and spring of 2019, DCR will engage in focused, solutions-oriented discussions to address the key public access management issues identified over the fall. Key stakeholders (user groups, land holders, partner organizations/agencies) will be invited to participate in the appropriate collaborative sessions. DCR's public access management principles will inform the search for solutions. Outcomes will not necessarily be consensus decisions, although consensus will be sought, where possible. The WRWAC will be regularly updated during this process.

A member of the public asked if there will be any opportunities for the user groups to speak with MassDEP directly. There was discussion of inviting a representative/regulator from DEP to attend a future WRWAC meeting.

In the summer or fall of 2019, plan elements representing the proposed solutions to the identified issues will be presented to the WRWAC and the public in written form, for review and feedback. These plan elements will include maps, written descriptions, tables, etc. If the review and feedback process bring to light misunderstandings from the collaborative sessions or critical new information, additional collaborative meetings may be scheduled to finalize plan elements.

A member of the public mentioned his concern related to the reduction of currently allowed activities. John Scannell commented that is more likely the update will change where certain activities happen, not cut out particular activities. Lisa Gustavsen added that controlling unauthorized activities has been mentioned as a focus by DCR's regulators.

Martha Varnot commented on timber harvests. She reminded everyone that forestry operations sometimes require the closure of trails. Before trail closures occur, representatives from the relevant user groups who frequent the area should be notified.

A member of the public questioned if DCR would provide a reroute if they had to close a snowmobile trail during the winter as part of a forestry operation; as the snowmobile season is already short to begin with. John Scannell answered that it would depend on a number of factors and would be site-specific.

A complete draft of the Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan will be presented to the WRWAC and at a public hearing, followed by a 30-day public comment period. DCR will then review, consider, and respond, as appropriate, to public comments. The final plan is anticipated to be released in December of 2019.

Jeff Schaaf commented that he would like to see the conversation regarding public access be an ongoing topic with the committee even after the access plan is finalized. John Scannell added that the new plan should have clear language

describing how to address the need/potential for change within the 10-year window between official updates.

Member Issues

A member of the public stated that the T7 trail was recently (within the last 30 days) closed. Large boulders were placed in front of the trailhead and signs were taken down. He is concerned that the trail was closed, but also that no one user groups were notified about the closure. Margo Petracone added that the Barre Riding and Driving Club has their fall ride scheduled for Columbus Day weekend and frequently uses that trail. Dan Clark noted that DCR will investigate the issue and get back to the committee with answers as soon as possible.

John Root asked how much red pine is still standing throughout the watershed. They were planted in the 1920's and 30's but have been systematically harvested out over the past couple decades as it is not a great species to have in a watershed (red pines suck up more water than other species). Dan Clark answered that the harvesting of red pines has sped up over the past 5 years and there aren't many left today.

A member of the public expressed appreciation for the job DCR did at restoring/revitalizing the Oak Hill area.

Robin Langer asked about two bridges there were recently removed from the watershed. Dan Clark answered that they ended up being too short for where they were originally intended to be installed. They are now projected to be installed at the Quabbin Reservoir. The plan is to purchase longer bridges for the Ware River when money is available.

Brett Russ asked for an update on the WRWAC legislation change. Jeff Schaaf answered that Anne Gobi has the paperwork, but it hasn't been officially filed yet.

A member of the public asked if a replacement will be named for Tom Bratko. Tom recently resigned as the primary representative for the Hubbardston select board on the WRWAC. Cindy Schlener is currently the alternate. John Scannell talked about the process for naming a new representative. The select board should provide DCR with names (up to 3) of interested individuals to then be chosen by the commissioner.

Dick Williams commented that there is an aquatic weed problem at Long Pond and asked if there is a plan in place to deal with it. He mentioned that it has been cut by DCR in the past. There was discussion about what species of plants are becoming an issue. John Scannell noted that many ponds need maintenance but that the budget limit where work gets completed.

Dick Williams commented on timber values currently being low and asked if it was effecting watershed forestry operations. John Scannell answered that forestry jobs are mainly proposed based on management principles DCR would like to accomplish. Dan Clark added that all the lots that were recently proposed were bid upon and sold. Most jobs run on a 2-year harvest window.

Dick Williams asked about where the new brush hog machine (skid steer with mulching head) has been used. Dan Clark answered that water supply has two of those machines and the plan is to split time evenly between Quabbin and the Ware River. Recently it has been used at Quabbin for field reclamation. It was suggested to be used in the Ware River to maintain the property at the Prison Camp Cemetery.

Dick Williams commented that he would like to see DCR continue to conduct outreach and education at local schools in the area. He suggested that DCR ask the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA) for more money and a larger budget; more personnel.

Helen Viner had recently been involved in process of getting 59 crosses delivered and installed at the Prison Camp Cemetery. Helen passed away on September 10th at the age of 79. She represented the Rutland Historical Society on the committee and will be greatly missed. DCR should be sure to continue annual upkeep and maintenance of the cemetery ground and crosses.

Martha Varnot asked about the status of gypsy moth population and what the projections are for Massachusetts forest health in 2019. Dan Clark answered that the prognosis isn't good. Lots of egg casings are being found. As a result, as much or more defoliation, and associated mortality, are expected for next year.

Meeting End Time: 8:53 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, October 18th, 2018 at 7 PM – Rutland Free Public Library (downstairs), 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543