

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, September 14th, 2017
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: John Root

Alternate: Dave Papale

Trout Unlimited: **Jeffrey Schaaf (Co-Chairman)**

Alternate:

A Rod and Gun Club: Joe Cataldo

Alternate: Bryan Waterman

Barre Selectboard: Martha Varnot

Alternate: Edward Yaglou

Hubbardston Selectboard: **Thomas Bratko**

Alternate:

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: Wes Dwelly

Alternate: **Bill Mucha**

Rutland Historical Society: **Helen Viner**

Alternate: Tim Nahrwold

Massachusetts Wildlife Federation: Bill Westaway (Co-Chairman)

Alternate: Thomas Berube

Massachusetts Audubon Society: **Martha Gach**

Alternate:

Sierra Club: Matt Hopkinson

Alternate:

Upper Ware River Watershed Association: Donald Rich
Alternate: Edward Yaglou
General Public: Mark DuBois
Alternate: **Dave Small**

DCR Staff Present:

Dan Clark, Herm Eck, Justin Gonsor, Brian Keevan, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present:

Bill Dobson, Mark Fauteux, Bob Hatch, Barbara Kellogg, Jane Lynds, Bill Lyons, Chris Palin, Sighle Philbin, Peggy Rotti, Tabitha Tashjian, Douglas Walther, Marianne Wojcicki, Douglas Wylie, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:06 PM

Approval of Minutes of Meeting on June 22nd, 2017

Dick Williams made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on June 22nd, 2017 with edits. Dave Small seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Brief Horseback Route update

John Scannell stated that no changes to public access will be made at this time in regards to T3 and T6; they will remain closed. The possibility of developing a working group in the future could be discussed when the Ware River Public Access Plan is updated.

A member of the public asked if there is a plan in place at T3 to evaluate the trail damage and mitigate the erosion issues going forward. John Scannell answered that there is not currently any evaluation happening at T3.

There was discussion on whether or not 'side gates', which were put in place to allow snowmobile access in winter, could be opened to horseback riders as a safety measure; Pine Plains Road and the Kitchen Camp fire access road were two examples given. Herm Eck mentioned that those gates were put in place to mitigate ATV traffic in the area. Dave Small further clarified that the gates were

originally installed with the intent that horses could pass over them during the summer season but ATVs could not. Members of the public noted that the side gates are currently too high for horses to safely step over. Tom Bratko mentioned that some areas near the side gates may have gotten washed out over the years resulting in the gates being higher than when they were originally installed. John Scannell stated that the issue will be looked in to.

Tom Bratko mentioned that he came across an offshoot trail of the Rail Trail that goes along the river but was shut down. He questioned why it was shut down and expressed sentiment that in the future, before closing a trail, could DCR first notify relevant user groups or present it to the committee. Herm Eck thought the trail in question may have been closed by the Student Conservation Association (SCA) crew that did trail work in the Ware River Watershed back in July. Most of the work they did was mapping trails, but as they found trails not located on any official maps, they closed those trails. There was discussion on how to best notify user groups of trail closures before they happen. Dave Small suggested revisiting the wording of the trail closure signs to make sure they are as accurate as possible.

A member of the public questioned why T6 can't be reopened immediately. John Scannell answered that T6 has never appeared as an approved trail on an official DCR map; T6 and other trail issues and concerns could be revisited when the Ware River Public Access Plan is updated. Brett Russ clarified that T6 is on the 2000 WRW Designated Bicycle Routes map.

The unfilled Quabbin Regional Director position was discussed. John Scannell mentioned that interviews have happened but is unsure when a decision will officially be made.

A member of the public expressed concern about future forestry operations affecting public access to recreational trails and roads in the WRW; he doesn't want to see any trails disappear due to logging and feels any damage to trails should be mitigated by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Presentation of Draft Comprehensive Land Management Plan

Dan Clark and Brian Keegan presented an overview of the Draft Comprehensive Land Management Plan to the committee.

The Division of Water Supply Protection’s (DWSP) mission statement was stated: “...to construct, maintain, and operate a system of watersheds, reservoirs, water rights, and rights in sources of water supply (to) supply thereby a sufficient supply of pure water to the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority, and (to) utilize and conserve said water and other natural resources to protect, preserve, and enhance the environment of the Commonwealth and to assure the availability of pure water for future generations.”

Where the Land Management Plan (LMP) fits into watershed management planning was explained. The main Watershed Protection Plan is updated every 5 years. Under the broad Watershed Protection umbrella, Public Access Plans are updated every 5-10 years while Land Management Plans are updated every 10 years. In the past, individual LMP’s were created for each watershed. These individual plans will now be combined into one comprehensive LMP to act as a guiding document for a variety of activities and should reduce redundancy and increase efficiency. The comprehensive LMP will include the Sudbury watershed, Wachusett watershed, Ware River watershed, and the Quabbin Watershed and will be updated every 5 years.

Characteristics of the individual watersheds were stated as follows:

	Sudbury Watershed	Wachusett Watershed	Ware River Watershed (WRW)	Quabbin Watershed
Acres of Land	16,300 acres	70,600 acres	61,700 acres	95,000 acres
Acres of Reservoir	1,400 acre reservoir	4,100 acre reservoir	-	24,500 acre reservoir
% Forested	41%	70%	76%	88%
% Protected by DWSP	14.6%	27.9%	39.8%	60.3%
% Protected by other Groups	10.5%	17.6%	12.0%	16.1%

The comprehensive LMP will take climate change into consideration. The predicted effects of climate change are as follows:

- Northeast U.S. will likely be more strongly impacted
 - Average precipitation will increase
 - Warmer, wetter winters

- Drier summers
- More frequent extreme events

DCR's Land Acquisition Program, which was started in 1985, was detailed. In that time, \$135 million dollars has been spent (funded by MWRA). Of that \$135 million, \$113 million has been spent at Wachusett, \$13 million at Ware River, and \$9 million at Quabbin. The land was purchased in fee and through Watershed Preservation Restrictions (WPR). The acquisition efforts have been focused on the Quabbin and Wachusett watersheds. From 1985 through January of 2015, the percent of Wachusett under Division control went from 7.9% to 28.4%.

Tom Bratko questioned why a highway is allowed to run along the shore of the Wachusett Reservoir. John Scannell answered that although the highway system can't be changed at this point, DCR has been working with Mass DOT on drainage reconstruction to avoid direct discharges from the highway getting in to the reservoir.

Brett Russ questioned some signage he has seen along the Quinapoxet River regarding arsenic leaching. John Scannell answered there is arsenic that comes in from behind an old landfill that is overseen by DEP as part of the landfill monitoring. Testing has been done historically and there is no evidence of any downstream impacts.

The Watershed Forestry Program is detailed in the comprehensive LMP. In April of 2010 a Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) review of the forestry program began and was completed in February of 2013. In August of 2013 DWSP released a 'From Here Forward' document that detailed how the STAC recommendations would be implemented. Those details are as follows:

- Improve public access to harvesting information through internet postings, public meetings, and signage
- Improvement in the internal review process
- Changes to openings and marking specifications
 - Create irregularly shaped and sized openings, with separation
 - Green-tree retention within most openings larger than a half acre
 - Promote late-seral stage forest characteristics through thinning practices
- Best Management Practices (BMP) monitoring

- Regeneration monitoring and photo documentation
- Short-term water quality monitoring at stream crossings
- Long-term water quality studies are currently under way

The typical approach of the forestry program is to actively manage roughly 75% of all forested acres, with the goal of regenerating 1% of the managed forest annually. General silvicultural considerations include:

- Take aesthetics into account when making openings
- Green-tree retention in openings
- Coarse woody debris standards for wildlife have been carried forward
- Sub-watershed rules
 - No more than 25% of the total stocking on DWSP forests can be cut in any sub-watershed in a 10-year period
 - Goal to prevent changes to water yield/quality
- Carbon storage
 - Calculating the forest's contribution to carbon sequestration

A member of the public questioned how long public access is restricted in an area where a forestry operation is occurring or has occurred. White Hall Road in Oakham was given as an example; the area was logged over a year ago and it was stated that there are 'no access' signs currently in place there. Herm Eck thought that the signage may have been put up to close an unauthorized trail in the area.

The review and oversight process for the forestry program was discussed and includes the following:

- Collaborative internal review process including the Natural Resource section, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), Environmental Quality section, Archeological Resources, and Regional Director
- Public presentation and comment period
- Harvesting permit required, which includes water quality protections and spill response measures
- BMP implementation has to meet or exceed regulations
- Service Forestry review and approval

The comprehensive LMP does allow for forest management variations in special situations. Restorative silviculture may be used to create larger openings in

specific areas such as plantations, degraded stands, and old field white pine. There will also be a focus on early successional habitat (ESH) management, specifically young forest habitat and barren habitat. These types of habitats can support globally or regionally rare species, represents a small fraction of DWSP lands, and will be concentrated in focus areas. The use of prescribed fire and terrestrial invasive plant control may be used in this management type.

Quabbin will have 3 young forest areas. Ware River will have 2 young forest focus areas. Wachusett will have 1 young forest focus area. They will all be located adjacent to existing open habitat. Openings of at least 10 acres will be created, with one section in each area being cut every 5-7 years to create a continuous supply of this habitat type.

Quabbin will have 5 barren focus areas. Ware River will have 2 barren focus areas. These areas contain rare species and have been identified in collaboration with NHESP. Management will be done via tree removal and thinning as well as maintained by period fire.

A member of the public expressed concern about the viability of existing trails in the proposed Harding Hill focus area.

Wildlife stewardship and management programs will continue under the comprehensive LMP. Protecting water quality and infrastructure is still the main responsibility. But there is also a responsibility to be good stewards of the land and to protect rare, common, or unique wildlife and habitats where possible. Wildlife programs for watershed management include beaver trapping/removal, resident geese population control, gull harassment, the Quabbin deer hunt, and moose population monitoring and research.

The comprehensive LMP includes a proposal to expand hunting at the Wachusett Reservoir. There will be future meetings and a thorough public review process next year to discuss the proposal. The current extent of allowed hunting at Wachusett is located west of I-190 (about 10,000 acres), is free, and a permit is required. The proposal is to expand hunting into areas east of I-190 outside of the reservoir zone. The I-190 East zone (4,700 acres) would be open to hunting all seasons, no dogs would be allowed, and a permit would be required. The reservoir zone (2,800 acres) would be limited to deer hunting during the two

weeks of shotgun season and the two weeks following shotgun season (primitive arms season). A permit would be required and be based on a random lottery drawing.

Cultural resources are also included in the comprehensive LMP. Archeological reviews are conducted for any management activities that might affect cultural resources. Harvesting restrictions can also be put in place if necessary. Active vegetation management is done in some areas to preserve specific cultural resources. A member of the public mentioned seeing trees and other overgrowth overtaking some of the foundations in the Prison Camp area and would like to see those maintained. He would like to see funds from the forestry program go to this cause.

A copy of the Draft Comprehensive LMP can be found online at:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/watersupply/watershed/dwsp-imp-sep-2017-draft.pdf>. Written comments will be accepted until 10/20/2017. You can mail written comments to Department of Conservation and Recreation, Offices of Public Outreach, 251 Causeway Street, Suite 600, Boston, MA 02114. Comments can also be submitted online to DCR.Updates@state.ma.us (put 'DWSP land management plan' in the email subject line).

A member of the public expressed concern over apple orchard habitats being taken over and lost in the watershed. Dan Clark mentioned that there is some grant money in place for habitat restoration in different areas of the watersheds; old orchards are on that list to try and restore and maintain that habitat type.

Brett Russ asked about the section of the plan that deals with sand and gravel pits. He noticed one of pits is located on a small, unnamed peninsula at Quabbin Reservoir, appears to be expanding, and asked if any studies had been done to measure the potential impacts from that pit. John Scannell answered that there is ongoing monitoring in the area.

Tom Bratko asked about the watershed's federal filtration waiver. John Scannell noted that the waiver requires DWSP to have a healthy watershed protection program in place, of which forest management is a part of. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection is responsible for oversight of the watershed protection program.

Member Issues

December 14th will be the 20th anniversary of WRWAC's first meeting. A recognition event is being planned for that evening at the Barre Town Hall. Further details will be given at the next meeting.

Dick Williams expressed concern over the long term sustainability of maintaining the Rail Trail.

Dave Small made a motion that the committee should draft a letter to DCR Commissioner Leo Roy expressing their desire that the Quabbin Regional Director position be filled as soon as possible. Martha Gach seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Brett Russ stated that recent rains have caused significant sediment loading out of the development on Pleasantdale Road into Demond Pond in Rutland. John Scannell mentioned that DWSP recently received a phone call from the Demond Pond Watershed Association about looking into possible sediment basins to control runoff in that area.

Meeting End Time: 8:38 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, November 16th, 2017 at 7 PM – Rutland Free Public Library (downstairs), 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543