

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, September 26, 2024
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 (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:

Alternate:

Massachusetts Audubon Society: Martha Gach

Alternate:

Sierra Club: Matt Hopkinson

Alternate:

General Public: Mark DuBois

Alternate: **Brett Russ**

DCR Staff Present: Brian Arrigo, Maria Beiter, Dan Clark, John Scannell, Ken Canfield

Members of the Public Present: Lucy Allen, Sean Blood, Chuck Coppolino, Ann Guyther, Steve Larivee, Rusty Savignac, Moussa Siri, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:03 PM

Approval of minutes from meeting on June 13, 2024

Thomas Hughes made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on June 13, 2024. Cindy Schlener seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

FY25 DCR-DWSP forestry lot proposals – Ken Canfield presentation

Chief Forester Ken Canfield presented the DCR-DWSP FY25 forestry lot proposals. The details of his presentation are as follows:

- Overall goals of the watershed forestry program:
 - Diverse forest: different ages/species of trees
 - Resilient forest: ability to bounce back from disturbances
- The harvest proposals are the results of:
 - Months long process – outlined in the land management plan (LMP)
 - Mapping, measuring, and a write up is done by DCR forester
 - Internal review by staff
 - Public review and comments
 - Variable timeframe after approval
- DCR-DWSP FY25 proposed forestry lot information (2 proposals in total)
 - Barre proposal
 - WR-25-24
 - Gilbert Road, across the Burnshirt River at the Rice Road bridge
 - 305-acre footprint
 - Red oak/hardwood and white pine/hardwood
 - Group selection up to 5-acre groups, thinning
 - Slashwall(s)
 - Hubbardston proposal
 - WR-25-44
 - West of Old Westminster Road, south of Highbridge Road
 - 60-acre footprint
 - Red oak, white pine/hardwood

- Shelterwood prep, group selection up to 2-acre groups
- DCR-DWSP has created a new online, interactive map that features all the watershed forestry projects and their details.
 - The QR code on the right links to the interactive map, FY25 forestry proposals, links to the public comments form, has information about past and current harvests, contact information, and links to other DCR sites.
 - <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/84f744ec96e54b93bab86a11ebd4b511/>



Additional questions or comments related to the proposed lots or forestry program in general can be direct to Ken via email Kenneth.canfield@mass.gov or phone (857-274-7090)

The logging moratorium since the Healy Administration took office was discussed. Since then, the Commonwealth's Forests as Climate Solutions (FACS) initiative evaluated DWSP's forestry program. The moratorium has been lifted.

It was noted that the WRWAC trails sub-committee has offered to help DCR clean-up trails that have been upset due to logging operations.

Forestry operations that cross existing trails in the watershed were discussed.

Cindy asked if the forestry staff replant in areas that have been logged. Ken answered that replanting is generally not done.

Dave Flick reminded committee members that they should each be bringing the forestry proposal information back to their constituent groups and urge them to give feedback during the public comment period (45 days).

A member of the public expressed concern regarding the 20% of watershed lands where no forest management occurs. He was worried those areas would have more fuel and be more susceptible to large fires.

A public tour of the proposed forestry projects was scheduled for Sunday, October 20 at 9am.

Watershed access issues discussion with DCR commissioner Brian Arrigo

DCR Commissioner Arrigo addressed the committee and stressed the importance of having open lines of communication between DCR and the folks who use and live in the watershed to hear their comments and concerns.

Jeff Schaaf asked for the Commissioner to reconsider some policy changes that went into effect with the approval of the most recent update of the Public Access Management Plan for the WRW. The committee would also like to have the option to evaluate and review the plan on an annual basis. Past public access plans were updated on a 10-year basis that involved an extensive public input process.

Mike Wood express concern regarding the change in access with the new plan, specifically more gates closed to vehicle traffic. He spoke about two gates (Ruben Walker Road; Prison Camp Road south to Rutland State Park) that he would have liked to see remain open to vehicles, and he expressed that sentiment through the public input process for the plan. He lobbied for vehicle access to those roads be retained. Commissioner Arrigo commented on the process that went into deciding which gates/roads should be closed to vehicles and that the results in the access plan were a compromise from those discussions. He values the committee's input and reactions to the plan but also feels that less than a year into its implementation, it would be premature to already start talking about altering it; he would like the keep the dialog open.

Jeff Schaaf asked if an annual review of the public access plan by the committee would be possible. Commissioner Arrigo answered that the scope of any potential annual review (or reviewable issues) would first need to be agreed upon by multiple parties.

Mike Wood asked specifically why Ruben Walker Road was closed to vehicles in the new plan. John Scannell answered that the issue wasn't picking Ruben Walker to be closed specifically. But that DCR was trying to allow people in important places in the watershed where they valued access, meetings were held during the plan's review process, and people were asked where they couldn't get to under the proposed plan. Those areas were marked on maps which resulted in some roads being reopened under the final plan. In the past, with all roads open to vehicles there was much more driving around the watershed and potential for bad behavior. DCR tried to pull back from that model in the recent plan update. Jeff Schaaf advocated for more vehicle access.

Darren Ross spoke about a recent brush fire on watershed land. He feels that locking gates has not resulted in accomplishing DCR's goals. He feels that reviewing the plan every 10 years is unacceptable supports is happening more often.

Dennis Guberski commented that MWRA has 3 current plans to expand their water user base. He feels that if the plans are seen through to completion, a result will be more water pulled from the WRW and an increase in restrictions as well. He would like to see any additional restrictions to be scientifically based. He used Long Pond as an example of a place in the watershed where additional restrictions were put in place (not allowing paddleboarding; limited number of large motor permits for boats) but doesn't believe they were scientifically based. Multiple committee members reiterated wanting to see any regulations/restrictions be evidence/scientifically based, citing various user groups of all ages that enjoy public access to the watershed.

Mike Wood noted that the committee was presented the plan from DCR on October 5, 2023, almost a year ago. At that meeting the committee listed things in the access plan that they would like to see reverted to before the update, as well as asking for the ability for an annual review of the plan. The committee isn't asking DCR to go through the entire public review process every year, just to hear specific issues from user groups on the committee as they arise under the new plan's implementation.

Senator Durand commented his desire to see regulations/restrictions to be evidence based and supported opening the two roads the committee has been asking about, with the caveat that if any problems come up, DCR could shut the roads back down if necessary. He supports a limited, annual review of the public access plan.

Dave Flick spoke about the need to formalize what a limited, annual review process would look like, what the scope of that review would be, who the stakeholders would be, but was unsure how that process would play out. Darren suggested picking one date/meeting a year to review specific access issues that come about. John Scannell commented that DCR will come up with an access review process/proposal to discuss with the committee at the next meeting.

Cindy asked how committed DCR is to the recreational aspects of the WRW and asked if they would consider allowing for expansion of new trails (away from the intake) in the watershed, without getting rid of any of the current trails. In the current access plan, there is language that allows for the review of the trail network

on an annual basis, but no increase in the total mileage of trails can occur; meaning if a new 1-mile trail was approved, 1-mile of trail would have to be removed somewhere else in the watershed. The committee would like the possibility of new trails to be added in the watershed without getting rid of any of the existing trails. Mike Wood added that he would like to see the other user groups represented on the committee a similar level of annual review the trails subcommittee was allowed.

The goal is for DCR to have their annual review proposal ready for the November WRWAC meeting.

Member Issues

Dave Flick spoke about the partnership over the past year between Barre Historical, Maria Beiter from DCR interpretive services and the Quabbin Visitor Center, and DCR archaeology and forestry regarding the Prince Walker Cemetery, a historical cemetery in Barre on watershed property. DCR has agreed to take on a trail improvement project in/around the area. The plan is to have the Student Conservation Association (SCA) start the trail work this autumn.

Dave also mentioned how nice the signage Rutland Historical has installed at the Prison Camps.

Mike Wood asked for an update on the Prison Camp gates that got ripped out/vandalized earlier in the year. Dan Clark answered that the gates seem to have been stolen as well. The gates were installed by Rutland Historical, and they are aware of the issue. The constant graffiti at the Prison Camp was also brought up.

Dennis Guberski commented on a horse trail on the west side of Rt. 122 (T1). He said gravel has been placed on the formerly grass trail and is in very bad shape for horses right now.

Brett Russ commented that the trails subcommittee is organizing a trail maintenance day on National Public Lands Day (9/28). They will be meeting near White Hull Pond and then heading out to improve the watershed trails network. He also thanked DCR and their partnership with the trails subcommittee which has resulted in better communication, trail access, signage, etc.

Rusty asked about a usage study on Long Pond that DCR was going to conduct over the past season. Dan answered that DCR should be ready to present a summary report at the next meeting.

Meeting End Time: 8:58 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- November 21, 2024; 7pm – Rutland Free Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543