
2022 Ware River Public Access Management Plan Update

Public Meeting November 29, 2022



dcr
Massachusetts



MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP)

DWSP manages Quabbin, Wachusett, and Sudbury watersheds and Reservoirs and the Ware River Watershed.

DWSP is responsible for management of the watersheds and water quality while MWRA is responsible for water treatment and distribution



The Ware River Watershed Project acquired about 23,000 acres of land in Rutland, Barre, Oakham, and Hubbardston.

Land was acquired specifically for watershed protection and was funded directly by rate payers that use the water.



DCR Watershed Payment in Lieu of Taxes to Ware River Watershed Towns

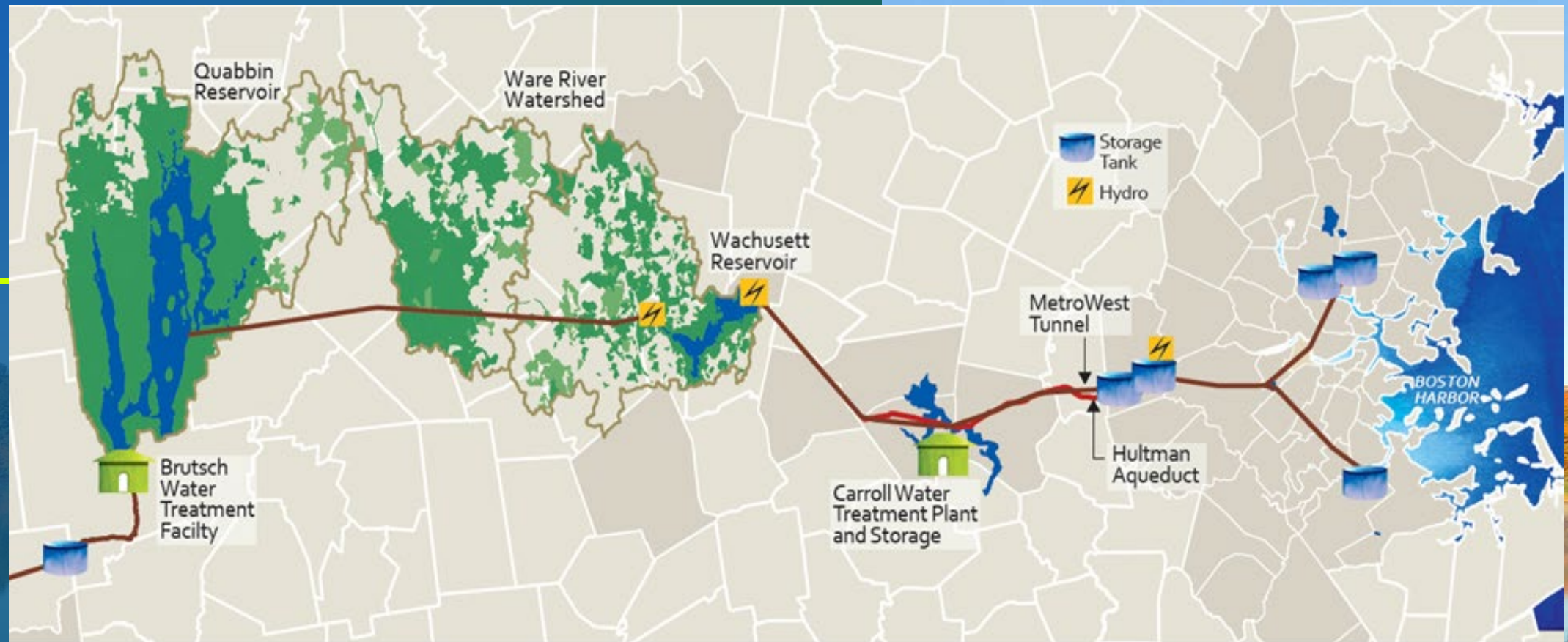
Payments are made to watershed towns using rate payer money

In addition to payments, watershed lands don't require many town services (schools, roads, etc.)

DWSP budget & staffing are paid by MVRA using rate payer money

Town	FY22
Barre	\$186,169
Hubbardston	\$380,387
Oakham	\$147,068
Phillipston	\$11,913
Princeton	\$316,538
Rutland	\$525,860
Templeton	\$1,082
Total Ware River PILOT	\$1,569,017
Total PILOT	\$8,479,324
% of Total PILOT	18.5%





The Ware River watershed, Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs provide drinking water for over 3 million people in MA (43%)

High quality of water within the watersheds means it can be distributed without filtration – but watershed protection and management is critical



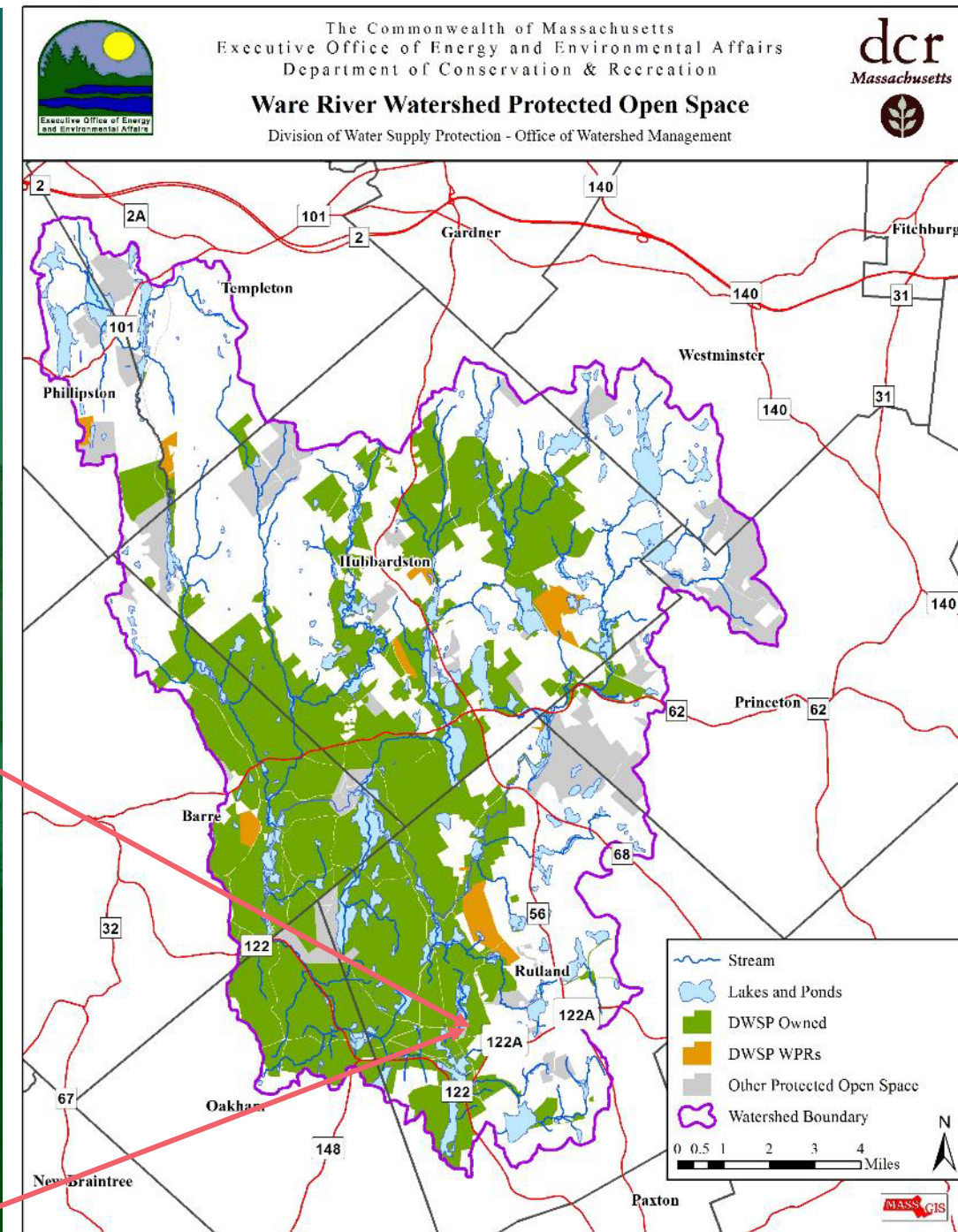
Water leaves the Ware River Watershed and enters the system at the Roger Lonergran Intake Works off Route 122 in Barre.

Water can only be taken under certain legislative restrictions (seasonal, flow requirements, etc.)

Ware River Watershed

Active part of DCR/MWRA water supply system that provides unfiltered drinking water to over 3 million people.

- DWSP owns 24,000 acres of land
- DWSP controls development rights on 3,500 acres (WPRs)
- DCR State Parks manages about 300 acres of DWSP land as “Rutland State Park”, focused around Whitehall Pond



Public Access Management Plan Update

DWSP Goals

- *Improve watershed protection*
- *Maintain or Enhance recreational opportunities*
- *Adjust past policies that did not adequately provide watershed protection*



Public Access Management Plan Update

Public Process to Date

- Kick-off meeting with Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) & Public – April 2018
- Presented *Watershed Management Principles* and *Public Engagement Plan* to WRWAC & Public – September 2018
- DWSP worked with stakeholder groups (e.g., mountain bikers, sportsmen/women, horseback riders, snowmobilers, etc.) to ID key issues – September to December 2018
- DWSP released a stakeholder survey and received over 900 responses – December 2018 to January 2019
- DWSP worked on solution analyses with stakeholder groups to try and seek consensus; proposed solutions to WRWAC & public – spring and fall 2019
- Plan put on hold in March 2020, due to Covid and Commissioner changes



Recreation in the Ware River Watershed in comparison to other entities

★ Exceptions

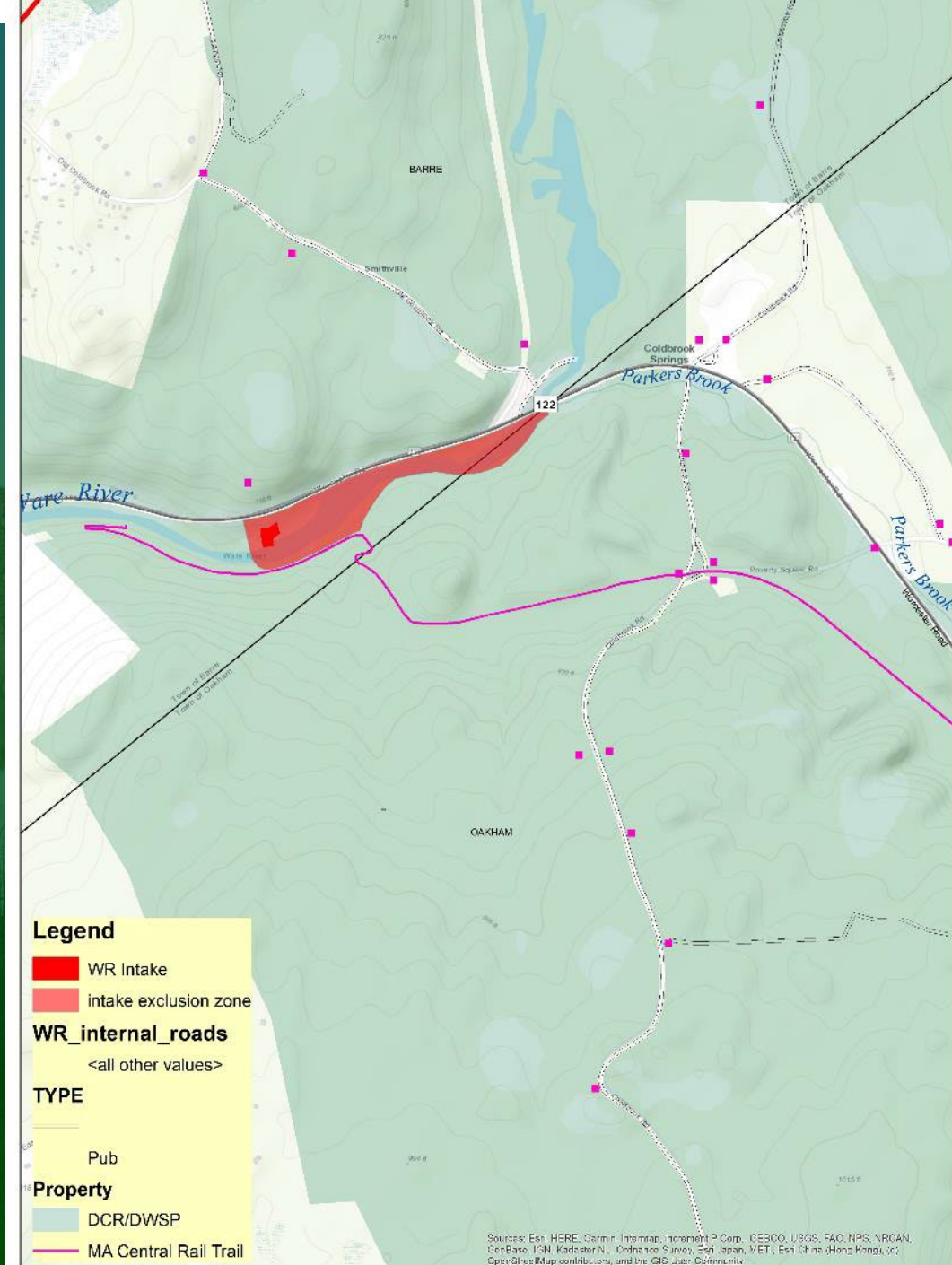
	MassWildlife	Mass Audubon	DCR State Parks	DWSP - Sudbury	DWSP- Wachusett	DWSP- Quabbin	DWSP-Ware River
Horseback riding	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Snowmobiling	✗★	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗★	✓
Single-track biking	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗★	✗	✓
Vehicle access	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Dogs	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗★	✗	✓
Pedestrian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Night Access	✗★	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

Current Status of Management Plan Update

- Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), as our water supply regulator, has pushed for plan completion
- A deadline for plan completion has been set for December 31, 2022
- DEP has weighed in that some currently allowed activities are too extensive and not protective enough for an unfiltered drinking water supply
- DEP indicated policies should more closely mirror Wachusett and Quabbin access policies
- DEP had some specific guidance on certain activities
 - Night Access
 - Horse permits
 - Long pond – bodily contact with the water

Intake Exclusion Zone

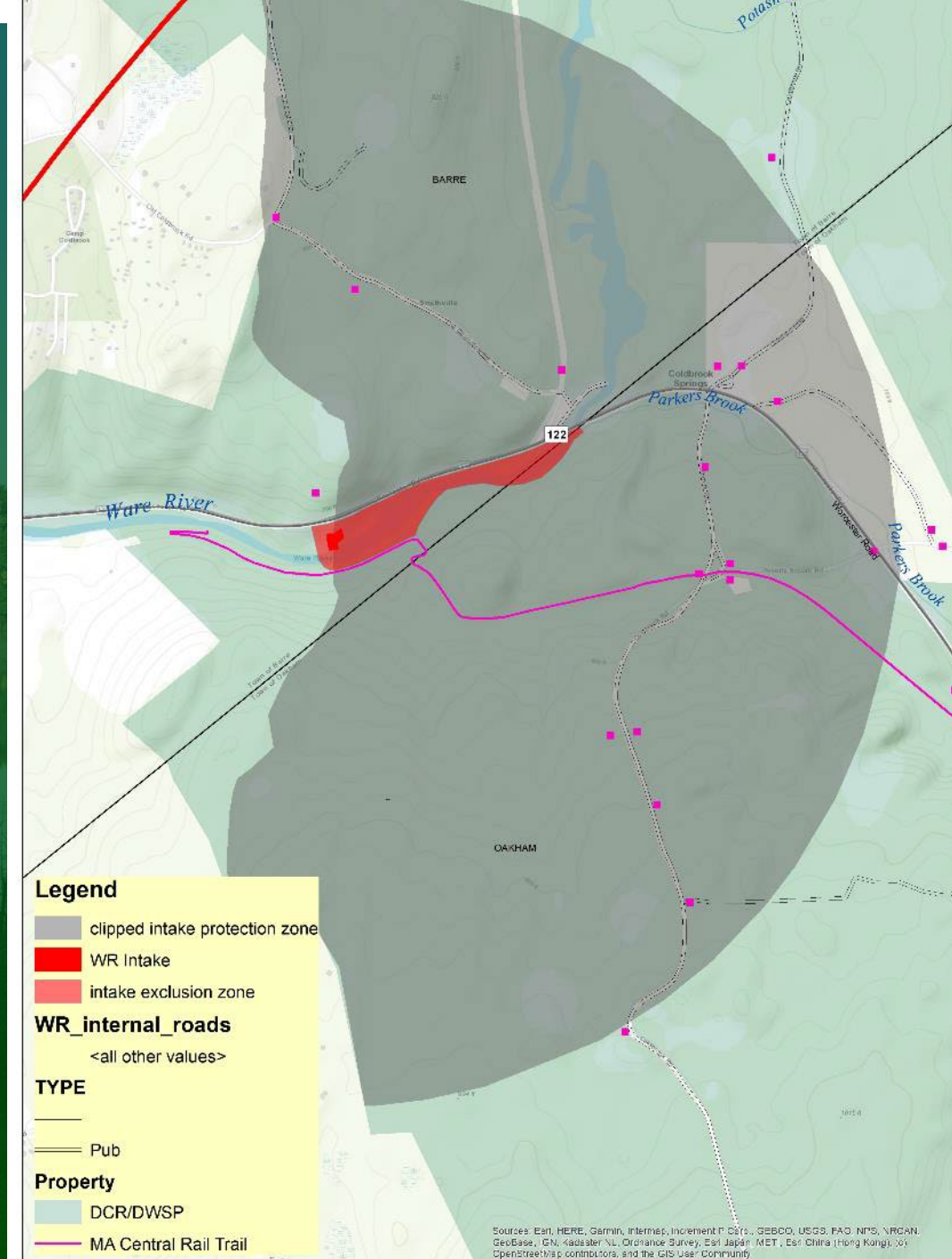
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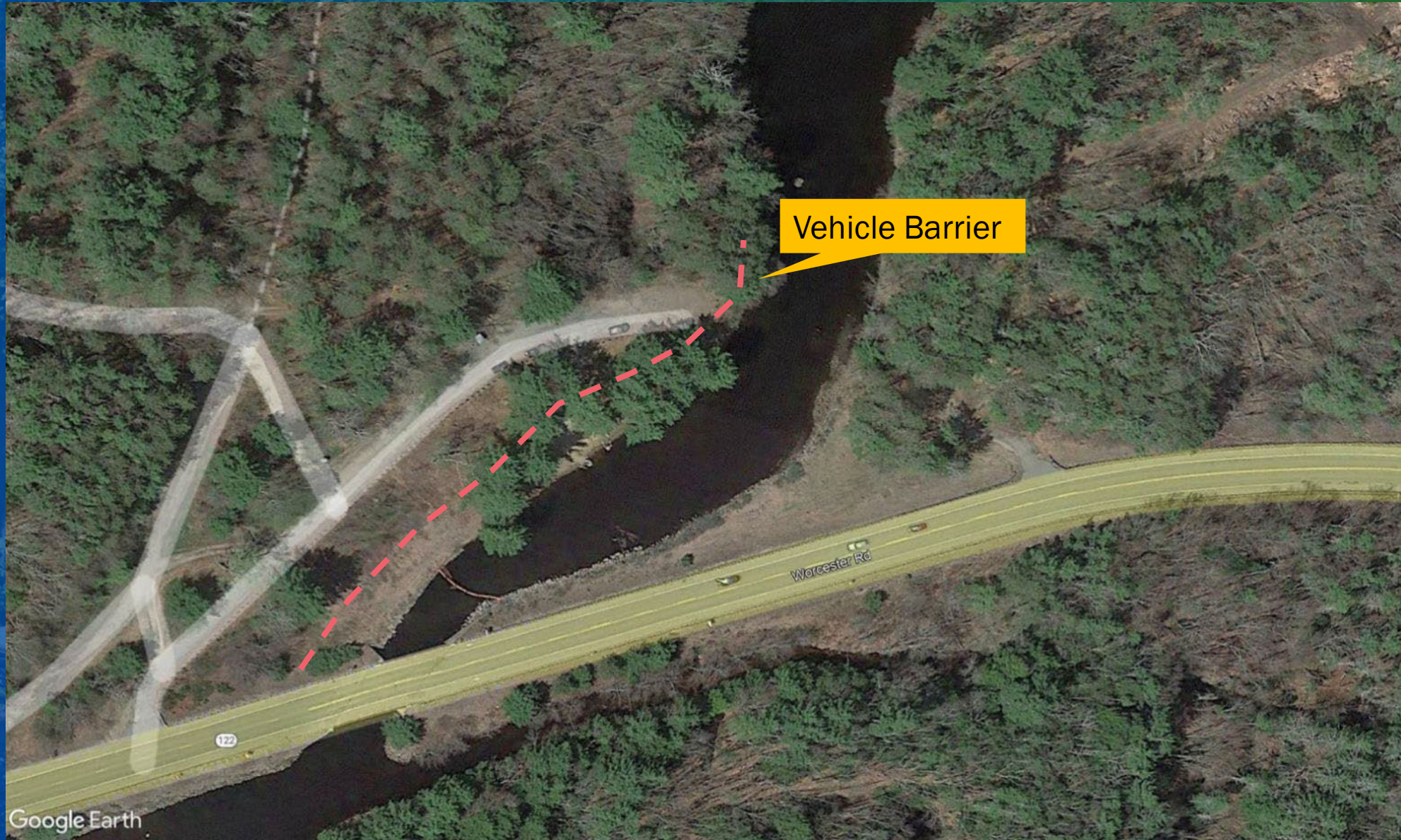
Key Elements

Intake Buffer Zone *New

- Creation of 1-km (483 acres) intake buffer zone – pedestrian access only with some exceptions
- New element to shift activity away from Ware River Intake
- Public access to parking lot along west side of Ware River will remain open for canoe/kayak launching (NOTE: change from 2020)
- New barriers will be added to the parking lot to prevent vehicles from directly accessing the Ware River to improve water quality protection.



Route 122 River Access



Key Elements

Hours of Access*^{New}

- Existing policy: All DWSP lands and most public lands are closed at night except Ware River, which is open 24/7 leading to significant safety issues
- New Policy: DWSP Ware River watershed lands will be open for public access one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset mirroring other watershed lands and DCR Parks
- DCR Regulation: 302 CMR 12.03
- DWSP Regulation: Watershed Protection Regulations 313 CMR 11.09(2)(a)2



Key Elements

Dogs *New

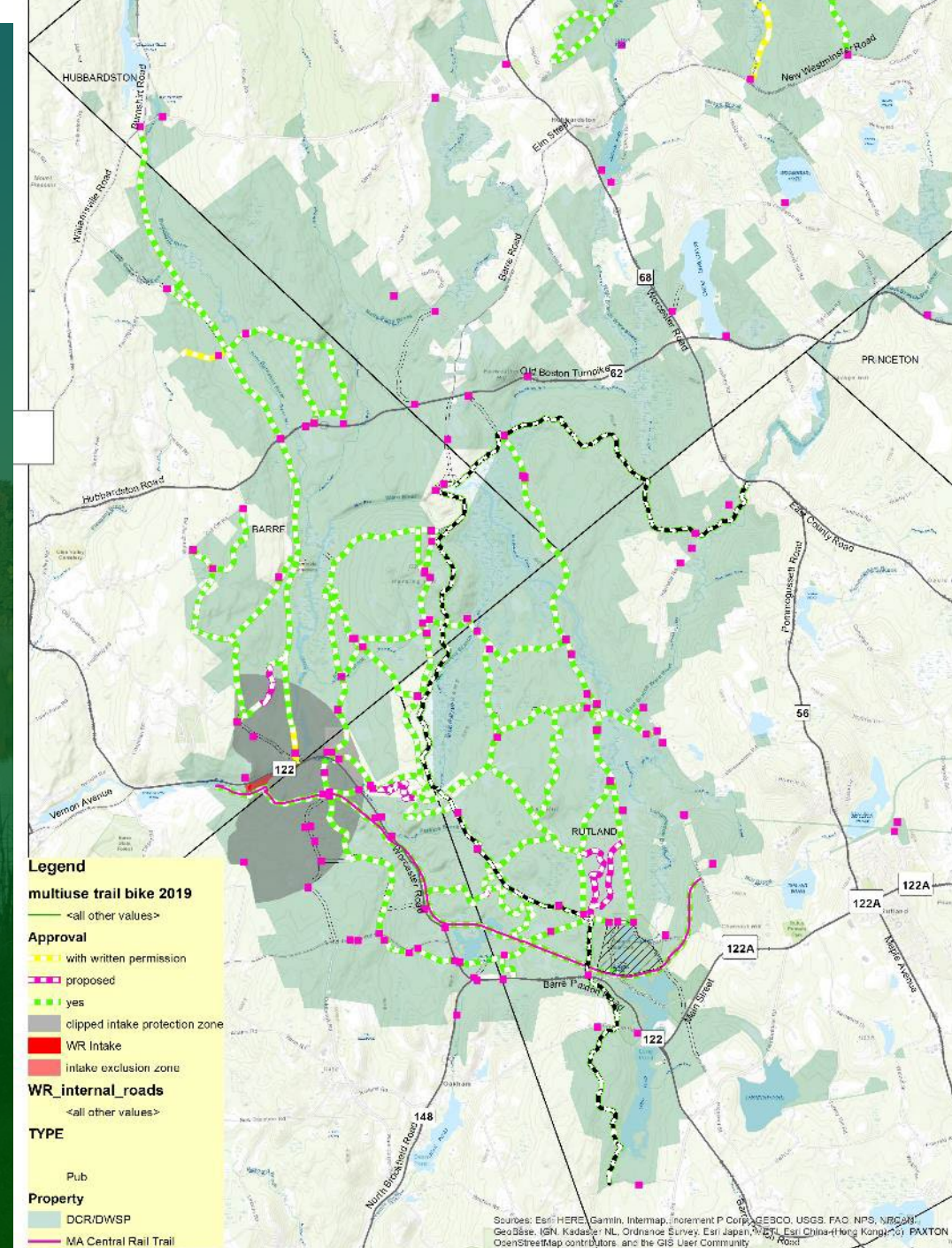
- Existing policy: Dogs were allowed on DWSP lands in the Ware River watershed without restriction
- New Policy: Dogs must be leashed on a 6' or shorter leash at all times on DWSP property except licensed hunters may have dogs off leash to hunt or train



Key Elements

Trails*^{New}

- After working collaboratively with user groups, DWSP has proposed a set of well-defined multi-use trails that:
 - Avoid intake buffer zone and riparian buffers
 - Use BMPs for stream crossings
 - Avoid leading to or crossing private property
 - Emphasize connectivity
 - Reduce redundancy
- Trails will be shared among pedestrian, bikers, horseback riders and snowmobilers (some exclusions)
- Allows for single-track mountain biking*^{NEW}



Approved: 

Trails in northern portion of watershed

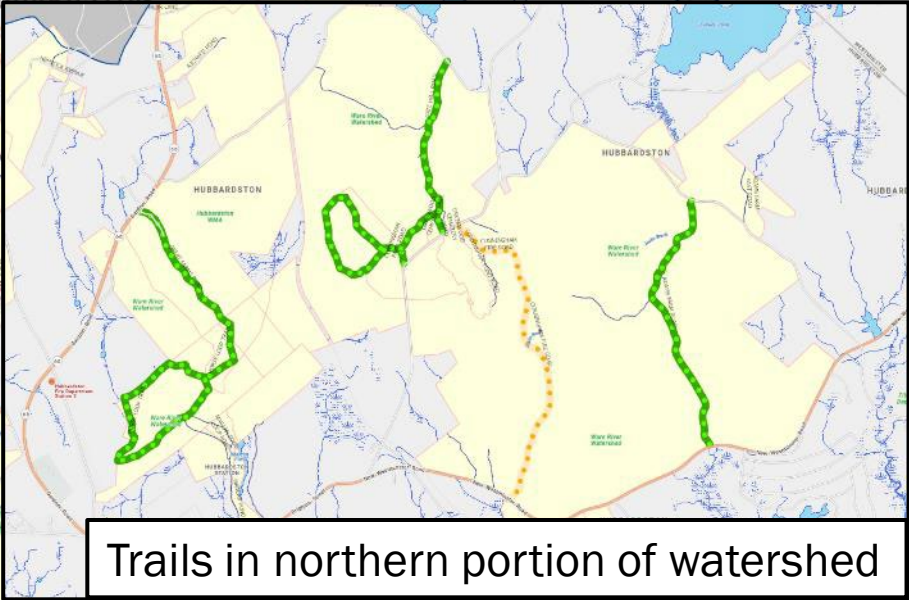
2010 Ware River Public Access Management Plan: Authorized horseback riding trails



Approved:

Proposed:

Potential:



Trails in northern portion of watershed

	2010	2022	Difference
Horse Trails DWSP	37.1 miles	54.7 miles	+ 17.6 miles
ACOE	3.8 miles	3.8 miles	0
TOTAL	40.9 miles	58.5 miles	+17.6 miles

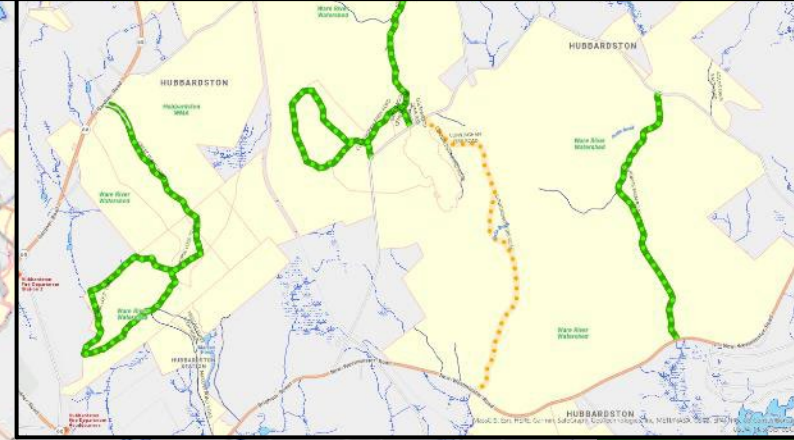
2022 Ware River Public Access
Management Plan: Authorized
horseback riding trails

Approved: 

2010 Ware River
Public Access
Management Plan:
Biking allowed on
roads and rail trails

Trails in northern portion of watershed

Approved: 
 Proposed: 
 Potential: 



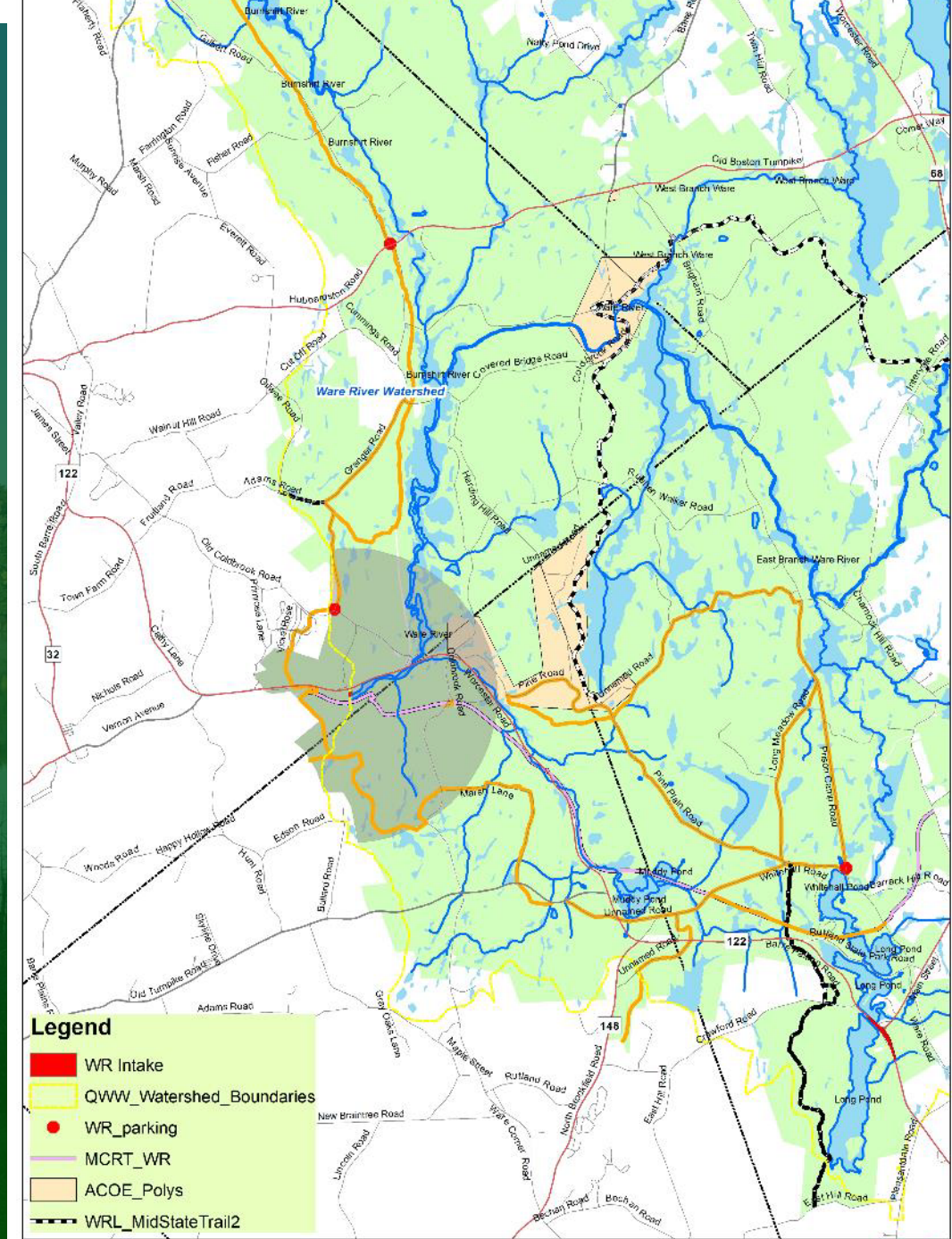
	2010	2022	Difference
Bike Trails DWSP	29.8 miles	75.4 miles	+ 45.6 miles
ACOE	3.8 miles	3.8 miles	0
TOTAL	36.7 miles	78.9 miles	+45.6 miles

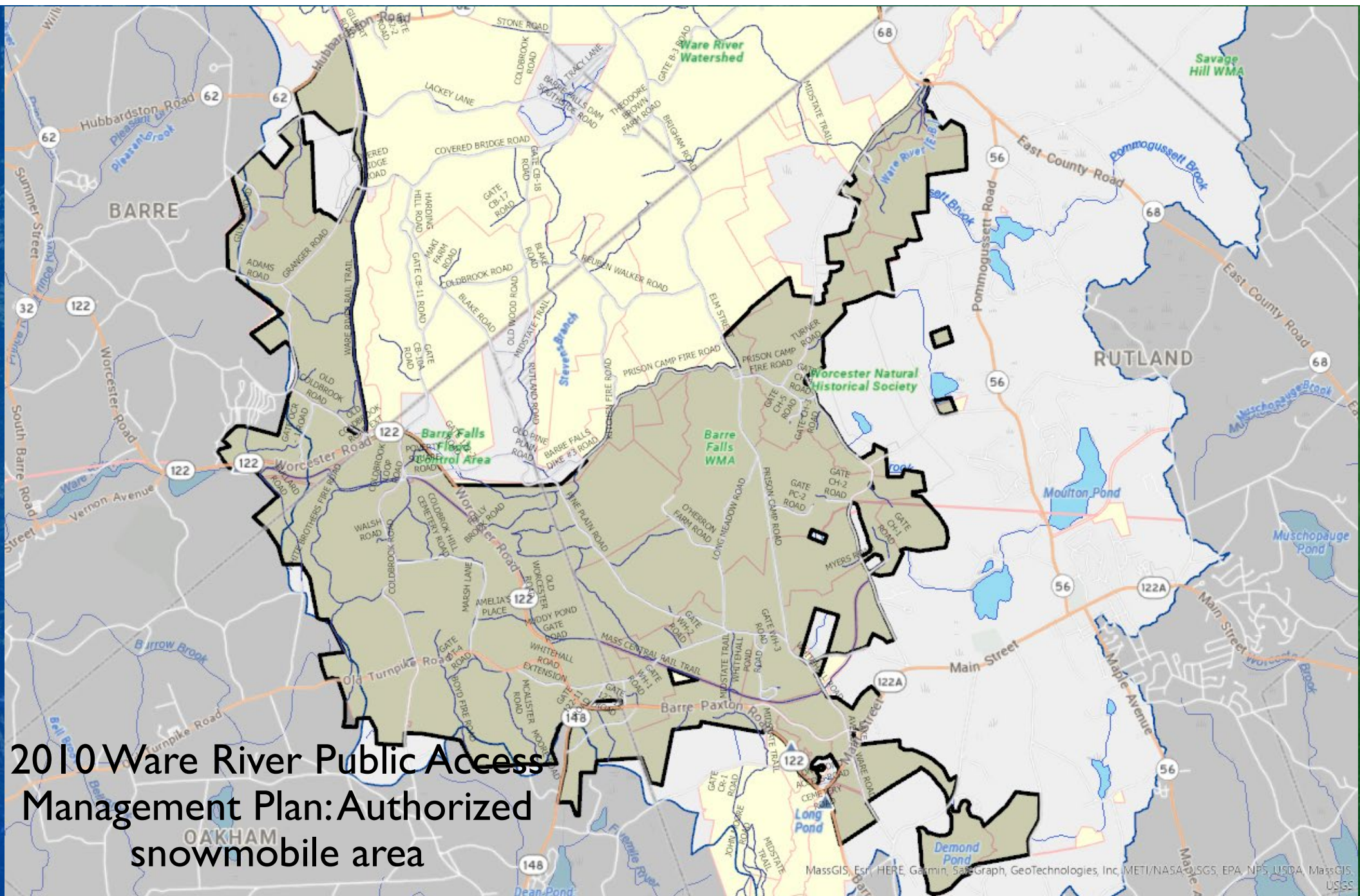
**2022 Ware River
Public Access
Management Plan:
Authorized biking
trails**

Key Elements

Snowmobiles*^{New}

- Existing policy: snowmobiles allowed in specific Areas
- New policy: snowmobiles allowed on specific trails, most of which will be multi-use
- Night access permits will be issued for trail grooming, etc.





2010 Ware River Public Access Management Plan: Authorized snowmobile area

Approved: ■■■■■■■■■■
 Proposed: ■■■■■■■■■■
 Potential: ■■■■■■■■■■

	2010	2022	Difference
Snowmobile Trails DWSP	20.9 miles	37.7 miles	+ 16.8 miles
ACOE	0.8 miles	1.1 miles	+ 0.3 miles
TOTAL	21.7 miles	38.8 miles	+ 17.1 miles

2022 Ware River Public Access Management Plan: Authorized snowmobile trails

Key Elements

DWSP Internal Roads*^{New}

- Existing Policy: all DWSP roads are open 24/7 April – December; Roads are closed during mud season, except Coldbrook is year-round when possible; roads may be closed because of condition or need. This policy leads to illicit activity.
- DCR/DEP Original Proposal: All roads closed to unauthorized vehicles except for permitted hunters during Fall deer hunting season



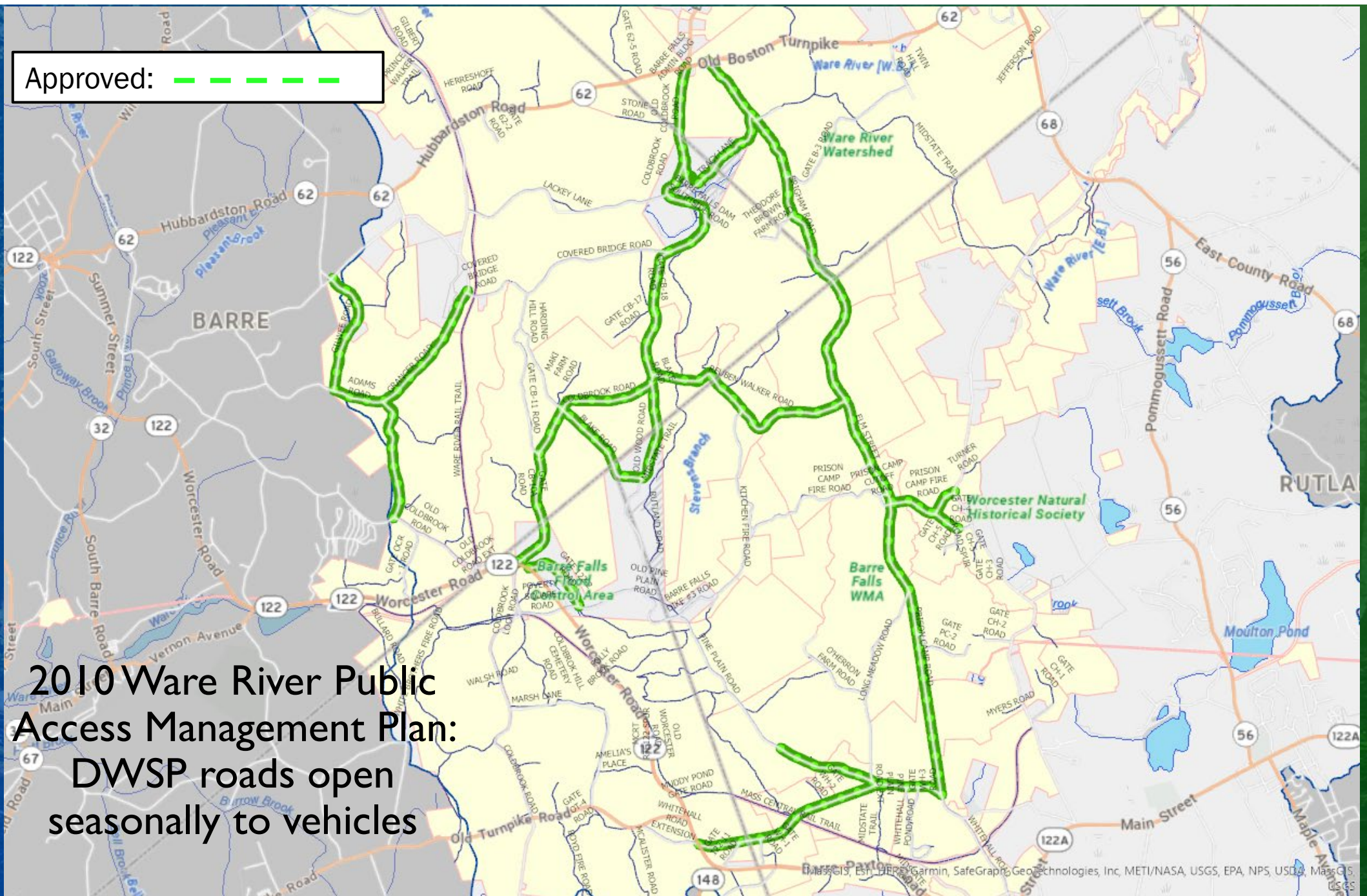
Key Elements

DWSP Internal Roads*^{New}

- Proposed Compromise (to address requests for access to the Ware River by fisherman, access to Prison Camp)
- All DWSP internal roads closed to unauthorized vehicle traffic except Coldbrook Road, which would be open from dawn to dusk
- Intervale Road would be open dawn to dusk to allow vehicle access specifically to the Prison Camps
- Non-vehicle access is always allowed past closed/locked gates during daylight hours
- A series of DCR gates will be unlocked and open to permitted hunters in vehicles Oct-Dec
- Existing permit system will allow short-term vehicle access past gates for organized groups



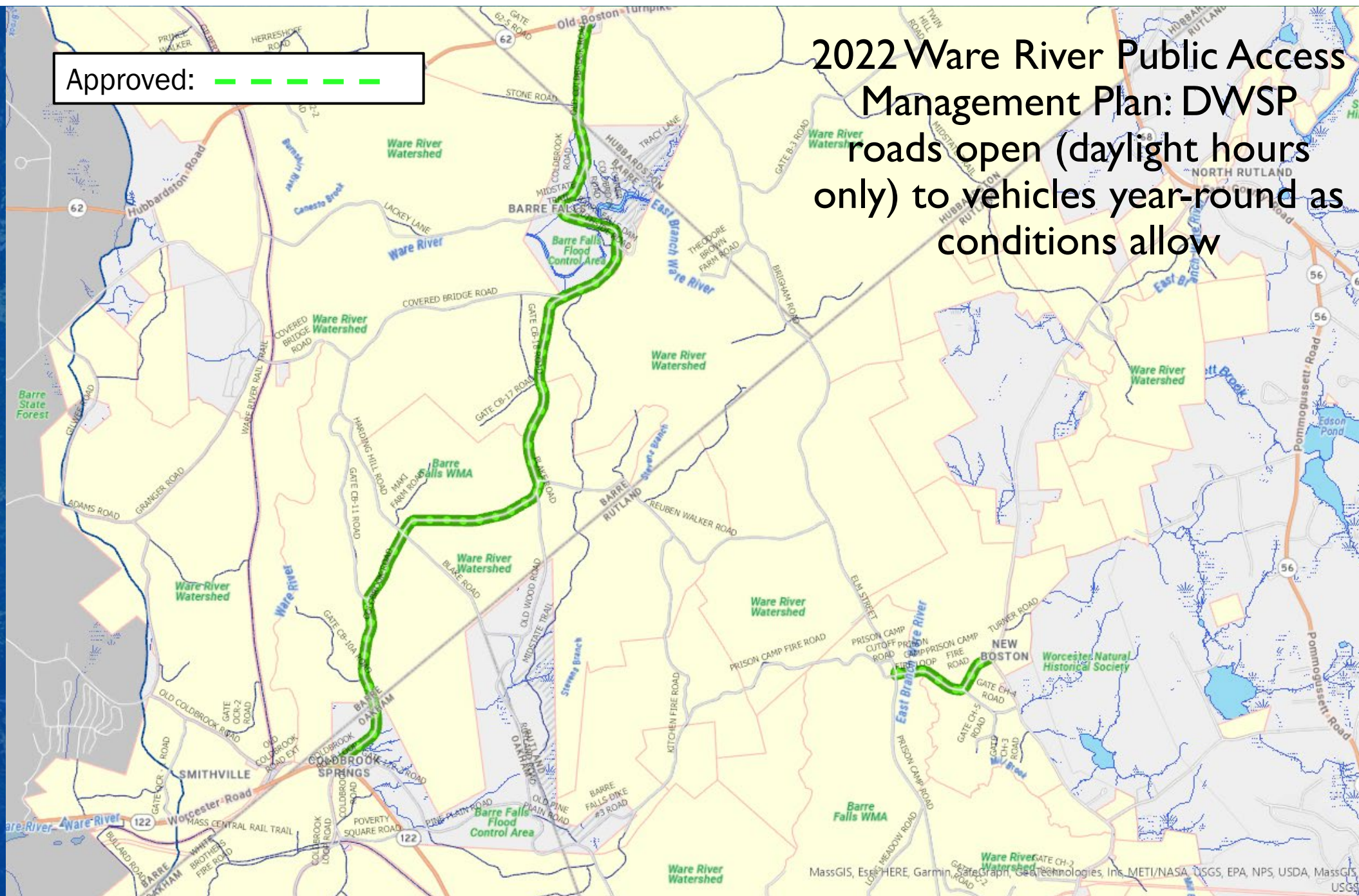
Approved: - - - - -



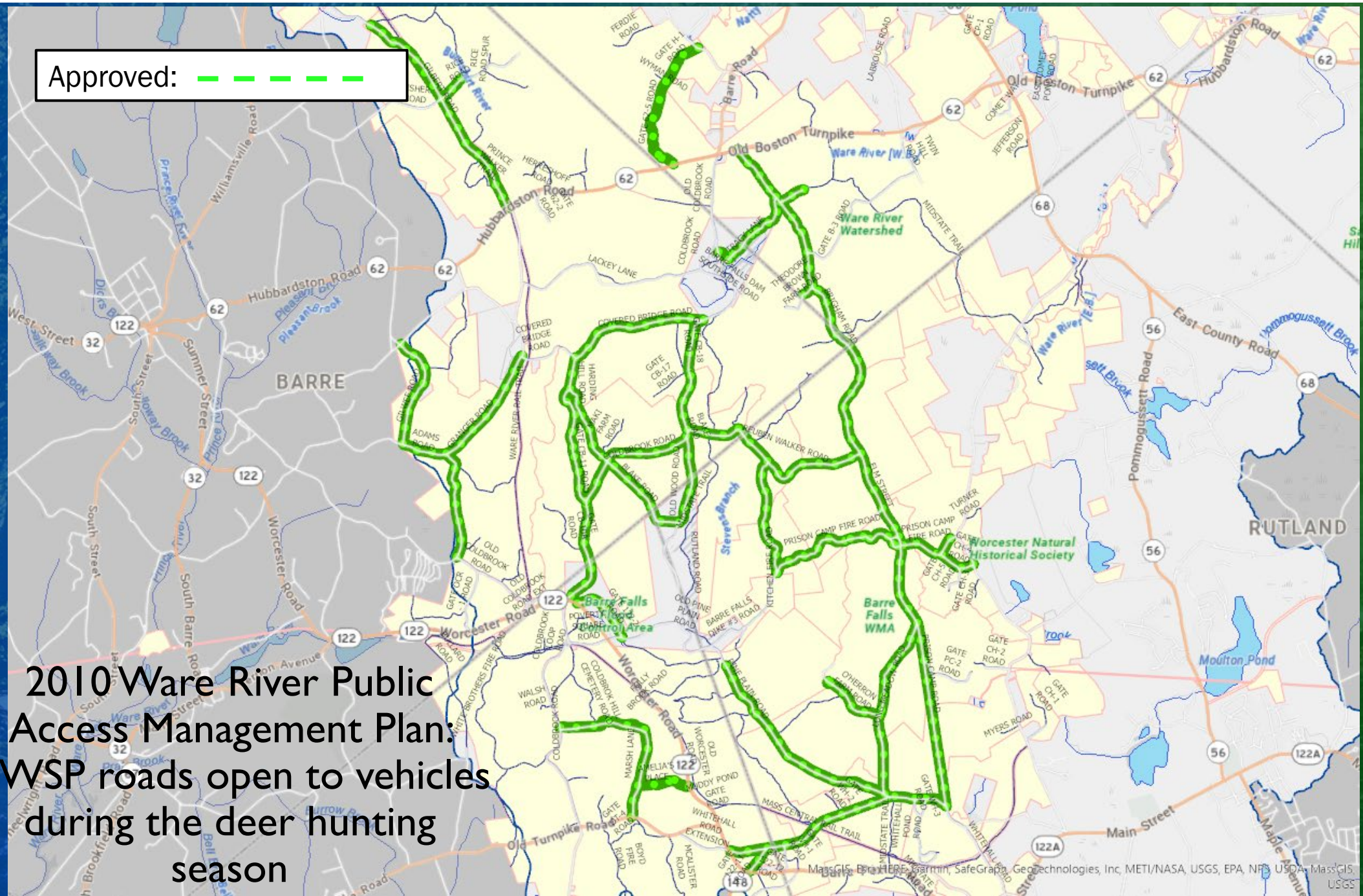
2010 Ware River Public
Access Management Plan:
DWSP roads open
seasonally to vehicles

Approved: 

2022 Ware River Public Access
Management Plan: DWSP
roads open (daylight hours
only) to vehicles year-round as
conditions allow



Approved: - - - - -

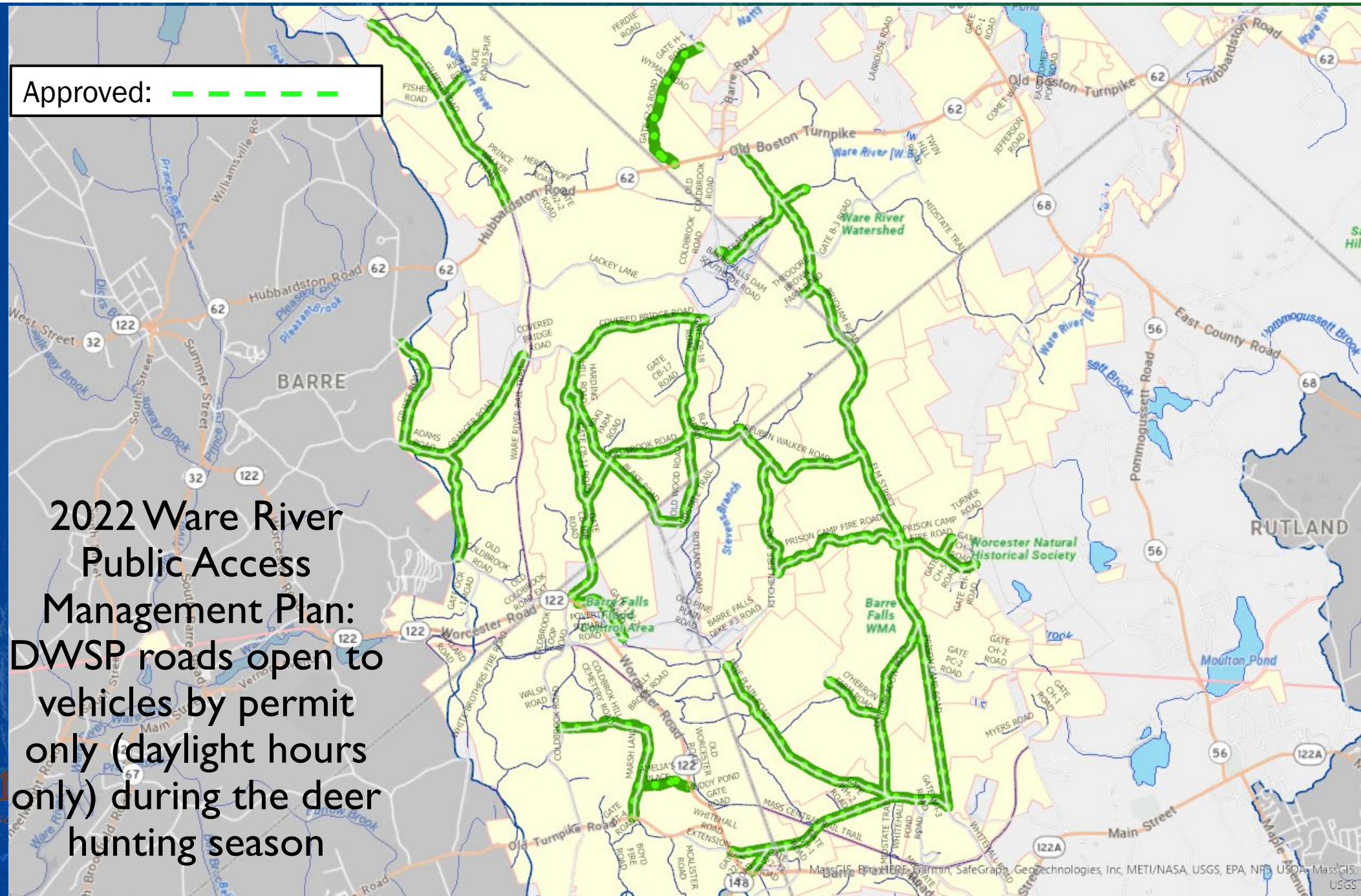


2010 Ware River Public
Access Management Plan:
DWSP roads open to vehicles
during the deer hunting
season



Approved: 

2022 Ware River
Public Access
Management Plan:
DWSP roads open to
vehicles by permit
only (daylight hours
only) during the deer
hunting season



Key Elements

Long Pond*New

- Pond and surrounding land completely owned by DWSP
- DEP requirement of no water skiing\tubing
- Large Boat Motor permitting will be eliminated
- Boats must comply with 20/25 hp motor restriction



Comet Pond*^{New}

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Key Elements

Procedural*New

- DCR will provide reasonable notice to Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) for temporary trail, road closures, etc.
- Changes to trail network can be submitted annually through WRWAC sub-committees and committee to DWSP for final decision
- DWSP will rely on Friend group and user groups to assist in reinforcing rules
- DWSP will reserve the right to become more restrictive if access issues persist and cannot be resolved



Next Steps

- Comment period to accept written comments has been extended to February 28, 2023; <https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>)
- Follow-up meetings as needed to address comments
- Revision to plan as needed
- Adoption of final plan