

November 7, 2019 Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting (WRWAC)
Summary of Comments to DCR's Proposed Updates
to the Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan

In Attendance: The meeting was attended by WRWAC members, DCR staff, and about 20 members of the public who primarily represented recreation interests.

Facilitator: Sara Cohen (DCR)

Overview:

DCR briefly reviewed the process to date of updating the Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan, including public engagement efforts. Dan Clark, DCR Quabbin/Ware Regional Director, then reviewed specific proposed policy updates and recreation trail maps (which are summarized/recorded separately from these notes). Comments were solicited and are summarized here.

Comments of Support

- Approve of the new dog leash policy (13 comments)
- Happy to see Long Pond engine size restriction
- Approve of increased enforcement around aquatic invasives at Comet Pond
- Approve of creation of distance swimming access point at Comet Pond
- Road closure policy will improve opportunities for cross-country skiing
- Happy about proposal to create more signage
- Approve of more consistent and clear trail names
- Approve of intention to formalize relationship with Friends Group

Primary Concerns (based on number of comments)

- No-paddleboard policy on Comet Pond is inconsistent with allowed swimming; paddleboards should be allowed (18 comments)
- Closure of park from dusk to dawn is too restrictive for those who recreate after work during shorter-daylight times of year (mentioned by snowmobilers, equestrians, hikers, and bikers). Request for closure at 8 or 9pm with preference for 9pm. (6 comments)
- Concern about loss of canoe/kayak launch site within buffer area (6 comments)
 - Current launch site allows younger or weaker paddlers to return to car by floating, if tired. Having to paddle upstream to return is less ideal.
 - New proposed launch location might be too fast-flowing for some paddlers to return to, or be impeded in the upstream direction by beaver dams.
 - New proposed location would need improved parking and launch infrastructure.
 - New proposed launch location may lead people to drive along rail bed.
- The new dog leash policy is too restrictive; especially the 6' length restriction (3 comments)

Additional Concerns

- Road gate closures (especially at Barre Falls) will impede access for turkey hunting.
- Year-round road closures will impede access for fishing.
- Closer of Coldbrook Rd. could be an impediment for quick transport during emergencies.
- Allowing snowmobiles on single track trails (e.g. T6) could harm trails and be dangerous.
- Snowmobile trails that traverse private property should not appear on DCR trail maps.
- A private driveway should not appear on DCR trail maps.
- There is currently no connection for bikers between the Mass Central Rail Trail and the Ware River Rail Trail. Would like to see this connection created.
- Concern that the many promises of implementation built into these proposals relies on funding that is not available.
- Concern that only allowing permitted hunters on open roads during hunting season will not be enforceable.
- Concern that closure of Rt. 122 parking lot within buffer will lead to dangerous parking along Rt. 122.

Suggestions / Other Comments

- Request to study the Mt. Wachusett Policy for night access guidelines
- Suggestion to use a Facebook Page people could follow or a Facebook Group people could join to “push” time-sensitive notifications about the Ware River watershed lands to people’s inboxes.
- Suggestion to post road plowing status of DCR internal roads so cross-country skiers and snowmobilers, etc. could plan accordingly.
- Request to increase the size of the parking lot off Intervale Rd., which enables access to Prison Camp Rd.
- Suggestion to remove brush at the edge of Comet Pond just before the path north of the dam enters the woods, to create the distance swimming location. This would be visible from the parking lot and be an easier entrance spot than the dam itself.
- Consider opening the Comet Pond Beach gate at other times of year for non-beach use (such as ice fishing).
- Suggestion to create a footpath for canoers and kayakers to access the river from Rt. 122, across from the parking lot on the south of this road.

Next Steps

- **DCR will review feedback internally and develop full draft plan.**
- **Anyone with specific suggestions for alternative canoe/kayak launch sites should be in contact with Dan Clark.**