



*Rebecca L. Tepper, Secretary of Energy and
Environmental Affairs*

Frederick A. Laskey, Executive Director, MWRA

*William Meehan, North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers,
Quabbin Fishermen's Association*

Matthew A. Romero, MWRA Advisory Board

Fred Heyes, Swift River Valley Historical Society

Water Supply Protection Trust

December 4, 2024

Virtual Meeting conducted via Webex

Trustees

Frederick A. Laskey, Executive Director, MWRA

Matthew Romero, Executive Director, MWRA Advisory Board (Designee for Richard E. Raiche, MWRA Advisory Board)

Vandana Rao, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Brigadier General William J. Meehan, North Worcester County Anglers and Quabbin Fishermen's Association

Fred Heyes, Swift River Valley Historical Society

MWRA

Dave Coppes, Chief Operating Officer

Rebecca Weidman, Deputy Chief Operating Officer

Carolyn Francisco-Murphy, General Counsel

Katie Ronan, Chief of Staff

Thomas Durkin, Director of Finance

Colleen Rizzi, Director of Environmental and Regulatory Affairs

Stephen Estes-Smargiassi, Director of Planning & Sustainability

Sean Navin, Director of Public Affairs

Michael Cole, Budget Director

James Coyne, Budget Manager

John Gregoire, Senior Program Manager, Western Operations

Hillary Monahan, Project Manager, Environmental Permitting

MWRA Advisory Board

Nathan Cote, Research & Policy Analyst

Christine Bennett, Research & Policy Analyst

DCR

John Scannell, Director, Division of Water Supply Protection

Dan Clark, Regional Director, Quabbin/Ware

Lisa Gustavsen, Deputy Regional Director, Quabbin/Ware

Derek Liimatainen, Deputy Regional Director, Wachusett

Kelley Freda, Regional Director, Wachusett/Sudbury

Joel Zimmerman, Watershed Planning Coordinator

WSCAC

Moussa Siri, Executive Director

Other

Dan Hammock, North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association

The meeting was convened at 10:02am.

- 1. Welcome and Introductions** – Trustee Laskey welcomed attendees, introduced himself as the Chair and called the December 4, 2024 meeting of the Water Supply Protection Trust (WSPT) to order. It was noted that the meeting was being conducted via remote participation and would be recorded.

The Trustees, as well as several MWRA and DCR Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP) staff, attended the virtual meeting via Webex. Trustee Laskey called the roll to establish attendance and a quorum. All Trustees were present.

Trustee Laskey thanked Felicia Bakaj, DWSP Land Acquisition Coordinator, Ken MacKenzie, DWSP Natural Resources Director, and John Scannell, Director of the DCR DWSP, for their attendance at the November 13, 2024 MWRA Board of Directors monthly meeting. He specified that the Watershed Land Acquisition Program overview was well-received, and proudly commented on acquisition successes over the years.

Trustee Laskey introduced a discussion regarding the breaching of the Quinapoxet River Dam currently underway in the Town of West Boylston, noting the project's historic significance and scope. Dave Coppes, MWRA Chief Operating Officer, provided background information on a series of photographs from the construction site. He described the construction of a bypass diversion channel, comprised of concrete blocks lined with a rubber plastic material to carry the river during deconstruction of the dam. Mr. Coppes then referred to a photograph of the diversion channel in action, carrying flow alongside the river to allow for the contractor to complete work in the river bottom. He explained that in order to restart the Oakdale transfer from Quabbin, the contractor is accelerating the construction of a rip-rap wall that will allow MWRA to turn Oakdale back on and continue work on the project.

- ❖ **Quinapoxet River Dam Removal** – John Gregoire, MWRA Senior Program Manager of Western Operations, shared a presentation on the Quinapoxet River Dam Removal Project. Mr. Gregoire provided background information on the project, summarizing major construction elements that have commenced. He noted various milestones in the project, categorized by date, and presented slides with photographs of the deconstruction process. Mr. Gregoire proudly stated that he is pleased with the dam removal's progress to this point.

Trustee Laskey inquired about the drought and how it affects the project. In response, Mr. Gregoire described the surprising nature of November's critical drought. While the project team had not anticipated a severe drought, a contingency was in place in the contract to allow the channel to accept Quabbin transfer flows. Due to the drought, many partial communities were stretching local sources and adding more demand to Wachusett Reservoir at this time of year when Quabbin is typically shut down, which ultimately increased demand. He noted that the MWRA Planning Department utilized internal modeling on watershed yield to help determine that the contingency would need to be triggered. Mr. Gregoire noted that the contract is moving ahead to accept Quabbin transfer flows.

Trustee Romero expressed enthusiasm for the project and noted that a time-lapse video of the construction would be interesting to view. Mr. Gregoire responded that time-lapse video equipment has been installed and will be available upon completion of the project. Trustee Rao echoed that sentiment, adding that the Quinapoxet Dam Removal is a terrific project. Trustee Laskey expressed agreement and asked Trustee Rao to provide an update on the drought.

- ❖ **Drought Update** – Trustee Rao shared an update on the current status of the drought. She explained that since the early 2000s, Massachusetts has developed and utilized a Drought Management Plan (DMP) to maximize the state's ability to effectively assess, prepare for, and respond to drought conditions. Trustee

Rao explained that the state is divided into seven Drought Regions to allow for flexibility and customization of drought declarations and response actions for different areas within the Commonwealth. The seven Drought Regions include: Western, Connecticut River Valley, Central, Northeast, Southeast, Cape Cod, and the Islands. She noted that drought is categorized into four levels of severity: *Mild* (Level 1), *Significant* (Level 2), *Critical* (Level 3), and *Emergency* (Level 4). Trustee Rao explained that since August of this year, Massachusetts has experienced a significant shortage in rainfall and has now reached a 10-inch deficit. She noted that this unprecedented dry period has consequently pushed stream flows to extremely low levels. Trustee Rao discussed the high fire danger index and explained how low precipitation, low moisture in the air, and dry soil result in fires that are especially difficult to manage. Trustee Rao noted that the recent slow-pattern rainfall over the last ten days has been a welcomed change. While the state is not yet out of the drought, Trustee Rao noted that the urgency and impacts around fire have abated for now.

Trustee Laskey asked if there have been any fires on watershed lands. Mr. Scannell responded that nothing significant has occurred, and any small fires have been reported and accessed by resources fairly quickly. Trustee Rao noted that there has been a significant amount of interagency coordination, specifying that the Drought Task force has been meeting every two weeks as conditions have rapidly deteriorated and the impacts have rapidly accelerated. Trustee Rao noted the importance of assessing data on a more regular basis as the Taskforce prepares a recommendation to the Secretary of EEA to make a final drought declaration for the state. Trustee Rao emphasized the importance of conserving in the winter months and educating the public on the topic of conservation. She noted that EEA continues to keep a close watch on drought status and shared an educational resource for more information on drought conditions.

- ❖ **Quabbin Hunts** – Mr. Scannell provided an update on controlled deer hunts at Quabbin Park. He explained that the Prescott Hunt is set to take place on Wednesday, December 4th and Thursday, December 5th. The second hunt at Quabbin Park is set to occur on Monday, December 9th and Tuesday, December 10th. The Petersham controlled hunt will take place on Thursday, December 12th and Friday, December 13th.

Trustee Laskey asked if the hunts will always be closely monitored by DCR DWSP or if Mr. Scannell envisions a statewide hunt. Mr. Scannell explained that in Sudbury, Wachusett, Ware River, and in a fair amount of the Quabbin, hunting is open in general. DCR only holds controlled hunts in certain areas (two-day controlled hunt on the Prescott Peninsula, Petersham Zone, and Quabbin Park Zone during shotgun season). Mr. Scannell clarified that Prescott Peninsula must be handled as a controlled hunt because it is completely off-limits to the public. He further noted that DCR DWSP makes decisions on a year-to-year basis as to whether a hunt needs to occur in each of these zones.

Trustee Meehan asked if Rangers are checking hunters for firearm IDs and hunting licenses. Mr. Scannell responded that all hunters are required to check in for each of the hunts. Additionally, hunters are required to provide copies of their hunting licenses in order to be accepted as participants. Mr. Clark added that hunters have already been vetted prior to the actual hunt, and that Environmental Police have an active presence during the Quabbin Hunts as well.

2. **Approval of the Minutes** – Trustee Romero noted that he is now the designee for MWRA Advisory Board's new Chair, Richard E. Raiche, who was recently elected in September. As amended, a motion was made by Trustee Romero and seconded by Trustee Rao to approve the September 16, 2024 WSPT meeting minutes. General Counsel Francisco-Murphy called the roll. The Trustees unanimously voted to approve the minutes.
3. **Update on FY2025 Spending** – Mr. Scannell shared a Fiscal Year 2025 Expenditure Update (through October 2024, or 33% of the fiscal year):

- **Expenditures** – About 26% total expended throughout the year (larger projects are developed and constructed later in the fiscal year).
- **Revenue** - Revenue is on-target for the year.
- **FY2025 Updates** –
 - Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment in Phase 2
 - Tighe & Bond to complete assessment of natural assets by end of year.
 - Forestry proceeding on watershed lands
 - FY2025 forestry lots presented publicly
 - Forestry lots sold in July and September
 - Staff working on elements of Forest as Climate Solutions
 - Quabbin Hunts
 - Quabbin Aquatic Invasive Control
 - First full year of work with MWRA's contractor on issue of controlling swollen bladderwort in Pottapaug Pond and O'Loughlin Pond in New Salem. Staff are reviewing the year-end report and will make recommendations regarding continued actions. Contractor will return next year to complete continued work. The areas were closed to boating for this fiscal year, so DWSP will make decisions prior to the start of next year's Fishing Season to decide if closures need to continue in 2025.
 - DEP Annual Watershed Reviews
 - DEP to issue official answers to MWRA and DCR in late winter.
 - South Sudbury Lands
 - Progress made by Commissioner on transferring lands surrounding Framingham Reservoirs 1 and 2 to DCR Parks. Currently working on MOU with Framingham State, who will be managing lands on the Salem End Road peninsula on Reservoir 1.

In response to a question from Trustee Meehan regarding monthly spending on temporary facilities in New Salem and rebuild updates, Dan Clark noted that the total is about \$45,000 per year. Mr. Scannell noted that DWSP is waiting to see a scope for that contract. Dan Hammock, representative of North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association, requested a definitive timeframe on a more permanent building. Trustee Laskey noted that MWRA would provide an update at the next WSPT meeting.

4. **Personnel and Hiring Update** – Mr. Scannell summarized DWSP's ongoing hiring efforts. He reported that DWSP's current FTE count is 145. All six remaining positions are in the process of being filled. He explained that there is an active posting for an accountant position, and a Ranger Supervisor position that will soon be posted. Mr. Scannell noted that all open positions are in play and staff are actively working to fill vacancies.
5. **Miscellaneous** –
 - **Quabbin Administration Building** – Mr. Clark shared a presentation on Quabbin Administration Building updates.
 - Window Replacement Project – Mr. Clark reported that 130 windows in the Administration Building are being replaced using federal ARPA funds. He noted that all windows have been removed from the East Annex and new windows are actively being installed. Mr. Clark assured the Trust that the project is making good progress, and that staff are aiming to match the historical character of the building as much as possible with the new upgrades.
 - Water System Repairs – Standpipe in back parking lot has been replaced and a new fire hydrant was installed.
 - Roof Replacement Project – Mr. Clark noted that staff are working with an architectural firm to draft the contracting documents this winter to go out to bid and start in the spring of 2025.

Trustee Meehan noted that several individuals have approached him regarding an extension of the Quabbin Fishing Season to what currently exists for Wachusett. He noted that Quabbin opens mid-April and closes in October, while Wachusett is open from April 1st through December 31st. Trustee Meehan noted that it seems to be a reasonable request, and that he would like the Trust to consider this request for the forthcoming Fishing Season. Mr. Scannell responded that staff are looking into it and he will have an answer before the season begins. Mr. Clark clarified that this request pertains to shoreline fishing, not extending the boat fishing season which would still end in October.

Trustee Rao requested clarification on the criteria to extend a fishing season. Mr. Scannell responded that the season used to end in November at Wachusett, and when the Public Access Plan was completed, the season was extended to the end of December. Mr. Scannell noted that a main concern historically has been ice in the coves earlier in the season or later into the spring, as it becomes a public safety issue when folks venture out onto the ice to cast. With the changing climate, it is very unlikely that ice is seen in the coves earlier in the season. Mr. Scannell noted that it is important to determine if responders could reach individuals if someone were to have an emergency before making a final decision on the extension request. Mr. Scannell noted that discussions with Rangers and Maintenance Supervisors about road conditions need to take place before a final decision is made. Mr. Clark added that it is important to make sure there are no regulatory constraints on the fishing season.

Trustee Meehan noted that trout and salmon seek cooler waters in the earlier and later parts of the fishing season, and an extension could provide a greater opportunity for shoreline fishermen to take advantage of those two fisheries. Trustee Laskey questioned if a separate license would be required. Mr. Clark responded that the same statewide fishing license would still be used.

There was discussion regarding the previous WSPT meeting on topic of Ranger enforcement. Trustee Romero clarified that the Advisory Board's intention behind the data analysis presented was not to throw ill will toward DWSP staff or the Rangers. He explained that the Advisory Board's intention was to indicate the loss of a tool for the Rangers and to look for ways to better support them. Trustee Romero further asked Trustee Laskey if there has been progress on reaching out to EEA regarding any written guidance for DWSP on the Rangers in light of the new legislation. Trustee Laskey noted he would follow up on the matter.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Trustee Rao. The motion was seconded by Trustee Heyes. General Counsel Francisco-Murphy called the roll. **The Trustees unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 10:49am.**