



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
John Sanchez, MWRA Advisory Board
Fred Heyes, Swift River Valley Historical Society

Water Supply Protection Trust
September 20, 2023
Virtual Meeting conducted via Webex

Trustees

Frederick A. Laskey, Executive Director, MWRA
Matthew Romero, Executive Director, 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 Historical Society

MWRA

Dave Coppes, Chief Operating Officer
Valerie Moran, Director of Waterworks
Ria Convery, Special Assistant to the Executive Director
Rebecca Weidman, Deputy Chief Operating Officer
Michael Altieri, Associate General Counsel
Carolyn Francisco-Murphy, General Counsel
James Coyne, Budget Manager
Michael Cole, Budget Director
Thomas Durkin, Director of Finance
Colleen Rizzi, Director, Environmental and Regulatory Affairs
Sean Navin, Director, Intergovernmental Affairs
Katie Ronan, Chief of Staff
Hillary Monahan, Senior Planner

DCR

John Scannell, Director, Division of Water Supply Protection
Dan Clark, Regional Director, Quabbin/Ware Region
Ken MacKenzie, Director, Natural Resources
Derek Liimatainen, Assistant Regional Director, Wachusett
Lisa Gustavsen, Assistant Regional Director, Quabbin
Trish McNally, Budget Manager
Joel Zimmerman, Regional Planner

WSCAC

Lexi Dewey, Executive Director

MWRA Advisory Board

James Guiod, Director of Finance

Other

Dan Hammock, North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association

The meeting was convened at 10:05am.

Trustee Laskey welcomed attendees, introduced himself as the Chair and called the September 20, 2023 meeting of the Water Supply Protection Trust (WSPT) to order.

The Trustees, as well as several MWRA and DWSP staff, attended the virtual meeting via Webex. Trustee Laskey noted that pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021 and subsequent acts extending certain COVID19 measures adopted during the state of emergency, the meeting was being conducted via remote participation and would be recorded.

All Trustees were present, establishing a quorum.

- 1. Welcome and Introductions** – Trustee Romero noted that he has been designated by the Acting Chair to represent the MWRA Advisory Board at WSPT meetings in place of Louis Taverna moving forward. Trustee Rao acknowledged that she has received the designation letter and will forward to MWRA General Counsel Carolyn Francisco-Murphy.

Prior to addressing the agenda items, Trustee Laskey took a moment to make a formal statement of respect for the people and ancestors of those who occupied the Boston Harbor and Commonwealth’s watershed lands, including Deer Island and the various watersheds where we are today: *The MWRA and the Trust are committed to acknowledging the truth about the past and offer acknowledgement today. While we are not together in one room, we share the broad landscape of what is now Massachusetts as we discuss our collaboration and would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held across the traditional lands of the Massachusetts Wampanoag and Nipmuc people who have stewarded these lands and waters throughout the generations. We would like to pay our respect to their elders, both past and present.*

Trustee Laskey recognized that this is an important tradition and requested the statement of respect to be formally written into the record.

- 2. Approval of the Minutes** – A motion was made by Trustee Rao and seconded by Trustee Heyes to approve the June 7, 2023 WSPT meeting minutes. The Trustees unanimously approved the minutes.

Trustee Laskey took a moment to acknowledge Lexi Dewey, who has announced her retirement. Trustee Laskey expressed his appreciation and gratitude for Dewey, stating that she has always placed the watersheds as top priority and that her expertise will be missed. He noted her many years of experience at WSCAC, and that a memento would be gifted in person upon next encounter. Lexi Dewey expressed her appreciation for the kind words and for the opportunity to serve in that role and work alongside MWRA staff over the years.

- 3. FY23 End of Year Report** – John Scannell, Director of the DCR Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP), shared a presentation summarizing DWSP’s Office of Watershed Management Fiscal Year 2023 and provided the following updates:
 - Planning Accomplishments –
 - Staff completed the FY24-28 Watershed Protection Plan, which was approved by MassDEP.
 - Staff finalized the Wachusett Watershed Public Access Management Plan Update.
 - Staff finalized the Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan Update, which was presented to Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee on September 13th.
 - Land Acquisition – DWSP finished FY23 with 304.1 acres protected at a cost of \$719,000. Seven parcels were purchased throughout the three watersheds.
 - Land Management – The Administration placed a pause on issuance of new timber harvesting contracts until December 7, 2023 to allow for the completion of revised guidelines with a climate focus. Staff continue to oversee logging on all lots sold before the beginning of 2023. After the pause ends in December, DWSP will resume issuance.

- Wildlife Management:
 - Active Gull Control Programs are ongoing at both Quabbin and Wachusett. Successful again this year, and operated from 27 weeks at Wachusett and 26 weeks at Quabbin. Coliform Standards were met at both Reservoirs throughout the year.
 - Active Goose control was conducted at the Sudbury, Wachusett, and Quabbin Reservoirs. The goose population management program at DWSP Reservoirs has been effective in both limiting the number of goslings hatched each year and gradually reducing the number of resident adults.
- Public Access Management:
 - Watershed Rangers continue to patrol the watersheds, continuing enforcement using education and law enforcement personnel as needed. Mr. Scannell noted that FY23 was a rather uneventful year. The number of people using our properties has come down since the pandemic and is settling toward normal usage. Mr. Scannell noted that monitoring access points and securing properties are an ongoing effort.

Trustee Meehan expressed concern regarding ranger enforcement, and suggested developing educational materials. Mr. Scannell assured the Trustees that more information on this topic would be presented at the December WSPT meeting regarding impacts from public access.

Trustee Romero seconded the importance of this topic and asked how rangers are engaging law enforcement, now that they are not able to ticket. Mr. Scannell noted that MSP or local police would be contacted if necessary.

- Infrastructure:
 - Major dams, spillways, and dikes were inspected monthly in FY23 and smaller watershed dams were assessed periodically.
 - At Wachusett, regular inspections of stormwater BMPs were conducted at least twice a year and after large rainfall events; maintenance and repair work occur as needed.
 - Quabbin Maintenance staff cleared the Quabbin spillway of woody vegetation.
 - Structural work completed - Lancaster Street Barn Siding, Wachusett Salt Shed
 - Contracted work at Quabbin - Gate 40 Stream Crossing Improvement Project

In response to a question from Trustee Laskey, there was discussion regarding DWSP's approach to culvert improvement and replacement. Trustee Laskey also asked if there was any damage from the recent storm in Leominster. Mr. Scannell explained that there were only minor impacts in the watersheds, specifically in the upper part of the Wachusett watershed. Storm conditions resulted in silty water in the Stillwater River and an increase in flow - but from a damage perspective, only minor issues.

Mr. Scannell provided the Trust with details on the following topics:

- Quabbin Spillway Channel Hazard Tree Removal
- Quabbin Spillway Stop Log Rail Lead Paint Removal Project
- New Interpretive Kiosks at Wachusett
- Quabbin and Wachusett equipment purchases
- Education and Outreach:
 - The Quabbin Visitor Center welcomed over 4,000 visitors with 6-day per week operations. Wachusett Dam Day returned in the spring. Several new videos were produced and put online. Mass Envirothon Annual competition held at Blackstone in May.
- Water quality and hydrologic monitoring:
 - Routine sampling in the Reservoirs and of all tributaries was conducted. Nutrient and total suspended solids samples were collected monthly. At Wachusett, chloride samples were collected from selected tributaries and from groundwater wells to document changes due to excessive applications of road salt.

- Reservoir algal population dynamics were accurately captured throughout the year.
- Staff continued efforts to address the issue of winter road salt use and impacts to water quality
 - Training for staff and local DPW employees - 30 in attendance
 - Matching Grant program awarded grants to 3 watershed communities with salt reduction efforts. Awards were made to Holden, Sterling, and West Boylston. Holden’s award was for a portion of construction of a brine generator.
 - Staff participated in Salt Sleuth outreach event
 - Meetings were held to form a multi-agency salt task force including DCR, MassDOT, MassDEP and other groups that will meet quarterly to advance salt issues at the statewide level. The task force made a presentation, which included DWSP’s monitoring results, to nearly 100 attendees at MassDEP’s Bureau of Water Resources meeting in March.
- Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) – Discovery was made of Swollen Bladderwort in Pottapaug Pond at Quabbin.
- FY23 Spending and Revenue
 - FY23 Final Expenditures – The total FY23 budget was 88% spent, at about \$18.8 million.
 - FY23 Revenue – Total DWSP Revenue for FY23 was about \$1.5 million. Collected 150% of estimate last year, majority from robust hydro revenue.

Trustee Laskey noted that progress is being made on a number of fronts, and expressed gratitude for the continued dedication of staff.

4. **Certification of FY23 Trust Expenditures** - Trustee Laskey explained that the Trust must annually certify DWSP expenditures. He requested a motion and a second to authorize him, as Chair, to sign the certification on behalf of the Trust and noted that a copy of the signed certification would be distributed to the Trustees prior to submission to the Comptroller. Trustee Heyes made a motion, seconded by Trustee Romero. General Counsel Francisco-Murphy called the roll and the motion was unanimously approved by the Trust.
5. **FY24 Workplan and Budget Review** – Mr. Scannell provided the following highlights of the FY24 Work Plan and Budget:
 - Staff heavily involved in the EEA Forests as Climate Solutions project.
 - Ware River Public Access Plan was finalized last week.
 - Staff are working on hunts in all watersheds for deer hunting season. Most of the watershed land is open to hunting broadly, but DCR still has Quabbin hunts that take place on specific days in the watershed. Staff are getting ready for early December hunts at Quabbin.
 - Mr. Scannell noted that DWSP received \$200,000 for FY24 through EEA to complete a multi-year Climate Vulnerability Assessment of the watershed lands, led by Ken MacKenzie, Director of Natural Resources for the DCR DWSP, and Ms. Felicia Bakaj, DCR DWSP Land Acquisition Coordinator. Mr. Scannell noted that he plans to provide a more detailed overview to the Trust in the December WSPT meeting.

Trustee Rao commented that she encourages all involved in this project to connect with EEA’s climate team – specifically the Office of Climate Science. Trustee Rao emphasized the importance of coordination among teams to ensure the issues are framed correctly and accurately, and to ensure that climate projections and data are consistent. Trustee Rao reminded Mr. Scannell and Mr. MacKenzie that she is available to offer assistance where needed. Mr. MacKenzie acknowledged Trustee Rao’s guidance and noted his eagerness to coordinate and ensure that the most up-to-date climate science is utilized.

Trustee Rao and Trustee Laskey congratulated Mr. MacKenzie and Mr. Scannell on obtaining this funding. Mr. MacKenzie and Mr. Scannell noted that the EEA funding is annually-issued, and that this work is incorporated

into the Watershed Protection Plan. Trustee Laskey encouraged Mr. MacKenzie to add this topic to the agenda.

Trustee Laskey inquired about the status of the Quabbin Park Hunt. Mr. Scannell commented that he is expecting EEA to sign off on it shortly, and that he anticipates a hunt in Quabbin Park this year. He also mentioned that Quabbin Administration Building Window Replacement project has gone to DCAMM for approval as an expenditure of more than \$250,000. He expects a contract will be put out soon. Staff at Quabbin have also put in for a grant to replace generators at Quabbin Tower and Quabbin Administration Building that are relatively dated – Mr. Scannell will be reaching out to MWRA for a letter of support regarding those generators and their importance to operations.

Trustee Laskey asked if there were any questions or concerns. The FY24 Work Plan and Budget was unanimously approved by the Trust.

6. **Ongoing Agency Responses to COVID19** – Mr. Scannell reported no significant updates from DWSP. Trustee Laskey noted that MWRA continues to track COVID19 data and is prepared to respond accordingly to any flare-ups.
7. **Hiring Update** – Mr. Scannell summarized DWSP’s ongoing hiring efforts. He explained that while departures continue to present challenges with reaching fully-staff status, DWSP’s FTE count is currently 142 with two additional hires starting work next week. Trustee Romero thanked Mr. Scannell for continued hiring efforts.
8. **Miscellaneous Updates** –
 - **Completion of Ware River Watershed Public Access Management Plan** – Dan Clark, DCR Regional Director for the Quabbin/Ware Region, shared a presentation on DWSP’s Ware River Public Access Plan and emphasized that staff have worked diligently on it for several years. Mr. Clark noted that the new plan provides better watershed protection than the previous plan. Key changes include:
 - Expanded protective zone around the Ware River Intake to minimize the types of recreational activities that take place.
 - Eliminated nighttime access, almost exclusively: the public is only allowed on property from one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset.
 - Developed a set of well-defined, multi-use trails to avoid wetland areas and emphasize connectivity.
 - Up to two large group horse permits will be issued per year. Permit will allow DCR to review and approve/deny the route, require manure pick-up, and will have pre- and post-ride inspections by Watershed Rangers
 - Roads – historically open to general vehicle traffic in the Ware River, and have now reduced that from 18 to 7 miles of roads open to vehicles from dawn to dusk, prioritizing access to hunting, fishing, and historic sites
 - A series of DCR gates will be unlocked and open to permitted hunters in vehicles October through December
 - Issuance of 50 large motor permits on Long Pond for 2024 by lottery
 - Continue to gather data on how Long Pond is being used through surveys. That information will guide future decisions on the number of permits that is appropriate
 - Reinstate distance swimming entry points at southern end of Comet Pond

Mr. Clark noted that they are making sure signage is appropriate - general signage needs to be updated to reflect changing policies. DCR plans to begin to implement these changes over the next 6-12 months. In response to a question from Trustee Romero about the costs of these changes, Mr. Clark explained that because sign production can be produced in-house, significant costs outside of the normal operating budget are not anticipated.

Trustee Rao commended staff on their patience with this plan, and for putting a strategy together that maintains the recreational value on these lands, while ensuring that there is not a diminishing effect on water quality. Trustee Rao acknowledged that this planning process has been a long road and praised staff for thoughtful work. Trustee Laskey seconded comments made by Trustee Rao, noting that he commends staff's dedication and hard work.

- **Update on Aquatic Invasives in Pottapaug Pond**—Mr. Clark gave an overview of the recent discovery of invasive Swollen Bladderwort in Pottapaug Pond:
 - Mr. Clark noted that MWRA contractors have performed a shoreline survey every August since 2010, and have never before detected any invasive vegetation. During a routine barrier check this past May, however, staff discovered a suspicious plant that was determined to be Swollen Bladderwort.
 - Swollen Bladderwort is a rootless plant that is not native to Massachusetts (native to southern US). It flowers in early spring and produces yellow flower stalks that protrude above the water. The plant can reproduce through seeds and vegetatively. The plant can form dense mats of vegetation which negatively impact boating, fishing, and other recreational activities. When those mats of vegetation die, oxygen is depleted, sediments increase, and the dense mats become so abundant that they crowd and exclude native vegetation.
 - After discovery – DCR performed a partial shoreline survey in early June of the pond to investigate the extent of the Bladderwort. Mr. Clark noted that once the location and extent was discovered, staff closed down Pottapaug to private boat launching. Internally, DCR conducted hand-harvesting (June 12 and June 15) and focused primarily on the coves along the western shore. During this effort, DCR staff collected 73 gallons of Bladderwort for removal. The invasive was still in bloom, but flowers were starting to degrade.
 - DCR immediately notified MWRA to ask for assistance once the plant was discovered. MWRA sent DASH Contractor in early July for a few days to conduct more hand-pulling, which removed 48 gallons. However, by this time, the plant had become difficult to detect due to its lack of flowering.
 - Plan for future – MWRA and contractor will return earlier next season to continue hand-pulling and monitoring. Mr. Clark emphasized that while it has not been detected in the reservoir, close monitoring will continue and prevent private boat launching in Pottapaug until the plant is eradicated or until new policies are developed to ensure the plant does not spread to the reservoir.

Trustee Meehan noted that bass fishing at Pottapaug is the best in the state, and suggested using a different sealing method for boats that primarily fish there.

Mr. Clark noted that because of the plant's biology, fragments that break off can establish new plants, and even DCR's rental boats (which have been allowed to continue through the season) could actually be disturbing the plant, fragmenting it, and potentially causing it to spread further. Trustee Meehan expressed that he would like to keep the topic under consideration in an effort to reach a resolution early next fishing season and alert people accordingly. Mr. Scannell noted that DCR will internally meet this offseason with experts and generate ideas.

Trustee Rao questioned what typical boat-washing protocols are being used by other lakes and ponds across the Commonwealth, and if there are additional options that could help to minimize this cross-contamination. Mr. Clark noted that this option will be discussed. The ideal solution is to eradicate the plant, but it may not be feasible. A lot of discussion to be had over the offseason.

Trustee Laskey asked if there is any evidence that it has gotten into the main reservoir, but Mr. Clark noted that we do not have any evidence of it at this point. Trustee Laskey emphasized the importance of not allowing

Bladderwort to spread in the main reservoir. Mr. Clark explained that the chance of missing the plant in August when surveys are done is high due to the plant no longer flowering, so it is possible that we have not seen it yet in the reservoir, but surveying in early spring would be beneficial to catch something sooner in the year.

Trustee Laskey noted that he will discuss more aggressive monitoring tactics with John Gregoire and Valerie Moran to increase monitoring and earlier surveying in the early spring.

- **Forestry Pause** – Mr. MacKenzie noted that Massachusetts is required to achieve a net-zero statewide greenhouse gas emissions goal by 2050. As part of the Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan (CECP), the Healey-Driscoll Administration has established aggressive land conservation goals to protect 30% of the Commonwealth by 2030 and 40% by 2050. As a result, the Administration announced a new initiative on June 7th to ensure Massachusetts’ forests are managed to optimize carbon sequestration and mitigate climate stressors as part of meeting the state’s aggressive climate goals. To explain this initiative further, Mr. MacKenzie presented material on the Forest as Climate Solutions (FACS), a new initiative that seeks to expand existing state programs, invest in forest conservation, enhance a network of forest reserves, and develop forest management guidelines based on the latest climate science. While many factors of this initiative are still being developed, Governor Healey has placed a six-month pause on all forestry on state lands. Mr. MacKenzie explained that several internal working groups have been developed and are meeting weekly (or more) to tackle the deliverables associated with this plan. Details of the initiative’s working group teams are as follows:
 - Landowner Incentive and Business Assistance Team
 - Create new incentives for private and municipal woodland owners that center on climate concerns, including optimizing resilience and carbon storage when pursuing forest management objectives
 - Develop assistance options to help forest businesses improve their technology and decarbonize their business practices
 - Promote and incentivize the use of wood products harvested in Massachusetts
 - Management Guidelines Implementation Team
 - Incorporate climate-oriented forest management guidelines
 - Currently on standby, waiting for EEA climate team to develop climate-smart guidelines
 - Climate and Carbon Data Team
 - Assess carbon/climate change data
 - Identify data gaps/improve data
 - Share data with staff and the public via dashboard or website
 - Forest Protection and Reserves Team
 - Implement EEA’s Resilient Lands Initiative (RLI)
 - Forest land conservation (40% protected by 2050)
 - Expand and protect Forest Reserves (largely preventing conversion of forest)

Trustee Heyes mentioned Representative Bill HD.4430, filed in June of this year, and further noted weight limitations on equipment in contracts – it shows intent on the part of each forester to determine which piece of equipment is more appropriate for the soils. Mr. MacKenzie agreed, noting that all aforementioned information is outlined in the Land Management Plan and worked into permits as they are issued.

Trustee Heyes expressed concern, noting he is discouraged by reliance on buying carbon credits in lieu of focusing on making environmentally sound lifestyle changes. He acknowledged that the world of carbon credits can be deceptive. Mr. MacKenzie agreed and noted that forests can only do so much in terms of absorbing carbon, further emphasizing the importance of a commitment to lifestyle changes. Mr. MacKenzie noted that he is pleased with the Administration’s investment in forests and believes it will do wonders for watershed protection. Trustee Heyes agreed and expressed appreciation for Mr. MacKenzie’s involvement in the forestry working group teams.

Mr. MacKenzie noted that EEA held a listening session in early September and stated he was very encouraged by the overall positive opinion that forests need to be managed for climate change and that we cannot have a hands-off approach, even in Reserves. Mr. MacKenzie noted that there have been many allowable management activities that can happen within Reserves that allow for climate change mitigation, resiliency, and adaptation. Overall, Mr. MacKenzie is encouraged by the response thus far to the Forest as Climate Solutions (FACS) initiative.

Trustee Heyes commended Mr. MacKenzie and his team on their level of preparation to move forward in terms of climate-smart forestry.

Trustee Romero noted that he was also able to attend the EEA listening session in early September and was very encouraged to hear that there were many advocates of forestry management. He noted that the Advisory Board has submitted written comments, and is pleased to hear that Mr. MacKenzie is involved in FACS working group teams moving forward. He noted that lessons learned over the years will benefit the Commonwealth and ratepayers alike.

Trustee Rao noted that the Trust and MWRA can continue to engage with EEA online. EEA is asking for feedback on three framing questions that received 50 testimonials at the listening session and several more comments in writing. One session had been held on the 12th, with another scheduled in November. Trustee Rao noted she will distribute a link to the Trust with more information. EEA is happy to meet with the Trust or MWRA between now and the end of the year if there is a desire to discuss any issues in more detail. Comments can still be provided in writing as well. Trustee Rao encourages all to read the material and send comments. Trustee Rao offered EEA's support to Trustee Laskey, who expressed appreciation for the team's diligence and hard work.

Trustee Heyes noted that Mr. MacKenzie's forestry walks are well-advertised and well-received by the public.

Trustee Meehan expressed concern regarding the issue of ranger enforcement, specifically on the update of Ware River Watershed, and noted 3,556 violations, 103 written warnings, and 381 citations listed in the FY21 Activity Report. Trustee Meehan emphasized the importance of ranger enforcement and asked Mr. Scannell to include the number of cases that have been referred to law enforcement and the number of denial-of-access letters issued during the past fiscal year to encourage the use of watersheds in a responsible way. Trustee Meehan noted the Annual Roadway Management Plan and advised that it should be coordinated on an annual basis with the two watershed advisory committees. Trustee Meehan would like to have it posted online for easy access.

Trustee Romero seconded the importance of ranger enforcement and thanked DWSP, Mr. Clark, and Mr. Scannell for the success of the first in-the-field Advisory Board field trip since the pandemic. Trustee Laskey seconded and thanked the Advisory Board and DWSP for a job well done.

Trustee Laskey also noted that staff continue to work on the Quinapoxet Dam removal Project. He further noted that MWRA won the "People's Choice Award" in New England Waterworks Association's Annual Taste Test, and commended staff's long-range planning efforts, hard work, and dedication.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Trustee Heyes. The motion was seconded by Trustee Rao. General Counsel Francisco-Murphy called the roll. **The Trustees unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 11:28am.**