

**Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**Thursday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017**  
**7:00 PM**

**Location:** Franklin Wood Studio, 232A Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543 (Behind Police/Fire Station)

**Members:** (Members in **BOLD** were present)

Massachusetts Council of Sportsmen: Robert Carey, William Label

Alternate: Mike Moss

Worcester County League of Sportsmen: **John Root**

Alternate: Dave Papale

Trout Unlimited: **Jeffrey Schaaf (Co-Chairman)**

Alternate:

A Rod and Gun Club: Joe Cataldo

Alternate: Brian Waterman

Barre Selectboard: Martha Varnot

Alternate: **Edward Yaglou**

Hubbardston Selectboard: **Thomas Bratko**

Alternate:

Oakham Selectmen: **Thomas Hughes**

Alternate: Phillip Warbasse

Rutland Selectmen: **Charles R. Williams**

Alternate: **Brett Russ**

Barre Historical Society: **Margo Petracone**

Alternate:

Hubbardston Historical Society: **Robin Langer**

Alternate:

Oakham Historical Society: Wes Dwelly

Alternate: Bill Mucha

Rutland Historical Society: **Helen Viner**

Alternate: Tim Nahrwold

Massachusetts Wildlife Federation: Bill Westaway (Co-Chairman)

Alternate: **Thomas Berube**

Massachusetts Audubon Society: Martha Gach

Alternate:

Sierra Club: Matt Hopkinson

Alternate:

Upper Ware River Watershed Association: Donald Rich

Alternate: **Edward Yaglou**

General Public: Mark DuBois

Alternate: **Dave Small**

**DCR Staff Present:**

Ken Canfield, Dave Celino, Herm Eck, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell

**Members of the Public Present:**

Sandy Beach, Patricia Begin, Maida Boudreau, Jassy Bratko, Cynthia Brooks, Robert Brooks, Karla Christiansen, Bill Dobson, Dan Duval, Steve Eckelkamp, Mark Fauteux, Stephanie Friend, Renee Gregoire, Dennis Gubeck, Bob Hatch, Kathleen James, Ann McCrane, Colleen Melanson, Nancy Monson, Chris Palin, Alan Rochette, Margaret Rote, Cindy Schlenen, Alycia Smith, Lisa Turcotte, Diana Walther, Doug Walther, Douglas Walther, Marianne Wojcicki, Douglas Wylie

**Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Start Time: 7:04 PM**

**Approval of Minutes of Meeting on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Dick Williams made a motion to accept the minutes from the WRWAC meeting on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Dave Small seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

**Presentation by DCR Chief Fire Warden – Dave Celino**

Dave Celino, Chief Fire Warden for DCR, gave a presentation to the committee on prescribed burns in general as well as upcoming plans for burning in the Ware River Watershed (WRW).

Prescribed burning is defined as purposefully putting fire on the landscape; applied in a skilled manner, under exacting weather conditions, in a definite place, and to achieve specific results. The main prescribed fire objectives tend to be for hazard fuel mitigation, ecological restoration, and fire training. Reasons given for using prescribed fire in forest and grassland management are as follows: reduce hazardous fuels, dispose of logging debris, prepare sites for seeding or planting,

improve wildlife habitat, manage competing vegetation, control insects and disease, improve forage for grazing, enhance appearance and access, and perpetuate species and communities that require fire.

Across the country, over 95% of all wildfires are human caused. There have been no major 'landscape level' fires in Massachusetts in the past 20+ years which has led to a tremendous build up of vegetation/forest fuels. Many of the Commonwealth's most ecologically significant natural areas require active management to conserve, protect, and enhance open habitats that support a diversity of endangered, threatened, and/or declining species. Myles Standish State Forest, Manuel Correllus State Forest, and Freetown/Fall River State Forest were given as examples of areas where fire was successfully used for ecological restoration.

DCR and Municipal Departments also utilize prescribed burns for valuable fire training. Firefighters learn fire behavior, firefighting tactics, and learn about the use of specialized wildfire equipment as well as the Incident Command System. This type of training cannot be duplicated in a classroom and is a very valuable training tool.

Plans for 2017 and beyond include prescribed burns at Quabbin Reservoir in Ware, Blue Hills Reservation in Milton, Scusset Beach Reservation in Bourne, and Demarest Lloyd State Park in Dartmouth. Every selected site has a comprehensive Burn Plan created. Every burn differs in objectives, burning prescription, and smoke management challenges (weather, fuels, smoke receptors, natural and cultural resources).

Smoke management and fire behavior indices were presented. DCR Forest Fire Control Personnel are highly trained in Smoke Management techniques to minimize the impact smoke on surrounding communities. Each prescribed burn has a stringent Smoke Management Plan that is adhered to throughout the burning process. DCR uses computer smoke modeling, observation towers, and roving smoke monitors to advise any negative smoke impacts. In the event of any negative impact from poor smoke dispersion, the prescribed burn is terminated immediately. Weather forecast is watched days in advance of any burn. A "Spot Weather Forecast" from the National Weather Service (NWS) is obtained the morning of the burn. On-site fire weather is taken every 30 minutes by the FEMO

(or as directed by the Burn-Boss). The burn boss is also in constant contact with NWS forecast desk for the duration of the burn. The tools DCR use to conduct a prescribed burn includes drip torches, firing device launchers, and hand thrown firing devices.

Various firing techniques patterns were discussed. Strip head firing generally produces more emissions than any other burning technique. It is used when winds are forecasted to stay within a 45 degree range. A point source fire generally produces fewer emissions than a strip head firing. It is used when strip head fires are too intense (as burn site gets drier). A flanking fire is used only when wind direction is forecast to be from only one direction. It is used to minimize crown scorch and requires a high level of coordination between the ignition crew. A backing fire generally produces fewer emissions than all other firing patterns. It is an excellent firing technique if fuels are dry and is used in areas with heavy fuel/vegetation. These fires tend to be slow moving. It is possible to burn during nighttime hours. This would only be done during situations where day-time burning is not permissible and other variables are favorable.

The chance of a wildfire occurring in the Ware River Watershed was discussed. Drought conditions increase the likelihood of a wildlife occurrence. There were just over 2,500 wildfires recorded in Massachusetts in 2016; mostly small fires.

There is an 8 acre Heath lot in the Ware River Watershed that DCR would like to have a prescribed burn at, with the goal of habitat restoration. Herm Eck mentioned that the site has significant Natural Heritage habitat that relies heavily on fire.

### **FY18 Ware River Watershed Forestry Lot Proposals**

Herm Eck presented 5 FY18 Ware River Watershed forestry projects proposed for harvest to the committee. A copy of Herm's PowerPoint presentation as well detailed versions of the lot proposals will be available to view online within the next couple months on DCR's Watershed Management Forestry Projects website.

The 1<sup>st</sup> lot proposed (WR-18-8-1) is located off of Whitehall Road in Rutland, MA. The details of that lot are as follows:

- 37 acre lot

- Predominantly white pine type with some pitch pine and oak. Southeast corner is predominately a mixed oak type.
- Goal is to create a pine barren in the western section.
- A few 2 acre openings in the northeast section are projected as well as a few 0.25-1 acre openings in the southeast section.
- The old well along Whitehall Road will be protected.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> lot proposed (WR-18-18-2) is located off of Old Coldbrook Road in the towns of Rutland and Oakham, MA. The details of that lot are as follows:

- 27 acre lot
- Contains a red pine plantation, spruce plantation, and a white pine hardwood stand.
- Goal is to remove the plantations and some of the poor quality white pine in openings up to 3 acres in size.
- A visual buffer will be maintained along Route 122.
- Cultural resources (foundations) will be protected.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> lot proposed (WR-18-18-3) is located off of the Rail Trail in Barre, MA. The details of that lot are as follows:

- 84 acre lot
- Predominately white pine-oak forest type.
- Goal is to regenerate a total of about 20 acres by removing sections of poor quality white pine in openings that range in size from 0.5-5 acres.
- Old rock quarry will be protected.

The Rail Trail will remain open during the logging process; no closures are anticipated.

A member of the public questioned how much income is generated per acre from the forestry program as well as how much income is taken in annually; and where that income ultimately goes. Herm Eck answered that lots are not sold by acre but as a lump sum sale per lot. Income can range from \$50-\$1,000 per acre and anywhere from \$200,000-\$1,000,000 annually; lately closer to \$200,000. The money goes to DCR to help offset some of the Massachusetts Water Resource Authorities (MWRA) costs. The goal of the Watershed Forestry Program is not to raise money but to maintain a diverse forest that is resilient to various forms of disturbance; keeping the forest filter as healthy as possible.

The 4<sup>th</sup> lot proposed (WR-18-28-4) is located off of Fisher Road in Barre, MA. The details of that lot are as follows:

- 107 acre lot.
- Predominately poor quality white pine hardwood type but also includes about 20 acres of oak type.
- Goal is to regenerate some of the poor quality white pine sections by creating openings up to 2 acres in size.
- Vernal pools in this area will also impact opening locations.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species habitat bubbles were discussed. If there is a bubble inside one of our lots, the cutting plan is submitted to Natural Heritage and they come back with a list of requirements to proceed. We treat all vernal ponds on our property as certified, even if they haven't been officially certified as such.

The 5<sup>th</sup> lot proposed (WR-18-28-5) is located off of Rice Road in Barre, MA. The details of that lot are as follows:

- 32 acre lot.
- Predominately white pine.
- Goal is to release advance regeneration by creating openings up to 5 acres in size.
- Vernal pool will impact landing layout and opening placement.

All openings on all lots that are over 0.5 acres will have some large trees retained.

### **Ware River Watershed Trail Closure Discussion**

A member of the public was concerned that the T3, T5, and T6 trails have been closed. He questioned why they were closed, what plans there are to mitigate the problem (if there is one), and what the plan to reopen them is. He mentioned that T5 was shut down due to a logging operation in the area. Herm Eck answered that T3 was closed due to erosion at a number of spots. John Scannell added that an evaluation on whether or not the trail can be reopened has not been done at this time. A member of the public suggested rerouting the trail around the eroded spots.

Jeff Schaaf asked for clarification on which trails have been shut down. John Scannell answered that according to DCR's current Designated Horseback Riding Trails map in the Public Access Plan, only T3 has been closed. No other official trails have been closed. Any trail modifications could be discussed during the Ware River Public Access Plan update scheduled to begin later this year (after July). A request from the Commissioner's Office asked that a review of the trail system be conducted at that time. There will be public meetings held but no dates have yet been scheduled.

The T6 trail is not an approved horseback riding trail according to DCR's current Public Access Plan and map. A member of the public stated that if you go out to T6 you can still see the old MDC signs designating it as a horseback riding trail. Brett Russ mentioned that he has seen a map from the 2000 Ware River Public Access Plan that includes T6, as well as a map from the 2010 Public Access Plan which does not have T6 listed; he was looking for clarification on that. Margo Petracone mentioned that she remembers walking the T6 trail with DCR rangers prior to the year 2000 and helped to put up signage designating the trail for horseback riding. She thought T6 disappeared off the map when the Public Access Plan was updated in 2010.

Ed Yaglou asked if DCR would be open to working with outside groups to help with rerouting/rebuilding/reestablishing trails; acknowledging DCR's limited staffing in the Ware River Watershed. John Scannell answered that any agreements or discussions along those lines would have to occur during the review of the trail system as part of the Ware River Public Access Plan update.

A member of the public voiced her displeasure at the trail closures and about DCR's response to said closures.

There was discussion on the T3 trail and whether or not it is the same trail today as it was when it was approved over a decade ago; unauthorized offshoots may have been created over the years. It was unclear when exactly T3 was closed, but was determined that it was closed sometime within the last 1-2 years. A member of the public felt that it should be fairly easy to reroute T3 around the eroded sections.

Helen Viner commented that the watershed is not a park. That the purpose of the land taking was to help protect Quabbin's water supply.

A member of the public questioned why certain gravel roads in the watershed have been closed to bicycles and horses. Ken Canfield answered that during the spring time, many roads get closed during mud season as a preemptive measure.

A member of the public commented that he felt there was a lack of clarity and transparency on trail closures and how water quality degradation is measured and qualified.

A member of the public asked about past water quality reports and how that data correlates with trail closures; if there's evidence that these trails are causing degradation to the water quality. John Scannell answered that although water quality data is collected, it isn't collected at every point in the watershed. If there is erosion adjacent to a stream we work from the perspective that there is the likelihood of an impact to that resource.

A member of the public commented that our pathogen signage in the watershed is inaccurate. Our signs state that horses carry cryptosporidium and giardia. He mentioned that recent studies show that horses do not carry or contribute to these pathogens.

Bill Dobson commented on the process by which the Public Access Plan is updated. He claimed that his recent public records request was denied because the documents he requested are part of the planning process for the 2017 Public Access Plan. He said he requested a copy of the planning process for the Public Access Plan and was told he could not be given that document because it is in draft form.

A member of the public expressed displeasure that the only time changes to the trail system could be discussed would be during the Public Access Plan update and planning period. She was upset that trails were closed without first informing or consulting with the public.

Tom Bratko commented that land in the Ware River Watershed was taken by eminent domain and belongs to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; limiting economic and recreational opportunities for citizens in the area.

Brett Russ commented that there have been multiple citizen proposals offering to mitigate trail issues free of charge to DCR.

A member of the public was concerned that this past March DCR rangers told her that any road or trail that was gated off was not to be used; she felt she was given inaccurate information. There was discussion on which roads are closed seasonally due to mud season. John Scannell mentioned that other than T3, all other designated horseback riding trails should be open, except during mud season. Members of the public felt that in the past, horseback riding was allowed on designated horseback riding trails, even during mud season.

Jeff Schaaf requested that the trails discussion stay on the agenda for the next meeting.

### **Member Issues**

N/A

**Meeting End Time: 9:38 PM**

### **Upcoming WRWAC Meetings**

- Thursday, June 22<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at 7 PM – Barre Old Town Hall, Barre, MA 01005