

Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, January 19th, 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: Peg Frost

Hubbardston Historical Society:

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:

Herm Eck, Justin Gonsor, John Scannell

Members of the Public Present:

Harold Block, Bill Dobson, Robin Langer, Michael Wetherbee, Dean Zuppio

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Start Time: 7:01 PM

The committee is planning to host a retirement party for outgoing Quabbin Regional Director Bill Pula who retired on January 2nd, 2017. The Barre Mill Restaurant was suggested as the location; they host a buffet on Wednesday nights for \$13.99 per person. A cake should be bought in advance; the restaurant will cut and serve it. The tentative date would be sometime in early April. Justin Gonsor will get in touch with Bill to see when he is available and coordinate those dates with committee members. Bill Mucha will be coordinating plans with the restaurant once a date is set.

Approval of Minutes of Meeting on November 17th, 2016

Dick Williams made a motion to accept the minutes from the WRWAC meeting on November 17th, 2016. Helen Viner seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Watershed Protection Regulations – Regulatory Update discussion

John Scannell, regional director at Wachusett Reservoir, is currently serving as acting regional director at Quabbin Reservoir until the permanent regional director position is filled.

John Scannell gave the committee an update on the Watershed Protection Regulations. When Governor Baker took office, one of his directives was for all

state agencies to complete a review of their regulations. That review was completed and presented at a public meeting. No changes made to the regulations; clarifications were made in a few places. The review is currently in the final stages of approval and likely to be reenacted mid-February. The regulations were enacted in 1994 after adoption of the Watershed Protection Act of 1992 and have been implemented ever since.

Tom Bratko questioned who approves the regulations. John Scannell answered that the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs approves the draft with the final step of the process being filing with the Secretary of State.

Brett Russ asked about the specifics and breadth of the review. John Scannell answered that the directive was to review all regulations. Clarifications were made to existing regulations but no actual changes to those regulations occurred. The regulations apply to all DCR-DWSP Watersheds.

Dick Williams expressed concern that the committee was not informed about the public meeting that took place regarding these regulation reviews. He wished they would have known and had more of a chance to voice their opinions. Tom Bratko also mentioned that he would have appreciated the chance to give his input.

Dick Williams asked about when the next set of management plan updates would be happening. John Scannell answered that every 5 years a Watershed Protection Plan update is written; a new plan will be written in FY18 to go into effect in FY19. Land Management Plans are produced roughly every 10 years. In the past, individual plans were written for each of the 4 watersheds with their adoption cycle being varied. There is currently a draft of a comprehensive land management plan in place that will include all 4 watersheds under one plan. Having 1 comprehensive plan will allow for new regulations and policies to be implemented over all watersheds at a single point in time, rather than staggered over the course of multiple years. The land management plans are separate from the public access plans.

John Root questioned if there was anything in the watershed protection plan to allow the agency to respond to public inquiry; the forestry moratorium that happened a few years ago due to public concern was used as an example. John

Scannell answered that there isn't anything specifically in the regulations that would keep the commissioner from taking an action that they felt was necessary.

Snowmobile Access Issues – Review of Existing Access

Herm Eck talked about one of the grooming requirements that is listed in the existing Ware River Public Access Plan which states that, "Watershed Ranger escort is required for all grooming." The policy has not been enforced over the past decade or so; grooming has been happening without ranger supervision.

Grooming normally takes place during the evening hours as it is safer and easier. There were discussions on the difficulties of providing ranger supervision during those times. John Scannell mentioned that it would be unlikely that DCR would be able to provide staff/rangers to supervise grooming during the evening.

Dean Zuppio asked about the chance of obtaining some sort of temporary waiver to allow grooming to continue without ranger supervision. Matt Hopkinson suggested possibly grooming early in the mornings as opposed to at night.

There was discussion about loggers being allowed unsupervised access on watershed lands. Herm Eck and John Scannell talked about the permitting and bidding process the loggers take part in and mentioned that they are also under contract to do work for DCR.

Brett Russ asked if another entity or type of law enforcement officer other than watershed rangers could be allowed to supervise grooming operations.

Matt Hopkinson asked if the issue was more about the proliferation of watershed gate keys being given out and wanting to rein that in. He thought the original logic of the regulation was to have rangers simply to let the groomers in and out of the gates but not actually supervise during the grooming process, per se.

Bill Mucha mentioned that in the 15 or so years that grooming has been happening in the Ware River, he couldn't think of any problems or issues that have come up over the years in regards to grooming. He also suggested a process by which DCR staff could go back and monitor a trail that was said to have been groomed and make sure everything took place where it was supposed to.

Dean Zuppio expressed interest in sitting down with DCR staff in the future to discuss options going forward. John Scannell was receptive to talking about alternatives and coming to a reasonable solution.

Long Pond Boating Permits

Herm Eck reminded the committee that to put a boat with a motor larger than 25hp with a 4 stroke engine, or larger than 20hp with a 2 stroke engine requires a permit. A limited number are issued. All Long Pond boating permits are given out on the 3rd Wednesday in April at the Quabbin Visitor Center in Belchertown, MA. Applications are put online at the beginning of March and also disseminated to various town clerk offices, state representatives, and senators. This year, the date will be April 19th; to ensure you receive a permit you should show up at the visitor center by 7AM and get in line, as all permits are given out that morning. Permits are valid from Memorial Day – September 30th, from 10AM – 6PM.

Dick Williams asked if any boat ramp monitors will be stationed at Long Pond this year. Herm Eck mentioned that Paula Packard, Aquatic Biologist at Quabbin, frequently stops up there to talk with boaters and inform them about the self-certification forms we encourage boats to fill out and leave on their windshield. It is a quick questionnaire that helps to increase boater awareness of invasive plants and decrease their spread across different bodies of water.

Brett Russ talked about seeing a lot of ATV activity along the south end of Long Pond. Dick Williams suggested putting up trail cameras in some of these areas to try and prosecute violators. Tom Bratko talked about the difficulties of prosecuting someone for unauthorized ATV usage if not caught directly in the act. He had been in touch with an EPO about the troubles of using trail camera footage to prove guilt in a legal dispute.

Dick Williams asked if there were any plans currently in place to address invasive species at Long Pond. Herm Eck answered that there isn't currently a plan in place. Dick also mentioned that he had asked the Town of Rutland if they have a backup water supply for their town; he had suggested Long Pond as a potential source, although acquiring adequate permits would be difficult.

DCR Organizational Updates

John Scannell reminded the committee that last fall, the then acting DCR deputy commission resigned. Since then, Commissioner Roy has since appointed two deputy commissioners. Priscilla Geigis was named DCR Deputy Commissioner for Conservation and Resource Stewardship. Nick Gove was named DCR Deputy Commissioner for Recreation and Operations.

Bill Pula, Regional Director at Quabbin retired in early January. John Scannell is currently overseeing Watershed Operations at Quabbin. The job has been posted and interviews will happen in the not too distant future; candidates will also have to go through full background checks, which can be time intensive. The new replacement would probably not be named within the next 6 months.

A transitional mapping team is meeting with Quabbin staff, partners, and other agencies to get their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities moving forward. Input on the skill sets needed for a good Regional Director will also be solicited.

Prison Camp Brush Cutting Update

Herm Eck mentioned that slight progress has been made regarding brush cutting around the Prison Camp. A meeting on the issue is scheduled to happen in February. Dick Williams and Helen Viner both felt that preserving these historical sites and ensuring they don't become compromised is important and should be a high priority.

Helen asked if the State Archaeologist is looking into the Prison Campy Cemetery. Herm mentioned how busy she can be as she is the only archaeologist for the entire state that deals with cultural resources. There was discussion about the need to mark the site, clear it out, and put up a fence around it. Helen had some ideas on potential grant money that might be available for this job. Herm will put Helen in touch with the State Archaeologist to discuss management options and grant opportunities.

Member Issues

Matt Hopkinson commented on a Telegram article he read that mentioned MassWildlife was looking to change regulations in some of their wildlife management areas which could potentially close public access on certain walking

trails. It was determined that public access would not be changing on any of these lands.

Dave Small mentioned that the working group that was formed in response to MassWildlife's proposal to establish a colony of endangered Timber Rattlesnakes on Mt. Zion at Quabbin Reservoir have scheduled their first meeting for January 30th at 6:30 PM at the Town Hall in Athol; Dave is a member of the working group. The meeting will be open to the public to attend and observe, but not to ask questions or give input.

Brett Russ had a comment about the Sept. 15th, 2016 WRWAC Meeting. He was concerned over suggestions by committee members on methods of raising funds for DCR's maintenance budget. He thought committee members had suggested extracting and selling off field stones from stonewalls, increasing sand and gravel extraction, and adding solar/wind farms on watershed lands as methods of raising money. He wanted to be sure that he was on record as being against raising money in those ways. There was discussion about the issue and determined that it would not be legal for DCR to use any of those methods to generate funds. Everyone on the committee seemed to be against raising money in those ways as well. Comments about fund raising at the September meeting may have been said in jest and taken out of context.

Dick Williams asked if there were any site walks planned for upcoming forestry operations. Herm Eck answered that there should be more proposals being brought to the committee around May/June. He also mentioned that there is the possibility of a controlled burn happening at the Barre Heath lot; a burn plan has been developed for the site. The committee was interested in having a burn boss come to a future meeting and give a presentation on the topic.

Meeting End Time: 8:09 PM

Upcoming WRWAC Meetings

- Thursday, March 16th, 2017 at 7 PM – Franklin Wood Studio, 232A Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543 (Behind Police/Fire Station)