

**Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**Thursday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018**  
**7:00 PM**

**Location:** Rutland Free Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543

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

Massachusetts Council of Sportsmen: William Lebel

Alternate: Mike Moss

Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs: **John Root**

Alternate: Dave Papale

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

Alternate:

A Rod and Gun Club: Joe Cataldo

Alternate: Bryan 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: **Bill Mucha**

Alternate: **Lee Dougan**

Rutland Historical Society: Helen Viner

Alternate:

Massachusetts Wildlife Federation: (group disbanded)

Alternate:

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:**

Dan Clark, Herm Eck, Justin Gonsor, Leo Roy, John Scannell

**Members of the Public Present:**

Michelle Arsenault, Lydia Barter, Christine Beriau, Alf Berry, Tom Brent, Leslie Choquette, Anthony Craig, Keith Davies, Lexi Dewey, Bill Dobson, Den Duval, Steve Eckelkamp, Lisa Ferro, Anne Gobi, Dennis Guberski, Mark Kraus, Paul Kresalck, Terry Lupien, Bill Lyons, Pete Mahoney, Ann McCrane, Larry Miller, Mike Nogueira, Chris Palin, Michael Priffi, Peggy Rott, Cindy Schlener, Lorraine Stewart, Brian Trimby, Trevor Vivrette, Jireen Walker, Diana Dupont-Walther, Douglas Walther

**Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting Start Time: 7:06 PM**

DCR Commissioner Leo Roy announced that Dan Clark will be the new Quabbin/Ware regional director. He also alerted that committee that Jonathan Yeo will be stepping down as director of the Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP). John Scannell will be taking over as acting director in his absence. He expressed his interest in hearing more about the public access concerns in the watershed.

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

John Root made a motion to accept the minutes from the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Dave Small seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

**Committee review of 2010 Ware River Watershed Public Access Plan; Suggestions for 2018 update**

Brett Russ stated his desire to have a more consistent balance between conservation and recreation in the Ware River Watershed (WRW). He noted that

DCR-DWSP, which oversees the Quabbin and WRW's, is managed differently than the rest of DCR. Off road bicycling is currently not allowed on DWSP managed land while it is generally considered an acceptable activity on trails at other DCR properties on trails, unless otherwise noted. He would like to see more of an alignment between DCR and DWSP policy. Those policies should be based on facts and balanced in their mission. He noted that the population around Worcester is growing and that there are very few trails in the WRW for people to use. He wants the committee to partner with DWSP to come up with fair, fact based policies for WRW lands. He considers people using the land to be an asset (reporting violations), not a risk. He talked about past water quality reports that mention specific issues impacting water quality (developer runoff, beaver dams, flooding, etc.); recreation has not been noted as impacting water quality. He stated that there is no evidence that supports non-motorized, passive recreation being any kind of risk to water quality on trails deemed sustainable. T3 and T6 were given as examples of trails that have been closed without notifying user groups first.

Commissioner Roy commented that the land in the WRW was purchased for watershed protection and because of that, it has a different kind of protection than the other lands that DCR manages. One challenge going forward is determining what that special protection means in this particular watershed. He spoke about the balancing act between maintaining conservation while also allowing recreation where it makes sense. The goal is to start the update process for the WRW public access plan later this year.

Tom Bratko referenced a powerpoint presentation given by Jonathan Yeo to the MWRA that listed the 'big 6' water quality concerns for the watershed system: bacteria, turbidity, pathogens, algae, chemical spills, and nutrient loading. He feels that recreational use of WRW lands is very minimal and the people who do use the land are helping to be on the lookout for unauthorized activities.

Dave Small cautioned that any impact from a given activity is increased as the number of people participating in that activity goes up. Programs/policies that are implemented can be difficult to curtail if necessary.

Margo Petracone commented on water quality monitoring throughout the system, asked where to find results from said monitoring, and asked how the

quality has changed since 2010. John Scannell answered that annual water quality reports are generated for each of the watersheds that outlines all the testing and monitoring that is done. There is a project being started to better gather data electronically and analyze long term trends going forward. The reports from 2014-2016 can be found online at:

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-watershed-water-quality-reports>

Tom Bratko stated that one of the problems in the watershed is lack of communication between the people who manage the watershed and the recreational users. The committee would like to see the new public access plan address protocol for closing/opening trails and to give reasons ahead of time if a trail closure is planned. He also reiterated that he would like someone from the committee be directly involved in the process of writing the plan. In the past, the committee was presented the plan after it had already been written. There is concern about past reasoning given for closing a trail, 'simply that it isn't on a map'; he wants a more scientific reason given in the future.

Commissioner Roy talked about the diverse process that DCR goes through when creating/laying out a trail. Considerations include archaeology, vernal pools, wetlands, slope, endangered species etc. Since a lot of time and effort goes into building a trail, we want to be sure that it is in the right place and will last for an extended period of time. This process should be outlined in the new public access plan. He also talked about successful collaborations DCR has had with other groups across the state in constructing trails.

Ed Yaglou added that he would also like to see the new public access plan address criteria for the sustainability of a trail into the future; ways to measure if a trail should/can be opened, closed, or created. Leo Roy commented that there is some time before the new plan is written and encouraged committee members to continue to point out specific issues they like or dislike about the current plan and what they would like to see in the new one. As an advisory committee, it may not be within their purview to have a committee member at the table when the plan is written. A member of the public reiterated support for DCR coming up with a set of criteria/specifications to satisfy in regards to reopening previously closed trails.

A member of the public commented on the problem of trails being closed before potential solutions are first thought of. She would like to see DWSP be more proactive in this regard and less reactive.

A member of the public expressed frustration over the closure of T3, asked about when it will be reopened, and what the plan is for mitigating the erosion issue on the trail. He noted that volunteer organizations have offered to help fix/reroute the trail free of charge.

Bill Dobson commented that he would like to see the people who will be writing the public access plan sit down with relevant stakeholder groups and committee members early on in the process. John Scannell mentioned that there were several user group meetings held before the writing of the 2000 access plan; so there is a precedent in place for that process.

Anne Gobi agreed that it was imperative to hear from user groups before the plan is written; she supported having a member of WRWAC work directly with those who will be writing the plan. She talked about the desire to increase communication and find better balance between resource protection and recreation.

Dave Small suggested holding a future WRWAC meeting to focus solely on trails. He would like to see DCR print out large maps to be hung on the walls so that everyone can start to get on the same page regarding where trails are located, which uses are allowed on said trails, outline where problem areas might be, and to help produce better maps for the 2018 access plan update. John Scannell agreed on the idea. It was decided that this meeting would be held on Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup> at 7PM at the Rutland Free Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543. Bill Dobson stated that NEMBA has mapped just about every trail in the watershed and has details on said trails. Bill will bring that map to the April meeting. A member of the public asked that the trail map from the 1998 draft public access plan be brought to the meeting. Jeff Schaaf added that it would be good to have a set of criteria from DCR in regards to what is acceptable vs. unacceptable regarding a trail in the watershed in advance of the April meeting. A member of the public commented that it might be a good idea to have different criteria when evaluating a trail that is frequently used vs. a trail that is hardly ever used. Commissioner Roy noted that a walking trail through the forest is evaluated

more from an environmental/sustainability standpoint than from how much use that trail gets.

Robin Langer commented that in the 2010 public access plan the bicycle and automobile maps are one and the same. He would like to see separate automobile and bicycle maps produced for the new plan.

Margo Petracone mentioned that she would like to organize a day or two where DCR staff could walk a number of trails with WRWAC members and everyone could see the trails firsthand together. This could happen sometime after the April trail meeting. A member of the public commented that they would like to see a trail be walked in person before any final decision is made about that trail.

A member of the public noted that there is an upcoming MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife public meeting scheduled for February 6<sup>th</sup>. The main topic of that meeting will be in regards to dog regulations, specifically to amend and establish rules relating to the leashing of dogs and the restraint of domesticated animals on MassWildlife wildlife management areas. These regulations will not apply to any DCR owned wildlife management areas.

Brett Russ asked about a series of signs in the watershed that were put up within the past year. The wording on the signs originally stated "trail closed to all access" but were then subsequently changed to "area closed to all access." He was looking for clarification why the wording was changed and what difference the wording means for the public going forward. Commissioner Roy agreed that the signage in the area can be confusing and that this issue should be addressed in the access plan update.

### **Discussion of possible changes to legislature regarding Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee**

Tom Bratko noted the legislation that created the committee mentions specific user groups to be on the committee. However, some of those groups have since disbanded and are no longer active. He questioned how the committee would go about adding new representative groups. Anne Gobi answered that she thought a legislative change would first need to happen; she will double check the legislation. The committee is planning to draft a proposal for Anne by early April,

being sure to list which groups are no longer around today and which groups would like to be added.

### **Member Issues**

Brett Russ asked about the brush operation happening around the Oak Hill area. Herm Eck answered that the operation is still in progress but they are waiting for the snow to melt first.

**Meeting End Time: 8:26 PM**

### **Upcoming WRWAC Meetings**

- Thursday, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 7 PM – Rutland Free Public Library (downstairs), 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543
- Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 7 PM – Rutland Free Public Library (downstairs), 280 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543