



## **WSCAC Meeting**

Location: John J. Carroll Water Treatment Plant  
Marlborough, MA  
December 10, 2019—10:00 A.M.

### **Members in Bold in Attendance:**

**Michael Baram, WSCAC Chair**  
**Whitney Beals**  
**William Copithorne, Town of Arlington**  
**Steven Daunais, Tata & Howard**  
Andrea Donlon, CT River Conservancy  
**Gerald Eves, Trout Unlimited**  
**Bill Fadden, OARS**  
Bill Kiley, BWSC

**Paul Lauenstein, NepRWA**  
**Martha Morgan, Nashua River Watershed**  
Martin Pillsbury, MAPC  
**Janet Rothrock, League of Women Voters**  
Bruce Spencer  
**Kurt Tramposch, Wayland Wells**  
**Roger Wrubel, Mass Audubon**

### **Non-Members in Attendance:**

Andreae Downs, WAC  
Lisa Gustavsen, DCR

Lexi Dewey, WSCAC  
Ace Peckham, WSCAC

### **WSCAC Business**

Michael Baram opened the meeting. Lexi Dewey shared with the committee Kurt Tramposch's minor corrections to the November meeting minutes, and Michael asked for any other comments. When none were forthcoming, a motion was made, seconded and the minutes were approved.

Ace Peckham asked all committee members to be sure to submit their Conflict of Interest forms and travel vouchers as soon as possible.

Michael mentioned that two more items on the agenda (the Water Supply Protection Trust meeting and the December Executive Committee meeting) were both canceled, so the committee will receive updates at the January 14<sup>th</sup> WSCAC meeting. Michael also emphasized that the January meeting will be focused on topics of interest to WSCAC members. He mentioned several specific issues that WSCAC staff have emailed to members, including a risk and resilience assessment of the MWRA system, health issues regarding plastic liners in wastewater pipes, PFAS in public water systems and sludge, timber sales in watershed forests, a proposed bill to prohibit the use of glyphosate, and proposed drought legislation. Roger Wrubel mentioned his interest in learning more about the MWRA's continuing efforts to limit their carbon footprint.

Lexi updated the committee on the recent December Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee (QWAC) meeting where Dan Clark announced that MWRA has installed a well in at the Quabbin Park Cemetery. Next summer there will be spigots available to the public for watering plants. In response to Kurt's question, Lexi confirmed that the water is not potable and only available for plants.

Lexi then introduced Lisa Gustavsen, Department of Conservation and Recreation – Division of Water Supply Protection (DCR-DWSP) Assistant Regional Director for the Quabbin & Ware River Region.

Lisa mentioned that she had presented to WSCAC at the early stages of updating the Ware River Public Access Management plan about a year ago. She offered a brief recap of the process: the last Ware River Access Management Plan was issued in 2009, and the goal is to complete the updated plan by end of 2019, though it will probably be completed by the end of January 2020.

The revision process began at the Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee (WRWAC) meeting in April 2018. To improve clarification of DCR's watershed policies to direct abutters to watershed lands and the public, DCR began by developing management principles for various stakeholders including hikers, bikers, horseback riders and snowmobilers. In December 2018, DCR posted a public survey regarding uses of the watersheds. They received approximately 1,000 responses.

The major themes of the survey were as follows:

- 1) Activities: The top three activities on watershed lands include hiking or walking (70%), biking or mountain biking (40%), and dogwalking (30%).
- 2) Location: 100% of the respondents said that they use one of the rail trails (there are two rail trails: North/South, aka the Ware River Rail Trail, and East/West, aka the Central MA Rail Trail). People also recreate on watershed land in Rutland and at the Barre Falls Dam (owned by the Army Corp of Engineers) in Hubbardston.
- 3) Conflicts in land use: 83% of the respondents said there were no conflicts. The next highest ranked conflicts were ATVS (illegal in watershed lands), trash, and unleashed dogs.
- 4) Problems experienced: lack of restrictions and/or too many restrictions (about 50% for each), concerns about boating, aquatic invasives, trail usability, parking and road conditions.
- 5) Type of illegal activities witnessed: illegal ATV use, dirtbikes, trash, and unauthorized trail use including tree cutting by mountain bikers.

After the survey was completed, DCR staff met regularly with WRWAC and stakeholder groups and engaged in a Public Engagement Plan, which included issue identification and solution analysis. This process ran from winter 2018 through spring 2019.

Michael asked how the stakeholders were sorted. Lisa explained that they started with Ware River Advisory Committee members (a horseback riding group, a snowmobiling group, a biking group, and the Sierra Club). They offered "office hours" for two months, where the plan was discussed with stakeholder groups and feedback was requested. The process involved both clarifying expectations, and the reiteration of DCR principles and goals. DCR continued to meet with the groups over the spring and summer, and a DCR facilitator was used to help the process run smoothly. Additionally, DCR staff sat down with local police departments (who assist with emergency situations that occur on the watersheds), the MWRA, DCR State Parks, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and the DCR commissioner.

In the summer and fall of 2019, DCR staff began working on watershed maps, allowing trails to merge and creating multi-use rather than single-use trails. Previously, trails for specific uses (horseback riders on one trail, mountain bikers on another), were separate, but based on feedback from the survey and stakeholder discussions, DCR took a different approach and merged trail uses. Trail users requested connections with other trails to increase accessibility. The map-making process was and is complicated, but staff are hoping that a draft map will be completed next month.

Lexi asked how the new multi-use trails will work, and whether there will be conflicts. Lisa responded that the stakeholders confirmed that they are willing to work together, so DCR will be holding them to that. Bill Fadden asked if cross-country skiing is allowed, and Lisa said that yes, it's considered in the same category as pedestrian access at Ware River. It is, however, still prohibited at the Quabbin, as well as snowshoeing. Bill Fadden also asked about ebikes. At this time, ebikes are considered motorized vehicles, but a policy for this is still in discussion.

Michael asked how the DCR public access information is shared with watershed towns. WRWAC consists of selectboard members from each town. The expectation is that members attending the meetings will share the information with town boards. Kurt mentioned that when the MWRA opened up trails in his town, there were many meetings that involved the planning board to ensure safety around road crossings. Lisa said that aside from the Midstate Trail, there are no town-owned trails in the Ware River Watershed. All trails are internal DCR property and do not cross public roads. The rail trail is the only exception, and it has a road-crossing system in place. Kurt asked whether road access wouldn't be useful in terms of connectivity, and Lisa said it might, but it's beyond the scope of this project.

Roger Wrubel asked about the type of trail surfaces. Lisa said there are three types, TRG (trap rock gravel), paved, and gravel.

Martha asked whether hunting is allowed on Ware River Watershed lands. Lisa said yes, but not on Sundays. Hunting will be excluded (along with other activities) around the intake zone.

Michael asked if there are any railroad crossings. Lisa responded that there is one railroad spur, but it crosses very little of the watershed land. Kurt commented that a map he'd seen of the Ware River Reservoir has a landing strip noted on it. Lisa said that the landing strip, which is probably private, is actually not on the watershed.

Janet commented that it doesn't seem right to treat ebikes like cars, and that a lot of trail uses seem incompatible with other uses – horses and dogs, for example. Roger commented that most of the trails are actual gravel roads, so they should be wide enough to accommodate all uses. Kurt said that the worst issue is ATVs, and horseback riding during a thaw, because once the ground refreezes, the trail is nearly impassible. He also mentioned that bike associations are working to separate ebikes from regular bikes. Lisa said that in her personal experience, ebikes can lead to heavier use in more protected areas, but that it's very complicated issue.

A question was posed about the hours of access, which are changing from 24/7 to opening at one hour before sunrise and closing one hour after sunset. Lisa explained that the proposed change would amend the hours of access to match with all DCR parks. Lexi asked if there was any pushback on the proposed opening and closing hours. Lisa said there has been some, mostly from people who want to go for a walk or run after getting home from work in the winter, and also from snowmobile groups, because they tend to groom the trails at night. DCR is considering a permitting system or allowing certain exceptions. Kurt commented there might be some concern from dogwalkers as well, again from people who arrive home from work after dark. Lisa agreed, and also pointed out that there are some new limitations on dog walking, restricting dogs to be on leashes of 6 feet or shorter, to match DCR policy. Kurt asked if the rail trail will have reduced hours as well, and Lisa said it's not yet determined given that the Central Mass rail trail is separate from DCR lands. Andreae shared that cycling commuters have successfully lobbied for trails to remain open later, since it gets dark early in winter.

Michael asked about the timeline, and Lisa said the next step is to finish the draft plan and review it internally by early January. WRWAC will see the draft plan and maps in advance of their January 19<sup>th</sup> public meeting. A 30 day public comment period will follow. After the comment period is over, DCR will review comments and then release a finalized plan and implementation schedule.

Paul asked about long-term staffing for enforcement, and if watershed rangers are armed. There are currently 9 full time rangers who work 7 days a week, 2 shifts a day. There will be an increase in full-time staffing over the next few years, up to at least 13 rangers. They are trained extensively, and do not carry weapons. State, local, and environmental police are available for assistance.

Kurt asked if there are ever any squatters, and Lisa said yes, there are some. Currently, they are encouraged to move along, but once the new time restrictions are in place, night access will be prohibited without a special permit.

Lisa said that DCR will keep WSCAC informed of any new information as they move ahead with the plan, and she opened the floor up for any final questions.

Kurt asked about unintended impacts on private property owners and the proposed new trails. DCR works to keep abutters aware of any changes and important information. The trails should not affect abutters, since private trails are not allowed in any scenario – no trails can start or end on private property. Michael asked, if abutters do not want one of the new proposed trails near their property, whether there's any recourse for the property owner. Lisa said the plan will include room for abutters to request modifications. Roger, Kurt, Michael, and Whit had a discussion about the impact of new trails on visitor traffic.

Paul asked about group access, and Lisa said they are creating a group access permit process. Lexi asked if mountain bike groups were still riding on unauthorized trails. Lisa said that the rangers have been working to reduce these unauthorized uses. Additionally, word has gotten out about the proposed changes to public access. The biking community wants trails to be kept open and are now working with rangers and with DCR staff to stop unauthorized uses. Paul commented that WSCAC has been concerned in the past with unauthorized trails, so it's great that bikers are now self-policing. Lisa also noted that DCR is developing an app that will show whether the user is on an authorized trail. Signage is also being improved.

Lexi and Whit commented on the amount of work and outreach DCR staff have committed to updating the plan. Lexi also asked about the use of fines or citations for violations, and Lisa said that rangers can issue tickets as of about six years ago, including the ability to issue parking citations. The amount ranges from \$25-\$300. Whit asked if citation numbers are publicized, and Lisa said there is a lot of conversation on social media about this topic. Andreae suggested including the citation amounts on DCR signs. Kurt asked if professional dog walkers could use watershed lands, and Janet asked if there is any limit to the number of dogs someone could walk. Lisa said that commercial activity is banned, but there is currently not a limit to the number of dogs a person can walk. Martha asked whether there are dog waste bags and disposal stations. Lisa explained that DCR's policy is carry-in, carry-out, so there are no trash cans on watershed lands. There are several portapotties on the rail trail, but no current discussion on adding more.

Lisa was thanked for her presentation.

Lexi announced that once the Ware River Public Access Management draft plan is available, the Executive Committee will review it and bring it to the committee for discussion. Ace reminded the committee to submit travel vouchers and conflict of interest forms before the end of the month.

The meeting was adjourned.

**WSCAC will next meet on January 14, 2020, at 10:00 am at the MWRA Facilities in Southborough, MA. Please [visit our website](#) for more information on this meeting.**