



WSCAC Meeting

Location: Held virtually

June 14, 2022 – 10:00 am

Members in Bold in Attendance:

Jerry Eves, WSCAC Chair
Michael Baram
Whitney Beals
William Copithorne, Town of Arlington
Steven Daunais, Tata & Howard
Andrea Donlon, CT River Conservancy
Bill Fadden, OARS

James Guidod – MWRA Advisory Board
Bill Kiley, BWSC
Paul Lauenstein, NepRWA
Martha Morgan, Nashua River Watershed
Martin Pillsbury, MAPC
Janet Rothrock, League of Women Voters
Bruce Spencer

Non-Members in Attendance

Lexi Dewey, WSCAC staff
Andreae Downs, WAC staff
Ginny Dautreuil, DCR Natural Resource Analyst
Cecelia Hampton, MWRA Advisory Board Intern

Katie Ronan, MWRA Project Manager, Environmental Permitting
Michael Cole – MWRA Budget Director
Mandy Hart, WSCAC staff
Steven Ward, Retired DCR Forester

Lexi Dewey opened the meeting and welcomed WSCAC members, friends and presenters to the virtual June 14, 2022 WSCAC meeting.

Lexi took attendance and confirmed the number of members present. A quorum was reached. Lexi then called for a vote on the May meeting minutes. James Guidod made the motion to approve the minutes and Paul Lauenstein seconded the motion. All members present voted to approve the minutes.

A brief announcement was provided by Lexi on potential changes to the open meeting law. If the legislature does not extend the ability to continue meeting virtually beyond July 15th, a quorum of seven members will have to be physically present at monthly WSCAC meetings. We will be monitoring this issue to determine the outcome. We hope hybrid meetings will be extended until December 15th. A potential hybrid meeting place could be at the MWRA facilities in Southborough, but they are not yet prepared for in-person meetings.

Lexi noted that WSCAC can vote to pass a bylaw today saying that we will continue to hold hybrid meetings if an extension by the legislature is passed on July 15th. She asked members for feedback.

The general consensus was that, if members do not take a vote on this issue now, there may not be another opportunity with a quorum for a vote at the next meeting in September if the July extension is not permitted.

Members agreed that it is best to do the vote now, as to eliminate the possibility of not having a quorum to vote on this in the future.

Lexi then called for a motion to adhere to the extension of hybrid meetings, should they pass. Martin Pillsbury made a motion for approval, and Jerry Eves seconded the motion. All members present approved and the vote was passed.

MWRA Advisory Board Briefs-James Guid:

- The Advisory Board has experimented with their first hybrid executive committee meeting. There were some things that were convenient and some annoyances, but they are happy to offer advice and help as we hope to eventually move to in-person meetings.
- The Advisory Board has given their comments and recommendations on the MWRA's FY23 CIP and CEB to the MWRA Board of Directors. They are recommending a rate of 2.85 percent. The budget will be voted at the June 22 Board of Directors meeting.
- The Advisory Board is focusing on MWRA staffing levels and have recommended a staffing study to explore possible options to address staffing shortages.
- An in-person field trip in August is under consideration. Details to follow.
- NPDES permitting is still on the front burner. The Advisory Board is exploring legal firms to address the potential of co-permittees included in the Deer Island permit process.
- Expansion of the annual water the rate survey in ongoing.

MWRA Briefs-Katie Ronan:

- WSCAC and WAC contracts will be going to the MWRA Board for a vote on June 22nd.
- The MWRA is getting ready to move staff from the Charlestown Navy Yard to Chelsea or Deer Island by May 2023. Many improvements are scheduled to renovate the Chelsea facility in the coming months.
- The annual Consumer Confidence Reports is in the mail to all residents in MWRA communities. The report can be found on the MWRA webpage as well.
- Staff are working on expansion of the water system, and exploring system capacity expansion to the North and South Shore. The legislature provided \$300,000 dollars to complete a report on this issue, due in December.
- Staff met with CVA communities last week to keep these relationships updated.
- Environmental justice initiatives are a prominent topic for EEA, so the MWRA is working on incorporating several new environmental regulations and principles into their programs and projects.

Lexi asked if the North and South System Expansion studies will be available to the public. Katie responded that there should be executive summaries for both, and these are intended to be public facing documents. They should be completed by the end of the calendar year. WSCAC will be able to review these.

Martin Pillsbury, WSCAC and WAC member, provided a short update on the MAPC's view of MWRA system expansion. He mentioned that MAPC and communities in the Ipswich Basin on the North Shore have been involved with a couple of initiatives where the option of system expansion has come into play.

On the North Shore, many communities in the Ipswich have been pulled together by Senator Bruce Tarr. They have formed a water resilience task force, which includes MAPC, to find ways to relieve stress on the Ipswich River. One option includes the possible development of a reservoir in Topsfield. There was a site set aside years

ago for a reservoir, but it was never developed. Another option is more communities in the basin joining the MWRA water system which would leave more water in the Ipswich River. Not all communities would be in position to use these options, but it is a positive development that communities are meeting to discuss this important issue and creating the political will to work together.

Martin added that Hamilton could be in for a swimming grant that includes six neighboring communities to look at ways of connecting them through an ad hoc way of transporting water to more surrounding communities North of Beverly and Salem, Senator Tarr has gotten one hundred thousand dollars earmarked for approval last fiscal year and is hoping to get a consultant to look into a Topsfield reservoir in more detail and see what kind of interconnection details and treatment would be needed to make it happen. South shore and MAPC has been involved for years at looking at what's going on at Union Point and has been involved in a peer review of MEPA that entails 3 to 4 thousand new housing units that have been on the table for 15 years. These have not yet been built, mostly due to water and wastewater issues. Previous studies of this show that the MWRA is the best option for this. It may not be the focus, but is worth exploring.

James informed members that system expansion will be discussed by the advisory board this week regarding the entrance policy on new communities, involving removing the entrance fee for a certain period of time to make it easier for new communities to join. After Martin asked if there is likely to be a vote at this meeting, James confirmed that there is likely to be a vote unless a lot of new information is presented to induce further discussion on the topic.

Martin said "MAPC is preparing heads to all different agencies involved and staking out interest in that with a couple caveats of greenhouse gas implications.

Lexi called for any questions on James or Martin's discussion.

Bill Kiley asked, "Do we need much of a pipeline to connect to Weymouth. Is there a way to connect to the existing pipeline, or would additional pipelines be needed?"

Katie responded that this is one of the things the study is going to look at, and there are preliminary options that may involve less pipeline, and studies to see what would be needed in order to supply south shore communities, and find about the amount of pipe would be necessary.

Lexi asked if the South tunnel would be required and Katie said that this is further South than that, so the tunnel doesn't specifically get to the South shore communities as this point.

WAC Briefs: WAC is working on comments to the legislative task force that is putting together legislature next in response to the PFAS report. There is a lot happening on the PFAS front and on non-flushable wipes as well that is causing a large current issue. They are still trying to get legislation on non-flushable wipes out of ways in means in order to bring it to a full vote. Andreae added that if anybody has not yet written a letter, WAC has a template that can be provided to advocate for it be moved out of ways and means.

A presentation was given on the October 7th meeting on combined heat and power and the that the MWRA has a possible way of generating electricity as well as continuing to make the best use of digested gas in order to mitigate some of the electrical cause by rearranging the process. There is talk of having another meeting on PFAS regulations along with TRAC and inviting EPA or EEP to discuss those regulations.

Deer Island will likely have a new NPDES permit by September, and much of the June WAC meeting was spent on identifying comments to submit.

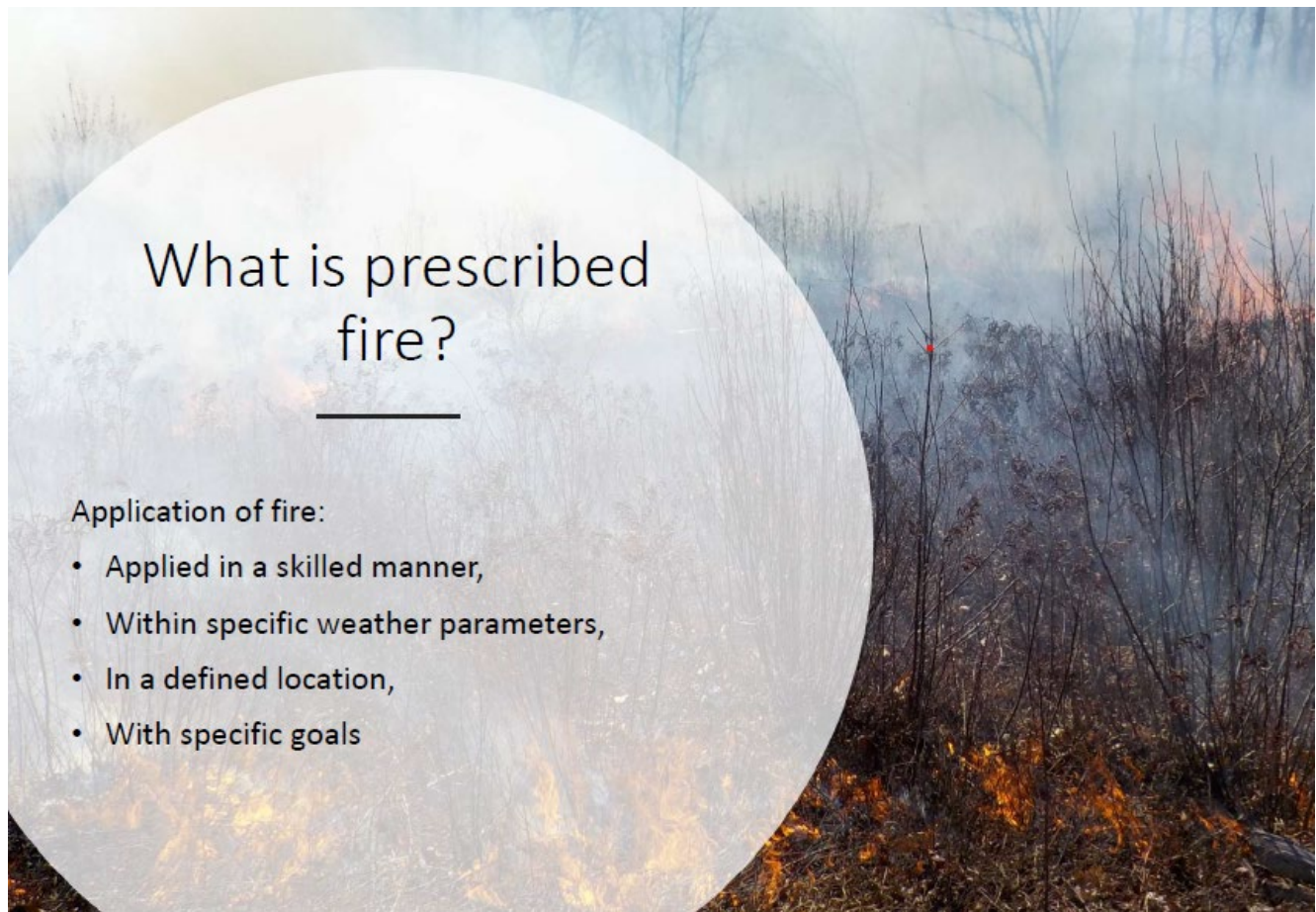
Lexi informed members that she and Andreae are discussing several topics that may be of interest to both WSCAC and WAC members for the upcoming year.

No more questions or comments were brought forth, so Lexi invited DCR staff member Ginny Dautreuil to begin her presentation.

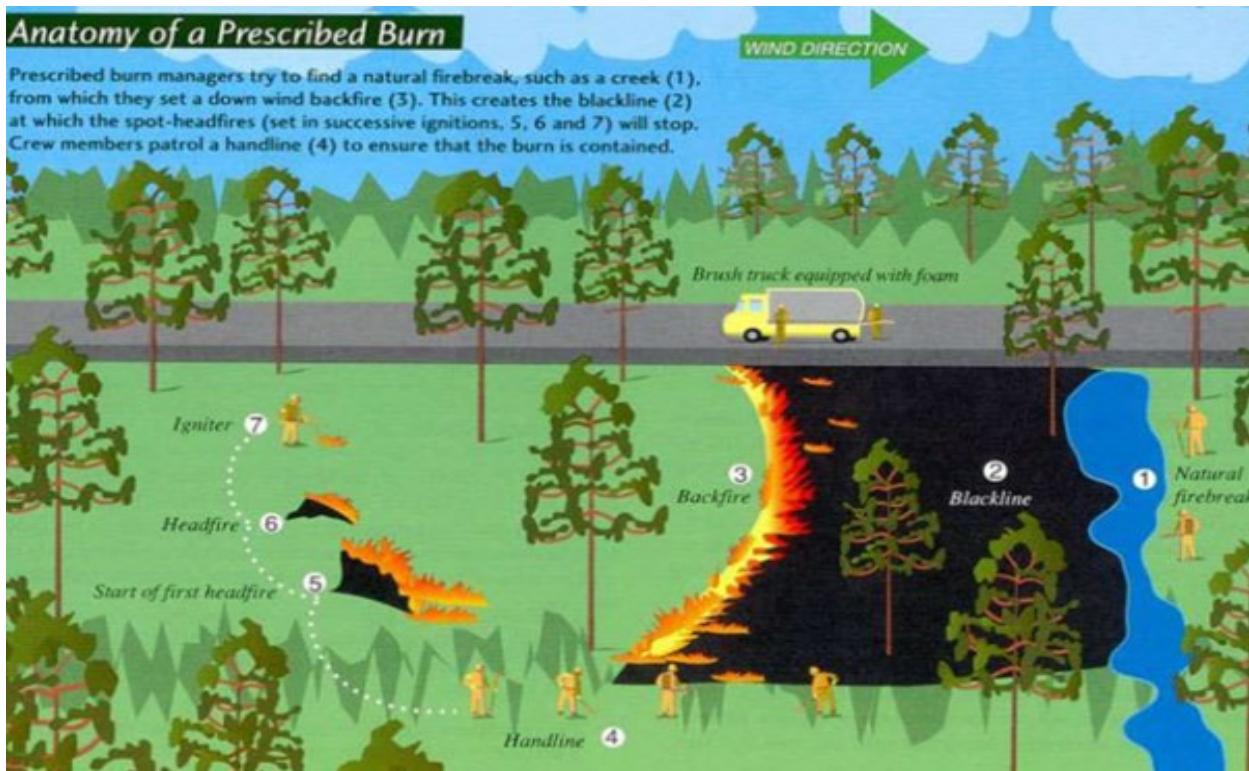
Ginny Dautreuil is a DCR Natural Resource Analyst and works on the prescribed burn program. She also does aquatic surveys involving invertebrate species.

Ginny began with, “Thank you for having me. It’s always fun to talk about fire and the use of it for landscape goals.”

Prescribed fire is the application of fire with specific objectives and goals. It can determine where, when, and how a fire is implemented and the specific weather conditions that it can be conducted under. It is always conducted by personnel that have national standardized training. DCR fire control implements prescribed burnings, and works with several agencies including the Division of Fish & Wildlife and local fire departments.



Below is an illustration of how fire can be implemented. Fire breaks are used where fire will be applied, and there can be a hard break in certain areas such as a paved road and breaks dug into the ground with tools.



A huge part of the planning process is developing a burn plan. It is based on wildlife fire format. It is a comprehensive burn plan including a description of the area, objectives, how fire implemented and how it will be monitored. The plan is extremely thorough and goes through a formal process with technical review by third party which is an excellent opportunity to learn more about very interesting part of process. It takes current fuel models and weather parameters that gets run through fire monitoring software to predict how the fire will react to the surrounding area and to find out how protect adjacent units if the fire break didn't work.

<h2>Burn plan</h2>	
Element 1 Signature Page	Appendices
Element 2A Agency Administrator Ignition Authorization	Appendix A: Maps: Vicinity, Project or Ignition Units (or both), Optional: Significant or Sensitive Features, Fuels or Fuel Model, Smoke Impact Areas
Element 2B Prescribed Fire Go/No-Go Checklist	Appendix B: Technical Reviewer Checklist
Element 3 Complexity Analysis Summary and Final Complexity	Appendix C: Complexity Analysis
Element 4 Description of Prescribed Fire Area	Appendix D: Agency-Specific Job Hazard Analysis or Risk Assessment
Element 5 Management Goals and Burn Objectives	Appendix E: Fire Behavior Modeling Documentation or Empirical Documentation
Element 6 Permits, Notifications and Contacts	Appendix F: Smoke Management Plan and Smoke Modeling Documentation (Optional)
Element 7 Prescription	Appendix G: COVID-19 Risk Management Plan
Element 8 Scheduling	
Element 9 Pre-burn Considerations and Weather	
Element 10 Briefing	
Element 11 Organization and Equipment	
Element 12 Communication	
Element 13 Public and Personnel Safety, Medical	
Element 14 Test Fire	
Element 15 Ignition Plan	
Element 16 Holding Plan	
Element 17 Contingency Plan	
Element 18 Wildfire Declaration	
Element 19 Smoke Management and Air Quality	
Element 20 Monitoring	
Element 21 Post-burn Activities	



Below is an explanation of the importance of smoke management. Careful planning goes into accurately predicting where the smoke will go, and MassDEP permits are required. It is necessary to map out any sensitive receptors such as assisted living homes and schools and to notify neighbors.

Smoke Management

- Permits acquired through DEP
- Sensitive receptors and nearest neighbors mapped
- Use V-Smoke modeling to predict smoke impacts
- Day of burn: towers and roving smoke monitor(s) used to assess impacts of smoke.



Why use fire on water supply land? Current land management activities include timber harvesting, deer, beaver and gull management, mowing, and brush hogging. Prescribed fire is a one way to create an environment conducive to the growth of warm weather grasses in order to diversify both vegetation and wildlife species.

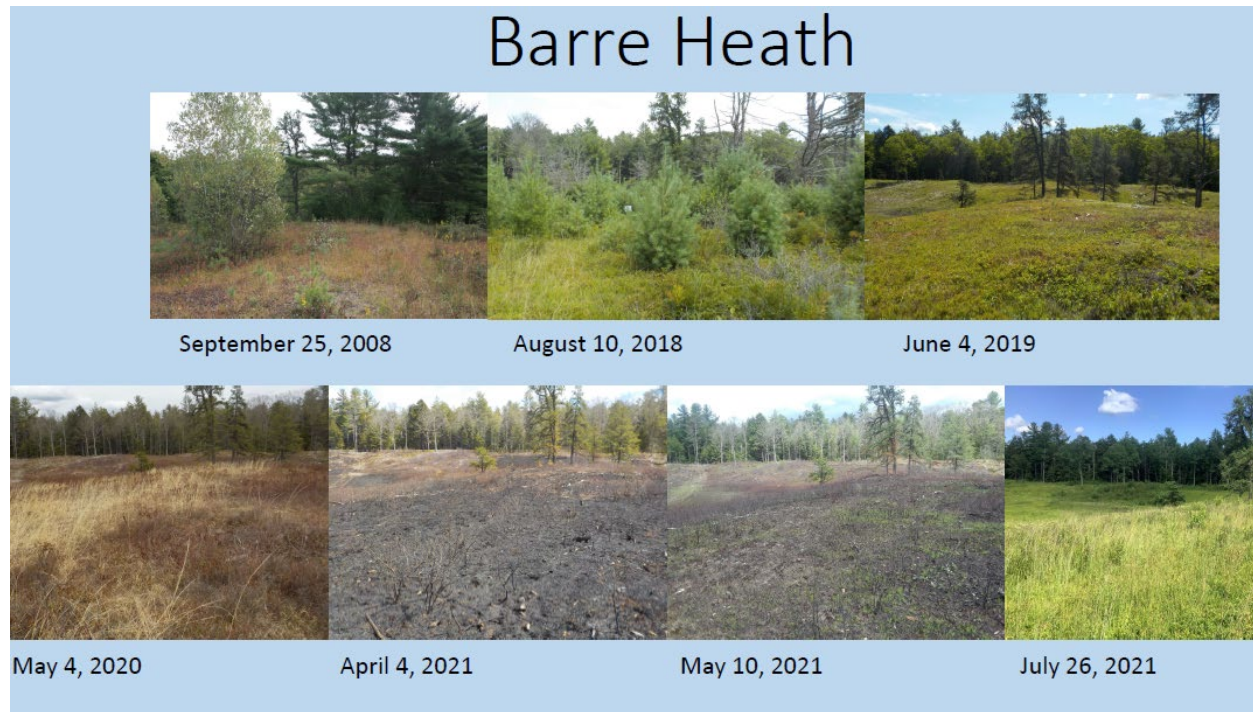


Another use is restoration of barren habitats noted in the land management plan and habitats that are globally rare on these sites. There are a number of rare plant species that can benefit. One plant that is rare, shown in the corner below, is purple milkweed. There are only three or four known populations of these plants in the state and they can exponentially increase after a prescribed fire.



One of DCR-DWSP restoration sites is the Barre Heath. This was considered to be a degraded heath habitat back in 2005. In 2008, there were some small mechanical treatments done on a small portion of the most intact areas. In winter of 2019, the land was prepped for a prescribed burn. About 20 acres were burned in 2021, which was

roughly half of heath. The fire reduced generalist species, leaf litter, and the fire promoted the growth of warm season grasses which allow rare species to grow.



After the prescribed burn is completed, DCR will switch to a maintenance regime that occurs at longer intervals. DCR is currently working on fields on the Prescott peninsula as potential prescribed burn sites. Photos taken in the mid-2000s show where there were previous prescribed burns as part of a maintenance regime. Benefits of prescribed fire allow better seed to ground contact. This can increase diversity of some of the herbaceous plants.



Prescribed burning can reduce fuel loads and understory vegetation, which can carry fire up into the canopy.

One other key point is that there have been some recent studies in South Carolina that have found watersheds that include prescribed fires as part of management have increased water quality and can alter the chemistry in ways that improve water quality. Some studies suggest it can reduce some of dissolved organic carbon and total nitrogen in those waters.

Ginny finished her presentation and invited members to ask questions.

Paul asked if Ginny could expand on how prescribed fire can enhance water quality.

Ginny responded that one of her colleagues is more versed in the water chemistry side, and that she would be happy to send along some articles that highlight those studies.

Bill Kiley asked, "Have there been other alternatives such as animal grazing to achieve the same goal and get some productivity out of it?"

Ginny said "I've heard of it in other areas. Currently I don't think we are allowed to use animals on watershed land. In other areas of the country they use them. On Martha's Vineyard there is a herd of goats that the land bank uses there as well. The fire is going to change the chemistry while the goats are unable to do that. They can use that in an areas where they can't use fire.

Lexi then asked if different species including natives have been documented at burn sites.

Ginny explained that they've been hearing, realistically, in our areas that they've been getting whip-poor-wills coming in. They are still doing vegetation surveys. They will have pre-burn surveys, and then during the summer, Ginny will do some of the post-burn surveys. Mass wildlife has been finding species in their areas that they haven't documented in 50 plus years, so those can seedbank for 50 years or more. They are a step ahead, so they hope to see that on their property end.

Steve Ward said, "On your slides explaining burn plans, you mentioned truck filled with foam. What about PFAS that seems to be an issue? Ware loved to use foam which sprayed everywhere, now with PFAS have you looked to see what sort of foam they have? It might be an issue. Will the habitats and burn plans ever be posted public online.

Ginny explained that that there are currently areas identified in the land management plan of 2017, but she would need to speak with her supervisor and Chief Celino on the process of posting them. Currently areas are identified in the land management plan of 2017. As far as burn plans, she would have to check with Chief Celino and supervisors on process of posting them.

Steve Ward countered that forestry operation is also supposed to be posted, so why not build support for it?

Ginny explained that they do have a website on the Barre Heath operation and have educational materials to explain to people why burning is happening and what the benefits are.

She added that they don't use foams but just water on their fire operations. They discuss tactics and techniques with the local fire department.

Lexi asked "Are there other plans or locations you're working on for next year?"

Ginny told the audience that they are almost done with the Prescott field's burn plan and are also looking on heath restorations in New Salem, and have already started that plan. They will also look into starting a burn plan for White Hall Rd. in Rutland along the bike path. They have three to five years after a timber harvest to implement a burn, so that leaves a two year window to start the burn plan process. They need to know when the harvest is finished and see how it is recovering since every area is different.

Lexi asked if they are still moving forward with the gravel pit at Barre Heath and Ginny explained that they are, and a road has already been completed.

Lexi also inquired about any turtle activity since the burn, but Ginny explained that there hasn't been anybody specifically looking out for that, as the survey is still under-way, but that there could be turtle eggs, although she hasn't heard specifically.

Paul Lauenstein said that we hear about wildfires in California associated with climate change, and is wondering about the fuel build up in Massachusetts as a result of fire suppression.

Ginny explained that it is definitely a concern, especially with watershed and invasive pests similar to out west such as lot of tree damage from different insects and pine scale. She would say that there is a bit of a buildup of fuel from prior suppression.

Lou asked about the duration of the burn at the Barre Heath and Ginny said it was a one day operation as most of the prescribed fires are. They then patrol it for a couple days to make sure all fire is out or until it rains. It will be similar in the upcoming Prescott burn.

Lexi asked if the fields to be burned at Prescott are for early successional habitat or a certain kind of regeneration.

Ginny said that maintaining the fields as open habitat, but doing those at different types of year can create more diversity. Benefits of warm season grasses, and lots of pollinators and insects that rely on warm grasses can diversify on a finer scale.

In response to Lexi's question about the frequency of maintenance, Ginny explained that every two to four years maintenance is done depending on the field, but it is site specific and intervals are on a case by case basis.

Lexi asked, "If we continue to move further into drought, soil moisture decreases. So if the KBDI level goes up, can you burn?"

Ginny said that is also site-specific and once KBDI is over that max level and soil is dry, they won't burn. There is a very small window of time with spring being optimal because soil moisture is higher.

Lexi said, with all the invasive species on watershed land, is it possible to do prescribed burning before logging operations to stop the spread of invasives?

Ginny said they have discussed this. Some invasives are more resilient and will come back after a fire. It is hard to treat invasives with fire alone, but it can knock them back quite a bit.

Ginny wrapped up her presentation and Lexi asked for questions upon its conclusion.

Paul wanted to remind everyone of the vote taken several years ago at a June WSCAC meeting at Quabbin that they voted to support the end of the three year moratorium on DWSP forest management on the condition that third party oversight be included. He wanted to bring this issue back to WSCAC's attention for further discussion given that DWSP has not agreed to green certification.

Lexi explained that the FY22 WSCAC Annual Report will include a discussion on this topic.

She said there will be no July WSCAC meeting, but we will update members on the upcoming Advisory Board field trip.

The meeting was adjourned.