



WSCAC Meeting

Location: Held virtually

January 11, 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 Guiod, 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, Retired DCR-DWSP Chief

Forester

Kurt Tramosch, Wayland Wells

Non-Members in Attendance

Lexi Dewey, WSCAC staff

Andreae Downs, WAC

Adriana Cillo, BWSC

Lexi Dewey opened the meeting and welcomed members to the virtual January 11, 2022 WSCAC meeting.

The November 2021 draft meeting minutes will be voted at the virtual February 8, 2022 meeting

Lexi provided the following briefs:

- The PFAS Interagency Task Force report to the legislature on potential policies and recommendations to address PFAS contamination in Massachusetts will be available in February. We hope to schedule a joint WAC-WSCAC meeting to discuss the report.
- MWRA Board of Directors information-Staff have been hit by the Covid surge and the MWRA is managing their way through it. They are meeting all regulatory requirements and deferring less critical maintenance that requires close contact. To reduce risk, only one person per vehicle and splitting muster times and locations.
- MWRA has reached a settlement with CSX Rail. The agreement is more comprehensive and favorable than the previous relationship with Pan Am. Track upgrades, inspections, lower speeds and no idling over the Wachusett reservoir are some of the changes noted in the settlement letter.
- The Combined Heat & Power Study is still undergoing internal review. We hope to have a joint meeting with WAC on this study soon.
- DCR-DWSP staff, except maintenance/labor, comes to work one day per week. Interviews are being conducted virtually for vacant positions. The new director at Wachusett is Kelly Freda. She has worked at Wachusett for over 20 years. First as a ranger, then in Environmental Quality.

Lexi mentioned topics for upcoming virtual WSCAC meetings:

- February-Metro Tunnel update
- March-Reservoir Operations and Water Quality
- April –Annual MWRA joint budget meeting
- May-TBD
- June-Barre heath tour (in person)

Member discussion topics:

- Wachusett rail

Members had a vigorous conversation regarding the proposed sale of Pan Am to CSX and the new settlement between MWRA and CSX. Michael Baram provided a thorough description of the settlement and answered questions from other members on the benefits of the settlement, federal preemption and whether the agreement precludes any future changes.

Several members asked about the hazardous materials that are moved by rail and the potential to learn more about the identification of these materials and options if a spill were to occur. Information on what is being shipped is considered sensitive and is not available to the public. It was noted that federal law limits the liability of any public carrier. The question was asked, what is the role of MassDOT in this case?

Members discussed the option of WSCAC providing further comment to the MWRA Board.

- Watershed forest management

Members had a detailed conversation about watershed forest management. Bruce Spencer discussed his recent email to members on two proposed forestry bills, the meaning of silviculture, and the effects of climate change on the forest.

He disagreed with the proposed legislation that promotes the prohibition of tree harvesting and associated activities on Massachusetts Public Lands that will result in significant carbon sequestration.

He noted that, “Silviculture is the art and science of tending forest to meet the goals of the landowner. Tending forest for watershed goals and carbon sequestration is not incompatible. Silviculture is like sculpture, it’s more important what you leave than take. Consequently always leaving high vigor trees with well formed stems and crowns and providing these trees with more space and resources will enhance carbon sequestration. Most MA Public Lands are older forest and many trees are of low vigor with little or no annual growth. Leaving high performing trees and trees that can respond to more resources enhances carbon sequestration. Equally important is using logging systems that are light on the land and have a balance of machines and humans plus no whole tree harvesting which is the opposite of a light method.”

With regard to the effects of climate change, he said, “A warming climate has energized fungal diseases causing mortality for sugar maples, pines and oaks. Man introduced diseases and insects are also causing increased mortality. The last gypsy moth infestation killed off 50,000 acres of oak forest from the Quabbin to Southeast MA. Forest reserves were not spared. Hemlock in late successional stands have been severely impacted by the hemlock wooly adelgid as have pines from needle cast fungi. The emerald ash borer and recently the spotted lantern fly have arrived to

feast on multiple forest species. And lest we forget invasive plants that change forest ecosystems in a negative way. All these negative forces decrease forest growth which means carbon sequestration is also decreased while carbon dioxide is increased from the dead rotting trees. Therefore our sculptured forest is one of diversity from the giants to the babies of many species done with a light touch on the land.” In addition, the forest operates on an annual solar budget and therefore there are limits on what can be taken. It’s more important what you leave, than what you take. Bruce noted that the continued use of heavy machines in logging operations destroy the ground.

Bruce and Whit Beals answered questions from members, and the committee discussed moving forward once again with promoting green certification for DCR’s watershed forest management program. Whit mentioned that the ten year review of the Forest Visioning process through EOEEA may not occur and even if it does, it does not include watershed lands. Members also agreed on the benefits of educating the public on forest management. Whit noted that the first recommendation of the STAC report in 2012 was a request to DCR-DWSP to write an executive summary to their very large Land Management Plan so that the public has a clear understanding of DWSP’s watershed forestry methods and goals. This has not been done. Andrea suggested inviting a member from the Nipmuck tribe to join WSCAC. Lexi will coordinate this effort with Andrea.

Whit recommended the NE Forestry website and looking at the article on exemplary forestry. <https://newenglandforestry.org/learn/initiatives/exemplary-forestry/>

The committee discussed writing a letter on the benefits of green certification and exemplary forestry methods. Lexi will coordinate a draft letter with Bruce and Whit.

- MWRA Advisory Board- Regionalization

James Guiod from the Advisory Board introduced the regionalization concept which is based on the opportunity to bring new communities affected by contamination issues, into the MWRA water system with financial assistance available from ARPA funds. There are two initial costs to joining the water system: The construction/infrastructure costs and the entrance fee. Does the option of removing the entrance fee serve to remove financial barriers for a community or group of communities to join the system? If one or several communities join, costs go down for all water system ratepayers because costs are spread over a wider group.

Members asked questions about a possible length of time that an admission fee waiver would last, how this option would affect communities that already paid the fee as well as potential future communities coming in to the system.

Paul Lauenstein discussed the contamination of a public drinking water well in Sharon and the town’s consideration of coming into the MWRA water system. The infrastructure cost, the admission fee and the corresponding higher water rates were discussed by the town. Ultimately, they decided to purchase a filter system for the contaminated well and remain with local sources.

Points were made by members including:

- The need for a donor basin report before more MWRA water is sold

- Renew the promotion of water conservation
- The importance of towns identifying types of contamination they currently have and working locally to address the manufacture and purchase of items (like artificial turf) that contain PFAS
- Contamination is possible in many places at the local level. The movement of hazardous materials by rail presents a bigger opportunity for contamination on a larger scale like the Wachusett Reservoir

In closing, Lexi thanked members for their participation and mentioned the importance of sharing information we received from DCR in November on the impacts from road salt.

The next virtual WSCAC meeting will be held on February 8, 2022 at 10:00 AM

The topic is an update on MWRA's Metropolitan Tunnel project.

The meeting was adjourned.

