



WSCAC Meeting

Location: MWRA Facilities
Southborough, MA
January 14, 2020—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 Tramosch, Wayland Wells

Roger Wrubel, Mass Audubon

Non-Members in Attendance:

Adriana Cillo, BWSC

Andreae Downs, WAC

James Guidod, MWRA AB

Lexi Dewey, WSCAC

WSCAC Business

Michael Baram opened the meeting and attendees introduced themselves. A motion was made to accept the December meeting minutes. The motion was seconded and the minutes were approved.

Lexi Dewey gave a brief summary on the January 9th WSCAC Executive Committee meeting, which included a discussion of WSCAC's meeting schedule and goals. She referenced a document sent out before the meeting which listed the following WSCAC priorities:

- **The MWRA water system:** Infrastructure projects, policies, programs which include system redundancy, dam and reservoir management, treatment, community programs including leak surveys, lead service lines, and policies including carbon footprint/greenhouse gas inventory
- **DCR-DWSP:** Watershed management through budgeting (MWRA), work plans, policies and programs including public access and recreation, deer hunting, fishing, water supply protection, forestry/land management, and wildlife policies. The partnership between MWRA and DWSP through the Water Supply Protection Trust board that votes the DWSP annual budget and provides oversight on DWSP programs
- **State water policy:** Water Resources Commission, Drought Management Task Force, MEPA, legislation, and assistance from watershed groups under the umbrella of the Mass Rivers Alliance

She then reminded members that any issues and topics need to fit into the ten meetings WSCAC holds per year.

Executive Committee Update

Lexi reviewed the DEIR comments WSCAC submitted on January 10 to MEPA on the proposed admission of Burlington into the MWRA water system. Burlington has Dioxane 1,4 contamination in 4 of its 7 public drinking water wells and the town has chosen the option of joining MWRA as a safe and reliable water source moving into the future. Burlington's ENF and DEIR have been noticed in the Environmental Monitor. The Secretary's Certificate will be available on January 17th. Burlington will then begin the Interbasin Transfer Act review process as implemented by the Water Resources Commission.

Lexi noted that the no updates were available from the MWRA Advisory Board. They do not meet in December. Updates on the WSPT meeting were not available at the exec. comm. meeting since that meeting date had been changed to January 13th.

The proposed glyphosate bill, PFAS and MWRA's position on statewide drought policies were briefly discussed and it was decided to address these at the January 14 full committee meeting.

Water Supply Protection Trust Update

Lexi provided a brief summary of topics covered at the Water Supply Protection Trust's January 13th meeting. The following were discussed:

- Deer Hunting Report – The hunt at Quabbin Park was cancelled. More science on the deer herd in the park was requested by the public. The annual hunt in the watersheds was held. Numbers on the deer taken will be available at our June meeting at Quabbin.
- Land Acquisition update – Seven recent watershed parcels were acquired. Four were acquired by fee and two are under watershed protection restrictions (WPR). Parcels are located in Petersham, Holden, Princeton, Shutesbury and Sterling. DWSP's Land Acquisition Model includes criteria that evaluate each potential parcel on its importance to water quality, its proximity to the intake, zoning, aquifers, sewer status and more.
- Forestry – WSCAC had raised concerns about a Quabbin forestry lot for sale in November where healthy oaks and Sugar Maples were marked for cutting. Whit Beals and Bruce Spencer attended the Trust meeting and presented their concerns to the Trust Board regarding the need for third party oversight and asking why DWSP is cutting healthy trees when there are thousands of acres of dead and dying trees in the watersheds.
- Ware River Public Access Plan – Draft will be available soon and a 30 day public comment period will begin. WSCAC will submit comments.
- Quabbin Park Cemetery Update – MWRA has paid for a non-potable well in the cemetery and will add irrigation pipe and 4 spigots in the spring. Water will be available for plantings and headstone cleaning.
- Road Salt Update – presentation available [here](#)
- DCR vacancy concerns were also voiced at the meeting, and it was revealed that every group (state parks, recreation, Bureau of Forestry etc.) of DCR falls under an overarching hiring cap. Although DWSP is funded separately by MWRA, when it comes to hiring, they're not considered a separate entity. DWSP needs 150 employees, currently has 132, and only two positions are currently posted, but the hiring cap affects DWSP in the same way as it affects all other branches of DCR. The Trust has agreed to write a letter to the state Administration and

Finance asking that DWSP be exempt from this cap. This news clarifies DCR's lag in hiring enough employees for DWSP, which has been a topic of discussion for a year or longer.

Some discussion ensued as to where the cap came from, and when it may be lifted.

Lexi reviewed several additional topics discussed at the WSPT's meeting, including the deer hunt (no numbers released yet). Kurt asked if there was any monitoring for the chronic wasting disease that deer can carry. Lexi suggested that Fish and Wildlife might, but she's not aware of any monitoring. Lexi gave an update on the Quabbin Park Cemetery, where DCR has drilled a (non-potable) well for irrigation purposes for next spring. Finally, DWSP, along with MWRA and UMass, is working on the problem of road salt contamination in groundwater. The Trust meeting had a presentation from Larry Pistrang, the head of Environmental Quality at Wachusett. DWSP has partnered with Baystate Roads on one training for watershed communities, which had positive reviews. Additional trainings will hopefully be held in the future. Lexi suggested that Larry come to a WSCAC meeting to present on the topic; members were interested. Discussion ensued on acceptable sodium levels in drinking water, and efforts in MA, NH and other states.

Discussion of Meeting Topics

Michael asked how members would rank today's assortment of topics in terms of importance for WSCAC's efforts:

- DCR forestry – current conditions and possible options
- PFAS discussion – MWRA status, MassDEP regulations, WSCAC comments and pending legislation
- DCR's Wachusett reservoir rail vulnerabilities and MWRA – DCR options
- MWRA discussion – evolving carbon footprint and potential effects on water and wastewater infrastructure from climate change (flooding and storm surges)
- Glyphosate use in MA – the effects of this herbicide on residential, commercial property and rights of way
- Drought legislation – how does a potential state-wide drought policy affect the MWRA?

Roger Wrubel asked whether any discussion topics proposed for this meeting didn't fit in with WSCAC's stated priorities. Lexi responded that MWRA issues take precedence. While the topics on hand for the day's discussion are within WSCAC's purview, there may simply not be enough time for WSCAC to address each one. Michael reminded the committee that the primary purpose of this meeting is to allow members an opportunity to express their interests and concerns, and to then determine how to integrate these into WSCAC priorities and potential meeting topics.

Discussion started on entrance fees to the MWRA and the multistep admission process. Additional questions were asked about current water usage in Burlington and other MWRA communities. Martha Morgan pointed out that Burlington uses 3 million gallons a day in non-essential outdoor water use, which is the amount that the MWRA is required to release to the Nashua River. MWRA has the capacity to release more water down the Nashua. The Nashua River Watershed Association has been asking for better flow management for many years.

Michael asked for a member to write up a one page summary on system expansion and ratepayer community management in the MWRA. Paul and Lexi will work together on this.

Michael reminded the committee that contamination cases like Burlington may continue in the form of PFAS, or road salt or other contaminants. Drought legislation, limits on water usage, and what the MWRA is able to request or require of its communities was heavily discussed (e.g. communities that are fully supplied by the MWRA are exempt from MassDEP summer water use restrictions, while partially-supplied MWRA communities with Water Management Act permits have restrictions from May through September. Paul brought up the need to protect MWRA mandated Swift River releases. The release of an additional 6mgd to the McLaughlin Fish Hatchery has increased flow in the Swift River as well.

Michael introduced PFAS contamination and other threats to our health and water supply. Kurt provided an introduction to the topic, and began by sharing that a PFAS primer was being offered later that week. He also commented that PFAS has caught nearly everyone unawares. Called “forever chemicals”, there are some variations of PFAS that are being regulated, while most others are not. PFAS are ubiquitous, used everywhere from Teflon to firefighting foams to ski wax. Most Americans have some PFAS in their bodies already. MassDEP has proposed regulations for Massachusetts lowering the current EPA level of 70 parts per trillion to 20 parts per trillion for drinking water. Comments are due on February 25th.

Michael asked what WSCAC would like to do about PFAS, starting with an MWRA focus. WSCAC could work to prevent the use of the chemicals or support lower levels in testing. Kurt and Janet, with help from Paul, are drafting a one-page summary on the topic.

The main concern for WSCAC is that PFAS are showing up in public water supplies other than MWRA such as Hudson and Westfield. MWRA lab manager Steve Rhode and MassDEP staff Mark Smith presented to WAC and WSCAC in October 2019 (viewable [here](#) and [here](#)). Detection is challenging, and health effects are cumulative over time. Exposure to high levels of the chemicals can result in cancer, immune suppression, liver and thyroid problems, harm to developing fetuses, and more. Some states are beginning to attempt to limit the levels allowed in drinking water, but funding, monitoring and testing methods are not definitive yet. Discussion included whether WSCAC could write a comment letter, and how to make this information more visible to the public. PFAS in sludge was mentioned and is a topic WAC is discussing. Members talked about as a potential increase in communities joining the MWRA due to contamination of public drinking water wells.

Andreae Downs explained that there are still a lot of questions regarding PFAS and its effect on human health. Treating wastewater is a thorny issue, because treating leachate results in a concentration of the removed substance, which then needs to be stored or disposed of in some way. PFAS has been detected in MWRA pellets formed from sludge and used as fertilizer. It is possible that the PFAS is coming directly from our waste products, just as we see heart, hormones and antibiotic medications showing up in groundwater from septic systems. WAC is following the topic closely.

Michael introduced the next topic, glyphosate (aka Round-Up). Is this herbicide showing up in water supplies? Kurt asked whether DCR uses it for terrestrial invasive control. Lexi confirmed that they are not. Roger said that Mass Audubon does not have a policy on it, and asked about clarification on the health effects of the chemical. It is supposed to degrade in a short amount of time, without residue remaining in the soil. Janet provided a reference stating that glyphosate increases risks of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. She pointed out that the application of RoundUp is widespread in the middle of the country, and is partially responsible for endangerment of monarchs. Paul mentioned an article from Salon Magazine that said 25 million pounds of glyphosate are applied to America’s agricultural fields

annually, and the glyphosate then finds its way into grain products like Cheerios. Michael said that WSCAC will make an inquiry about glyphosate use by DCR and MWRA.

Michael moved the conversation to climate change, including flooding, flood mapping, updating data, MWRA's carbon footprint, and more. Roger mentioned a previous suggestion he'd made, which was floating solar panels. James posed issues that this could cause including attracting birds, and maintenance efforts. The fact that Quabbin is a non-filtered water source means that maintaining the criteria for the annual filtration avoidance waiver with MassDEP requires stringent controls on activities allowed in the watersheds and on the water.

Roger then asked about MWRA's plans to reduce their carbon footprint. Lexi said she spoke with MWRA staff, and at this time they have not updated their statistics. Deer Island, with the largest footprint, is proposing a Combined Heat and Power project, which is designed to change how the produced methane gas is used. WSCAC and WAC are planning a joint tour of Deer Island in May to learn more about this project. Additionally, more information is available in the [MWRA Quarterly Orange Notebook](#), which provides data on MWRA's green infrastructure.

Michael suggested that Roger and Paul put together a one-page review for the committee to review.

Janet asked about what climate data MWRA uses, since data is changing constantly. She is concerned that decisions may be being made using older data that is no longer applicable. There will be an opportunity to ask MWRA staff this question at WSCAC's March meeting. Andreae mentioned that members may be interested in attending [WAC's meetings](#) on CSO's (combined sewer overflows) which focus on the impacts of flooding and stormwater into community sewers that flow to Deer Island.

Michael asked Bill and Janet to compile a short list of issues and possible solutions.

Jerry mentioned that rivers are dramatically affected by reservoir levels, both in times of drought, flooding and the occasional prolonged spilling at reservoirs.

Kurt mentioned that he'd like to see an increase in budget items for education and outreach, possibly holding workshops for the public, inviting communities that may be considering joining the MWRA. Additionally, he requested that public health impacts such as noise, dust and traffic be taken into consideration in greater scope during major MWRA building projects, such as the new tunnel redundancy project.

Michael and Lexi thanked everyone for the lively discussion.

The meeting was adjourned.

WSCAC will next meet jointly with WAC on February 11, 2020, at 10:30 am at the Waterworks Museum in Chestnut Hill, MA. Please [visit our website](#) for more information on this meeting.