



Minutes for October 29, 2024

RSC Representatives present: Marlies Henderson, Chair (Billerica), Emma Lord (NPS), Elissa Brown (Lead River Ambassador), Matt Brown (OARS), John Drobinski (Sudbury), Christine Dugan (Lincoln), Bill Fadden (Framingham), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Carlene Hempel (Concord), Laura Mattei (SVT), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt)

RSC Representatives absent: Ron Chick (Framingham), Dan Cook (Carlisle), Stephanie Koch (USFWS), Frank Richichi (Bedford-Alt)

Welcome and September Minutes

7:02 pm Council members introduced themselves. Ms. Henderson offered a correction she had to the September Minutes. Hearing no other corrections, Ms. Henderson motioned to accept the Minutes as amended, Ms. Lord seconded, and the vote passed 10-0 with one abstention.

River Ambassador Report

7:10 pm Ms. Brown said that she has been doing some water quality bacteria sampling for OARS. She shared a slide from Ben Wetherell which showed that OARS' bacteria measurements for SuAsCo sampling sites on the Sudbury and Concord rivers were very low. The Assabet sites were all below state standards. She mentioned that a few sites outside of the WSR have higher levels. Matt Brown said that an updated report and a bacteria dashboard will appear on the OARS website soon.

7:12 pm Ms. Brown said that in the past month she had attended a walk with the Friends of Woodlands and Waters, which was formerly the Friends of the Assabet River Wildlife Refuge. She also took a walk in Lowell led by John Macone, the Director of Policy and Education for the Merrimack River Watershed Council. The major concern in that area is the amount of Combined Sewer Overflows entering the river. She saw some herring in the river and learned that a few sturgeons had been sighted and documented this season. She attended a lecture by the Walden Pond Archeology Program. Displayed artefacts included chips associated with making arrow points (found at Walden Pond) and ceramics made by indigenous peoples (found in the general area.)

7:16 pm Ms. Brown attended the Partnership Wild and Scenic River (PWSR) Gathering at Jay Peak in VT, along with Ms. Lord, Mr. Chick, and Ms. Henderson. It was hosted by the Upper Missisquoi & Trout Rivers WSR. She noted that many promotional materials created by other PWSRs were on display. She thought the RSC could elevate its presence by developing new materials inspired by those examples. She particularly liked the ones that had the look and feel of NPS brochures.

7:18 pm Ms. Brown attended the OARS fundraiser at Three Stones Gallery in Concord. She was able to talk with people there about Warner's Pond and other river issues. She attended the Talbot Mills NOI meeting in Billerica. There were about 100 people there. The Conservation Commission requested a lot of peer reviews.

7:20 pm Ms. Brown said that the 30% Design for dredging Warner's Pond has been submitted. The Warner's Pond Task Force just produced an update looking at 3 different alternatives for dredge amounts. Each alternative included a wetland shelf for some of the sediment. The rest would be hydraulically dredged onto North Field. This would greatly reduce the transportation estimates which were the major cost in the last round of dredging bids. The next step is a Request for Information to get estimated costs.

7:22 pm Mr. Sciacca suggested that the RSC could distribute a press release on OARS' WQ sampling results to let people know that our rivers are, with the exception of the mercury issue, clean and usable. Mr. Brown said that OARS' September and October newsletters highlighted recreational activities on the rivers. However, while OARS publicizes swimming and boating activities, it does want to advocate for the most stringent wastewater permitting in the future. It is useful to inform the public about any WQ issues that are present.

PWSR Gathering Report

7:26 pm Ms. Henderson said that the PWSR meeting from October 21-23 was impressive. She particularly enjoyed a documentary called "Celebrate" in which paddlers filmed the entire river system using GoPros and drones. Attendees enjoyed an afternoon paddle on the Missisquoi River. Ms. Lord said that this meeting included representatives from 15 out of the 18 PWSRs. She thought it was a great opportunity for sharing ideas and different types of projects and programs that other rivers run. The RSC might consider hosting the 2026 PWSR Gathering as that date approaches. Alison Field-Juma was honored with an award from the PWSR Program for her valuable contributions over the years.

Approve 2023-2024 Community Grant Reports

7:31 pm Ms. Lord opened a discussion on the 2023-2024 Community Grant Reports from Mass Rivers Alliance, Ma'yan Tikvah, Concord Museum and Farrington Nature Linc. An extension request from the Assabet Food Co-op and a 2022-2023 Appalachian Mountain Club Report which had been delayed by staff changes were also received. Ms. Mattei said that the Assabet Co-op will need an extension through next Spring to complete some planting and stonework on a particularly steep slope. Council members discussed each Report to determine if the stated objectives had been successfully completed. There were some areas of concern, but it was agreed that each organization had sufficiently achieved the outcomes they had specified in their proposals.

7:37 pm Ms. Lord asked for a motion to accept the grant reports and the extension for the Assabet Co-op. Ms. Henderson then asked for a show of hands and the motion passed 11-0.

2024-2025 Community Grant Application Review and Decisions

7:42 pm Ms. Henderson opened a discussion to review the 2024-2025 Community Grant applications. Ms. Lord stated that the Community Grants budget for this cycle is \$43,188. The RSC received four applications totaling \$46,350, which is \$3,162 more than the budget allows.

7:44 pm Ms. Lord said that Concord Land Conservation Trust asked for \$15,000 to work with a contractor using Clearcast to treat water chestnuts on the Sudbury River in Concord. Ms. Brown, Mr. Brown, and Mr. Sciacca each commented that they had seen good results with Clearcast after hand-pulling had been unsuccessful.

7:48 Ms. Lord said that the Concord Museum asked for \$6,350 to hire two interns to photograph and catalog historical indigenous artifacts. The museum will pay an honorarium for a Nipmuc consultation on this project. Ms. Brown noted that this project will make digitized items accessible to tribal communities, researchers and the public, while also facilitating consultation on culturally sensitive items.

7:56 Ms. Lord said that Mass Rivers Alliance has asked for \$15,000 to help create Dam Busters 201, a continuation of the Dam Busters 101 webinar series that the RSC partially funded. Several Council members wondered how much the SuAsCo WSR would directly benefit from these workshops. Ms. Lord said that the RSC could consider partial funding.

8:03 pm Ms. Lord said that the Westborough Conservation Commission has requested \$10,000 to try a new approach to invasive species management of knotweed and Phragmites. This would be a pilot project to turn the biomass of these 2 species into pellets for various uses. The work will be based in Westborough but it will have applicability throughout the SuAsCo watershed. Council members were interested in the idea but said they needed more information. Ms. Lord said that she would reach out to Mass Rivers Alliance and Westborough for more information which she will share with the RSC.

8:18 pm Ms. Mattei motioned to fully fund the Concord Museum and the Concord Land Conservation Trust. Mr. Sciacca seconded, and the motion passed 11-0.

Updates

8:19 pm Ms. Henderson said that she met with Ms. Lord and Ms. Brown to discuss updating the Strategic Plan. They collected and reviewed all the RSC's accomplishments over the past 5 years as well as comments and suggestions made by Council members. Ms. Lord said that the group would like to create a more concise Strategic Plan than the last one. Ms. Henderson invited Mr. Brown to join this group and he agreed.

8:21 pm Ms. Henderson brought up the Billerica Conservation Commission's recent meeting on the Talbot Mill dam removal. She mentioned their request for multiple peer reviews. Mr. Brown said that federal agencies had not projected these new costs but will find a way to complete the requested reviews. Ms. Brown thought that some of the peer reviews had already been done, but that the Commissioners were unaware of that. Mr. Fadden said that "peer review" is a generic term that can be done in several different layers of detail. With nuclear power projects, you don't do all the calculations, you just review them. Ms. Brown said some specific peer reviews were mentioned. One was wetland delineation, but the Commission also wanted to go over the water elevation study again. There was also a third request.

8:29 pm Ms. Henderson said that she received an email from Kara Sliwoski from the DCR Lakes and Pond Program about boat ramp signage encouraging boat owners to clean their boats after being on the water. The Program gives out Stop Aquatic Hitchhiker signs for anyone to take and to hang. Ms. Henderson wondered if CISMA might want to put up some signs. Ms. Lord said that a notice about these signs will likely appear in the next CISMA newsletter. She asked Ms. Brown if she would check with Town representatives about their town's interest in posting these signs.

8:35 pm Mr. Brown said that he is working with Mr. Chick to create wayfinding and informational signage in Framingham. The signs are currently being approved. OARS has received approval from Framingham and from Mass Fish and Wildlife to run a River RAT (River Recreation Activity Team) site at Kellogg Park. This is a volunteer program to get new people on the water, particularly underserved individuals and families. The program has been approved in Maynard. OARS is working to find a location in Billerica.

8:37 pm Mr. Sciacca motioned to adjourn, Mr. Hammond seconded, and the motion passed 11-0.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan