



SuAsCo RSC Minutes for January 27, 2026

RSC Representatives present: Marlies Henderson, Chair (Billerica), Andrew Petit de Mange (NPS), Matt Brown (OARS), Dan Cook (Carlisle), Carlene Hempel (Concord), Brian Murphy (Bedford), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), Angela Taveira-Dick (Bedford-Alt), Ross Tucker (Lincoln) Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt)

RSC Representatives absent: Ron Chick (Framingham), Jonathan DeKock (Carlisle-Alt), John Drobinski (Sudbury), Bill Fadden (Framingham-Alt), Stephanie Koch (USFWS), Laura Mattei (SVT), Vacant (Commonwealth of MA)

Also attending: Elissa Brown (Lead River Ambassador), Ellie Sablak (Social Media Manager), Jennifer Miller (Conservation Director for Westborough), Jeremiah Brown (Blackwood Bamboo), Kristin O'Brien (SVT), Kathryn Pope (Mass Audubon), Caitlin Fitzgerald (OARS), Callie Sties (OARS), Grace Bellavance (OARS)

Welcome and November Meeting Minutes

7:02 pm Ms. Henderson opened the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves. After some discussion Mr. Sciacca motioned to accept the Minutes as amended. Ms. Hempel seconded and the motion passed 8-0 with one abstention.

River Ambassador Report

7:15 pm E. Brown began her report. She said that Concord's new Warner's Pond Management Committee has been established to prepare and support the implementation of an adaptive management plan for the pond. She was nominated for the Committee's first-year term and Ms. Hempel was nominated for the second-year term.

7:20 E. Brown shared an image of what Sherman's Bridge will look like after its renovation. She also shared an image of GluLam, an engineered wood product which will be used for the decking. A five-foot wide sidewalk on the bridge's upstream side has been proposed. MassDOT objected to encasing the new steel guardrails in .25 inches of wood to maintain the bridge's historic appearance because it thought the wood cladding could interfere with crash worthiness. The Wayland DPW has agreed to look at this guardrail issue again, in addition to writing a technical memorandum about the new sidewalk. Mr. Sciacca thought that some sidewalk funding might come from grant proposals to the RSC.

7:24 pm E. Brown said that she and Mr. Chick represented the RSC in Framingham at the First Night event on the Cochituate Rail Trail. They hosted a fire pit and talked with lots of people about the SuAsCo rivers. She also attended meetings on Sherman's Bridge, a NMCOC discussion on the Talbot Mill dam, an Open House sponsored by the Assabet Wildlife Refuge, a Water Quality presentation by OARS at the Concord Library, and a Metrowest Conservation Alliance meeting. She and Mr. Sciacca gave their perspectives at a focus group meeting for OARS, Concord and the MAPC Regional Climate Collaborative. Wayland is requesting herbicide treatment for one cove at Heard Pond. There is some interest in Sudbury for help with water quality issues at Hop Brook.

7:29 pm Mr. Petit de Mange said that the Dept. of the Interior's funding bill has been signed. At present the RSC is funded as fully as it was last year. We will have to submit our own budget for next year in the next few months.

PARTNER PRESENTATIONS

7:30 pm Ms. Miller spoke about the invasive species management pilot project that the **Westborough Conservation Dept.** completed with funding from its 2024-2025 RSC Community Grant. This pilot program originally proposed removing and eradicating both phragmites and Japanese knotweed, but due to permitting costs focused solely on

Japanese knotweed. Ms. Miller noted the recurring obstacles involved when towns are trying to avoid using herbicides to eradicate invasive species, such as staffing time, limited budgets, and the need for repeated non-herbicide removal. She wanted to explore a different approach. She and J. Brown from Blackwood Bamboo developed a model that shifts eradication costs to contractors by converting harvested invasive biomass, such as knotweed, into a marketable product while minimizing herbicide use in order to support habitat restoration. Three accessible sites totaling approximately one-half acre were selected for their project. She showed photos of dense knotweed and the same areas after complete removal. They chose to produce pellets for home heating and, because younger knotweed shoots have a high nutritional content, for animal feed. It took time to regulate the moisture content by getting the right ratios and the right binders. A kiln-like setup was used to produce the biochar. The first harvest occurred late in the season. Westborough hopes to do another round of treatment and move towards removal cycles to shrink treatment areas and, ideally, to achieve eradication. These steps will help finalize the pilot program and support future funding requests.

7:45 pm Ms. O'Brien asked what biochar is, how to make it, and about some of its uses. J. Brown said that biochar is taking any living thing and putting it into an oven, which takes out all the oxygen. If you put an invasive species into that oven you will be creating pure carbon. His company creates bamboo charcoal since landfills in the Carolinas will not take bamboo because it is invasive. That exchange reminded Ms. Miller that hauling and disposal of invasives are problems you can solve with this approach.

7:52 pm Ms. O'Brien said that **CISMA** used some of its RCS grant for website maintenance, including the calendar event section where Review Board partners post events and allow people to register for events. The bulk of their funding went to their 2025 Small Grant Program. They combined \$1,081 from the previous year's unused funds with the current grant and awarded a combined total of \$8,081.

7:54 pm Hudson's Conservation Commission has been hosting volunteers every Saturday for years on Danforth conservation land. They have cleared what they could using manual methods and then applied for a \$2,062 grant to treat woody invasives with an herbicide. They purchased native plants for the areas that are completely clear. CISMA provided funds to the Kalmia Woods homeowners association on the Sudbury River for an intern to monitor and remove water chestnuts. The Lincoln Conservation Dept was awarded \$1,559 to purchase native plants, protective material for herbivory and educational signage at Mt. Misery. Marlboro Conservation Commission was awarded \$1,900 to treat porcelain berries at Ghiloni Park. A delay led to excessive biomass and a \$30,000 removal estimate. A volunteer crew will now clear the porcelain berry, and funding is extended to this Spring for completion.

7:59 pm Ms. Henderson noted a chat question from E. Brown asking J. Brown how he would address knotweed roots. He explained that the roots should be left in place and managed through repeated cutting or herbicide to deplete stored energy. Ms. Miller added that root disturbance should be minimized until regrowth has ceased, at which point a dense mat could potentially be removed.

8:01 pm Ms. Henderson introduced Kathryn Pope as the **River Schools** Coordinator. Ms. Pope spoke about the 2024-2025 school year. River Schools works with one 12th grade classroom in Wayland that has 3 teachers and about 25 students. It is a project based, learning community based elective class about climate change and how it relates to their watershed. Bedford High School had a one-year River Schools agreement with two AP environmental science classrooms. There is one teacher and about 35 students. Audubon connected Bedford's existing AP curriculum on outdoor learning experiences with the River Schools program. River Schools worked with the McAuliffe Charter School in Framingham. It is a Title One school in an environmental justice neighborhood. This was an opportunity to give students access to their watershed and to learn about climate change. River Schools completed its first full year with Thoreau elementary school, which is on the Assabet River. Students were able to have their field experiences right outside their school. River Schools worked on an after-school program at the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Billerica. It was a class of 12 students in grades 3 and 4. Audubon provided 14 visits of an hour each. Audubon worked with Hoops and Homework, an out-of-school program in Framingham. There are two locations, each had about 15 participants and amounted to between 24-27 contact hours. To fulfill their Action Project requirement, which is to Act, Educate, and Advocate, Wayland students partnered with a first grade classroom. The high school students chose ways to connect their first-grade buddies with the watershed and to climate change issues in age-appropriate ways, such as discussing pollinator

friendly gardens and rain gardens that could positively impact their school. The Bedford High School's ACT project was about invasive and native plants. They did a conservation project to mitigate some of the Japanese knotweed found at their school. The Hoops and Homework groups chose to create posters and badges at their living community about not polluting since that material goes into their waterways. Billerica grammar school students presented brochures to their Select Board on Stream Buffer Zones. Ms. Pope said that River Schools also offers professional development for teachers.

8:18 pm Ms. Henderson asked if Audubon credits RSC sponsorship in any of its materials. Ms. Pope said that the RSC is spoken about in initial meetings with teachers. She also sends the teachers an informational draft email about the program that they can send to parents. That letter notes the RSC as a source of funding.

8:20 pm Ms. Sties said that **OARS** would like RSC support and sponsorship to host RiverFest events next summer. OARS would like to expand access to paddles from May-July for community members. It would partner with other local organizations to bring in specially themed programming focused on the rivers. Their River Rats program offered several free paddles this summer, reaching about 100 people. It provided the boats and safety equipment. The goal of the program is to eliminate barriers to recreation. It had locations in Framingham, Billerica, and Maynard and would like to expand into Concord this season. Ms. Bellavance spoke about continuing themed community paddles in collaboration with local organizations. These could include a historical tour, birding from the river, fishing trips or designated stops that highlight recreation and conservation areas.

8:24 pm Ms. Sties said that OARS organized 8 chestnut pulls last season, with pulls in Acton, Concord, Billerica, Bedford and Framingham. OARS sponsored its first ever Concord River Race at the Bedford Boat ramp. They had 60 participants and offered a 3-mile and 6-mile race. It was a New England Canoe and Kayak Racing Association (NEKRA) event and will be held on May 9th this year. It will include a 9-mile race. OARS would like to organize a Carnival of Boats, which is an historical event and would be a good way to celebrate OARS' 40th year.

8:38 pm M. Brown explained that the Talbot Mill dam removal project team appealed to NMCOG after Billerica's Historic District Commission (HDC) voted not to advance the project. NMCOG ruled to remit it back to the HDC and recommended mediation. The project team's attorney has reached out to the HDC to say that they would like to seek mediation. The HDC has not replied. The project team expects the HDC to make a more thorough administrative ruling and vote No again. If that happens the project team will take the appeal to Superior Court. It is possible that Billerica will not want to pay for an expensive legal battle. In that case the project team could move their legal funding over to mitigation and that would benefit Billerica. For now the team is waiting to hear from the HDC. The Billerica Conservation Commission is close to completing its Order of Conditions. The project team has construction funding but that has a deadline. If the dam removal goes through one or two appeal processes they will need to extend the deadline. The project team was awarded a Seawall Grant with a substantial line item for legal fees which will also help fund the appeal.

8:42 pm Mr. Tucker shared an image of the Mt. Misery parking lot and the Lincoln Canoe Landing which are located close to each other. They are connected by a narrow trail which often floods during the year. A proposed 1,000-foot elevated boardwalk would link the two popular spots. This area is on the Bay Circuit Trail. The project asked for, and was denied, \$20,000 in funding from Lincoln's Community Preservation Committee. The CPC grant would have fulfilled the 20% funding commitment needed to qualify for a Mass Trails grant. The Conservation Department is exploring potential future funding opportunities. Mr. Tucker said that he wanted the RSC to be aware of this project because if funding is found at some point in the future then the boardwalk will be subject to reviews by the Army Corps of Engineers and the RSC.

8:50 pm Mr. Cook motioned to adjourn, Mr. Sciacca seconded and the motion passed 9-0.