

SuAsCo RSC Minutes for January 28, 2025

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

RSC Representatives absent: Dan Cook (Carlisle), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Stephanie Koch (USFWS)

Guests: Melissa Hansen (Mass Audubon Society), Kathryn Pope (Mass Audubon Society)

Welcome and November Meeting Minutes

7:00 pm Ms. Henderson called the meeting to order. She asked for comments on the November Minutes. Ms. Lord and Mr. Sciacca offered edits. Ms. Henderson motioned to accept the Minutes as amended. The motion passed 8-0, with 1 abstention.

Partner Presentation by Mass Audubon

7:04 pm Ms. Hansen thanked the RSC for its funding. She said that it was an important part of Mass Audubon's (MAS) Education programming and is very impactful not just for River Schools but also for similar programs throughout the state. Kathryn Pope introduced herself as the River Schools Coordinator for MAS' Metrowest region. She said that four in-school programs were taught during the 2023-2024 school year. There were three 5th grade classrooms with three teachers and about 60 students at **Happy Hollow** in Wayland. This was their third year of River Schools programming and the teachers were able to run the program by themselves with MAS offering support work. This was the second year that River Schools worked with Wayland High School's Connect program, which is a social studies elective co-run by three teachers. It encourages students to find problems in their community that they want to help solve.

7:08 pm River Schools ran Spring and Fall afterschool sessions for twelve 3rd and 4th graders at the **Billerica Boys & Girls Club**. Their student action project included exploring and cleaning the tributary near their school. For their climate action project, the students created informational posters on topics such as wildlife in the watershed and ways they could take climate actions. MAS taught out-of-school programs at two **low-income housing complexes in Framingham**. Each class had 15 students per site, and each had 11 contact hours. A River Schools program was independently paid for by Mill Pond School in Westborough. That program involved six 7th grade classrooms with 6 teachers and approximately 130 students. It included 10 contact hours per student.

7:15 pm MAS conducted a Fall **Professional Development** session on climate and watershed science for River Schools teachers and a January session about climate action projects. Ms. Pope said that **Wayland High** is in its second year of River School programming, the **McAuliffe school** is in its first full year, the **Billerica Boys and Girls Club** is in its third year, and Hoops and Homework extended its contract for both locations. River Schools is partnering with **Bedford's AP Environmental Science teachers**. It is focusing on climate change, which is part of the AP test. One MAS staff member is teaching at the Thoreau Elementary School in Concord and another one is supporting the McAuliffe school.

7:18 pm Ms. Lord thanked Ms. Pope for her excellent presentation. Mr. Brown said that OARS will soon offer a similar program in some of the same schools and towns. He suggested they talk later about not duplicating their efforts and complimented MAS on its model. Mr. Chick, Mr. Simms and Mr. Sciacca were impressed with MAS's efforts in Wayland and Framingham. They hoped that the programming would expand to more schools in SuAsCo member towns.

2024-2025 Partner Grant Mid-Term Reports

7:27 pm Ms. Lord said that the 2024-2025 mid-term reports from OARS and SVT had been circulated earlier. She asked if anyone had questions. Mr. Sciacca wondered if the Happy Hollow well could be added to OARS' **salt sampling sites**. Mr. Brown said he was happy to take any suggestions on new sites because OARS will soon be reviewing their water quality

monitoring and sampling procedures as part of their Strategic Plan review. Ms. Henderson motioned to accept OARS' report so that half of their grant expenses could be reimbursed, Mr. Chick seconded and the motioned passed 9-0 with one abstention. A motion was made by Ms. Henderson to accept SVT's report and to release half of its grant funds, Mr. Chick seconded and the motion passed 9-0 with one abstention.

River Ambassador Report

7:37 pm Ms. Brown spoke about her River Ambassador activities. As part of Framingham's First Night celebration she and Mr. Chick set up a table with RSC promotional literature and OARS' large SuAsCo watershed map as well as s'mores to give out. Mr. Chick said that Ms. Brown was constantly engaged in discussions about the WSR during the event. There was a lot of interest in the brochures and the watershed map.

7:39 pm Ms. Brown said that Bedford and Lincoln have agreed to put up **Aquatic Hitchhiker signs**. Ms. Koch has suggested posting one at the Wayland kiosk, which Ms. Brown will do after she gets final permission. Ms. Brown read through the Conservation Commission reports from RSC member towns. She noticed that Wayland has a NOI for chemical treatment for water chestnuts at **Heard Pond**. That problem had been managed successfully over the years with harvesting and hand-pulling but one area of the pond has a new infestation.

7:41 pm Nashawtuc Country Club is not conforming to the Dark Sky requirements of its NOI for some work being done on the property. She thinks the RSC should keep this issue in mind when considering other projects in the watershed. Ms. Brown said that the house at **355 Garfield Road in Concord** has a scenic view of the Sudbury River near Fairhaven Bay. The residents there recently filed an After the Fact NOI in response to their dramatic removal of vegetation which reaches all the way to the Bordering Vegetated Wetland line. Many oaks and white pines were cut down. The restoration plan is for creeping juniper to stabilize the slope. A new **mixed use facility** is being proposed for a parcel on the Concord River at **279-290 Boston Road in Billerica**, which is downstream of the WSR. The proposed facility will include residential, commercial, and restaurant space. There has been a lot of discussion about sewerage connections. Ms. Brown suggested that the RSC look at the project. On February 27th there will be a public forum on Warner's Pond. The last meeting was weighted heavily towards opponents of the dam removal. She asked RSC members to publicize the upcoming meeting.

Riverfest 2025

7:51 pm Ms. Lord said that it is time to start planning RiverFest events. The total number of participants for all RiverFest 2024 events totaled roughly 230 people. She thought that number was low considering the amount of time, effort, and capacity that goes into planning and publicity. She suggested reevaluating what we have done over the past few years. She realized that many RiverFest events could be competing with other events being held in RSC member communities. She wondered what Council members thought about not having RiverFest this year, but rather joining community events that are already planned. She said that Concord 250 is going to be huge and that could be a good opportunity for the RSC to be a participating organization in a larger community event. Ms. Brown was not sure how well the RSC is accomplishing its RiverFest mission, which is getting more people on the rivers. Ms. Lord was interested in hearing from Council members who have led RiverFest events. Mr. Brown said that OARS led one paddle. He thought the dual registration process was clunky and that we could streamline the process. He said that OARS is planning several events this summer. He would like to coordinate what the RSC is planning with what OARS is planning. He was open to doing those events together. OARS is looking to significantly increase their river recreation and stewardship activities. They don't want to take away from RSC events, and vice versa. Mr. Chick liked the idea of collaborating with OARS on a Sudbury River paddle and possibly a walk to Lake Cochituate. He thought that there would be a lot of opportunities for collaborating with Framingham's Parks and Rec Dept and the Conservation Commission.

7:55 pm Ms. Henderson wanted to know what the rest of the Council thought of this new idea. Ms. Dugan said that the RSC might be able to join Lincoln's regular trail walks. Will Leona from Lincoln's Conservation Dept has led a paddle to Fairhaven Bay for the past 2 years. The RSC might be able to coordinate a Sudbury River paddle with him. Mr. Dobrinski said he would check in with Sudbury's Conservation Department to see if they have any suitable programs planned. Mr. Fadden was interested in reviving the event where a flotilla of boats with lanterns paddle to the North Bridge at dusk. Ms. Brown has talked with Concord 250 about that paddle and hopes it could be launched in the Spring. Mr. Simms thought that Wayland could continue its history paddles. Ms. Brown thought we could coordinate to attend community events and still give our SuAsCo talk and offer our brochures at those events. Mr. Sciacca said that Wayland could still run the history paddle and probably a photo walk. A co-branded event at the Wayland Library, such as his talk last year

on Stone Bridge, is also a possibility. Ms. Lord said that it sounds like the Council is generally on board with collaborating with other partners and doing more co-sponsored events during the summer or spread throughout the year. She said that if Council representatives know of specific events in their communities or monthly walks by Town departments they can email Ms. Lord or Ms. Brown so that we can think about how the RSC could partner with some of those events. Mr. Brown suggested a virtual or in-person meeting about this soon. He said that OARS has invested a lot of time and energy into their Spring and Summer recreation calendar. Ms. Lord said that she would set up a meeting.

Updates and Other

8:17 pm Mr. Chick said that Framingham is celebrating "Framingham325" this year. Events will take place throughout the year. The RSC could collaborate by hosting a table on Earth Day. There were only 3 water chestnut pulls by Framingham last year so the progress on that is impressive. The City purchased a property on Central Street along the Sudbury River. It will provide sustainable housing and also create areas for parking and an accessible dock along the river. Construction has begun on the Carol Getchell Trail although the work will be slowed down by winter weather. He encouraged Framingham's Mayor and Director of Planning to apply for a construction grant from Mass Trails and they have agreed to do so. There will be 2 grants: one for design and committing to connect the two sections of the Carol Getchell Trail and the other will be for construction.

8:21 pm Ms. Henderson attended a Billerica Conservation Commission meeting on the Talbot Mill dam removal. The Conservation Commission and Select Board remain wary about the Town's water supply if the dam is removed. Ms. Henderson said that the process is going very slowly but that Eric Hutchins from NOAA remains positive. She met with Stephanie, Grace and Tom from GMNWR, Jane from CISMA, and another volunteer to look at a parking lot off Route 4 beside the Concord River in a WSR area. It needs attention but she hasn't received the Volunteer Service Agreement yet. At a luncheon for the Assabet Friends group she learned that Great Meadows is understaffed with only 7 staff members to care for its 8 properties. The Weir Hill HQ has been closed. The new office is on the border of Stowe and Sudbury. She said that decisions for the Refuge are difficult because all the options are expensive. Staff members are reluctant to make a decision on behalf of one species when there might not be enough money left to act on behalf of another species.

8:26 pm Mr. Brown said that OARS is requesting a letter of support from the RSC for a NOAA fish passage grant for work on the fish ladder at Centennial island. The proposal is in cooperation with Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust. OARS would also provide some additional funding for historic mitigation for the Talbot Mill dam removal. OARS is working on its 2024 data collection. This year OARS will do its first ever macroinvertebrate study; it will take place in Framingham. OARS and the town of Stowe partnered to submit a proposal for a DER Reconnaissance Study for the Gleasondale Dam. Mr. Brown will attend another Section 106 meeting for the Talbot Mill Dam removal and hopes that progress will be made on creating a Memo of Understanding. OARS has a new project on culvert assessments. They have partnered with Excel Education Corp, which is a nonprofit that offers on-the-job training for unemployed and underemployed urban young adults. OARS completed its online recreation maps. They are working to get the final maps printed. OARS is presenting to Framingham Conservation Commission next week for wayfinding and educational signage installation. OARS is working with the Concord, Lowell, and Maynard schools. They are in talks with Hopkinton, Stowe, Acton and Westbrook about doing some camp education. On May 4th OARS will launch its 86 Mile Club, its River RAT cleanup effort, and its Concord River Race.

8:31 pm Mr. Simms said that he is the Sustainability Director for Concord. In November he submitted an Expression of Interest for the MVP program in conjunction with OARS and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council with the idea of building some watershed capacity across the SuAsCo as it relates to water issues. He hopes to receive some feedback in the next week or two.

8:34 pm The Council voted unanimously by verbal agreement to make some small edits to a previously agreed upon Letter of Support for Framingham for its Mass Trails grant.

8:34 pm Ms. Henderson adjourned the meeting.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan