



## SuAsCo RSC Minutes for February 24, 2026

**RSC Representatives present:** Marlies Henderson, Chair (Billerica), Andrew Petit de Mange (NPS), Ron Chick (Framingham), Jonathan DeKock (Carlisle-Alt), Angela Taveira-Dick (Bedford-Alt), Christine Dugan (Lincoln-Alt), Stephanie Koch (USFWS), Laura Mattei (SVT), Brian Murphy (Bedford), Ingeborg Hegemann (OARS) Ross Tucker (Lincoln), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt)

**RSC Representatives absent:** John Drobinski (Sudbury), Bill Fadden (Framingham-Alt), Vacant (Commonwealth) Dan Cook (Carlisle), Carlene Hempel (Concord)

**Also attending:** Elissa Brown (Lead River Ambassador), Jane Calvin (Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust)

### Welcome and October Meeting Minutes

7:03 pm Ms. Henderson opened the meeting and welcomed all the participants.

7:07 pm Ms. Henderson asked for comments on the January Minutes. Mr. Chick motioned to accept the Minutes as distributed, Ms. Mattei seconded and the motion passed 7-0 with two abstentions.

7:09 pm Ms. Henderson made a motion to correct an error found in a comment made by Delia Kaye concerning Warner's Pond in the October 2023 Minutes. Ms. Mattei seconded and the motion passed 8-0 with one abstention.

### Partner Grant Presentation Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust (LPCT)

7:11 pm Jane Calvin thanked the Council for the grant it awarded to LPCT for its diadromous fish restoration and Blanding's turtle restoration efforts. She spoke first about its diadromous fish monitoring program. She explained that the fish swim upstream from the ocean to reach Lawrence, they then go up the Essex fish ladder and swim to Lowell. Once in Lowell they can travel up the Merrimack or south to the Concord River, though they are discouraged by the dams on the Concord river. She said that 99.9 % of the fish are marked as originating in the Merrimack River.

7:13 pm She showed a slide of the Centennial Island fish ladder and pointed out the V-bar that the fish cross as they are counted. She said that because this ladder is the first and last obstacle before the Billerica dam it was important to document that fish could get through. Volunteers count for 10 minutes every hour, with the season running from May through mid-June. There is a camera as well, so there is visual and video monitoring. The 2025 monitoring season ran from early May through mid-June. Five new monitors were trained. She was proud that 100% of the counting days had at least a statistically accurate account of nine total counts.

7:16 pm Ms. Calvin shared a photo of a trash rack that was repaired at a significant cost to the dam owner. It had the wrong sized grids which let juvenile fish enter the turbines at the hydro facility when they came back downstream. The owner recently replaced the grid to create a narrower fish passage than is required. She then shared a design drawing of a new nature-like fish passage for the Centennial fish ladder. The final design should be completed in June.

7:19 pm **Turtle Conservation Update:** LPCT's turtle conservation work includes monitoring of Blanding's and spotted turtles, with wood turtle monitoring beginning this year. Monitoring Blanding's turtles includes year-round radio

telemetry and nest monitoring, The head-starting program begins with hatchlings that weigh just 10 grams and then grow to about 200 grams (the size of a 4 year old turtle) when they are released 10 months later at their original site. Significant populations of Blanding's and spotted turtles are located in Chelmsford near the I-495/Route 3 interchange, and wood turtles are increasingly found in the area. LPCT works year-round with Zoo New England and is collaborating with the Smithsonian on a spotted turtle project. Habitat loss due to development remains the primary threat for turtles. Four spotted and four Blanding's turtles are currently housed in tanks at the LPCT office.

7:21 pm LPCT's after-school program is integrated with field monitoring efforts. Students receive training in radio telemetry as they work alongside professionals in the field. Four schools currently host pairs of turtles, with LPCT providing in-school programming. Students participate in turtle release events in partnership with Zoo New England. The year-round program is supported by 32 volunteers who contributed nearly 600 hours of service.

7:23 pm Mr. Sciacca asked whether there is a long-term plan for the turtles or if the population is expected to become self-sustaining once established. Ms. Calvin said that turtles in the state forest were doing well. They are tracked by Mass Wildlife. She thought they would expand beyond the state forest into other areas of the Merrimack Valley.

### **River Ambassador Report**

7:28 pm. Ms. Brown said that she and Ms. Hempel are members of the new Warner's Pond Management Committee in Concord which met on February 5th to talk about preparing and implementing an adaptive management plan.

7: 30 pm Ms. Brown looked at issues in RSC member towns based on the topics raised at relevant town committees. She found that Concord CPA funds have been requested for the multi-use trail over the Assabet River. There is also a request for \$500,000 for a conservation fund which would allow the Conservation Department to mobilize quickly in the case of property for sale that should be protected. There is a warrant proposal in Lincoln for a change to its Dark Skies zoning bylaw which would benefit migratory birds. There were a few CPA applications in Wayland that would help our watershed. Those included bittersweet removal to preserve trees on Heard farm, herbicide treatment at South Cove on Heard pond and a water management proposal for the Dudley pond watershed. She said there have been changes to the original Sherman's bridge proposal so that it will now look entirely wooden, even the railings. They will include a conduit underneath the bridge for potential future relocation of overhead utilities. She thinks the RSC should look into that since it could involve a visible PVC pipe. Ms. Brown was concerned that the town is considering preserving the wood with copper chromated arsenic treatment even though copper is quite toxic to the aquatic environment. Mr. Petit de Mange said that he would reach out to the engineers. She attended the Billerica Historic District Commission meeting where they reissued a written decision pertaining to the Talbot Dam which they have not made available to the public yet.

### **CISMA Cards**

7:42 pm Ms. Mattei said that CISMA is requesting \$700 to create invasive plant identification cards for its Weed Warrior volunteers. Kristin O'Brien has been working with a high school volunteer to create 4"x5" cards with photos and identifying features for Weed Warrior partners.

7:48 pm Ms. Brown motioned to fund the CISMA plant identification cards for \$700, Mr. Sciacca seconded and the motion passed 9-0.

7:49 pm Ms. Hegemann shared ideas for OARS' Celebration of 3 Remarkable Rivers which will include a mix of different activities that reflect the history of the Wild and Scenic Rivers and expand to some urban rivers that are undergoing improvements through the Municipal Vulnerability Program (MVP). There are also some restoration activities which will be included, including dam removals. Julia Blatt will discuss the Wild and Scenic River designation. There will be guided walks, paddles, and river experiences from both from the water and from land. OARS will continue their regular activities such as water chestnut pulls and river cleanups. OARS is requesting \$30,000 for this programming that would build upon RiverFest but also move beyond that.

7:55 pm. Ms. Henderson thanked Ms. Hegemann for mentioning the Wild and Scenic River throughout her proposal. Ms. Mattei liked OARS' concept and thought that it would be valuable to the RSC but would like to see a budget. Mr. Petit de Mange also wanted to see more details about the programming and where the \$30,000 might go. Ms. Brown said that last year the RSC spent \$12,500 on RiverFest, and that OARS was budgeted for \$40,000, mostly for water quality monitoring. Ms. Henderson suggested that OARS consider re-starting the River Stewardship Award that used to be given out at the kick-off party for RiverFest.

#### **Budget Discussion for Oct 2026-September 2027**

8:02 pm Mr. Petit de Mange began the 2026-2027 budget discussion by saying that the RSC has two line items for administrative costs. Line 31 includes items paid by SVT in its fiduciary role and includes items such as website maintenance, Mass Rivers Alliance membership, and shared storage. The cost for SVT increased slightly this year because the total budget rose by \$10,000. He thought we should confirm if any maintenance costs could change in the next year. He said that there was \$107,000 in carry over funds from previous years that will be added to the 2026-2027 budget.

8:04 pm Ms. Brown said that we paid Monty \$2,200 this year to update the website platform. We pay Ms. Sablak a few hours a week for day-to-day updates. Ms. Sablak uses only a small portion of the 250 hours allotted.

8:08 pm Mr. Petit de Mange moved on to internal projects, which are mainly the cumulative hours for Ms. Brown and Ms. Sablak. He asked for suggestions on what to do with the \$10,000 remaining from that line. Ms. Henderson asked about the state of Ms. Brown's contract and wondered if we could include a raise.

8:11 pm Ms. Brown said that she has been working without a contract this year but that she could update her last contract by entering new dates and changing the hourly rate. There was general agreement for her to make those updates. Other suggestions for unused funds included outreach materials, river crossing signs, and consulting work regarding a mishoon burn.

8:19 pm. Mr. Petit de Mange offered to circulate a revised version of the budget to include changes discussed at this meeting. He listed \$8,000 for projects related to the Conservation Plan and \$45,000 for Community Grants. The remaining line is for Partner Grants: Mass Audubon, CISMA, SVT, OARS, and LPCT. Due to the federal furlough and the uncertainty of funding we never released an RFP to our Partners. He will talk to them about their proposal ideas and said that we will have a more refined version of the 2026-2027 budget at the March meeting.

8:25 pm Ms. Henderson started the **Community Updates** by saying that NMCOG has said there could be another appeal concerning the Billerica Historic District Commission vote to deny removal of the Talbot Dam. She is watching the NMCOG page closely for updates and then to see what reaction the dam removal team will have.

8:32 pm Mr. Murphy noted that at each meeting there is a comment that the RSC has available funds. He wondered if we could have that amount announced at every meeting as that might encourage more ideas, especially proposals for communities.

8:44 pm Mr. Chick motioned to adjourn, Mr. Murphy seconded and the motion passed 9-0.