

SuAsCo RSC Minutes for July 29, 2025

RSC Representatives present: Marlies Henderson, Chair (Billerica), Elissa Brown (Lead River Ambassador), Matt Brown (OARS), Dan Cook (Carlisle), Christine Dugan (Lincoln), Bill Fadden (Framingham), Carlene Hempel (Concord), Stephanie Koch (USFWS), Andrew Petitdemange (NPS), Tom Sciacca (Wayland)

RSC Representatives absent: Ron Chick (Framingham), John Drobinski (Sudbury), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Emma Lord (NPS), Laura Mattei (SVT), Brian Murphy (Bedford-Alt), Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt)

Welcome and June Meeting Minutes

7:03 Ms. Henderson opened the meeting. Andrew Petitdemange introduced himself as the NPS representative while Emma Lord is on maternity leave. He has worked for the NPS at the Boston Harbor Islands, on projects for the Westfield River, the Missisquoi in VT, two Farmington River designations in CT, and on the Deerfield PSWR Reconnaissance Survey. He has worked with the PWSR program for about 6 years.

7:06 pm Ms. Henderson asked if there were any edits to the June Minutes. Mr. Sciacca added more detail to the Verizon balloon test in Wayland. Ms. Hempel motioned to approve the Minutes, Mr. Sciacca seconded and the motion passed 9-0.

River Ambassador Report

7:15 pm Ms. Brown said Concord's Warner's Pond Task Force has recommended a Five-Year Study and a budget of either \$100,000 or hiring a consultant for \$50,000 to do water quality monitoring and assess biomass. The Natural Resources Commission prefers to start with a one-year study and an option for additional years. The new Warner's Pond Committee will be a smaller group and a subcommittee of the NRC. It will look at developing an adaptive management plan with clear and specific goals as well as metrics and performance targets. Cyanobacteria has been detected near Gerow Park. Over the past month Ms. Brown spent time at tabling events and farmers markets in local towns. She participated in OARS' water quality monitoring in the Concord River as well as some bacteria and chlorophyll monitoring in the upper Sudbury. She attended a summer solstice event at the Old Manse which included craft tables, a band, and an Earth float of natural materials which was released from the Old North Bridge. Ms. Brown attended OARS' annual meeting where she heard Kim Castens, a water quality scientist, give the keynote address on salt in the watershed. Ms. Castens has posted a detailed report on the OARS website about the increasing amount of salt found in the SuAsCo watershed. It appears in our streams and will likely be found in our groundwater soon.

7:23 pm A discussion followed on salt management for icy roads in member communities. Ms. Henderson suggested that every representative check on what the salt management plan is in their towns and if brine is used on the roadways to reduce the amount of salt needed.

7:29 pm Ms. Brown said that she, Ms. Henderson, and Mr. Brown attended a meeting with Mark Sanborn, the EPA Administrator for the New England Region. Mr. Sanborn said he has no priorities of his own. He takes orders from EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin. He is interested in a smaller EPA, streamlined permitting, centralized government, fossil fuel expansion, and supporting the automotive industry. He does not want to hear from river advocates unless we are providing some kind of solution for one of his problems.

7:31 pm Ms. Brown participated in a water chestnut removal event sponsored by the Carlisle Conservation Foundation and OARS. A fair amount of material was collected from just upstream of the Bedford boat launch and a bit more just downstream from there. There were 30 participants. She also led a Fowler Afield event for the Concord library. Participants read "Concord's Great Meadows" ahead of a group walk to the Refuge while discussing how and why the Refuge came to be and why it is important to people, fish, and wildlife. She attended an aquatic species identification presentation by Tom Flannery and Toni Stewart from DCR. They brought some common aquatic invasive species in buckets for people to examine. Their book on identifying aquatic invasives has a good key and flow sheet.

7:33 pm Ms. Brown said that she was dismayed to find water chestnuts in parts of the Sudbury River where she hadn't seen them before. She could not remove all the plants so she removed only the nuts and suggested that other people do the same if they find water chestnuts during the rest of this season.

7:35 pm Mr. Sciacca referred to a comment from Ms. Brown on the river's present low water level. He said there are pilings visible now on the NW side of the Route 20 bridge which are the remnants of a steamboat landing there in the late 19th century. Mr. Fadden said he had checked on the Framingham reservoir gauge and it had a reading of 3.9 feet, which approaches the all-time low of 3.8 feet in 2010.

7:41 pm Ms. Brown said that she, Julia Khorana, and Ellie Sablak will be collecting dragonfly larvae at three locations for the Dragonfly Mercury Project. She also said that Wayland has hired a consultant to look at replacing the wood on Sherman's Bridge with an asphalt deck. Mr. Sciacca said that there has been vocal community opposition over the years to multiple proposals for renovating that bridge by replacing it with steel girders and a concrete deck. The highway department has always backed down. Ms. Lord has told Ms. Brown that the gravel ramps at Sherman's Bridge are fairly well-gullied and seriously eroding into the river.

Discussion Fairhaven Bay Dock

7:44 pm Ms. Henderson said that last month Ron McAdow informed her that a new dock with a long walkway had been installed by a homeowner on Fairhaven Bay. Mr. McAdow is the author of a book on the SuAsCo and the former Executive Director of SVT. He wondered how DEP could have approved the dock. Ms. Henderson contacted Lincoln's Conservation Dept. Ms. Grzenda said that the Commission did not have grounds to deny the project. Ms. Henderson and Ms. Dugan kayaked to the spot to examine the dock. She said that the dock is a shocking site when you round the bend heading downstream of Mt. Misery towards Fairhaven Bay. She shared a photo of the dock and walkway. She explained that Ms. Grzenda did what she could to safeguard the area by writing a 16-page Order of Conditions with the Conditions in perpetuity. The dock must come out of the water in October and cannot go in until April.

7:48 pm Ms. Brown thought that only the dock has to come out seasonally and not the walkway. The dock can be put in after April 15th and must be taken out by November 1st although those dates can be extended under certain conditions. A discussion followed on whether there are pilings. Ms. Brown thinks there are only footings which sit on the bottom of the river. Ms. Henderson said we could get the design drawing. Mr. Petitdemange said the design will be important to learning how the dock was built and how it will hold up.

7:56 pm Ms. Henderson said that the dock blocks most of the channel and will be worse with low water levels. She will organize a paddle in early November to see that the dock has been taken out for the season.

7:58 pm Mr. Sciacca wondered about the abutter zone. Ms. Brown said that ownership lines depend on the specific area and the specific parcel. Some areas of the river are wholly owned by Great Meadows. Other property lines go to the middle of the river. GIS often captures the lines, as do the assessors' maps, but you really have to go to the original deeds to be sure. Ms. Dugan apologized to the Council for not being aware of the Conservation Commission meetings where this dock was discussed and approved.

Discussion Stop Private Jet Expansion at Hanscom

8:03 pm Ms. Henderson said that a new Hanscom AFB expansion idea is being proposed for just one Navy hangar. It would add two flights per day. She is concerned that if this smaller change is approved then other small changes will be approved later, leading to bigger problems. The comment period recently ended.

Discussion on State Representatives

8:07 pm Mr. Petitdemange said that the absence of representatives from state agencies on our PWSR Councils is apparent across the state. Only the Westfield River has a representative who attends periodically. He said that all the river Councils would love to have a reliable, regular state presence and input at their meetings. He thought a joint request from all four PSWR's in Massachusetts would be more impactful than individual requests. One state representative could attend all four Council meetings or it could be a team of people. He said that Ms. Henderson had sent him a letter written last winter by Ms. Lord about this subject. The letter is specific to the SuAsCo but it would be a good template to use for all the state's PWSR's.

8:10 pm Mr. Petitdemange asked for volunteers to reach out to the other PWSR's and form a brief working group to create a final letter that gets passed for approval by each Council. He will send the final version to those in state leadership who could assign a state representative to the role. Mr. Sciacca and Mr. Cook said they were interested in volunteering for the working group.

Community Updates and Upcoming Events

8:12 pm Ms. Henderson moved on to community updates. Mr. Cook said that the Carlisle Conservation Foundation's water chestnut pull included 16 canoes.

8:13 pm Mr. Brown said that OARS has an upcoming water chestnut pull in Acton. OARS is nearing the end of its recreational paddles which brought about 100 new paddlers on the SuAsCo. OARS is planning a Three Rivers clean-up on Sept. 27th. Mr. Brown said that an appeal to the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments was filed regarding the decision of the Billerica Historic Districts Commission to deny the Talbot Mill dam removal. The Talbot Mill project team is moving forward with the Board of Health and with Billerica's Conservation Commission as well as with state and federal permits.

8:21 pm Mr. Petitmenage said that progress is being made on PWSR cooperative agreements and there is optimism that they will be federally funded. A number of rivers have moved through the final process. It looks like the SuAsCo will receive a round of funding at \$210,000. He thought that spending down the RSC's leftover funds was a good idea.

8:22 pm Mr. Brown was interested in the Council agreeing on a proposal to decide how to spend our leftover funds. Mr. Petitmenage said the funds can be distributed in accordance with the RSC's Procurement Policy. Ms. Henderson was in favor of sending out RFP's. Ms. Brown said that the Council could consider agreeing on a project to fund instead of sending out RFP's. Mr. Brown suggested a more informal process of reaching out to organizations we have previously funded and asking them to apply. Ms. Henderson thought this could be a topic for the Executive Committee.

8:30 pm Ms. Henderson wanted to discuss a Turf Field statement as well as a Land Acknowledgement statement at our next meeting. She said that we could consider having an August meeting even though those are uncommon for the RSC due to the energy normally spent on July RiverFest events in previous years. The Council agreed on an Executive Meeting instead of an August meeting.

8:33 pm Mr. Brown returned to the subject of the RSC's unspent funds. Ms. Henderson said that an Executive Committee could formulate a few options to propose to the full group at the September 30th meeting.

8:37 pm Ms. Hempel made a motion to adjourn. Hearing no objection, Ms. Henderson adjourned the meeting.