Musconetcong River Management Council

Minutes of a Member Meeting, February 18, 2025

The meeting was convened 7:05 as a hybrid at the MWA headquarters in Asbury, recorded on Teams and under the direction of Chairman, Charlie Fineran. A quorum was achieved. Notice of this meeting was published in the Star Ledger and the Express Times in accordance with the NJ Open Public Meeting Act.

Also attending were:

Alan Hunt

Paul Kenney

Tom Dallessio

Ben Yaskulka

Christa Reeves

Laura Gould

Bill Leavens

Tyler Greenfield

Paul Tarlowe

Albert Krouse

Steven Rattner

Marsha Benovengo

Charlie Fineran

Nancy Lawler

Bill McQuaide

Pamela Bailey

Cathryn Schaffer

Jamie DeAngeles

Steven Wolfrum

Sharon Petzinger

Al Ivany

Beth Styler Barry

Natalie Negrete

Dwight Pederson

Randy Gutwein

Laura Tessieri

Bob DelPizzo

There were no guests.

Following the flag salute, Mr. Fineran opened with greetings to the Members’ present. The first order of business was the approval of the December minutes. Alan Hunt made spelling corrections that will be incorporated in those minutes. Motion was made by Charlie with a second by Jamie DeAngelis. The minutes were approved as distributed with those corrections.

Under new business, Laura Gould presented the ‘in brief’ of the Resilient Musconetcong 2050 Vision Plan which outlines how the Association will be working within the watershed. This Plan is a resource for anyone interested in protecting the watershed and working to achieve the goals of preservation through defined targets and strategies.

Information regarding the plan can be found on MWA’s website Musconetcong.org.

The MRMC was stated to have a critical role in advancing the plan by continuing to work with watershed municipalities and advocating to their officials.

Representatives were asked to read and share the plan and encourage town councils, land use boards, and concerned individuals and organizations to become familiar with the plan so that it can be successfully implemented.

Charlie thanked Laura for the presentation and congratulated MWA on the forward thinking that has gone into the plan. Charlie requested a motion to thank Laura. Bill Leavens made that motion. It was given numerous seconds and unanimously approved by the Members.

The in-brief will be linked and sent out to the Members of the Council. This is a living document that will be changing as opportunities and current information is presented.

Laura Gould is the point of contact for this work. Charlie noted that we are the largest tributary of the Delaware River. The Delaware River has just been recognized by the State of Pennsylvania for its excellence. We are the first watershed in the state to have a Vision plan.

Christa Reeves, MWA Water Quality Program Manager, then made a presentation on the PFAS chemicals that were found along the Route 31 corridor in Washington, Warren County. From what we learned, chemicals were sprayed on farmland in the area as part of routine fertilization programs, using municipal waste. EPA has been open to sharing their plans and programs for identifying and dealing with it. They are presently conducting both surface water quality testing and groundwater testing. We are waiting on 319 data. Christa will continue to provide updates, and the EPA website will be updated with current information as it becomes available:

https://response.epa.gov/site/site\_profile.aspx?site\_id=16763

Charlie thanked Christa for her work in monitoring. A motion was made by Sharon Petzinger that was given second by Steven Wolfrun to acknowledge Christa’s work and thank her. That motion passed unanimously.

Ben Yaskulka then discussed the current National Park Service work plan and the consequences of the Management and Budget freeze on NPS fundings on January 25. Several organizations have combined to oppose this. We immediately reached out to Congressman Kean. Their office was helpful, and they have written letters of support to secure our funding. The freeze was lifted on Jan 29 and NPS funds available to MWA were accessible on that date. A new cooperative agreement will be initiated this August. USFW and other agency funding has also been under question. We have over $10,000,000 (ten million dollars) in project funding that is at risk. MWA cannot make any decision on our work until we have certainty that there will be funding available.

Sharon Petzinger asked if since the Federal budget is to be approved in March, are there possible potential cuts? Mr. Dallessio responded, “Yes.’ However, because our projects involve the removal of are high hazard dams and infrastructure spending, we may be in a more favorable position. Charlie: is that information about high hazard conditions going to the funding agencies? ‘Yes.’

Tom Dallessio personally thanked Alan Hunt and Paul Kenney for their support in this situation. Paul “We are doing what we can do.”

For 2025 and 2026, we have generated a memo that can be presented to your municipalities about proposed changes to the work plan.

Ben Yaskulka then reported on two development projects: Kings highway Road near Rt. 57 in Washington Morris is a former industrial site, a 42-acre parcel that is being proposed for high density residential use. We are waiting on the site plan. This may be considered by the Town Council in March, but there is a new Committee in place after the previous committee turned the plan down because of access issues with the site and potentially hazardous traffic conditions.

The Tinsley development is a warehouse in Greenwich which would be on Rt 173 near Bloomsbury. 371,000 square feet of impervious development would generate a tremendous amount of oily stormwater runoff. The first Greenwich hearing will be in March.

Under Old Business: EPA RERC – Recreation Economies in Rural Communities. These rules are proposed to aid mainstream local economies. The selection of the communities has been delayed until Spring. Asbury and other Musconetcong watershed communities are still under consideration.

Highlands Open Space and Recreation Plan – there have been conversations about accessibility. How easily can anyone walk or drive to a recreation point? This plan also includes consideration of ADA access.

Significant Nexus Standard update – MWA has reached out to NJDEP to encourage adoption of new standards, we are looking to DEP to make rule making in favor of access.

Filing vacant seats on the Council – we need to find meeting dates with Bloomsbury for a conversation with the Town Council about securing representation on this council.

Charlie: Discussion with COAH and Highlands Council: Ben Spinelli of the Highlands Council, Laura and Tom have been discussing Highlands municipal COAH issues. New Jersey passed a law that requires towns to produce new housing numbers. The Highlands Council is offering support to conforming municipalities so they might have more control over low-income residential site determination. That encourages municipalities to conform to the Highlands Master Pan regulations. There is a fast period and MWA is working with the Highlands Council to assist municipalities in this regard. The MRMC members are a critical part of securing municipal conformance for those municipalities that have not adopted Highlands rules. Charlie’s experience is that his town received a significant reduction in their required number because of their conformance.

If the municipalities have been doing their homework, they are well ahead of the game. The preliminary plan is out, and they will be negotiating with towns that have consistent municipal plans. If a town’s COAH plan is challenged, they have more potential protection from inappropriate residential development if they conform with the Highlands.

River Administrator’s report: NPS plan update. Please read the work plan proposal that has been distributed previously.

Watershed Planning update. Tom: Christa and Craig are updating the 319 plans. Charlie recommended that a report of watershed planning activities be made at each meeting going forward. There is a lot of data available on the MWA website that fully explains what we are doing and what is going on with our water quality work. Charlie asked about road salt use. Christa responded that it depends on where you live and where there have been dangerous road conditions.

Educational Trail: we have trail funding that is now frozen. On the Mill, flooring is being installed. The Mill dinner is on February 26 and proceeds from that help pay for Mill work going forward. The aim is to open Camp Musky and for a memorial service for Chuck Gullage who was instrumental in moving Mill construction forward.

Upcoming events: April 13 is the river clean up – an all-day event with food. Camp Musky registration is on the website. That MWA site has been redesigned and is much more visually appealing. Municipalities are encouraged to link to the MWA site and join. MWA is seeking fee for service opportunities for funding.

NPS report: Paul Kenney reported that the new work plan is coming together.

Alan Hunt: NPS now has a new employee, Nathalie Negrete who is fluent in Spanish. She will be working to understand watershed management and the working of the Council. She has a one-year fellowship. She is doing a reconnaissance survey on the Raritan River as they proceed toward a Wild and Scenic River designation study.

Alan will continue to help identify NPS resources that can be used to fund MWA activities. A pre-proposal is being developed to see if bacterial contamination is coming from groundwater sources. How does the bedrock allow wastewater contaminants to reach downstream?

The Asbury Mill funding is ranked high in the region for NPS Educational funding and that will go into a competitive process to help match state funding.

The Peace NJ project in Hackettstown to provide ADA river access has been completed and shared with the municipal council. That can also be shared with Warren County. Their traffic consultant has been approached, and they may produce a plan to provide access along Willow Grove Street. It is in the County plan and then goes to the regional transportation authority for approval. Implementation may proceed in 2026.

The Student Conservation Association has been approached to work on the trail. NPS will provide a letter of support for that project.

The Roundtable of NGO and municipal reports followed. Steven Wolfrun reported that there may be a development project on the river behind the Wawa on Rt. 57 and Mountain Avenue. That would be a residential apartment complex.

Al Ivany reported that Washington Township (Warren) has a second reading of their open space plan reauthorization.

Bob Delpizzo reported on the Mine Brook dam. There was a site visit there with Assemblyman Inganamort. He was supportive of the effort, but project funding has been frozen.

Seve Rattner noted that PFAS was on the agenda and reported that all the towns in his service area are in the process of upgrading their systems to deal with it. Jefferson is looking for sewage treatment on the older bungalows around Lake Hopatcong. Since that is the headwater of our river, resolving that with a regional sewer system would be helpful.

Laura Tessieri reported that RC&D has been working with several farmers in the watershed on grazing and forage procedures. That is through a USDA Program that has been frozen including funds that have already been spent. She reported that good people are being forced out of the Department of Agriculture.

Marcia Benovengo is preparing for the cleanup with Trout Unlimited. She notes that there is less garbage out there and that is a good thing. She will be at Point Mountain.

Nancy Lawler reported that Peace New Jersey is fundraising for projects. She is working with Pinelands Preservation Alliance on a grant that will improve accessibility for Hackettstown residents on Alumni Park. She is looking forward to working with the watershed ambassador.

Paul Tarlowe noted that Warren County Parks Foundation will participate in the river cleaning up.

Tyler Greenfield reported that Pohatcong is looking to generate a letter of support for the removal of the Warren Mill dam.

Charlie reported he got a phone call from Tara Mezzanotti on the Lower Delaware River. She is working with Upper Mount Bethel and looking to secure designation as a Wild and Scenic River. Bill reported that he will be listening to local leaders about the positive and negative aspects of designation. Beth: she is doing her due diligence on securing designation for the Paulinskill.

As there was no additional business to transact, Bill Leavens moved to adjourn. That was met with numerous seconds and immediate departure by acclamation.

Respectfully submitted,

A close-up of a handwritten text

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Bill Leavens