

# Musconetcong River Management Council

## Minutes of a Member Meeting. - April 19, 2022

The virtual meeting was brought to order under the auspices of President Charlie Fineran at 7:00. Also attending were Bill Leavens, Albert Krouse, Steve Ratter, Frank Pinto, Dwight Pederson, William McQuade, Christa Reeves, Beth Styler Barry, Katie Parrish, Pamela Bailey, Nancy Roberts-Lawler, Marsha Benevego, Dave Dech, Paul Kenney, Casey Ezyske, James McMekin, Canny MacGonagle and Robert Delpizzo. Executive Director Alan Hunt joined along with guests Ellen Nerbak and Ryan Conklin from Warren County Planning.

Notice of this meeting was published in the Star Ledger and the Express Times in accordance with the NJ Open Public Meetings Act.

The first order of business was approval of the January minutes. There was one correction to be discussed. At the February meeting, it had been discussed to invite NJDEP to join as a voting member. Mr. Fineran made a motion to confirm that DEP would be invited to join the Council as a voting member. This measure was adopted after second was given by Nancy Roberts-Lawler. The meeting minutes were adopted as corrected.

The first discussion item was the adoption of the amended Council by-laws as developed by Alan Hunt and Paul Kenney. These have been distributed to Council members for approval at this meeting. Steve Rattner moved to accept the new bylaws. Mr. Fineran gave second and this was given unanimous approval on a voice vote.

Under new business, Ryan Conklin gave a presentation on the Warren County Scenic Byway. The County is looking for a motion in support of extending the Byway. The Byway designation was adopted under a Federal program that were managed by NJDEP. It is one of eight that exist in the state. The route currently runs along Rt. 57 on the southeastern edge of the county. The County would like to extend the byway down to the Phillipsburg free bridge. A northern extension would extend to Waterloo Village from Hackettstown. Further extensions may connect to the Rieglesville Roebling bridge. All of the municipalities along the route have adopted resolutions in approval of the extensions. No new billboards could be constructed along the route. Municipalities would have to adopt conforming resolutions. The idea is to build an economic asset to promote tourism throughout the area. Check the website: <http://njscenicbyways.com/byways/warren-heritage>

Bill Leavens offered a motion that the Council adopt a resolution in support the southern and northern extensions of the byway. This was given second by Nancy Roberts Lawler and unanimously adopted by the Council after discussion.

The next item under new business were upcoming events. The Musconetcong Watershed Association will present a River Talk on Tuesday April 26 on edible gardening. The Run for the River will be held May 1. Details are on the MWA website but the event will be both virtual and

in person. The Native Plant Sale will be held on May 7 but participants will be encouraged to order online. Events are up to date on the MWA web page.

Under Old Business, the Film Festival in February was well attended. We had 154 registered and 71 live attendees. Subsequently, 21 watched on-demand. There was an uptick of general interest on social media. The West Portal Creek website page had 130 hits after the film event. The Festival Planning Committee recommends that it be continued as a virtual and on-demand activity.

Nancy Lawler said that some of her invitees had problems accessing the platform. Viewers did have to create an account with the host organization. Mr. Hunt will discuss access support issues with the Movie Committee. The Festival gets our message out to a larger community in a new presentation medium. Marsha Benevego reported that she has received a large amount of recognition for her appearance in the Great Waters film that has been aired recently. These films work well within the communities that we want to influence. Mr. Hunt noted that the Secretary of the Interior sent out a Youtube link to the Department of Agriculture personnel on the West Portal Creek film.

Mr. Hunt then reported on the Warren County 'Meet and Greet' event with Warren County Commissioner Jim Kern. This went very well and was attended by a crowd spilling out of the room that included many elected officials. It was good to see a full room full of people who supported environmental efforts in Warren County. Similar events will be planned in the future in Sussex County and on Lake Hopatcong.

The River Cleanup was this past Saturday. 356 individuals signed up for 26 different sites. Over 200 individuals showed up. Mr. Hunt noted that the river is getting cleaner by his observation. Do we need to move to other watersheds and sites? Ms. Roberts-Lawler suggested that focus be put on the tributaries, especially in Hackettstown.

The next topic was the Unigrd brochure and on-line map of access points to the river and historic sites that has been created. The map is a work in process, but it is being filled out comprehensively. This will be distributed for comment after the committees have completed their work. The responses were all positive. Mr. Kenney was pleased to note that it appears very much like other NPS maps. Ms. Roberts-Lawler asked if this would be reproduced in Spanish and other languages. Mr. Kenney responded that this was customary for the principal languages, however this Unigrd brochure will not likely be translated soon. It will first have to be presented in print format to meet ADA requirements.

The Water Quality Dashboard was then presented by Christa Reeves. It is now live on the MWA website under the 'What We Do' heading. The site explains a number of sites and gives an explanation of what and where impaired conditions are. Water quality is expressed in colors that indicate ratings for the presence or absence of macroinvertebrates. It includes pictures and descriptions of the different measurement sites. Descriptions are given of the different types of impairment. Not all sites are filled out completely because not all data has been received back

from analysis. There are a lot of clickable external links, too. Click around the site, enjoy and learn.

Dwight Pederson asked if other metrics would be included? Ms. Reeves responded that it is not cost effective to include other measurement equipment yet. The sensors do get fouled often and require maintenance. Localized rain gauges would be good and that can be done. Note was made that the Cocoras data is out there if it is accessible. Ms. Styler Barry noted that the counties collect rain data and individuals at the State (Dave Robinson) might be interested in sharing data. Mr. Hunt asked if this data could be shared with NJDEP to inform their decision making.

Mr. Hunt then gave his report as Executive Director. He is now working with Mr. Kenney on the 2023 work plan and budget. Funding has been expanded to recognize the new rivers that are being added. Much depends on how 2022 finishes out. Mr. Hunt will share the plan and budget at the next Council meeting. He will be happy to consider new planning ideas.

The Warren (IPP) Mill dam was the next subject to be discussed. NJDEP is doing an analysis of alternative removal methods. The estimate for removal is now over \$15 million dollars. We are trying to find Federal construction money from different sources. Earmarks are now possible again along with many other funding sources that have not proven possible.

There may be 319H funding available for river water quality assessment for the river area between Lubbers Run and Saxon Falls. We do not have RMC representatives from some of the affected towns so he will be asking local municipal clerks. The sewerage authorities are in the assessment area, but they have enough issues with permitting and litigation that it would be unlikely. Mr. Rattner noted that he is fighting PFAS contamination.

Earth Day is next weekend. On Friday, April 22, Representative Malinowski will be in the area. He should be recognized for grant funding that was awarded last year. We also have to recognize the inclusion of the lower Wild and Scenic Riven segment designation. Alan and Mr. Kenney have also been trying to get a representative from the Department of the Interior. Nancy Roberts Lawler volunteered to represent the Council.

The next topic was the Great Waters Economic Impact Survey. How is potential tourism in the area going to influence economic activity. Nancy Roberts Lawler and Bill McQuaide volunteered to assist with distributing a survey on April 30.

Lastly, the Delaware River Sojourn on June 21 and 23 is being joined by MWA and Warren County. The tour will be close to the Musconetcong and Mr. Hunt will be making presentations as the tour passes through. Municipal officials will be invited to participate to build awareness. This is all part of the Great Waters program's promotional effort.

Mr. Kenney then gave the NPS report. In the new bylaws, there was a new provision to rename the Executive Director position as a River Manager to bring the title into conformity with other

Wild and Scenic rivers. Great Egg Watershed Association started their own Youtube channel. On the NPS budget, there will be a 20% increase in the support to MWA, but with potential changes in Congress next year there may be following cuts. The Assistant Secretary of the Interior has signed the measure to extend the designation 4.3 miles downriver to the Delaware confluence. This has to be published in the Federal Register before it becomes established. He also noted that there will be a mile-long streambank stabilization project along the river near Asbury by NRCS. Beth Styler Barry reported previous interest in this, but it is now under permitting. MWA had no knowledge of this. The work will be performed will be on river right bank below the Wolverton Road bridge. Apparently, there is a significant amount of erosion that will be addressed by contractor, Joe Urbani.

Under Committee reports, Dwihgt Pederson reported for the mudsnail committee. They filled in the distribution list of entities that should be notified when there are updates on the presence of the mudsnails. People will be directed to the MWA website. A management plan is being developed for NJDEP to develop a management plan for the mudsnails. Nancy Roberts and Christa Reeves worked on that plan. There is growing awareness of equipment cleaning at the different sites. There has been public interest as evidenced by newspaper reports.

Under municipal and NGO reports, Mr. Finneran announced that Allamuchy is renewing their ERI and preservation plans. The township had not signed off on the Preservation Area under the Highlands Council. They are looking into changing from a Planning Area now.

Pam Bailey announced that MWA is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. She is working with Karen Doerfer at MWA to hold an event at Hampton Borough Park.

Marsha Benevego then reported that she is being given the George P Howard Conservation Award by the NJ Federation of Sportsmen for her youth activities statewide. Ms. MacGonagle then made a motion to recognize Marsha's award from the Council. Mr. Fineran gave second and that measure was adopted unanimously.

There was no public participation. The meeting was then concluded by Mr. Fineran on a motion that was given multiple seconds.

Respectfully submitted,



