



FOR THE SUDBURY ASSABET & CONCORD RIVERS

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OARS 38th Annual Meeting Minutes of May 29, 2024

Meeting Attendees: (total 47)

Board members: Roger Beatty, Don Burn, Holly Clack, Jeff Collins, Kirk Doggett, Allan Fierce, Paul Fitzgerald, Ingeborg Hegemann, Pam Rockwell, and BOD candidate Nick Karmelek.

Staff members: Matt Brown, Heather Conkerton, Sarah Kwan, Adam Nolde, Ben Wetherill

At 7:00 pm it was noted that a quorum of 25 members were present. A total of 47 people attended the meeting.

Welcome: New OARS Executive Director Matt Brown, called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm and noted that a quorum was present.

Financial Report: Matt Brown presented the financial report, which was also available on OARS website. The year 2023 was dominated by several large grants for ecological restoration projects leading to a total budget of \$602, 929. 69% of our funds go directly to our programs, 2% goes to fundraising, and 29% goes to administration. OARS has dramatically increased our programs which help local communities secure newly available funding to remove outdated dams and restore the health of the rivers and brooks in our watershed. We are so grateful that OARS members have stepped up to help us meet this new funding challenge. We thank you very much, in advance, for your continued generous support!

Board of Directors Election: Roger Beatty, member of the Governance & Nominating Committee, introduced the Board's recommended slate of new and returning board member candidates for 3 year terms: New Director candidate: Nick Karmelek from Southborough

Existing Board members for re-election:

Don Burn from Westborough
Allan Fierce from Stow
Paul Fitzgerald from Lincoln
Pam Rockwell from Concord

Ingeborg Hegeman, President of the OARS Board of Directors, asked if there were any other nomination from members; there were none. Ingeborg moved to close the slate, Holly Clack seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously. Ingeborg moved to accept the slate, Kim Castens moved to second the motion, and the slate was approved by a unanimous voice vote of members present.

Approval of Minutes: Paul Fitzgerald made a motion to accept the Annual Meeting Minutes of June 5, 2023, Holly Clack seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved by a unanimous vote of members present.

Volunteer Recognition: Water Quality Scientist Ben Weatherill recognized 4 long serving volunteers:

- **Len Rappoli**, the longest serving OARS water quality volunteer, who has been hopping in the river since 1995
- **Michal Mueller**, who has monitored our rivers since 1999, and also volunteers with the Nashoba River Watershed Organization, and is an ardent protector of turtles and wildlife.
- **Pam Rockwell**, who has not only monitored the rivers since 1995, but has dragged her family along.
- **Jim Clarke**, who participates in the water quality monitoring program, and also has volunteered in our outreach program.

Matt Brown thanked the volunteers on behalf of OARS.

State of OARS: Executive Director Matt Brown introduced OARS' board members and our amazing staff to the meeting. OARS programs include river science, science-based policy & advocacy, outreach & education, recreation, river stewardship, ecological restoration, and climate resiliency. This year has shown that people really want a connection with our rivers.

This is a unique time to be working on ecological restoration, and OARS has risen to the challenge to help local owners remove dams, create rainwater gardens, and manage invasive species with water chestnut pulls. In 2023 32 water quality monitoring volunteers took 258 samples at sites throughout our watershed.

In 2023, OARS staff led 16 community talks or events, 130 children were educated at our water wise workshops, and 14 water chestnut education signs were installed. We worked with our partner organizations, local cities & towns, and grassroots environmental organizations to advocate for the rivers. We represented 900 members.

In 2024 we expect to expand our capacity with Terra Corps interns who will help us expand and manage our volunteer force and reinforce our education and outreach programs. We are expanding our Water Wise Workshops to reach out to communities in our watershed that need better access to nature-based education. We know that there are communities in our watershed where kids might grow up near our rivers, but never actually bike to the river or canoe on the river, so we are working on programs to provide equitable access to river recreation activities.

In Spring 2025 we plan to launch our "Now That's Paddling" program to enable River RATs volunteers as stewards of our "Adopt a Launch" program and train them to become paddle leaders. We plan to sponsor KICK boats, which will give paddlers easy access to boats at put ins across the watershed, and we are organizing an 86-mile paddling challenge.

Water quality in the upper Concord has improved enough to be safe for swimming. We are delighted to invite you to our 2023 Report Card Launch and Swim on Thursday June 6th at 11am at the Bedford Boat Launch!

Our River Report Card: OARS Water Quality Scientist Ben Weatherill presented the OARS 2023 River Report Card. This is OARS' second report card, updated after 5 years. Our report card synthesizes a wide variety of attributes into one grade (not just bacteria, like many watersheds do). OARS evaluates the 5 broad categories of Water Quality, Streamflow, Scenery, Habitat, and Recreation for 6 major river

sections. Our 2023 grade is B+, an improvement from 2018 (as calculated following the same adjusted methods as 2023).

The good news of this raised grade is the major improvement in access and additions of trails in a number of our communities. This means that more people are going to the river. The bad news is that water quality has been negatively affected by extreme flooding and drought cycles. That may be a product of climate change.

A full report on the process and science of our river report card can be found on our website. Here are some highlights:

Weather patterns have greatly affected the water quality in our rivers. In the past five years there have been extreme droughts and extreme flooding years. While phosphorous remains a water quality issue, we have reached a point where non-point source contributions are being exacerbated by the constant flood/drought cycles that concentrate phosphorous in droughts and create more contaminated runoff in floods. Some areas in the Sudbury River may be experiencing low dissolved oxygen related to extreme overgrowths from flooding. OARS is also concerned about high nitrogen discharges from wastewater treatment plants that could affect estuaries at the river delta... nitrogen is not currently limited in WWTP permits. The rivers are also experiencing a concerning increase in temperature in drought years, with some measurements approaching the warm water threshold for fish. This is likely the result of warm water runoff from paved surfaces along the rivers and streams. Streamflow did improve slightly from flooding, which also helped recharge the groundwater in flood years.

Lowell has added attractive walking bridges across the river, improving the scenic aspects of our rivers. Dams do not just block migratory fish in our watershed, but also boaters. Even so, there are a plethora of new boat launches in Stow, Billerica, Bedford, and Concord, and dozens of new trails at the riverside. The Wild and Scenic River protection is likely the reason that the upper Concord River has reduced its bacteria load and is now swimmable. Although there are still advisories against eating fish in some of our watershed due to mercury from the NYANZA superfund site. OARS is working with Towns in our watershed to track down the sources of bacteria in the river so that all our rivers can be safe to swim in.

In the future, OARS hopes to address salt (from stormwater) and PFAS in the river. OARS has 20 years of data showing the increase of salt in our rivers. Matt Brown reminded the crowd that we have a lot of work to do to bring that grade of B- up.

Ben ended the meeting by thanking Heather Conkerton, Adam Nolde, Sarah Kwan, Roger Beatty, and Allan Fierce for helping put the report card together.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 pm