

Record of Public Comments Received

Walden Pond Open Water Swimming Draft Rules and Best Practices

From: Charlie Russo [<mailto:charlierusso@gmail.com>]
Sent: Friday, November 07, 2014 2:21 PM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: "Walden open water swimming" (support)

To Whom It May Concern:

I support the DCR's draft Open Water Swimming policy for Walden Pond. Walden Pond is a valuable resource for a variety of recreation, including and especially open water swimming, and the draft regulations set reasonable guidelines to balance all uses. Ensuring the rights of and setting guidelines for responsible individuals to open water swim at Walden is appreciated.

Thank you for this effort,

Charlie Russo
30 Juniper Road
Sudbury, MA

From: Cathy Brennan <cathybrennan60@yahoo.com>
Date: November 20, 2014 at 4:19:49 AM GMT+11
To: "Geigis, Priscilla (DCR)" <Priscilla.Geigis@MassMail.State.MA.US>
Subject: Open water swimming Walden

Priscilla could you please forward this for me email address I had was not correct thanks

I am very supportive of the proposed plan for open water swimming at Walden Pond. As a long time swimmer at Walden I observed

this past season that the pilot plan worked well.

I would like to encourage the DCR to explore the possibility of opening up another pond for open water swimming in Massachusetts.

The growing popularity of triathlons has greatly increased the demand for open water swimming. If the state were to open another pond for open water swimming the number of swimmers at Walden would be reduced.

Thank you

Cathy Brennan
Sent from my iPhone

From: Jan Oh [<mailto:janomtl@yahoo.com>]
Sent: Friday, November 21, 2014 4:01 PM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: Walden Open Water Swimming

Dear Priscilla and DCR,

I have been having a lot of difficulty with my internet service, so I will send my first comments right now, and head out to a Starbucks to get the rest out. My service is so intermittent...and they came to "fix it" only two days ago.

First comments:

I was reviewing some photos I have taken of Walden Pond—one of my favorite places on this earth. Over and over again, my photographs reflect peace, calm, spiritual and physical healing and replenishment. I sighed. This simple and so precious experience was so difficult to find during the summer of 2014.

Walden Pond is not a public swimming pool. It is a divine healing entity, filled with wildlife and sheltering trees under an ever-changing sky. It is a magical place, and those of us who have experienced that magic, while protective, are thrilled when visitors arrive and see, feel, partake in this magic. Unfortunately, steps taken by the DCR with input not from the general community but from a specific and invited group of triathletes and a few open water swimmers, has badly intruded upon and negatively impacted the divine magical presence that is Walden Pond.

Many of us have been taught to believe that we are valued for what we do, not just for who we are. 'Doing' is important, but to keep life in balance, we also need time to just 'be.' This is what visitors experience at Walden Pond: a chance to just "be": to reconnect to nature, to reflect, relax, heal, breathe, laugh, walk, swim, play. Henry Thoreau and his writings and beliefs are ever-present. Visitors come to experience his vision, to learn about history, about nature—to marvel at the hawk circling overhead, or the grey heron striding majestically through the shallows.

Henry David Thoreau expressed this so well in his writing: "There were times when I could not afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hand. Sometimes, on a summer morning, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumacs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveler's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been."

It is impossible to experience such valuable peace, to reflect, to grow, when a lifeguard is screaming at two adult women (not near the buoys, nor dressed in wetsuits) "Are you planning to swim in the rest of the pond?!? Well ARE YOU?" Or yelling at ten year old Italian boy, his first time back at Walden Pond in a year, "YOU CAN'T GO NEAR THE BOUYS!!! GET AWAY FROM THE BUOYS!!!" Or loudly demanding of a 9 year old girl, whose father is sitting just off and to the right of the lifeguard stand, "Where are your PARENTS??? Where are your parents???"

This and many more instances of aggression and abuse of power is what I witnessed during the summer of 2014. None of this was necessary—not if we look honestly at the history of Walden swimming. There has not been a single drowning at Walden Pond since 1994. Twenty years, with the thousands of people who visit Walden Pond every day in the summer—that is amazing.

[Yes, a man died in October 2013—an excellent swimmer, a member of swim clubs, he sadly suffered a massive heart attack while engaging in what to him was a typical fall activity—a peaceful swim at Walden Pond. This man did not drown—and this process to "crack down" on the peaceful community of Walden Pond was in place well before this terribly sad event.]

I realize that what is now called "Open Water Swimming"—an activity which we regulars have always referred to as simply "swimming" was officially "not allowed" by DCR regulations. It may be a step in the right direction to finally have "swimming" officially "allowed" at Walden Pond.

However, as one older, long-time Walden devotee put it, "It is a strange exercise when freedoms we have known for many years, freedoms we are entitled to, are suddenly threatened to be removed, and then, as a 'compromise' we are 'allowed' a greatly restricted version of the same freedoms we enjoyed for so many years."

I do not believe that the steps taken at Walden Pond have in fact improved safety at all. In fact, during this past summer, there were only two incident involving "open water swimmers" and a HUGE uptick in incidents inside the buoys.

From: jane martin <janemartin174@gmail.com>
Date: November 6, 2014 at 10:35:02 PM EST
To: "Geigis, Priscilla (DCR)" <Priscilla.Geigis@MassMail.State.MA.US>
Subject: comments on Walden Pond

To the committee:

As a long-time swimmer and walker, I greatly appreciate the work the committee and DCR have done to protect Walden Pond. Parking policies, cleanliness, extra life guard stations, and roped areas all have improved our well-used treasure, and made it possible for many to enjoy. It should be considered a model for other ponds/state parks across the state.

Thank you-

Jane Martin
174 Appleton St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

.....

From: Deborah Galef [mailto:drgalef@gmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, November 09, 2014 11:30 PM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: Walden open water swimming

Unfortunately I missed the meeting on October 28th, but I have read the online presentation and would like to make some comments.

I am thrilled that open water swimming will finally be recognized as a legitimate activity at Walden Pond. I know DCR rangers for years felt uncomfortable talking about it, despite its great popularity. The new rules put in place last summer seemed to be fair and worked well, at least from my standpoint as an open water swimmer. Now I hope all will be able to accept the proposals.

A few specific comments:

Wearing a wet suit when swimming for any length of time in cold water is sensible, but having a cut-off of 70 degrees is not. For one thing, no one ever knows what the temperature is, as it is not posted. More importantly, cold water (and temperature) tolerance varies from person to person. A suggestion that wearing a wet suit is sensible in cold water should be adequate.

It makes perfect sense for swimmers to keep away from boaters, but by the same token it makes sense for boaters to keep away from swimmers. Some of the boats on Walden move backwards, and the person sitting in the boat may not be paying attention to anyone who may be behind, near or far. Other boaters seem less than adept at maneuvering. Perhaps all users need to look out for others.

Walden Pond is a fabulous resource for those of us who enjoy and are capable of open water swimming. I whole-heartedly endorse its new acceptance by the DCR.

Deborah Galef

From: Jorge Matesanz [mailto:jorgesbr@yahoo.com]
Sent: Saturday, November 01, 2014 2:36 PM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: Open Water Swimming

As an avid Open Water Swimmer I applaud your efforts to set guidelines for the benefit of all who use the wonderful resources that Walden presents to all swim enthusiasts. I urge you to expand to concept to all venues under DCR control.

Jorge Matesanz
401-338-6915

From: Ira Hart [mailto:ira.hart@yahoo.com]
Sent: Thursday, October 30, 2014 2:19 PM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: Walden Open Water Swimming

Thank you for allowing open water swimming at Walden Pond!
It's great to know that we can now swim without breaking the rules. Please publish the guidelines and we will follow them

Thanks again.
Ira Hart
MIT Lincoln Laboratories.

From: Joe Reid [mailto:joejoereid@gmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2014 3:05 PM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: Walden Open Water Swimming

DCR -

Thank you very, very much for your service on this matter.
All of us are quite pleased to see on our best state agencies working so hard to balance the needs of many at Walden Pond.

We are in your debt.

We thank you everyone's time and attention to this very important matter to so many of us.

Joe Reid

192 Mystic Valley Pkwy (A DCR road!)

Winchester MA 01890

Joe Reid ~ joejoereid@gmail.com ~ 617.901.8588 mobile/SMS

.....

From: Elaine Vescio [mailto:evescio@mpstraining.com]

Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2014 10:59 AM

To: Updates, DCR (DCR); kiera.blessing@globe.com

Subject: Walden Open Water Swimming

DCR should be applauded for looking for a way to enable people to enjoy open water swimming at Walden Pond in as safe of a manner as possible while not detracting from other people's enjoyment of the pond.

A set of rules and best practices are a great first step. On the other hand, the swimming self assessment if comprised solely of a series of questions, will fail to prevent unqualified swimmers from attempting open water swimming at Walden. At almost every open water swim clinic that my company has put on, at least one person has been completely surprised by how much he/she panicked in deep water. Many of these were very competent swimmers including a few who had worked as life guards, and others who had been on swim team in high school and college.

Inexperienced open water swimmers need to be watched closely to see how they will react to the unique challenges of the open water. A questionnaire cannot address that. My company would be willing to put on a few free open water swim clinics at Walden Pond to give inexperienced open water swimmers the opportunity to try open water swimming with the support and guidance of coaches, and under the careful watch of lifeguards. A modified version of our popular [open water swim clinics](#) should work well. We would focus on the small group aspect of our typical open water swim clinic, and would eliminate the part where we practice the triathlon swim starts since that aspect would not be relevant to open water swimming at Walden.

In addition, I would be willing to do a free seminar on open water swimming in the Concord area, using material from an open water swim presentation that I gave at TriMania at MIT in 2013.

Finally, included in this email is a link to an article I had written on open water swimming which discusses some aspects of the sport. It's called: "[Open Water Swimming: Fun and Exhilarating vs Dark and Scary](#)".

Thank you again for trying to accommodate the demand for open water swimming at Walden Pond in as safe of a manner as possible.

Regards,

Elaine Vescio

USA Triathlon Certified Coach

Owner of Vmps

(mobile) 508.612.3000

Be a part of the [TDD Triathlon](#)
Check out **Vmps** at: mpstraining.com
[Find us](#) on Facebook

.....
From: Michael Jacoby Brown [mailto:mjbrown246@gmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2014 8:04 AM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: Walden Open Water Swimming

I swim year round and have for over thirty years. I swim In a local pool during the winter. When the warm water comes I look forward to getting out of the chlorine and into Walden Pond. Like many others, I go in the early morning. It is beautiful.. Often, with the mist rising off the pond, I swim along the north shore, not too far from the shore and across the pond. I get to look out at the trees as I slowly,slowly glide along. It is peaceful and also a great way to stay in some kind of physical shape. The water is clear. I can see the bottom and other swimmers approaching so we don't interfere with each other.

I have been doing this for over thirty years and it is one of the blessing of summer in New England. Driving in the state or crossing the road as a pedestrian is probably more dangerous than swimming across Walden Pond. The state need not "protect" me from this essential part of living in Massachusetts.

--

Michael Jacoby Brown
10 Brattle Terrace
Arlington, MA 02474 USA
Tel: 781 648 1508
Mobile: 617 645 0226
www.MichaelJacobyBrown.com
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ws58VrYAVuY>
<http://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/d.jsp?llr=yldlqrlab&p=oi&m=1111910354296>

From: jfowley@verizon.net [mailto:jfowley@verizon.net]
Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2014 6:57 AM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: Walden Open Water Swimming

I am writing to support the proposal to continue to allow open water swimming at Walden Pond. I regularly go to the pond in the summer and swim across the pond. Although I am 65 years old, statistically the most dangerous part of my undertaking is the drive to and from the pond. Someone who has a heart attack while swimming may die, just as someone who has a heart attack while driving may die. But in response to such isolated incidents, it makes no more sense to ban distance swimming than it would to ban driving.

In the press Ms. Geigis of your department is quoted as saying, "Open-water swimming is an inherently dangerous activity, but we understand that people make their own decisions." In a world filled with

idiocy - not just in government - I find that to be an almost astonishingly sensible statement.

Jeffry Fowley, 8 Cherry St., Marblehead, MA

.....
From: Jennifer Yanco [mailto:jjyanco@gmail.com]

Sent: Wednesday, October 29, 2014 12:04 AM

To: Updates, DCR (DCR)

Subject: swimming at Walden

Dear DCR,

I am all for open water swimming at Walden Pond.

And while we are at it, what about other public bodies of water? In particular, what about the Mystic Lakes? I live near them and used to enjoy swimming there; it was truly the highlight of my summers, especially on hot evenings or early in the morning. I was so happy to live in an area with these wonderful bodies of open water. Yet now there are no swimming signs posted all around. Why should people be able to risk drowning in boats but be forbidden the simple pleasure of swimming in open water? If one has the good fortune to own a boat, the lake is open territory. If not, then you're plum out of luck and must just sit on the shore and watch. This has the effect of favoring the well-off who have the means to own boats, reserving a public resource for their use and prohibiting others from using it.

I think everyone should be able to enjoy our natural resources and swimming is for many of us a very important and enjoyable activity. Swimming may be dangerous; but hardly more so than crossing the street, riding a bicycle, driving a car, or countless other activities that we engage in daily. Most are regulated and that helps avoid unnecessary risk. Why not the same for open water swimming? I think the proponents of open water swimming at Walden are onto something and hope that you all will consider extending this to other communities.

A serious swimmer and long-time resident of Medford.

Jennifer J. Yanco, PhD

16 Monument Street

Medford, MA 02215

jjyanco@gmail.com

.....
From: Carla [mailto:carlalist@gmail.com]

Sent: Tuesday, October 28, 2014 11:28 PM

To: Updates, DCR (DCR)

Subject: walden pond open water swimming

To Whom it Concerns,

I am not sure what has transpired at tonight's meeting, but based on the article that appeared in the Globe, I would like to write to you to request that you please not implement any more rules than those you had already implemented last summer. In fact, if possible, can you roll some of these back as well.

Yes, it is a mournful fact that a man died swimming in the pond last fall of 2013, but I am sure if you had asked him if there was a place he would rather die, if he knew he were going to die that day, that

Walden pond would be it. And the world is a bit luckier because he did not die driving a car, or doing something else that could have endangered others.

DCR should not be punishing the swimming public solely because some DCR employees were freaked out by the death, and because the search crews were not deft enough to find the body sooner. It is very sad that he died, for the entire pond community, but again, that community should not be punished for this event. Yet, that is exactly what the DCR has done, first by roping off a much larger swimming area, and then by expanding the areas where open water swimmers and boats cannot go.

Now, it appears that DCR also wants to limit further the sections where swimmers can swim, by increasing the distance from the boat ramp as an area that excludes swimmers as well. This seems to be an excessive limitation, and I see no basis for this new restriction.

I thought I heard that the DCR was satisfied with how things went last year. Then why would the DCR have to go and implement even more rules? Many of the park visitors are disturbed and upset by lifeguards yelling at them as to where they can't swim and what they can't do. In addition, the limited open water swimming areas are more conducive to accidents among swimmers outside the ropes, as there is just not as much room to swim.

Conditions are so harsh in the guarded areas, you see whole families with young kids now going off to swim in the unguarded areas.

Please consider bringing Walden back to the way it was...let folks swim at their own risk. Let there be a guarded area within the ropes, and anything else is at a swimmer's risk. Let it be a much more pleasant experience for all.

I am writing to you as a long time open water swimmer and boater, and someone who will gladly swim at her own risk, in the spirit of what Walden pond is really about.

Thank you so much, and I look forward to your response.

Carla Schwartz, Ph.D.

From: Ann Gordon [mailto:annbgordon@comcast.net]
Sent: Tuesday, October 28, 2014 9:50 PM
To: Updates, DCR (DCR)
Subject: Walden Open Water Swimming

Thank you for tonight's meeting, and for the work of the past six months. As a regular distance swimmer at Walden I appreciate that the proposed regulations are sensitive to the interests of diverse groups and not onerous on any one group. I say good job!

I would like to second the suggestion made at tonight's meeting to provide a way for swimmers to know the daily water temperature. It would be a useful safety measure particularly in spring and fall.

Many thanks,
Ann Gordon
Wayland, MA
