

dcr

Massachusetts



downstream

# The Quabbin Visitor Center

The resource at the “source”

by Clif Read, Program Coordinator



The Visitor Center is on the first floor of the Quabbin Administration Building.

In the early 1980s it was becoming apparent that increased interest in – and visitation to – the Quabbin Reservoir was creating an unmet interpretive need.

At that time, there was no formal visitor services staff to answer questions, provide written materials, teach school groups about Quabbin, or handle the growing number of access permit requests. While interpretive services had already been developed to provide visitor information and management assistance for natural and cultural sites in the greater metropolitan Boston area, staff in Belchertown’s engineering and administrative departments had to incorporate these tasks in with their regular responsibilities.

The Quabbin Visitor Center became a reality in 1984 when Les Campbell, who worked in the Quabbin Laboratory, led the effort that officially designated space in the Quabbin Administration Building for an interpretive facility. The Visitor Center’s fate was solidified by the enabling legislation (Chapter 372 Acts

of 1984, Section 105) that created the new Division of Watershed Management within the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC, DCR’s predecessor) and shifted drinking water distribution and treatment, as well as waste water management, responsibilities to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA). This law specified that the newly created Division “...shall maintain a visitor’s center at the Quabbin Reservation.”

During its first few years, the agency relied on volunteers recruited through the Friends of Quabbin, a non-profit support organization founded in 1984 by Les and his wife Terry. The 1987 budget finally provided funding for interpretive staff, three of whom were hired in 1988. The name of the agency changed again in 2004 with the merger of the MDC and the

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A portico view out to the Quabbin Reservoir.

# Wachusett Reservoir Public Access Plan

The 2011 update is complete By Joel Zimmerman, DCR/DWSP Regional Planner

The most recent DCR/DWSP plan, the *Wachusett Reservoir Watershed 2011 Public Access Plan Update*, went into effect on July 1, 2011. This plan assessed the public's recreational desires, evaluated these demands within the context of the Division's primary goals of water supply and resource protection, and developed control measures to mitigate impacts from public access on the 21,028 acres of land and water in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed. The policies for many common recreational activities were built upon the previous 1996 and 2003 Wachusett Watershed Access Plans.

Adoption of the plan is the culmination of a process that included two public meetings and a survey that received 327 responses. Many people voiced the

Activity	Action	2011 Policy
Shoreline Fishing	No Change	Allowed except in most areas of the Intake Protection Zone.
Hiking	No Change	Allowed with some restrictions in areas of the Intake Protection Zone.
Cross-Country Skiing	No Change	Allowed with some restrictions in areas of the Intake Protection Zone.
Boating	No Change	Motorized boats are prohibited. Non-motorized boats allowed on Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers in the Tributary Headwaters Zone and on West Waushacum Pond.
Swimming	No Change	<b>PROHIBITED</b>
Bicycling	Clarified	Bicycling allowed in designated areas, rail trails, and from gate 39 to road below the dam on the old rail line bed only.
Horseback Riding	No Change	<b>PROHIBITED</b>
Camping	No Change	<b>PROHIBITED</b>
Motorized Vehicles	No Change	<b>PROHIBITED</b>
Hunting	No Change	Hunting allowed with DCR permit in the Tributary Headwaters Zone (locations must still meet MassWildlife regulations).
Dog Walking	Clarified	Dogs are prohibited except they are allowed (leashed) from below the dam to posted signage at the top of the spillway or while actively hunting in Tributary Headwaters Zone.
Geocaching/Letterboxing	New	Authorized in all areas where public is allowed following DCR guidelines.
Paintball	New	<b>PROHIBITED</b>

A summary of the 2011 *Wachusett Reservoir Watershed Public Access Plan Update* policies shows only small changes to existing rules. These restrictions help maintain the quality of this unfiltered water supply.

desire to see increased opportunities on DCR watershed lands for boating, dog walking, horses, and biking as well as expanded fishing and hiking. Respondents also acknowledged the special nature of these protected water supply lands in the regional landscape.

DCR recognizes that there is an inherent conflict between water supply protection and public demand for access to these lands. Any human activity on or near water supply source waters, however, can introduce disease-causing agents to the water supply. As water supply managers, DCR must exercise caution when considering public access policies while simultaneously considering that these natural resources are attractive recreational destinations. Public access policies must ultimately work within the agency's goals

to maintain water supply safety, water quality, security, historic and cultural resources, and ecological health while working with limited financial and personnel resources.

The policies set forth in this update, therefore, do not significantly alter the access rules that have allowed DCR to continuously achieve federal and state regulatory requirements for an unfiltered drinking water supply (see table above). Several existing policies, such as bicycling and dog walking, have been clarified and new guidelines have been added for geocaching/letterboxing and paintball.

The implementation strategy of the plan is organized into eight categories: Structural Controls, Signs, Mapping, Enforcement, Public Education/Interpretive Services, Sanitation, Technology, and

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# Americorps Builds Trails and Character

## Student Conservation Association lends a hand at Quabbin Reservoir

by Clif Read, Program Coordinator

**D**CR's Quabbin Section hosted a crew this summer for the tenth consecutive year from the Student Conservation Association (SCA) Mass Parks Americorps Program.

The SCA program partners with DCR to provide conservation service opportunities across the Commonwealth. Volunteers between the ages of 18 and 25 commit three, five, or ten months to the program, which is based out of Dubuque State Park in Hawley. The trails portion of the program begins in March with an intensive three week training period. Members are then broken into crews that fan out across the state working on one or two week long trail-related projects for a variety of agencies and organizations.

This year the crew at Quabbin completed work on the Swift River Discharge Channel Trail, including construction of a footbridge, riverbank stabilization, protection of trees along the bank, and improvements of the trail surface. These efforts were actually a continuation of a 2007



Left: The SCA Americorps crew pose after a job well done. Left to right — Eli Rolli, Zach Wagner, Elizabeth Packer, Jack Laskey, Gaia Posner, and Joe Castano.

Below: SCA volunteers work to make a trail more accessible to the public.

SCA initiative to build a bridge across the lower portion of the Swift River Channel. That original work, however, evolved into a five year project, as each year a different group has toiled at Quabbin to improve the quality of the trail, protect the river bank environment, and address public safety issues.

This year's crew, like the preceding four, was a hard working, professional team of young men and women who were a pleasure to work with. Please check out their work on your next visit to Quabbin Reservoir. 💧



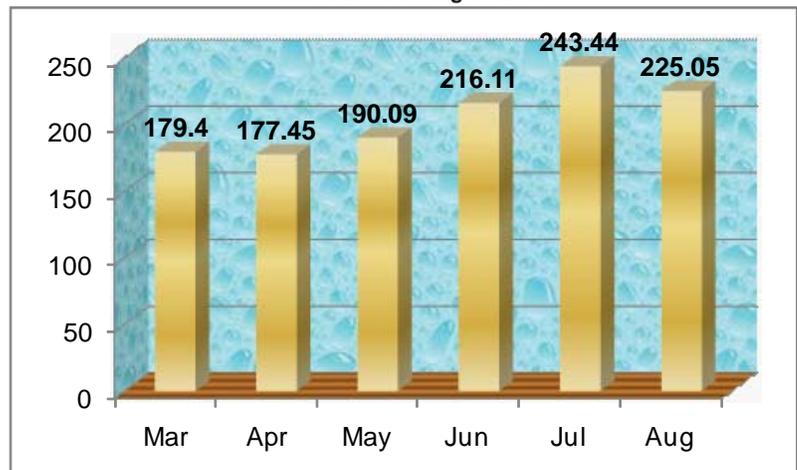
## Reservoir Watch

Reservoir levels and 6-month precipitation

Reservoir	Quabbin	Wachusett
Minimum Elev.	524.56'	387.37'
Percent Full	89.9%	85.0%
Date	3/1/11	3/1/11
Maximum Elev.	530.03'	392.05'
Percent Full	100.1%	94.1%
Date	5/25-26/11	3/29/11
Precipitation	32.55"	28.13"
Seasonal Avg.	25.05"	23.2"

Data Source: MWRA

System-wide 6-month Water Usage  
(million gallons per day)  
March 2011 to August 2011



## Quabbin Visitor Center from Page 1



Many come to admire the view from the Administration Complex, home to the Quabbin Visitor Center, at the southern end of the reservoir in Belchertown, MA. See this vista in real time via the MWRA's "Quab Cam" at [www.mwra.state.ma.us/qcam.html](http://www.mwra.state.ma.us/qcam.html).

Department of Environmental Management into the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), however the mission and services of the Visitor Center remained the same. The Visitor Center received a major face-lift in 2005, expanding visitors' view of the reservoir, increasing exhibit space, and relocating staff offices into the center.

Today the Quabbin Visitor Center is staffed and operated approximately 360 days annually, typically serving about 20,000 visitors. While the Center is open year round, the greatest visitation occurs during the autumn when the impressive array of color attracts visitors from all over the world. The Center staff also operates a satellite visitor center at the base of the Quabbin Lookout Tower atop Big Quabbin Hill on weekends during peak fall foliage season.

Visitor Center staff are busy throughout the school year providing programs to visiting student groups on topics connected to drinking water, Quabbin history, watershed management, and wildlife. Staff work with DCR watershed community schools to provide in-school programs and field trips. Due to the popularity of programs and the primary focus of Quabbin staff on communities within its watersheds, these educational services are limited to watershed towns and communities supplied by water from the DCR/

MWRA system. Drawing on the varied resources that have been developed and collected over the years, staff will try to assist any teacher developing a Quabbin or water related curriculum or project.

One of Quabbin's most intriguing aspects is that four former towns lay within the Swift River Valley, the area now covered by the 25,000 acre reservoir. While no buildings remain standing beneath the water from the disincorporated towns of Enfield, Prescott, Greenwich and Dana, some of the 2,500 residents who were required to move from the valley remain in the area.

In the mid-1980s, as the 50th anniversary of the towns' disincorporation approached, the Quabbin Visitor Center began a weekly gathering of former residents that became known as Tuesday Tea. In addition to serving as a focal point for former residents, the events provided opportunities for school groups and members of the public interested in Swift River Valley history to converse with folks born and raised in the valley. Sadly, as the numbers of former residents dwindle, the frequency of gatherings has been pared back to a monthly event. The summer picnic held at the end of August, however, still attracts a large crowd, some of whom travel great distances to reconnect to Quabbin and friends from the former towns.

### The Quabbin Visitor Center Interpretive Message

Several key themes are highlighted about the Quabbin Reservoir and DCR's watershed management through exhibits, brochures, and multimedia presentations:

- *Quabbin is a public drinking water supply with a critical role in the DCR/MWRA water system.*
- *Quabbin is a historically significant area covering four former towns that were disincorporated in order to build the reservoir.*
- *Quabbin is an important natural resource, preserving a vast contiguous natural land area essential to native flora and fauna.*
- *Quabbin is a watershed carefully managed to maintain high water quality and resource protection.*
- *Quabbin is a recreational resource that offers excellent opportunities for activities that are compatible with a public drinking water supply.*
- *Quabbin is part of the statewide resources of DCR.*

In recognition of the continuing loss of former residents and their first-hand accounts of life in the valley prior to the creation of Quabbin Reservoir, an oral history project was initiated in the mid-1980s to capture the memories and recollections of those who lived in the valley, vacationed in the towns, and/or worked on the Quabbin's construction. More than 150 interviews have been conducted to date. DCR and the Friends of Quabbin are currently working on a project to convert these findings to digital format and index the interviews for easier access by researchers.

The Visitor Center also works closely with the Swift River Valley Historical Society, the organization formed from the historical societies of the disincorporated towns. Located on Elm Street in New Salem, the museum houses a huge collection of the former towns' items, from a 1920s era North Dana fire truck to collections of photographs, clothing, and tools. A visit to the museum is a must stop for anyone interested in Quabbin history.

As part of the valley towns' disincorporation, the Quabbin Superintendent (now called the Regional Director) became the Town Clerk for Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott. The Regional Director is responsible for issuing official vital records documents such as birth, death,



The Visitor Center features environmental and historical displays as well as a wealth of genealogical information about past residents of the Swift River Valley.

and marriage certificates. The Visitor Center manages these records, preparing documents for sealing and signing by the Regional Director. Staff also provides assistance for individuals conducting genealogical research through the microfiche cards of the former town records. In addition to research on ancestors from the valley, people also search for information of former home sites.

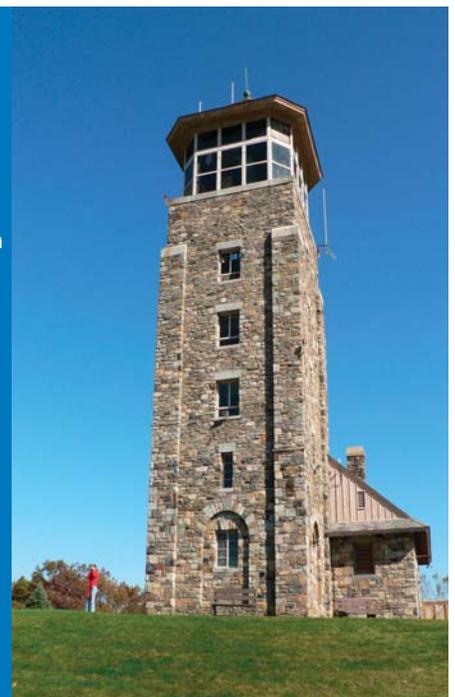
Much of the administrative work with the Controlled Quabbin Deer Hunt is also handled by the Visitor Center staff. From managing the application process to deal-

ing with permits for the 1,200 hunters each fall and coordinating the orientation sessions for participants, the program keeps the staff busy every fall. Other access requests and special event permits are also handled through the Visitor Center.

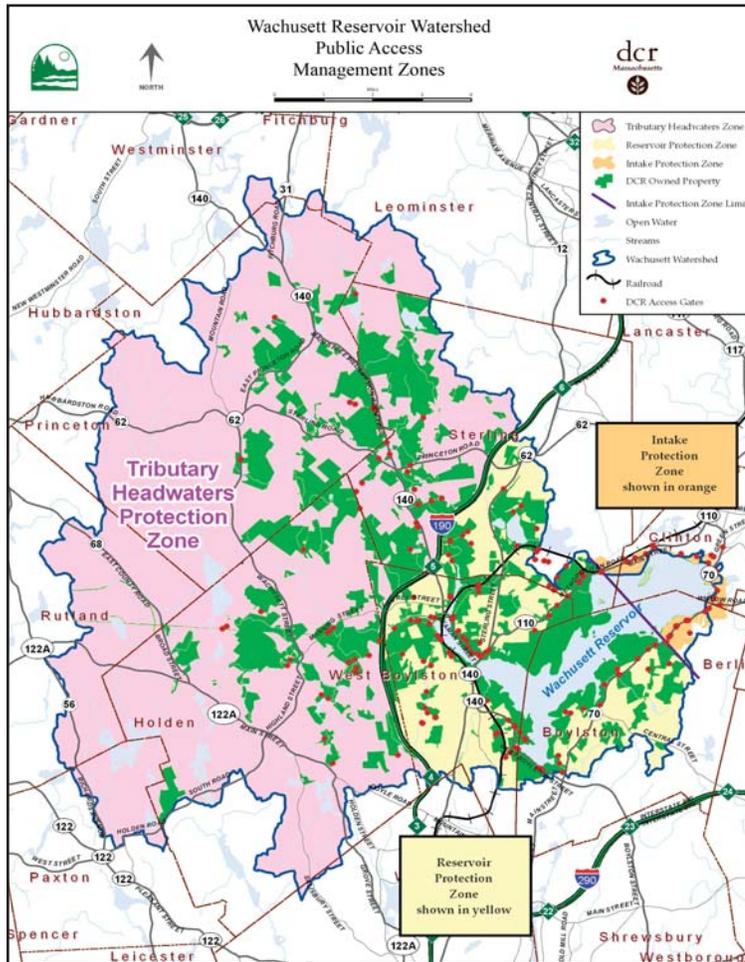
The Quabbin Visitor Center is located off Route 9, in the town of Belchertown, and can be accessed through the western or main entrance to the Quabbin Reservation. It is open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Staff can be reached by phone at (413) 323-7221. 💧



Just to the east of the Administration Complex one can see the Winsor Dam, an earthen structure with stone facing that holds back the 412 billion gallon Quabbin Reservoir (left). The Quabbin Observation Tower (right) situated at the summit of Great Quabbin Hill, is an 84' tower that was completed in 1941 for use as a fire watch tower as well as for public viewing. Accessed via Rt. 9, recent rehabilitation has made it ready for the fall "leaf peeping" season.



## Wachusett Public Access Plan - from Page 2



This map shows the three protection zones established by the *Wachusett Reservoir Watershed Public Access Plan*. DCR land is shown in green; the red dots are access gates.

Maintenance. There are 65 objectives associated with these categories that will be integrated into the Wachusett section's annual work plans. The recommendations compiled through this update process are mindful of the limited funding for expanded activities beyond routine maintenance and patrols, keeping open the potential to partner, when appropriate, with other groups and organizations that could work in conjunction to meet DCR's goal of improving public safety while protecting the drinking water supply for 2.2 million people.

In order to facilitate the implementation of these policies, the watershed has been divided into three management zones: **1. The Intake Protection Zone** provides primary protection of the water supply by prohibiting public access near reservoir intake structures; **2. The Reservoir Protection Zone** includes the watershed lands around the Reservoir and main tributaries (Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers) and the West Waushacum Pond; and **3. The Tributary Headwaters Zone** is made up of DCR/DWSP lands located outside of the Route I-190 and Route 62 corridor.

*The Wachusett Reservoir Watershed 2011 Public Access Plan Update* is available on the DCR website, [www.mass.gov/dcr/watersupply/watershed/dwplans.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/watersupply/watershed/dwplans.htm), along with the previously updated Public Access Plans for DCR's three other water supply watersheds – Quabbin Reservoir (2006), Ware River (2010), and Sudbury Reservoir (2010). Copies of the plan, which includes a summary of the public survey, have also been sent to the watershed towns and public libraries. 💧

## Security Spotlight

The events of September 11, 2001 highlighted the need for increased security throughout the watershed system, particularly in the areas around the reservoir intakes. DCR and the MWRA have developed many safeguards to help ensure the safety of more than 2.2 million people's source of high quality water.

A few examples of access improvements made over the past decade include:

- *Adding video surveillance at multiple areas.*
- *Replacing several gates with more secure entrances.*
- *Changing guardrails with a higher fence to discourage trespassing.*
- *Establishing additional gated entrances for staff to access the reservoir.*

Watershed Rangers, as well as all other DCR and MWRA staff, remain vigilant and observant of any activity taking place

in priority areas such as those around the dams and other structures.

The Public Access Plans and policies for the DCR/MWRA watershed system take into account the EPA's guidelines and recommendations to guard against terrorist and security threats based upon a five-tiered Department of Homeland Security system. Public access to any DCR land may be limited at any time due to potential security issues. In the event that any closure is necessary, the public will be notified through signage, the media, and any other available outlets deemed necessary.

In case of any emergency or suspicious activity, please contact the Watershed Rangers at (978) 365-3800 or (413) 323-0191, or the State Police at either (413) 323-7561 or 508-829-8410. 💧



The 10th anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy was commemorated on Sunday, September 11th, 2011 at DCR's Old Stone Church in West Boylston. Powerful blue lights shone skyward in the early evening to symbolize the World Trade Center's twin towers, while the local landmark was illuminated inside, as was the large American flag outside. People lined Route 12 to view the impressive display, which was provided by the West Boylston Municipal Light Department.

## Kids Corner

## The Bald Eagle



Bald eagles "skating" on the Quabbin ice.

**Bald Eagles vanished from Massachusetts in 1910, but were re-introduced to the state in the 1980s at Quabbin Reservoir.**

Quabbin's mature forests next to a huge body of water is ideal bald eagle habitat, since they perch in tall trees while fishing. The eagle's comeback has been a great success. MassWildlife recorded 32 bald eagle pairs in 2010 across the state. In 2011, Quabbin Reservoir was home to 6 nests and 11 chicks. Here are some fun facts and an eagle quiz.

by Maria Beiter-Tucker,  
Quabbin Visitor Center

**Bald Eagle Facts:**

- Bald eagles aren't bald; the name comes from the Old English word *balde*, which means white.
- The bald eagle's scientific name, *haliaeetus leucocephalus*, signifies a sea (halo) eagle (aetos) with a white (leukos) head.
- An eagle's body is about 2.5 feet long (head to tip of tail) and can weigh from 8 to 15 pounds.
- Female eagles are larger than males.
- Eagles have a wingspan of 6.5 to 7.0 feet wide.
- An eagle's nest is called an eyrie (*air-ree*). It is made of sticks and lined with twigs and green grass and is about the size of a play pen. The heaviest nest ever found was 2,000 pounds.
- Bald Eagles are protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

**Take the Bald Eagle Quiz!**

- 1. What does the bald eagle mostly eat?**  
A. Insects                      C. Carrion  
B. Fish                          D. Bird seed
- 2. How much can its nest weigh?**  
A. 10 ounces                  C. a ton  
B. 20 pounds                  D. Eagles don't nest
- 3. Where are bald eagles found?**  
A. Worldwide                  C. In North America  
B. The Western Hemisphere      D. Only in U.S. states beginning with M
- 4. What state has the largest population of bald eagles?**  
A. California                  C. Washington  
B. Florida                      D. Alaska
- 5. What bird did Ben Franklin want to be the emblem of the United States instead of the bald eagle?**  
A. California condor      C. Florida pelican  
B. Wild turkey                D. Sage grouse
- 6. How fast can an eagle dive?**  
A. 40 mph                      C. 100 mph  
B. 70 mph                      D. 130 mph
- 7. The Bald Eagle is on the Federal Endangered species list.**  
A. True                          B. False

(Answers at the bottom of the page)

## And another thing...

by J. Taylor



If it's stuck inside this bottle, how can it be "fresh"?

**For more information about...**Quabbin Reservoir Interpretation

Quabbin Visitor Center

[www.mass.gov/dcr/watersupply/watershed/dwmed.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/watersupply/watershed/dwmed.htm);

[www.mass.gov/dcr/events.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/events.htm)

(413) 323-7221

Friends of Quabbin/Swift River Valley Historical Society

[www.foquabbin.org](http://www.foquabbin.org); (978) 544-6882

Bald Eagles (MassWildlife Fact Sheet)

[www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/species\\_info/nhfacts/haliaeetus\\_leucocephalus.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/species_info/nhfacts/haliaeetus_leucocephalus.pdf)

Student Conservation Volunteers

Student Conservation Association

[www.thesca.org/mass](http://www.thesca.org/mass); (413) 339-5504

Americorps

[www.americorps.gov](http://www.americorps.gov)

DCR Planning

Division of Water Supply Protection

[www.mass.gov/dcr/watersupply/watershed/dwplans.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/watersupply/watershed/dwplans.htm)

Resource Management Plans

[www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/rmp/index.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/rmp/index.htm)

# The Quabbin Reservoir Headquarters' Story

by Dale Monette,  
Quabbin Visitor Center

The Quabbin Administration Building, a neo-classical complex typical of early 20th century government buildings, was constructed between 1937 and 1939.

Its purpose was to provide office space for the engineering, clerical, forestry and management staff in charge of final construction, and the subsequent daily operations, of the Quabbin Reservoir. The design included two ten-stall garages behind the main building for vehicles, maintenance machinery, and work areas for upkeep of the equipment. A seaplane hangar facing the water beneath the roadway in front of the main entrance to the building was also part of the original plan, as it was expected that the reservoir would be patrolled by amphibious aircraft. While that idea never came to fruition, the hangar remains and



In March 1938 (left) the main building had taken shape and by May (below), the exterior was largely complete. The entire complex was completed by September 1939 (below right).



now serves as an ideal boat storage and maintenance facility.

East and west wings were attached to the ends of the main building. The easterly portion was developed as a residence for the Superintendent, who was required

to remain on-call around the clock. The westerly end served the Metro Police. A police presence had always been part of the water supply plan; a jail cell from past days is still in the basement, though it is now used solely for storage. The Massachusetts State Police currently occupy the west end of the building while the Regional Director and his immediate staff have offices in the east residence.

The building, as intended, is still home to the daily operations of the Quabbin Reservoir watershed, including the Quabbin Visitor Center, an MWRA water quality lab, and other DCR staff. ♠



Looking Southerly at Administration Building ~ Cont 56 ~ 9-19-39 ~ Photo Pike ~ (56) 23

## downstream

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