

# Environmental Management Commission Meeting Highlights Climate Resilience

By Charlie Bickham

The Environmental Management Commission (EMC) discussed the importance of climate resilience and the conservation land on Camp Edwards. Jake McCumber, the natural resources and training lands manager, said the EMC needed to start a discussion about climate resilience, which he defined as an ecosystem's ability to withstand climate change. Illustrating the EMC's commitment towards climate resilience.



The EMC protects the drinking water and wildlife habitat of the Upper Cape Water Supply Reserve.

The 15,000-acre reserve is the primary training area for the Army National Guard in the Northeast and lies on the Joint Base Cape Cod JBCC, a base home to five military commands.

“[Climate Resilience] requires that broad collaboration, but it also allows us to really look at all the successes that we've already been having because of our conservation work. The agencies we represent, our agency, and everyone working together on ecosystem health is providing this climate resiliency, but we have a long way to go,” McCumber said.

McCumber said the EMC shouldn't be tackling the climate crisis by only reducing carbon emissions.

Instead, he believes people should be taking a complex look at climate change and climate resilience.

“We're told generally to break things down to about an eighth-grade level, so it's accessible to the general public” he said. “Once you dive into a topic like climate change, if you do that, you lose that inherent complexity. That often becomes a problem because it leads people to embrace overly simplistic solutions.”

McCumber also talked about how climate reliance has affected Massachusetts in the past few months. First, there was a longer growing season, which caused more vegetation. A prolonged drought mixed with this vegetation creates a fire risk, which could affect the drinking water reserve that supplies thousands of Cape Cod residents with water.

“We went through a drought that doesn’t really have any historical precedent in Massachusetts, and that drought was broken by a whole series of rainstorms that also don’t have much historic precedent.”

McCumber talked about a severe side effect New England already sees from a lack of climate resilience: the Southern Pine Beetle.

“In Long Island, over the last six years, they’ve been averaging about 8,000 acres a year of ditch pine mortality from the southern pine beetle. That is an ecosystem-changing species that is coming because of climate change.”

He claims the EMC is working hard to build up its climate resilience.

“The good news is, the work we’ve been doing over the last 15 years makes us resilient to the southern pine beetle because we’re doing those prescribed burns, we’re doing conservation guided forestry.”

McCumber proposed a plan to cut out pockets of trees in large Massachusetts forests, which would allow sunlight and water to come in, increasing the durability of the forests.

Another focus of the meeting was how training operations affect the ecosystem of Camp Edwards. Michael Ciaranca, the deputy director, described the capturing and containment of projectiles during training and the extensive soil sampling the EMC does to “employ the maximum feasible pollution protection.”

“A critical aspect of this commission is how the impact of our live fire training may bear on our environment” he said.

There is doubt over the safety of these gun ranges. The JBCC has been active since 1911, and the Environmental Protection Agency proved that past environmental practices caused impacts on the groundwater and environment.

However, when a member of the public asked to read a letter in opposition to the gun ranges and their effects on the environment, the commission denied their request. The meeting didn’t further address these concerns.

Matthew Porter, the Base Operation Manager, described two training operations that focused on collective training and the engineer and firefighter detachments.

Porter compared collective training to a coach bringing in all members of a team and training them to win a game or “In the army’s case, successfully execute our mission, which is exactly what we did.”

The engineer and firefighter training consisted of over a year of preparation to ensure that training operation was “compatible with the military’s use of the Upper Cape Water Supply.”

The EMC says it ensures that all military and other activities don't harm the reserve's environment.

McCumber said, "We have to be able to support the mission of our agency and the land we use. We have to be able to train soldiers, and so we have a whole conservation framework here to support that."

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