

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF February 15, 2024 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Greg Martin; Dunstable: Marijan Andacic; Harvard: Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

NPS: Emma Lord

MassWildlife: Pat Huckery

Guest: Hannah Volk, NPS Fellow

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. The meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

Administrative

The minutes of the January 18, 2024 meeting were approved as presented.

NPS Update

Emma Lord announced that Paula would be the guest speaker at the upcoming Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers (PWSR) “Brown Bag Lunch/Speaker Series” meeting on February 21, 2024. Her topic will be dam removal. Emma will send a link to the meeting to the Council members.

Emma reminded the Council that the federal government is still operating under a Continuing Resolution, the first vote to adopt the FY24 budget to be held on March 8th. While the NPS initially directed us to assume our FY24 funding would remain \$210,000, it is possible it may be reduced when the FY24 budget is adopted, possibly to \$200,000.

FY25 Draft Work Plan and Budget

Emma presented the draft FY25 Work Plan and Budget that she has been working on along with Lucy and Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold. She walked through the various components of the Work Plan, as follows:

- Outreach and Project Coordinator: Covers the work now being performed by Wynne, ranging from outreach for and organizing the three regional workshops to assistance on the FLP project, to managing the website.
- NRWA Program Support and Implementation: Includes the various ways in which NRWA staff assists the Council in carrying out its various activities.
- Outreach & Education: Covers projects such as the Interpretive Signage project which are designed to raise awareness of the Wild and Scenic Rivers and resources associated with them.
- Projects and Stewardship Plan Implementation: Receives the greatest amount of funding as it covers a large number of activities, including the FLP project and the three regional stewardship workshops.
- Community Grants: Over the last three years we have awarded 23 grants to our river towns.

Emma then explained the Budget categories required by the NPS by which the Plan components are reported:

- Personnel: Council Outreach & Project Coordinator; NRWA Program Support & Implementation
- Fringe: NRWA Staff Fringe Benefits (currently at 34% of personnel costs)
- Travel: Reimbursements for local travel (\$.067/mile current federal rate)
- Supplies: Miscellaneous materials needed for various Council projects and activities
- Contractual: The largest classification, it includes Outreach & Education, Projects & Plan Implementation, and Community Grants
- Indirect: Covers NRWA as fiduciary agent with flat rate of 10% of total budget.

It was suggested that we consider using funding for Supplies to cover small “swag” items, such as baseball caps, refrigerator magnets, dry bags for cell phones that would have our logo on them.

Emma plans to bring the FY25 Work Plan and Budget to the March meeting for adoption by the Council. As review of budgets is no longer being done at the regional level, but rather by headquarters in Washington, DC it may take longer to have our Work Plan & Budget approved by NPS Budget Office.

Finances

Lucy reviewed the Council’s finances as of the end of January, beginning with the Summary of Council NPS funds which tracks the status of NPS funds, based on expended funds, committed funds, and balance of remaining funds. She explained that there had been adjustments in NRWA staff support with respect to the FLP project which resulted in erasing the previous deficit in personnel costs. FLP project management is proposed to be covered through a contract (see below).

The Council’s current financial status is as follows:

- Contractual Activities expended approximately \$219,010 and has committed \$44,095, leaving a balance of approximately \$155,613. Lucy noted that the contract for FLP project management will be covered by this account.
- NRWA Program Support expended just over \$204,974 and has committed approximately \$42,595 to ongoing staff program support, travel and supplies, leaving a balance of \$1,890, if all the estimated staff time is used by June 30th. Including the funds expended and committed for fiduciary expenses, total expenditures as of the end of January were approximately \$466,383 and total committed funds were \$95,358, leaving a balance of \$173,259.

Lucy then walked through the “Status of Obligated Grants & Projects”. There was some discussion about redirecting the funds set aside for the ACEC Management Plan project to outreach on the value of the ACEC designation for our Wild & Scenic Rivers or supporting other follow-on projects that came out of the regional stewardship workshops, such as addressing invasives. Beth Suedmeyer urged the return of conservation networking breakfasts or gatherings.

Update on Current Projects

Interpretive Signage:

Lucy reported that the next step will be manufacture and installation of the three signs. Beth asked if the map lines delineating state boundaries and major routes had been extended as discussed at last month's meeting.

Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers Regional Stewardship Conservation Workshops:

Lucy noted that the Final Report on the Nissitissit Regional Stewardship Conservation Workshop had been included in the package of materials for this meeting. The facilitator, Robb Johnson is now preparing the report of the Nashua River Workshop which was held on January 26th. River Workshop at the River Resource Center. Heidi Ricci noted the benefit of the US Fish & Wildlife Service having two representatives present, given the importance of the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge to the Nashua River greenway.

Wild Inside: Lucy reported that four programs remain to be given. These talks have been extremely successful and well-received; perhaps a follow-on series could be considered next year.

Phosphorus and TMDL: Lucy reported that NRWA staff is in the final stages of preparing an application to MA Department of Environmental Protection. If a grant is awarded, it will go to the NRWA and not the Council; the Council's role was to provide the seed money for research and meetings to assure a strong, compelling, and successful application. The work performed by this grant will be of significant value to the Council in carrying out its obligations under the *Stewardship Plan*.

Forest Legacy Program Project

Lucy reported that due to NRWA staffing issues, Jen Keegan had reached out to possible outside sources to contract for FLP Project Management. Lucy was now requesting approval of a contract between North County Land Trust (NCLT) and the Council. She explained that Anna Wilkins, NCLT Executive Director would be the Project Manager. After a couple of additions were made to the proposed contract's delineation of the manager's responsibilities, a motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved authorizing Lucy to sign the contract on behalf of the Council.

Lucy also reported that the NRWA had signed a contract with Bob Spencer for a title examination of the Fors property in Ashby, MA, and future title work if needed. She explained that as this due diligence work is reimbursable under the FLP program, it is cleaner for NRWA to contract for the work and get reimbursed by the state than the Council.

Community and Land Protection Grants

The Council has received two Final Reports for 2023 grants:

- Ayer/PACE for water chestnut pulls on Grove Pond
- Shirley/Shirley Greenway Committee for Fredonian Park invasives removal and restoration

On motion made, seconded, and unanimously approved, both reports were accepted.

The Council has also received a request for extension of the 2023 grant to World Farmers. Lucy explained that severe flooding this past summer, along with Bolton's Conservation Agent being on

maternity leave, had slowed the engineering and permitting process being pursued to alleviate seasonal flooding of Mentor Flats in Lancaster. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously approved, a six-month extension was approved.

The last item to consider was the issuance of the RFP for 2024 Land Protection Grants, which had been postponed due to uncertainties around funding for the FLP project. It was decided to wait another month to decide and, in the interim, get a firmer estimate on the FLP project's funding needs.

Other

West Groton Dam: As this is a dam on the Squannacook River, Lucy felt the Council should know that the Department of Ecological Restoration (DER) is conducting studies and community outreach to determine if this dam should be removed. No action is required at this time; we may want to comment at a later time when the studies have been completed. Paula Terrasi noted that Pepperell has had three dams removed and that in each instance DER did extensive studies on the impact of removal, including assessment of sediments behind the dams, impact on vegetation, and benefit to aquatic species. She also emphasized the importance of community outreach, as few are aware of the benefits to the river with removal of small dams. A flyer noting the series of presentations on dam removal being given in March by NRWA staff was included in the packet for tonight's meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 21, 2024 at 7 PM by Zoom