

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF AUGUST 17, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Dunstable: Kate DeLoureiro; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

NPS: Emma Lord

NRWA: Jennifer Keegan and Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold

DEC: Neil Angus

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 June 15, 2023 meeting were approved as presented. The minutes of the July 20, 2023 meeting were approved as amended.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reminded the Council of the upcoming meeting of the Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers lunch meeting by Zoom on August 23, 2023. This is part of the regular speaker series meetings. The topic in the upcoming meeting will be "Arts on the River." If a member did not receive the email invitation to this event, she asked they let her know so she could forward it to them. Emma also reported the Dragonfly Mercury sampling had a successful day on Monday, August 14th, with 11- 12 volunteers collecting a record amount of larvae from a site on each of the three rivers. Both Joan Wotkowicz and Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold participated as first-time volunteers. Results of the 2022 sampling are still pending. Emma added that this year water samples were also collected to be tested for dissolved organic carbon.

Finances

Wynne reviewed the July expense report, noting expenditures on various Council projects, including upgrades to the website, preparation for the upcoming 10 Wild Inside programs, and the Squannacook Regional Stewardship Charrette. She also reviewed the summary of Council NPS funds for FY21-FY23, showing balances of \$18,301 Contractual, \$93,753 NRWA Program Support. The balances take into account not only expended funds, but also obligated funds. Lucy noted that these remaining funds will augment the FY24 NPS funds. Jennifer Keegan added that these funds can be applied to the projects being proposed later in the meeting.

Update on Current Projects

Interpretive Signage Project: Wynne reported on the status of the sign development. The illustrator, Kelly Finan, and graphics designer, GERALYN Miller have met and are coordinating their respective pieces of the sign. Kelly has sent a preliminary illustration to the working group for its review and comment. The illustration shows three aspects of life associated with the river: above, on the surface, and below, and will cover roughly 50% of the sign. GERALYN will add graphics for the other portion, including text and a map. Lucy asked that the proposal submitted by GERALYN in the amount of \$836 (a discounted fee for non-profits) be approved. By motion made and seconded, the proposal was unanimously approved.

Squannacook River Regional Stewardship Charrette: Council members who attended the Charrette reported that they felt it had been very successful and attendees were interested in meeting again to focus on key topics, such as land acquisition, trail connectivity, and managing invasives. Lucy noted that MassWildlife was unable to send a representative to the Charrette; Heidi Ricci added that as a landowner/manager of key connecting lands within this corridor, it would be beneficial to have MassWildlife participate in any follow-up sessions. Lucy reported that Robb Johnson, the facilitator, will be submitting a summary report on the Charrette, which will be distributed to the Council.

Potential Future Projects

Next Steps: Land Acquisition Charrettes and Resource Management Planning: The NRWA is proposing to provide staff support to organize a workshop for attendees of the Squannacook Charrette focused on land acquisition. Similar workshops would be organized for attendees of the proposed Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers Charrettes. Joan asked if the follow-up workshops should be combined into a single one held after the other two charrettes. Jen felt it is important to hold a workshop for the Squannacook sooner rather than later in order to keep participants engaged and not lose momentum. It was suggested that the proposal make clear that the initiatives raised at the Charrette extend across ownership boundaries, hence the need for coordinated efforts.

Another aspect of this proposal, which also came out of the Squannacook Charrette was consideration of an ACEC Resource Management Plan, given there are three ACECs within our Wild & Scenic Rivers' watershed. Lucy noted this would be a significant undertaking, comparable to the Study for designation as Wild & Scenic Rivers, and the Plan would require state approval. However, once completed and approved, the rivers and lands within the ACECs would have another significant layer of protection. This proposal is for NRWA staff to investigate the requirements for such a Plan so the Council could decide in the future if it wants to undertake this effort. Proposal cost: \$11,925. By motion made and seconded, the proposal was unanimously approved.

Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers Regional Conservation Charrettes: A proposal for hosting two additional charrettes was submitted by the NRWA. Lucy explained it would follow the same template as used for the Squannacook Charrette, including retaining the services of Robb, who has agreed to serve as facilitator. The proposed dates would be December 1, 2023 for the Nissitissit River Charrette and late January/early February for the Nashua River. Proposal cost: \$20,000. On motion made and seconded, the proposal was unanimously approved.

Phosphorus Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL): Jen reported that the Nashua River is currently listed as Category 5, "Waters Requiring One or More TMDL" for phosphorus. There was a draft report prepared in 2007 for Phosphorus TMDL which was never accepted by the EPA. As water quality is critical to the health of our Wild & Scenic Rivers and the species and habitats they support, the NRWA is proposing to provide support to the Council to begin the process of establishing a phosphorus TMDL. Based on this initial work, the NRWA will be able to apply for funding under the Clean Water Act Section 604(b) to prepare a TMDL plan for submittal to DEP and EPA. Neil Angus commented that undertaking this work would be important given the new requirements for MS4 permits. Proposal cost: \$12,525. On motion made and seconded, the proposal was unanimously approved.

Forest Legacy Program Project

With funding for the Council's FLP expected by October 1st, there is a need to get a leadership team together to oversee the successful completion of this project. At last month's Council meeting it was agreed that it would be appropriate for NRWA staff to be part of this leadership team, along with

Lindsay Nystrom, DCR FLP Coordinator and Janet Morrison, land conservation attorney who has worked on previous MA FLP projects. Lucy presented a proposal, “Management and Execution of the N-S-N Forest Legacy Project,” outlining the role and cost of NRWA staff support. Jen explained that she is in the process of interviewing candidates for the position of “Land Conservation and Climate Resilience Program Manager” and believes it will be filled in September. One of the responsibilities associated with this position is to coordinate with Lindsay and Janet in managing completion of the myriad of steps required by the Forest Service prior to closing on each acquisition. Given there are 20 tracts involved in this project and the 2 ½ to 3 years window to complete them, management and coordination will be critical. In addition to the support to be provided by the NRWA Program Manager, other NRWA staff may be enlisted for specific tasks. The proposal cost of \$50,000 is anticipated to cover at least the first year of the FLP project, but may be adjusted as needed. The Council unanimously approved the proposal.

Lucy then presented the proposal from Janet Morrison, dated August 7, 2023, for services in the amount of \$20,000 (\$100/hour, her discounted rate) for the period August 7 – October 5, 2023. There was discussion regarding the length of the period covered by the proposal and the justification for 200 hours work in this time period, especially given the anticipated start date around October 1st. Several amendments to the proposal were suggested: 1) that the period be extended from October 5th to December 1st; 2) that project management be eliminated as one of the services to be provided; and 3) that there be a description or schedule of specific tasks, such as review of legal documents and contracting with appraisers, to justify initial estimate of 200 hours. Lucy explained that Janet brings invaluable experience in land conservation and, particularly involvement with earlier FLP projects, as well as a relationship with most area appraisers who are qualified to perform the Forest Service required Yellow Book Appraisal. She added that the process for completing each tract’s enrollment in the FLP has multiple steps, which the Steering Committee will need to be fluent in when meeting with landowners. It was suggested that she ask Lindsay and Janet to provide an FLP training session for the Steering Committee prior to their meetings with landowners. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously approved, the Council directed Lucy to relay its suggested modifications to Janet’s proposal and, if accepted, to authorize her to sign it.

Announcements

Approve Officers: Lucy presented a slate of officers for FY24 as follows: Chair – Lucy; Vice-Chair – Heidi; Secretary – Joan; Treasurer – Beth Suedmeyer. On motion made and seconded, the slate was unanimously approved.

Hill Week: Lucy announced that Hill Week, an annual gathering in Washington, DC for supporters of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Program to meet with policy-makers and legislators, will be held March 18-22, 2024. As the Council cannot use NPS funds for travel to attend this event, attendee(s) would need to secure another source to cover expenses.

Mentor Flats Farms Open House: Lucy announced that World Farmers, a 2023 community grant recipient, will be holding an open house on Friday, August 25th, to tour the Mentor Flats Farms. She noted that our grant to World Farmers was to address drainage issues due to periodic flooding by the Nashua River. The farms have been totally wiped out by this year’s storms.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, September 21, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom