

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF JULY 20, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Harvard: Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NPS: Emma Lord

Guests:

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold, NRWA; Anne Gagnon and Leslie Gabriliska, MassWildlife; 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.

As there was not a quorum of voting member entities, actions requiring a vote were deferred to the August meeting.

Administrative

No action was taken on the minutes of the June 15th meeting due to a lack of quorum. Approval was deferred to the August meeting.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that the FY24 Work Plan-Budget was approved on July 3, 2023 and funds are now available for the Council to use. In response to a question by Lucy, Emma explained that Elizabeth requested that the funds be deposited into our account on a quarterly basis, although other councils may have them deposited on a monthly basis or as needed. Lucy will contact Jen to set up a schedule for receipt of funds.

Finances

Emma screen-shared a summary of the status of NPS funds as of June 30, 2023 which Lucy reviewed on Jennifer Keegan's behalf. The Council began FY23 with \$525,000. The Council awarded and/or allocated \$197,181 to grants and projects, and expended \$148,694 for NRWA staff program support. The Fiduciary fee was \$34,588, bringing total expenditures to \$380,463. In addition, another \$44,265 is obligated for 2023 grants. The balance of funds to be carried into FY24 is \$100,272, to be added to the \$210,000 in FY24 funding.

Update on Projects

Squannacook River Regional Stewardship Charrette: Lucy asked members of the Council (Emma, Heidi Ricci and Joan Wotkowicz) and staff (Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold and Hannah Volk) who participated in the Charrette to share their reactions and thoughts. All agreed it was a very diversified and large group of individuals (~35 including Charrette steering committee) representing the towns (Groton, Shirley, and Townsend), the state (Department of Conservation and Recreation – DCR), and private conservation groups. It was unfortunate MassWildlife was unable to send a representative, as it owns and manages a significant portion of this corridor, interconnecting with lands owned by each of the three towns (Groton, Shirley, and Townsend). Wynne and Hannah commented on the high level of

engagement by participants, particularly in the break-out groups. Emma felt having the break-out groups work off maps was a very effective way to both focus and capture issues of concern. She added that the several themes emerged when the participants introduced themselves and shared their priorities during the introduction portion of the gathering. Joan felt it accomplished one of our key goals: getting groups to think about the regional impact of their land management. For example, there was considerable interest in trail connectivity and issues surrounding trail development that would assure public access while protecting sensitive resources. Heidi reported that Eric Seaborn, DCR Director of Natural Resources, had shared that three state ACECs (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern) had developed “Resource Management Plans” which, once approved by the state, provided another layer of protection and regulation of the lands within the ACEC. She encouraged the Council to consider undertaking development of a Resource Management Plan for the two ACECs within our Wild & Scenic Rivers watershed. Heidi also appreciated Sherry Anders “TED talk” on the history of conservation of the Squannacook River led by local residents, particularly Benton MacKaye. All agreed Robb Johnson had been an excellent facilitator. Lucy noted that this workshop was a pilot for similar charrettes focused on the Nissitissit and main stem of the Nashua Rivers. She added it would be good to have Robb Johnson facilitate them as well. The attendees were very interested in having another session focused on a key topic, such as land acquisition. Participants hoped that MassWildlife would be able to participate when this follow-up meeting is scheduled, especially given its interest in protecting lands along tributary streams and headwaters of the Squannacook River.

A debrief session will be held by the steering committee and a report issued to the Council.

Interpretive Signage Project: Wynne reported on the kick-off meeting held the previous week at the River Resource Center which included Kelly Finan, the illustrator, and Emma by zoom, and, in person, GERALYN Miller, the graphics designer, along with the steering committee (Joan, Jen, Lucy, and Wynne). The meeting was followed by a tour led by Joan of the three locations for the signs. Kelly and GERALYN have been in touch since this meeting. Lucy reported that, as requested at the last Council meeting, Wynne had reached out to Kelly regarding the ability to contract initially for just the artwork for the three signs and, if we so desired, to contract at a later time to purchase either a 50% or 100% interest in the artwork. As Kelly was amenable to that approach, Lucy had signed a contract for the artwork for three signs at a cost of approximately \$6,600. Heidi asked for clarification that this would not be interpreted as avoiding going out for bid. Lucy responded that at our last meeting the Council felt we would not be in a position to determine if we wanted to purchase additional rights to the art until we had seen it. In addition, in reaching out to a couple of other graphics designers, Kelly was the only one who worked primarily on nature-focused signage. Emma will confirm with her superiors at NPS but believes we have been transparent in our process with Kelly, who was the only one who was able to satisfy the Council’s niche need for the type of artwork on the signs.

The Council felt GERALYN’s proposal in the amount of \$836 to provide the graphics design for the signs was acceptable; a formal vote, however, will be taken at the next Council meeting. Wynne let GERALYN know and that she could proceed.

River Canoe Access & Recreation Charrette: Emma reported that an information flyer had been sent to potential participants last week. The Charrette, to be held September 6 – 8, 2023, will focus on two sites; she encouraged Council members interested in attending to contact her. The River Resource Center will be the base. The River Management Society, which is the host of the charrette, will provide some funding for food and supplies. Wynne offered to help with any additional outreach Emma might request. Both Joan and Bernadette McQuilkin are interested in attending.

Dragonfly Mercury Project: Emma reported that sampling will be done on August 14th, with a rain date of August 15th. The volunteers who sampled last summer have been contacted and several will participate again this summer. As the sampling program could accommodate up to 15 volunteers Emma encouraged anyone interested in participating to contact her. Anne Gagnon asked if the results from last summer's sampling were available. Emma said they are still being finalized, but once completed we will get a report focused solely on our rivers, as opposed to all the rivers tested nationwide. Lucy asked about sampling for PFAS; Emma believes the USGS is testing some of last year's samples and may do so with this year's as well.

Final Reports

Ayer/DEC 2022 Community Grant: Lucy reported that Neil Angus had emailed her regarding the timing of submittal of the final report, which will be due August 15th. All grant funds have been expended: final planting of the pollinator garden will be completed in the next week or so, the trail has been roughed out, and the signage completed and production pre-paid for. However, due to delays in the signs being produced, they will not be installed until September. It was agreed that there was not a need to extend the grant period beyond August 15th, and that Neil could submit the final report when all work has been finished. Beth Suedmeyer noted that this project had engaged many community members. Once the signs are installed there will be a grand opening for the public.

Townsend 2023 Community Grant: Lucy reported that a final report had been submitted for this project, but unfortunately the final budget was incomplete. She has been working with the grantee on the accounting of not only grant funds, but also in-kind match, to be included in the final budget. She hopes to bring the final report back to the August meeting for the Council's approval.

Joan noted this seems to be a recurring issue with grantees and offered to revisit providing a template and/or clearer explanation of requirements for the final budget. Beth suggested we develop a spreadsheet tracking in-kind match to the grant funds and report this to the NPS to show what is leveraged with the Council's grant funds.

Forest Legacy Program Project

Lucy reported that funding for our FY24 FLP project, originally expected in early 2025, was now to be funded by the Forest Service using funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and that we could expect to have those funds available to us by October 1st. She has been working with Jen to determine what level of support NRWA staff might be asked to provide in coordinating work with the landowners, Lindsay Nystrom, DCR's Forest Legacy coordinator, and Janet Morrison, the land use attorney the Council contracted with during development of the FLP application. She added that the members of the FLP Steering Committee were the primary contacts with the landowners, having been the ones to identify and work with landowners to participate in this project. As we have 20 tracts to enroll in FLP, there will be a need to coordinate the tasks the Steering Committee members are charged with completing, as well as coordinating with Janet (on appraisals and legal documents) and Lindsay. Lucy asked if this was a position the Council would be willing to consider funding. It was agreed that this project coordination would be more than what a volunteer should be expected to undertake. Lucy offered to bring an estimate for the cost of this position if provided by NRWA staff to the next Council meeting.

Announcements

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. She will forward the flyer to Council members.

Updated FEMA Maps: Following last month's meeting, Lucy had checked with Harvard's conservation agent regarding status of the updated FEMA maps for Harvard. She learned that earlier this spring the town had received notice of their availability and that FEMA would schedule a public meeting to review the maps. There has been no additional contact since then. Paula Terrasi added that the preliminary FEMA maps for the Nashua River watershed have been completed and again encouraged Council members check with their respective town officials on the status of review and adoption of the FEMA maps in their town.

Officer Nominations: Lucy reminded the Council that officers are to be appointed annually following the start of the fiscal year (July 1st) and that the Executive Council acts as the nominating committee. Her goal is to have a slate to present to the Council at the August meeting. She will reach out to the current officers to see if they want to continue. She also asked for members to nominate others to serve as officers, as it is healthy to bring in new leadership.

Other: Bernadette asked if members could recommend a design or installer of beaver deceivers, as that topic had been recently raised at the Hollis Conservation Commission meeting. Paula suggested Mike Callahan, an expert in the design of very effective beaver deceivers.

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

Next meeting: Thursday, August 17, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom