

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 16, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Brookline: Greg Martin; Dunstable: Marijan Andacie; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NPS: Emma Lord
NRWA: Jennifer Keegan and Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold
MassWildlife: Pat Huckery

Guests: 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 October 19, 2023 meeting were approved as presented. Greg Martin, Brookline's new Alternate member, introduced himself to the Council, noting that he serves on its Conservation Commission. The Council members then introduced themselves to Greg.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that as Congress is currently operating under a Continuing Resolution for FY 24, there is no information on the Council's expected FY25 budget at this time. She reminded the Council that FY25 will be the last year of our Five-Year Cooperative Agreement (CA) with the NPS and that we must spend all funds provided by the CA by June 30, 2025. We should begin negotiations on a new CA in the spring of 2025.

Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold reviewed the Council's finances, referring to a Summary of Council NPS funds through October which tracks not only spent funds, but also funds committed for Council projects. She noted that in reviewing the Summary and more detailed financials, she and Lucy had noted some discrepancies which they will need to resolve with NRWA's bookkeeper. With that caveat, Wynne proceeded with her review. Over the last three years, the Council has received a total of \$735,000 through the Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service. To date, the Council has spent approximately \$209,500 and committed \$67,000 for contractual activities, leaving a balance of approximately \$142,000. Similarly, the Council has expended just over \$174,000 and committed approximately \$81,000 for NRWA staff program support, travel and supplies, leaving a deficit balance of \$6,000. This deficit, we believe, is possibly due to an error in the bookkeeper's error in entering committed funds for staff support. Taking into account the funds expended and committed for fiduciary expenses, total expenditures as of the end of October were approximately \$422,000 and total committed funds of \$163,500 which would leave a balance of \$150,000.

After Wynne and Lucy have met with the bookkeeper a revised Summary and more detailed financial statement will be sent to Council members.

Update on Current Projects

Interpretive Signage Project: Wynne gave a brief Power Point presentation on the purpose and process used in developing the sign which will be used at various sites on the three Wild & Scenic Rivers (initially one at each river). She also explained the rationale behind the messaging shared with the working group by the illustrator, Kelly Finan: “3-30-3.” This refers to the amount of time people may spend reading the sign: 1) 3 seconds for a quick overview; 2) 30 seconds for a little more information; and 3) 3 minutes to read and absorb all the information on the sign. She then shared the most recent draft of the sign, which is approximately 50% complete. Lucy added that should the Council approve the sign design, we could proceed with completing it, producing the signs, and then installing them in the spring. The Council responded enthusiastically to the sign and proposed wording. Pat Huckery asked that the otter be redrawn to show the back legs (currently covered by the tail). She also asked that the wording be sent to her so she could review it more closely. Wynne agreed to send the text to everyone for their review. The Council agreed to move forward with the present sign design, subject to concurrence with the text and correction to the otter.

Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers Regional Stewardship Workshops: Lucy reminded the Council that the Nissitissit Workshop is being held on December 15th; she noted that the Nashua Workshop would be held on either January 26th or February 9th, with the date to be finalized over the next month. Wynne reported that a Save the Date postcard for the Nissitissit Workshop had been sent to potential participants and that 15 to 16 had already responded that they are planning to attend. The format will be the same as that used for the Squannacook Workshop, including a TED talk, arranged by Bernadette McQuilkin, to be given by Pete Smith, a long-time member of Beaver Brook Association and champion of the Nissitissit River. Several additional invitees were suggested; Wynne will reach out to them.

Wild Inside: Talks continue to be given by NRWA staff in the Wild & Scenic Rivers’ towns. Wynne noted that a presentation had been made at the Ayer Public Library last night (November 15th)

Phosphorus and TMDL: Lucy noted that Council funds had been appropriated to this project as seed money for the NRWA to develop a basis for an application for funding under the Massachusetts 604B Water Quality Assessment Program. Jennifer Keegan reported that Martha Morgan, NRWA Water Program Director, had been meeting with both MA DEP and federal EPA representatives in preparation for filing a grant application which will focus on addressing non-point source pollution (bacteria, phosphorus, and nitrogen) throughout the watershed. The NRWA will partner with the Devens Enterprise Commission (DEC) as the application must come from a public entity.

Annual Reports to Select Boards: Joan Wotkowicz reminded the Council of its annual reports on Council activities to the local Select Boards. Lucy added that we had discussed adding information on volunteer hours raised as match to our community Grants, noting that Emma was working on a spreadsheet to capture that information. She could also include matching funds raised in response to the grant as well. In addition to reporting on the Community Grants awarded in the past year, this report should also highlight current and future projects, as well as promote applying for the next round of Community Grants. Joan offered to draft the basic report, which representatives may modify as appropriate for their respective towns. Lucy noted these reports are usually given by Council members to their Select Boards at a January or February meeting.

Resource Management Plan: One outcome of the Squannacook Stewardship Charrette had been the suggestion the Council investigate the possibility of developing a Resource Management Plan for one or all three of the Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) within the watershed of these Wild and Scenic Rivers. Wynne had been in touch with Nancy Putman, DCR lead on ACECs; Nancy had

sent her the application and designation for the Central Nashua River ACEC, most of which lies within Lancaster. Michele Girard noted that conservation commissions often do not know how to proceed with review and permitting within an ACEC. Lucy shared her understanding the Resource Management Plan, if approved by the state, would add an extra layer of local boards' review and permitting of projects within an ACEC. Pat questioned if there was a MEPA review required for permits with an ACEC. It was agreed that more information is needed.

Forest Legacy Program Project

Jen gave a brief overview of the scope of this project: protection of 20 forested tracts, through fee or conservation easements, collectively comprising approximately 2,000 acres. Funding for these acquisitions would be with over \$8 million in Forest Service funds and an additional \$4 million in cost share contributions. She reported that we have been given permission by our FLP-DCR partners to begin preliminary work on this project, including title examination, survey or legal description of the property, and preparation of a draft conservation easement. Lucy noted that the Council (instead of the landowners) can pay for this work for which it will later be reimbursed with FLP Project Funds. Jen announced that NRWA has staffing in place to oversee this project and work with the landowners Janet originally contacted: Sara Singh who will be the contact with landowners and Will Collier (who will be starting at the NRW on November 27th) will serve as the project manager. There will be a meeting of the FLP Steering Committee (including all those who are working with landowners) on November 30th.

Community Grants

Lucy would like to close out the following older Community Grants (2021 and 2022):

Ayer ConCom: Waterways Signage
Ayer/DEC: Nashua River Trail/Pollinator Garden
Groton Invasives Committee: Knotweed Removal
Lancaster Land Trust: Cook Conservation Land Parking Area
Townsend Select Board: Adams Dam Bank Stabilization

Lucy would like the representatives for these towns to reach out to the grantees. She has already spoken to Beth Suedmeyer regarding the two Ayer grants and asked Stacey Chilcoat, Justin Smith, and Joan to follow up on their grantees in Groton, Lancaster, and Townsend, respectively. There was some confusion about the Townsend grant as a final report had been submitted. However, given there were unspent grant funds, Lucy had asked the grantee and was waiting to learn if there were other uses for these funds.

Other

Forests as Climate Solutions: Lucy reported on this draft report prepared by the MA Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (OEEA) being circulated for public comments, adding that the link to the report was on the agenda. She knew Heidi Ricci had testified as a private citizen at the public Zoom hearing last night. Wynne had also attended the hearing and gave a brief summary of the comments made, noting they ranged from pro-harvesting by commercial interests to managing public lands to maintain healthy forests (for example by removing invasives) to keeping public forests as wilderness areas. She added that there is a survey which can be found on the website for this Plan should anyone want to comment. Jen added that NRWA is working with an intern from the Harvard Law School's Environmental Clinic on a response to the proposed plan. It is not clear if the state will provide new guidelines or regulations as part of the report; at the moment it is gathering information and public input.

Wild & Scenic Rivers Coalition: Lucy reported that the Coalition is conducting a survey on NPS Partnerships and Civic Engagement, a portion of which pertains to Wild & Scenic Rivers. She plans to take the survey. She also reminded the Council that at the last meeting Emma had agreed to look into the ability of the Council to use NPS funds to pay a small, but not mandatory, membership fee to the Coalition. Emma reported that as most of the Coalition's work is lobbying and advocacy for federal programs, NPS funds cannot be used.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

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