

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF OCTOBER 19, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Drew Kellner; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NPS: Emma Lord
NRWA: 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 September 21, 2023 meeting were approved as presented.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that as Congress is operating under a Continuing Resolution, the FY24 budget has not been approved. Therefore, we have not received formal notification of the Council's FY NPS funding. Lucy confirmed that the requested amount was the same as the FY23 funding level: \$210,000.

Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold reviewed the Council's finances, beginning with the summary of Council NPS funds through September which tracks not only spent funds, but also funds committed for Council projects. Over the last three years, the Council has received a total of \$735,000 through its Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service. To date, the Council has spent \$202,674 and committed \$55,128 for contractual activities, leaving a balance of \$160,921. Similarly, the Council has expended \$166,192 and committed \$51,590 for NRWA staff program support, travel and supplies, leaving a balance of \$31,677. In addition, \$36,887 has been spent and \$10,672 committed for NRWA fiscal agent services, leaving a balance of \$19,260. In sum, the Council has committed \$117,390 to on-going activities, and has another \$211,858 in available funds.

Wynne then walked through a more detailed accounting of Council disbursements for each specific program in September. Total expenses for the month were \$10,300, \$3,364 were under Contractual and \$6,933 for NRW support and fiscal agent services.

Update on Current Projects

Interpretive Signage Project: Wynne reported that work is nearing completion on the sign and that the working group would hope to bring it to the next Council meeting for approval.

Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers Regional Stewardship Workshops: The Nissitissit River Workshop, scheduled for December 15, 2023, will follow the same format as the Squannacook. Wynne reviewed

the proposed agenda and asked for comments or suggestions. Heidi Ricci commented that the state's proposed "Forests as Climate Solutions" initiative looks to landscape-scale planning for forest preservation, which may resonate with our river corridor-scale workshops. Lucy announced that Bernadette McQuilkin is working with Peter Smith, a long-time advocate for the Nissitissit River and member of Beaver Brook Association to put together a PowerPoint presentation on his work and knowledge of the river. Peter also will be able to attend the workshop on the 15th.

The Nashua River Charrette will be held in late January or early February 2024.

Wild Inside: Wynne shared the schedule of upcoming talks being given by Gaynor Bigelbach of NRWA Environmental Education staff. The only change was postponement of the Groton program; future date to be determined. Joan Wotkowicz reported on the recent program in Townsend at which she introduced Gaynor and spoke briefly about the work of the NRWA, Council and Squannacook River Rail Trail. She reported that the program, which was attended by 20-25 people, was very well received.

Phosphorus and TMDL: Wynne gave a brief update on this pilot project being supported by the Council. She explained that in 2007 daily standards for phosphorus/nitrogen loading in the Nashua River had been developed but never approved by the state. The purpose of this project is to gather data, identify sites, and additional information to include in an application for DEP. As a municipality must be the applicant, the DEC (though not a municipality) may apply on behalf of the Council. The RFP is due out in November and proposals must be submitted by February.

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 ACECs within the watershed of these Wild and Scenic Rivers. Wynne had reached out to Nancy Putnam, Senior Ecologist with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), who oversees the state's ACEC program. Wynne reported that budget cuts over the last several decades had left the department without the resources or staff to support the ACEC program or review proposed Resource Management Plans. There was some discussion about ways to support Nancy and see that she has the funding and staff needed to oversee management of the ACEC program and stewardship of these resources through approved Resource Management Plans.

Forest Legacy Program Project

Lucy reported that Janet Morrison had terminated her contract with the Council to provide legal and conservation services associated with the FLP project. She explained that a small working group (Jen, Wynne, Marisa Browning-Kamins, Lindsay Nystrom, Emma, and herself) had met with Janet a couple of times to try to resolve roles and responsibilities between Janet and NRWA staff. She believed that after the second meeting there was a better understanding, that Janet would continue pulling together information on the various tracts, and that the group would reconvene in early November. Unfortunately, shortly thereafter Janet decided to terminate her contract. Lucy added that Lindsay had confirmed that the Forest Service had not signed the contract with DCR, so work that would be reimbursable could not be undertaken. Hence, we have something of a grace period while we reorganize and orient the expected NRWA new hire. Lucy reported she has contacted the members of the larger FLP Steering Committee of Janet's departure. Emma asked if Janet's contract, which was through December 1, 2023, was terminated as of the date of her notice (October 17, 2023). It was agreed that Lucy would send a letter to Janet formalizing termination as of October 17th, and that the letter be by regular mail and attached to an email.

Lucy then presented Janet's invoice dated October 16, 2023 in the amount of \$6,075 for approval. By motion made and seconded, payment was unanimously approved.

Community Grants

Townsend Historical Society Final Report: The Final Report 2021 Community Grant to the Townsend Historical Society (THS) had been sent to Council members prior to the meeting for review. Lucy thanked Joan for pursuing wrapping up this grant, which had gone through various delays due to change in leadership at the THS. She added that the grantee was not requesting the balance of grant funds (\$750) due as it had received other donations. On motion made and seconded, the report was accepted.

Proposed Revisions RFP Announcement and Grant Agreement: The Council approved the proposed revisions previously made by Joan for the 2024 Community Grant Agreement. Lucy questioned the appropriateness of including volunteer hours in a proposed revision to the Grants Award Announcement, noting that at the time of award we would not know the amount of volunteer hours. All agreed tracking this information would be beneficial and could be included on our website and in our annual report to Select Boards. Emma noted that she has started gathering this information based on the last three years' grants.

At the last meeting it had been suggested we combine the Community and Land Protection Grant RFPs into a single document. Joan had undertaken to do so and reported that there are enough unique elements in each program that combining them would result in a large and cumbersome document. It was agreed that we would announce both programs at the same time, have same timeline for receipt of proposals and award announcement, but keep the RFPs and Grant Agreements separate. Drew Kellner suggested adding funding for a land management plan as a Community Grant activity and keeping Land Protection Grants to due diligence and land acquisition-related costs. The timeline for 2024 grants will be:

Release RFP – week of January 8, 2024
Proposals Due – March 8, 2024
Select Grants – March 21, 2024
Announce Awards – March 28, 2024
Grant Term – to March 21, 2025

Other

Oxbow Open House: Beth Suedmeyer announced that there will be an Open House at the Bill Ashe Visitor Center on October 21st which will include a guided trail walk and activities for families. She added that a new Manager should be appointed shortly for the Eastern Massachusetts Refuge Complex (which includes the Oxbow NWR).

Stormwater Fund: Beth reported that Ayer is creating a Stormwater Fund to offset the cost of upgrades to stormwater drainage systems. She will share information when available.

MACC Conference: Heidi announced that the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commission will be holding its annual conference on October 28th. She will be leading a workshop on wetlands restoration and streamlining the permit process. The conference will be held at Devens.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom