

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 21, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Drew Kellner; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NPS: Emma Lord
NRWA: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold
DEC: Neil Angus and Deborah Seeley

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

Lucy opened the meeting by asking Neil Angus to introduce Deborah Seeley, Vice Chair of the DEC and recently appointed Alternate to the Council; Neil will succeed Peter Lowitt as the DEC Representative. Deb was given an opportunity to share her background: while currently a resident of Shirley, she previously lived in Lunenburg where she served on its Planning Board; she has a long standing interest in conservation and is looking forward to participating in the work of the Council.

The minutes of the August 17, 2023 meeting were approved as presented.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported on the Canoe Access Planning Charrette which was held over the course of 2 ½ days earlier in September. Two sites were selected for assessment and planned improvement for both access to and from the river, but also additional passive recreational opportunities, such as trails, along the river. The sites were a property owned by Beaver Brook Association on the Nissitissit River in Hollis, NH and the Petapawag boat launch in Groton, MA on the Nashua River. Stacey Chilcoat led the participants in on-river exploration of the Nashua River (the canoes were furnished by Diane Carson of Nashoba Paddler). In addition to time spent at the sites, the participants reconvened at the NRWA River Resource Center where they were split into small working groups and given copies of aerial photographs of the sites to mark with their suggested improvements to river access and the site. Joan Wotkowicz and Bernadette participated in the Charrette; they felt it was a great success and model for future planning to improve river access to degraded, publicly used sites.

Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold reviewed the August expense report, noting this is the 4th year of our 5-year NPS Cooperative Agreement. She began with the summary of Council NPS funds for the first 2 months of FY24, noting the report takes into account not only spent funds, but also funds committed for Council projects, such as the Interpretive Signage and Nissitissit and Nashua River Stewardship Charrettes.

There is an estimated \$176,500 remaining in Contractual funds and roughly \$89,300 in NRWA Program Support funds with an additional \$29,600 for Fiduciary expenses. Wynne then walked through a more detailed accounting of Council disbursements for each specific program in August.

Update on Current Projects

Interpretive Signage Project: Wynne reported that the illustrator and graphic designer had developed a rough sketch of the base sign to share with the working group. Based on feedback they received, they are working on refining the sign in preparation for a meeting in early October. The basic sign may be ready for review at the October Council meeting; the base sign will then be modified to fit each specific river location and sent for production. Lucy noted the intent is to install the signs next spring once the ground thaws.

Squannacook River Regional Stewardship Charrette – Final Report: The Report was made available to members prior to the meeting. Michele Girard was impressed with both the number of conservation landowners in this corridor and the number who participated in the Charrette. When asked for suggestions, Council members felt it would be good to attach the names and affiliations of the participants added to the Report. Lucy noted that the Report would be posted on the Council's website and asked if attendees names should be included there as well. Heidi Ricci felt that if the attendees agreed, then they should be included as well. In addition to the Report, the Notes of the Charrette prepared by Robb Johnson will also be shared with the Council. Lucy added that Wynne had transcribed the notes on the maps and added them to Robb's Notes. She has the maps so if anyone wants to review them they should see her.

Lucy reported that Robb had submitted his final bill for this Charrette. His contract had been for \$1,800, at \$100/hour, but the time spent meeting and reviewing the report with the working group before finalizing it, exceeded his estimated time. Lucy had agreed to the additional hours and authorized payment of his invoice in the amount of \$2,248.

Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers Regional Stewardship Charrettes: Lucy reviewed Robb's contract for facilitating these next two Charrettes, noting his rate is the same (\$100/hour) and that he expects his time may be less than that needed for the Squannacook River Charrette. The Nissitissit River Charrette is scheduled for December 1, 2023 and will follow the same format as the Squannacook; the Nashua River Charrette will be held in late January or early February, 2024. Lucy noted that the Nissitissit River Charrette has the added benefit of covering two states. The TED talk given by Sherry Anders at the Squannacook River Charrette was very well received and we are looking into a similar talk at the Nissitissit event. Bernadette will reach out to Peter Smith, a long-time and active member of Beaver Brook Association who is extremely knowledgeable about the Nissitissit River corridor, as a possible speaker.

Forest Legacy Program Project

As Heidi would have to leave the meeting shortly, Lucy asked that the remaining projects' update be deferred so Heidi could participate in the discussion on this topic. Lucy then briefed the Council on the FLP process: the Council had applied to DCR's Forest Legacy division under the FLP program; DCR accepted the application and submitted it to the US Forest Service as a state application. When the project was approved by the Forest Service, it was with the state, not the Council. Therefore, the contract for funds will be between the Forest Service and DCR; Lucy does not believe that it has been

signed yet. The Council's role and responsibility is to work with the landowners and DCR to assure the successful completion of the project as proposed in our application to DCR. To accomplish this, the Council approved retaining Janet Morrison, as was done for the FLP application, for her conservation and legal services at a rate of \$100/hour, not to exceed \$20,000 to the period ending December 1, 2023. Lucy reminded the Council that Janet had been retained on similar three-month contracts during the preparation of the application.

In recent communications to Lucy, Janet has asked for a vote of the Council to name her Project Manager, responsible for not only the legal requirements as outlined in her proposal, but administrative responsibilities as well, including setting the agenda, overseeing landowner contact by our various partners, and assigning tasks to the NRWA lead staff. Lucy added that her expectation had been that the FLP project would be overseen by a small working group (as was the case in with the FLP application), comprised of herself, representing the Council, Lindsay Nystrom, DCR Forest Service Coordinator, Janet, Jen Keegan as fiscal agent, and the new NRWA staff person. Unfortunately, filling the new NRWA staff position has taken longer than expected, although the new person is expected to be on board by our next Council meeting. Wynne added that as Jen supervises and manages NRWA staff, Janet could not assume that role in this instance. Beth Suedmeyer commented that for this project to succeed it would need to be a coordinated team undertaking. Heidi concurred, noting the contract is with the state and, as such, meeting its requirements is Lindsay's responsibility. Janet would have a role in coordinating the fulfillment of legal documents, working with landowners and/or their contacts. Drew concurred that it was not appropriate for us to pay \$100/hour for administrative work. Joan pointed out that Project Manager was not included in the proposal the Council approved last month. Should additional responsibility be given to Janet, we would need a more comprehensive contract with a specific work plan. Lucy reported that she would be meeting with Janet, Lindsay, Emma, and Jen on Monday to try to resolve this situation. It was suggested that specific tasks for each person and a general work plan be developed. The hope is that once the new NRWA staff person is on board and has met with Janet, Janet will feel more comfortable with her role as originally set forth.

Update on Current Projects - Continued

Wild Inside: Wynne reported on two different programs that were developed and will be presented by NRWA staff for free to the river towns (one per town). She shared a schedule of towns and programs, some of which have set dates and the others still to be determined. She will update the schedule as dates are finalized. Most of the programs are being held in the town's library. As Harvard's Council on Aging had already paid for and had the program, it is not included on the current schedule.

Dragonfly Mercury Sampling: Emma reported that the samples had been sent off last week for analysis but did not expect results for at least a year, as we have not yet gotten the results from last year's sampling. She noted that the *Groton Herald* had covered the sampling in a short article.

Community Grants

Townsend Final Report: The Final Report 2023 Community Grant to the Townsend Conservation Commission for its Invasives Workshop was presented for acceptance. Lucy noted there had been a delay in this final acceptance due to a delay in completing the final budget. On motion made and seconded, the report was accepted. Lucy can now request disbursement of the balance of grant funds to the grantee.

Proposed Revisions RFP Announcement and Grant Agreement: Joan had several suggestions for improving both documents, based on the experience of the last few years. In particular, the final report requirements pose significant challenges. She walked through suggested edits that are intended to simplify and clarify the information to be provided. She also suggested having the Land Protection grants be available on a rolling basis; Lucy suggested combining the Community and Land Protection grants. Drew felt Land Protection grants should be expanded to include reimbursement for transactional costs. Several suggestions were offered, which Joan will take into consideration in further revising these documents. Lucy thanked Joan for her excellent editing skills.

Other

Nashua Nature Volunteers: Beth reported on the recent formation of the Nashua Nature Volunteers, comprised of members from the Assabet Great Meadows and Oxbow NWRs and other community volunteer groups. NatureGroupie is a platform developed and managed by UNH for volunteer recruitment, which enables word of a volunteer activity to be broadcast beyond the immediate location of the work. It is free to use and she found it particularly helpful when looking for volunteers to participate in the Ayer/DEC pollinator garden project as it drew people from well beyond Ayer. She offered to look further into this platform and make a presentation at our October or November meeting.

Ayer/DEC Pollinator Garden Dedication: Beth announced that there will be a dedication of the new Nashua River Trail and Pollinator Garden October 12th or the following weekend. This project was funded by a 2022 Community Grant.

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

Next meeting: Thursday, October 19, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom