

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF JANUARY 18, 2024 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Greg Martin; Dunstable: Kate DeLoureiro; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NPS: Emma Lord
NRWA: Jennifer Keegan and Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold

Guest: Darrin Ferguson, NPS Visual Information Specialist

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 December 21, 2023 meeting were approved as presented. Diane Carson, Kate DeLouerio, and Paula Terrasi abstained as they had not been at the December meeting.

NPS Update

Emma Lord announced that Paula would be the guest speaker at the upcoming Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers (PWSR) “Brown Bag Lunch/Speaker Series” meeting on February 21, 2024. Her topic will be dam removal. Emma will send a link to the meeting to the Council members.

Emma also announced that Sarah Nelson can give a presentation on the Dragonfly Mercury Project at our April meeting. Sarah has been one of the main national leads on this project.

Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold reported that she, Lucy, Beth Suedmeyer, and Robin Hebert, the NRWA Bookkeeper had met to review the Council finances and allocation of funding, particularly with respect to the projected deficit in NRWA Program Support. Adjustments and corrections have been made, but a deficit still remains, in large part due to the FLP Project being awarded funding a year earlier than expected. The staff time estimated for that project, as well as some other ongoing projects, may be less than being carried as committed expenses. Lucy added that funds could be moved from Contractual to NRWA Program Support, subject to approval by the NPS Finance Team.

Wynne then reviewed the Council’s finances, beginning with the Summary of Council NPS funds through December 2023 which tracks the status of NPS funds, based on expended funds, committed funds, and balance of remaining funds. The Council’s current financial status is as follows:

- Contractual Activities expended approximately \$213,148 and committed \$504,375, leaving a balance of approximately \$155,200.
- NRWA Program Support expended just over \$194,683 and committed approximately \$81,090 to ongoing staff program support, travel and supplies, leaving a deficit balance of \$26,315, if all the estimated staff time is used by June 30th. There are several possible reasons for the deficit, one being that the budget had not anticipated the FLP project, which will require significant staff

support, starting this year. Considering the funds expended and committed for fiduciary expenses, total expenditures as of the end of December were approximately \$448,277 and total committed funds were \$144,612, leaving a balance of \$142,111.

Wynne reviewed two additional reports: the first being a report which detailed expenditures by Council Projects in the month of December, noting the significant amount of staff time being spent on the FLP Project. The second report, similar to the previous one, was a cumulative accounting of Council Projects by each project's budget, expenses to date, and balance.

Wynne asked if Council members found all three reports useful to cover in our meetings. It was agreed all three would be sent to members prior to the meeting, but that the Summary of Council NPS funds and the previous months' spending might be all that needed to be covered during the meeting. Obviously, all of the reports could be reviewed if desired.

New NPS Staff

Emma introduced Darrin Ferguson, a NPS Visual Information Specialist, recently assigned to develop visual outreach materials for the 17 Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers. Darrin explained that he could help design video content, graphics material, newsletters, etc.; basically, to help us tell our rivers' stories. He will try to attend the next several Council meetings so he can learn more about our work and ways in which he can assist us.

Update on Current Projects

Interpretive Signage Project: Wynne reported that the illustration has been completed and now the graphics consultant, GERALYN MILLER, is completing the graphics for the signage, such as adding labels to the highlight species. Wynne will be contacting the sign manufacturer, Pannier, for both cost estimates and length of time to make the three signs. She noted that the QR code in the lower right corner would provide a link to a translation application on our website. Current plans are for providing translation into Spanish and Portuguese. It was suggested we also provide translation into Haitian Creole, given the growing Haitian population in Lowell. It was suggested that the major roadways (Rt 2, Rt 119) and state lines be extended to the edge of the map. In addition, the Devens lands on the map should be relabeled "South Post, Ft Devens" and "Devens Enterprise Zone" the latter including land in Shirley as well as Harvard and Ayer. Wynne will work with GERALYN in making those corrections.

Lucy presented the final invoice from Kelly Finan, the illustrator, for approval, noting an increase of \$90 in the contracted amount due to additional time spent on the river otter. On motion made and seconded, the Council unanimously approved payment of \$3,438.

Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers Regional Stewardship Conservation Workshops:

Lucy reported that the Report on the Nissitissit Regional Stewardship Conservation Workshop was being prepared by the facilitator, Robb Johnson, and should be available to the Council at its next meeting. The Nashua River Workshop will be held on January 26th at the River Resource Center and will follow the same format as the other two. February 2nd is being held as a snow date. Lucy will reach out to the new US Fish & Wildlife Service Refuge Manager to encourage at least one, if not two, representatives to attend the workshop.

Wild Inside: Wynne noted that ten programs, along with three videos, were the original proposal approved by the Council. The programs have been very well received and, as a result, two additional towns have asked for presentations. Of the three videos, one has been completed and a second is nearly

done. If the third video is not produced, there would be sufficient funding in this project to accommodate the additional two programs. By motion made and seconded, this modification was unanimously approved.

Phosphorus and TMDL: Lucy reported that the purpose of this project was to provide seed money for NRWA staff to investigate the feasibility of a watershed wide program to develop Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) standards for the three rivers. Jennifer Keegan and Martha Morgan have met with Department of Environmental Protection representatives regarding state grant funding for this work. An RFP for a state grant that could fund this project is due out shortly; an application will be due in March. Should funding be awarded, it will become an NRWA project.

Resource Management Plan: Wynne reported that she and Marisa Browning-Kamins had met with various stakeholders in Lancaster regarding the possibility of developing a Resource Management Plan for the Central Nashua River Valley ACEC. This has been put on hold for the near future as 1) the state is not providing funding or support to develop and approve such plans, and 2) this is not the appropriate time to pursue such an undertaking in Lancaster. It was felt, however, that outreach and general education of the public on the ACEC designation would be useful, perhaps through a speaker series offered to the public. The state requirements for designation under the ACEC program can be found at: www.mass.gov/info-details/acec-program-overview.

Forest Legacy Program Project

Lucy reported that Will Collier was no longer on NRWA staff, having left shortly after the first of the year to pursue other opportunities that he had been interested in prior to coming to the NRWA. In the interim, Sara Singh, Conservation & Climate Resilience Specialist, will continue to provide administrative support. Members of the FLP Steering Committee have begun working with landowners on the required due diligence documentation. The Steering Committee will be meeting later this month.

Community and Land Protection Grants

The Council has received a Final Report from the North County Land Trust for its 2023 Land Protection Grant to survey and monument the boundaries of access to conservation land in Lunenburg. On motion made and seconded, the Council approved the Final Report and disbursement of the remaining grant funds.

Program on Native Americans

Wynne has been in touch with Mike Volmar, past curator at Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, for information on the Native Americans who once populated the Nashua River watershed. Mike would be willing to come speak to the Council but wanted to know how best to frame his talk. Suggestions from the Council members included: stewardship of the land; use of the rivers and land for their livelihood; management of forests; and nature of fisheries activities. Mike has offered to give the talk gratis; should we find it beneficial, we could pay him to give a similar presentation to the general public. Beth asked if progress had been made in establishing a contact with the local Nipmuc Council. Mt Grace Land Trust has a representative from the Nipmuc Council working part-time with them. It would be good if we could have a similar partner.

Other

Groton-Shirley Dam: Heidi Ricci reported that Groton has received an MVP grant to study the feasibility of removing a “high risk” dam (Department of Ecological Restoration designation) on the

Squannacook River. As the river forms the boundary between Groton and Shirley, it is important that there be outreach to Shirley residents. While the Groton side of the dam is owned by the Town, the Shirley side is privately owned. Removal is controversial, hence the need for greater engagement with Shirley residents. There are two public meetings scheduled in Groton in March. Lucy suggested that the Council should make sure representatives attend the public meetings and, if appropriate, comment on the proposed dam removal. Diane Carson will keep the Council advised on time and place of meetings. Wynne noted that Jen and Martha had met on site with DER representatives, along with Groton officials and a Shirley landowner.

2024 Community Grants RFP: Lucy announced that the RFP and Grant Application for the 2024 Community Grants has been posted on our website, and that there is notice of the RFP and a link to our website on the NRWA website. Wynne will also be sending announcements of the RFP to local newspapers and attendees of our three Regional Stewardship Workshops.

2023 Annual Report: Lucy reminded members that they should share the 2023 Annual Report with local Select Boards, other town committees, and interested parties.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:25 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, February 15, 2024 at 7 PM by Zoom