

## N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

### MINUTES OF MAY 16, 2024 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

#### Voting Member Entities Present:

*Towns:* Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Greg Martin; Dunstable: Marijan Andacic; Harvard: Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz  
*NRWA*: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold  
*DEC*: Neil Angus

Guest: Sarah Widing, NRWA Board Member

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 March 21 2024 meeting were approved as presented.

#### Dragonfly Mercury Project Presentation – Sarah Nelson

Lucy welcomed Sarah Nelson, Director of Research at the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). Sarah provided information on her background and her current role at AMC in working with the Merrimack River Watershed Council on a watershed-wide study of the impact of industrial and other pollution on the watershed's rivers. This study began with focusing on DEI and EJ communities situated in old mill cities which are most vulnerable to water and air pollution. Dragonfly larvae are a useful source for measuring pollutants such as mercury in rivers and wetlands as they are prone to stay in one location over their lifetime. The Merrimack watershed sampling program, in which the Council is participating, is now in its third year and beginning to yield useful data. Data from our samples is added to a national database run by the USGS and Dartmouth College labs. The lead agencies in this national program are the NPS and USGS. After a very informative presentation, there was a brief question and answer period. Unfortunately, a full agenda prevented more discussion.

Sarah agreed to send her presentation to Emma to share with the Council.

#### NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that an NPS River Restoration Specialist had been able to visit the Beaver Brook access site which had been part of the workshop on improving degraded river accesses. A plan for addressing the erosion at this site is being developed, beginning with a topographical survey.

#### Finances

As we did not meet in April, Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold's report included both March and April finances, which she began with the Summary of NPS funds used, committed, and balance, as of the end of March.

- Total Contractual: of the \$418,723 budgeted, \$223,726 has been expended and \$128,118 is committed to ongoing activities. This leaves a balance of \$66,878. The change in committed

funds reflects the setting aside of \$30,000 for land protection grants and just over \$80,000 in community grants.

- NRWA Program Support: of the \$249,459 budgeted, \$211,296 has been expended and \$16,236 is committed for ongoing projects. This leaves a balance of \$21,928.

The April Summary showed the following status of NPS funds:

- Total Contractual: Expenses have increased to \$244,219 and committed funds have decreased accordingly to \$109,250, leaving a balance of \$625,254.
- NRWA Program Support: Since March, expenditures have risen to \$215,409 and committed funds decreased to \$12,312, leaving a balance of \$21,739.

Lucy mentioned that a few of our older Community Grants need to be closed. She asked Beth Suedmeyer to check again with the Ayer Conservation Commission about the use of remaining grant funds to manufacture more signs. If there is no interest in this, we need to free those funds for other uses.

### FY25 Draft Work Plan and Budget

Emma reported that our FY25 Work Plan and Budget had been submitted to the Finance Office in DC for review and approval. While she has not received approval of the FY25 budget, she does not anticipate any delay in our receiving funds on July 1, 2024.

### New Cooperative Agreement NPS – NRWA

Emma explained that there will be a change in the length of cooperative agreements (CA) going forward: instead of having a 5-year term, they will run for 4.5 to 4.75 years. This change was instituted so that CA recipients can spend all their funds before the end of 5 years. In addition, due to the start date of our new CA (September 1, 2025) there will be a 9-month overlap of funds between our current and next CA. The new CA will end on April 30, 2029.

### Update on Current Projects

*606b Grant to MA DEP:* Funding provided by the Council enabled NRWA staff to develop information and assist the Devens Enterprise Commission (DEC) in developing a proposal to MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) under the 604b program. An application has been prepared and submitted by the DEC which will fund, if awarded, water quality monitoring for nutrients and E coli, data modeling that can be used to inform needed phosphorus waste reductions, and a “Watershed-Based Plan” for a portion of the W&S Nashua River watershed.

*Interpretive Signage:* Wynne reported that sign is close to completion, with only the addition of QR codes needed. She asked that the representatives for the towns where the signs will be located (Brookline, Groton, and Townsend) reconfirm with the appropriate entities placement of the signs at the locations currently shown on the signs. Wynne has contacted Pannier and learned it will take 8 to 9 weeks to prepare the signs. Before actually manufacturing the signs we will be given a full-sized proof for final review. Lucy asked Wynne to confirm the cost of the signs.

*Dragonfly Mercury Project:* Lucy announced that paperwork has been filed to allow the NPS to obligate \$5,400 Council funds for this project.

## Forest Legacy Program Project

Lucy reported the work is well underway for this project. The Steering Committee meets monthly to share progress reports. Anna Wilkins continues to do an excellent job managing this complex project.

## Grant Updates

- 2022 Groton Community Grant– Invasives Project: Lucy reported the grantee has asked that the balance of grant funds (\$1,270) be released before the final report is submitted in order to reimburse one of the volunteers who paid for seed and other items. On motion made and seconded, the payment was authorized.
- 2023 Groton Community Grant – Trail Signage: Due to delays in getting necessary approvals which prevented installing signs before migration began, the grantee has requested an extension to December 31, 2024. On motion made and seconded, the extension was approved.
- To date we have not received any applications for 2024 Land Protection Grants. Greg Martin believes Drew Kellner does intend to submit a grant to cover some of the cost of a recent acquisition.

## Other

*Partnership W&S Rivers Gathering:* The annual PWSR Gathering is being held at Jay Peak in Vermont October 21 – 24, 2024. As the Council has funds in the FY25 budget to cover travel Lucy encouraged members to consider participating in this event.

*SRWMA Meeting:* Lucy reported that Representative Margaret Scarsdale has reached out to MassWildlife in an attempt to facilitate a meeting regarding the proposed ecological restoration of 200 acres within the Squannacook River Wildlife Management Area with MW and interested stakeholders. MassWildlife would like to delay the meeting until after the proposed Forest Management Guidelines undergo another round of review by internal and stakeholder agencies, such as MassAudubon. Heidi Ricci suggested that NRWA submit comments. It was also suggested that MW consider a pilot restoration project on Shirley's Pumpkin Brook Conservation Areas which abuts SRWMA and has been heavily cleared.

*Nashua Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership:* Wynne reported that she has attended two meetings of this newly-formed group started by North County Land Trust. It was agreed it would be good for the Council to participate in these meetings. The next one will be in August.

*Legislators Tour of Rivers:* Wynne reported that Mass Rivers Alliance had reached out to Emma and her regarding a possible tour of our rivers by federal and state legislators as a way to learn about the Wild & Scenic Rivers program. They will keep us advised as plans develop.

*Regional Conservation Partnership:* Heidi reported that the RCP is seeking proposals for workshops to be held at its November conference. She suggested the Council might be interested in organizing a workshop.

*MA DEP Wetlands Regulations:* Heidi reported that MA DEP is updating its wetlands regulations and wondered if NRWA had or was submitting comments. Wynne suggested she reach out to Martha Morgan. Heidi commented that some of the proposed changes would make removal of dams and invasives easier with a more streamlined permitting process.

*Silver Lake, Hollis:* Bernadette McQuilkin announced that the Hollis Conservation Commission had received a state grant to address algal blooms, both the cause and mitigation measures.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, June 20, 2024 at 7 PM by Zoom