

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

### MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 20, 2025 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

#### Voting Member Entities Present:

*Towns:* Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Greg Martin; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci and Sarah Widing; Townsend: Eva Vaughan

*NRWA*: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold

*NPS*: Emma Lord

*MW*: Pat Huckery

*Guest*: Nathalie Negrete, NPS –PWSR Fellow; Marisa Browning-Kamins and Jessica Veysey-Powell, NRWA staff; Sherry Anders, Shirley Greenway Committee

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. The meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

#### Administrative

Lucy welcomed Eva Vaughan, the new Townsend Representative. After the Council members introduced themselves, Eva did the same. Lucy also announced that two new Alternates have been appointed by their respective Select Board: Ben Thyng for Hollis and Rob Templeton for Townsend.

The minutes of the January 16, 2025 meeting were approved as presented.

#### NPS

Emma Lord reported that the Federal Government is still working under a Continuing Resolution (CR) which will end on March 14, 2025. While we still should plan on flat funding for our next fiscal year (FY26), there remains the possibility that the expected \$210,000 could be decreased by \$5,000 - \$8,000.

#### Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenold reported that access to our NPS funds through our ASAP portal had been frozen when the President ordered all federal funds frozen a few weeks ago, but then subsequently re-opened, giving us access again to our funds. To date we have drawn all of our FY25 funds for our first Cooperative Agreement (CA1) and 50% of our FY25 funds for the first year of our second Cooperative Agreement (CA2). Wynne added that with CA2 funds in house, we have begun charging costs to CA2 while continuing to expend the remaining funds in CA1 which must be zeroed out by June 30, 2025. To keep the expenditures for the two CAs straight, she would be reviewing two Summaries.

Wynne began with a Summary of the Council's finances under CA1 through January 31, 2025.

- **Total Contractual:** A total of \$15,019 was disbursed in January: \$8,646 for the Interpretive Signage and Legacy Program projects and \$6,373 for Community Grants. There remains \$51,910 committed for current projects and grants, leaving a balance of \$27,123 to obligate and spend by June 30<sup>th</sup>. Wynne noted that this amount in the December report had increased by \$3,250 with termination of a 2024 Community Grant.

- NRWA Program Support: The Staff Support line had previously been zeroed out so there were no charges against it in January. There were small charges to Supplies and Travel, totaling \$856, leaving a balance of \$931.

The combined remaining balance of Contractual and Program Support funds is \$30,859.

Wynne then provided a brief Summary of CA2 January expenditures.

- Contractual: There were no expenditures or funds committed, leaving the full \$123,383 allocated to this category untouched.
- NRWA Program Support: A total of \$5,361 was spent on staff support, fringe, and indirect costs and another \$21,318 committed for on-going projects, leaving a balance of \$59,939.

### Update on Current Projects

*Dragonfly Mercury Sampling:* Lucy asked that the Council approve payment of the \$6,000 due for this year's Dragonfly Mercury project now even though the sampling will not be done until August. The intent is to draw down the CA1 funds before June 30<sup>th</sup>. Emma shared that the results of the 2023 sampling season were posted in January and that she expects the 2024 season results will be posted in the fall. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously supported, payment of \$6,000 was approved.

### Potential Projects

*Regional Invasives Plant Management:* Since the last Council meeting, the Regional Invasives Species Management working group had met to consider possible projects to undertake over the next few months. Lucy asked Marisa Browning-Kamins, NRWA Senior Restoration and Land Programs Associate who has been providing support to this group, to explain the proposal she had developed at the working group's request: "NRWA Stewardship Project Proposal." The proposal captured the range of projects being considered and provided a budget for Marisa's time from March through June, estimated to be 115 hours at a cost of \$4,000.

Following the last working group meeting Marisa, Lucy, and Wynne, met to refine a proposal to bring to the Council for work that could be completed by June 30<sup>th</sup>. It was agreed that a workshop would be the best project, both because it could be completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> and could provide a good starting point for undertaking Regional Invasive Plant Management. Marisa further refined this recommendation with a second proposal, "Regional Invasive Plant Management Workshop with Stewardship Coordination Funding." The \$3,700 budget for this project would cover NRWA staff support, hiring a facilitator, and honorarium for a speaker. Members of the Council were strongly supportive of a regional workshop; however implementation and funding of on-the-ground projects were raised as concerns. Lucy noted that our Community Grant program has supported individual invasive management projects and that these grants might be the best vehicle going forward. Heidi Ricci noted local projects would be an effective way to educate residents on invasives and management techniques. Beth Suedmeyer suggested compilation of best management practices. After some further discussion, on motion made, seconded and unanimously supported, the Council approved \$4,000 for regional invasive plant management efforts through June 30<sup>th</sup>.

*Data Loggers:* Jessica Veysey-Powell, NRWA Water Programs Director, presented a proposal, "Stream Chemistry Monitoring for Aquatic Life Health," seeking \$10,000 to cover NRWA staff. She explained that the NRWA has a grant from another foundation to cover installation of eight temperature data loggers in various locations on cold water stretches of our wild and scenic rivers and their tributaries. The project scope has grown since first funded requiring more staff time in on-site monitoring of the

loggers, adding seven conductivity loggers, adding sites of interest, such as downstream of developments to monitor their impacts, and uploading data to the EPA's database. The loggers will be installed beginning in March and monitored through the fall of 2025. A key purpose of this data collection is to determine potential cold water refugia to be protected for cold water dependent aquatic species and initiate appropriate conservation planning. Jessica explained the total cost of the project was \$27,800, \$12,500 of which was coming from the Fleetwing Charitable Foundation, \$10,000 from the Council (if approved) and the balance from other potential funding sources such as the Massachusetts Environmental Trust. Noting the high value of this project with respect to our stewardship of the resources associated with the rivers, Pat Huckery suggested raising the amount supplied by the Council to \$15,000 so that the project is now assured full funding. On motion made, seconded and unanimously supported, the Council approved \$15,000 for this project. Jessica will submit a revised project proposal with a revised budget.

*Story Map:* Bernadette McQuilkin has been taking an ARC/GIS course and feels confident that with what she is learning she could create our story map. This is a project that could be undertaken in the future when she has completed the course and has the time to devote to it.

### FY26 Work Plan and Budget

Emma and Lucy walked the Council through the draft FY26 Work Plan and Budget, highlighting this year's change of the addition of a Stewardship Coordinator position to be funded at \$9,554. Still to be finalized is the hourly rate for NRWA staff, currently set at \$41.54/hr, and the fiscal agent rate, currently set at 10% but which now can be raised to 15%. Other categories are the same, with amounts allocated to them modified from the FY25 budget to accommodate the new coordinator position. Emma cautioned that while the budget assumes \$210,000 in funding, it may be reduced once a final NPS budget is approved by Congress. The final Work Plan and Budget will be presented for approval at the March Council meeting.

### Community Grants

The following Final Reports for Community Grants were submitted and accepted, thereby releasing payment of the grant funds due:

- Ayer 2024 PACE
- Harvard 2024 Conservation Commission
- Harvard 2024 Fivesparks

PACE had realized savings in its grant expenditures, and, therefore, did not need the full remaining grant funds. As a result, \$1,237.12 will be added to the balance of unspent CA1 Contractual funds.

The Harvard Conservation Commission also did not spend all of its appropriated funds, and as a result \$20.27 will be added to the balance of unspent CA1 Contractual funds.

*Shirley 2024 Community Grant:* At last month's meeting the Council accepted the Shirley Greenway Committee's offer to use its remaining grant funds to print 400 copies of a generic riparian landowner's management brochure, adapted from the Shirley-specific brochure created under this grant. The generic brochure was approved by the Council. Lucy thanked Marisa and Wynne for their work in making the modifications and Sherry Anders for offering to print the brochures. She expects them to be ready in one to two weeks.

*Disbursement of Remaining Active Grant Funds:* Given the deadline of disbursing CA1 funds by June 30<sup>th</sup> and, preferably, April 30<sup>th</sup>, Emma suggested that we disburse to our active grantees the remaining 50% in grant funds now rather than holding them until final reports are submitted and approved. Wynne noted that some funders do, in fact, provide all grant funds at the time of award. There was some concern voiced about assurance that these projects would be completed and funds spent appropriately. Lucy noted that there are eight active Community Grants representing approximately \$19,600 in funds being held until completion of their projects. There are three open Land Protection grants, representing \$36,000. The general consensus was that paying out the remaining Community Grant funds was a low risk that projects would not be completed; the three open Land Protection grants might represent a greater risk. Lucy will contact the grantees for the three Land Protection grants to ascertain their status and likelihood of successful completion.

At Emma's suggestion, the third quarter of the CA2 funds will be drawn down on March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

### Forest Legacy Project

Lucy presented an invoice in the amount of \$675 from the North County Land Trust for Anna Wilkins' coordinator services from January 1 – February 18, 2025. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously supported, payment of the invoice was approved. Lucy reported that DCR has informed the FLP Steering Committee that it cannot issue new contracts due to the uncertainty caused by federal funds being frozen. She explained that DCR seeks reimbursement from the US Forest Service as it anticipates funds to be needed for payment under current contracts. DCR has the funds to cover current contracts so work can continue under them. However, no new contracts can be let until DCR has assurance it will receive future FLP funds from the Forest Service.

### Updates and Announcements

*PWSR Speaker Series:* Emma announced the next event will be held on Wednesday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, noon to 1:30 PM. In addition to a speaker, there will be time for break-out sessions. She will resend the link for the meeting.

*Hill Week – March 24-28:* Lucy announced this annual event which is intended to inform legislators on the value of the Wild & Scenic Rivers program and encourage on-gong funding. Emma noted our travel funds could not be used to cover someone attending as this is a lobbying event for which federal funds cannot be used. There was no interest expressed in attending.

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

Next meeting: Thursday, March 20, 2025 at 7 PM by Zoom