

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF JANUARY 16, 2025 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Greg Martin; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Sarah Widing
NRWA: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold
NPS: Emma Lord
MW: Pat Huckery
Guest: 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

The minutes of the December 19, 2024 meeting were approved as presented. Lucy advised the Council that a Conflict of Interest policy, which had been adopted in 2010, was to be signed annually by members. Unfortunately, she had not been requiring it. She will send the form out to the entire Council with a cover email explaining the need to sign and return it.

NPS

Emma reported that the Federal Government is working under a Continuing Resolution (CR) which will end on March 14, 2025. The intent is that the FY25 budget will be adopted by Congress before the CR ends. Emma's advice was to assume a flat budget for our FY26 (which will begin on July 1, 2025) of \$210,000. It is possible that amount may be decreased by \$5,000 - \$10,000, so we should also be taking that into account when developing our FY26 budget and work plan.

Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold reviewed a 1-page Summary of the Council's finances under its first NPS Cooperative Agreement (CA1) through December 31, 2024. While funds provided by CA1 must essentially be spent by April 30, 2025, Wynne reminded the members that we also have funds available under our second NPS Cooperative Agreement (CA2) to spend during this current fiscal year. She then reviewed the status of CA1 funds as follows:

- Total Contractual: No funds were drawn from this category in December, so \$71,000 remains held as committed funds for current community grants and projects, with the balance of contractual funds to expend by April 30, 2025 just over \$23,000.
- NRWA Program Support: The remaining funds allocated to Personnel and Fringe were spent down to \$0 in December. In addition \$1,000 from Supplies was moved to cover Personnel and Fringe costs. Going forward, funds from CA2 will be used to cover Staff Program Support. Emma advised that funds from CA2 became available on July 1, 2024 and should be used to cover current expenses as we zero out the CA1 funds.

Update on Current Projects

Culvert Assessment & Mapping: Wynne reported that the team leaders for this project are requesting \$2,207.02 for additional stream crossing equipment. This will enable up to five teams of staff and volunteers to conduct simultaneous stream crossing assessments. Wynne added that the NRWA has applied for, and seems well-positioned to receive, a grant from MA DER for culvert assessments in Fitchburg and Leominster. Having the training and additional equipment funded by the Council will be a significant reason for this grant to be awarded. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously supported, the Council approved the additional funds for supplies.

Interpretive Signage: Following up on the direction provided at last month's meeting, Wynne had been in contact with Kelly Finan, the illustrator for the signs, regarding the cost of buying various levels of rights to the illustration. There are three cost levels:

- For use on additional signs - \$558 per sign.
- For unlimited use for signs only - \$2,790.
- All rights buyout - \$5,580

Wynne noted that the first two options would allow Kelly the right to sell this illustration to others and limit our use of the illustration to only signs. In the last option the Council would have exclusive rights to use, even modify, the illustration however we wanted. Given the ideas for additional ways to use the whole or portions of the illustration (on the cover of the Jr River Ranger booklet, t-shirts, or other branding) it seemed most cost efficient to purchase all the rights. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously supported, the Council approved purchase of all rights to the illustration for \$5,580. Wynne will speak to our graphics consultant, Geralyn Miller, regarding the files she would need from Kelly to be able to modify the illustration for another purpose.

Wynne announced that the three interpretive signs had been received and were available at the RRC for folks to see. Lucy presented the invoice from Pannier in the amount of \$1,503.50 for production of the three signs, noting it was the remaining 50% due under our contract to Pannier. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously supported, payment of the invoice was approved.

Potential Projects

Story Map: Bernadette McQuilkin explained that the Town of Hollis has retained the services of FB Environmental (FBE) to develop a watershed management plan for Silver Lake and that FBE had suggested developing a Story Map as one component of the plan. Given the work Emma and others had done on developing text for a possible Story Map for our three Wild & Scenic Rivers, Bernadette thought the Council might like to retain the services of a firm such as FBE to do the technical portion (ARC-GIS) of this project. She also suggested a second Story Map could be made based on Peter Smith's presentation at the Nissitissit Rivers Conservation Management Workshop. It is not likely that NRWA staff has sufficient fluency in ARC-GIS or time to undertake this project, but Wynne will check further. Emma added that there are many challenges to NPS hosting our Story Map. Beth Suedmeyer noted that the DEC retained BSC Group to develop a Story Map of the Nature-Based Solutions employed on Devens. She added that the contract has a cap of \$1,500. It was agreed it would be worth looking into a consulting firm to create the Story Map. Bernadette will reach out to FBE to get a sense of their cost.

Regional Invasives Species Management: Notes from the January 9, 2025 meeting of the small working group interested in this topic were shared with the Council. Lucy explained that Kristin O'Brien,

Conservation Restriction Manager at Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) provides coordinator support to the SuAsCo CISMA. Kristin shared the process for creating the CISMA, which began with 20 partners entering into a Memorandum of Understanding. Since its formation in 2007, the partnership has grown to 47 members, which is led by a 12-person steering committee comprised of representatives from federal and state agencies, local municipalities, and non-profits. Their work consists primarily of funding support through some small grants, helping partners with prioritizing their local projects, and training volunteers as “Weed Warriors” in the removal of invasives. Their biggest impact is through education and information disseminated through a monthly newsletter. Sherry Anders suggested that the SuAsCo CISMA may not be the regional approach envisioned by Pat Huckery. Members agreed and felt we were looking for a more coordinated effort across our rivers’ watersheds. In addition, we may want to address both aquatic and terrestrial invasive plants, which require different removal methods. Beth liked the idea of tapping into volunteer “Weed Warriors” as a way to engage the public in local stewardship. She also suggested creating a pollinator pathway as a way of encouraging the creation of pollinator gardens.

Pat suggested we start small. Noting that many of our member towns have established local invasive management committees, she suggested we host a meeting of these groups to share and learn what has worked for them. She added that MassWildlife is working with the Town of Shirley in addressing the invasives in Pumpkin Brook, and that there could be lessons learned from that project.

Lucy suggested that she, Wynne and Emma meet to consider the possibility of creating an “invasives plant coordinator” position in next year’s budget and work plan, similar to the Outreach Coordinator Position currently in our plan. They will report back to the Council in February.

Community and Land Protection Grants

Lancaster 2022 Community Grant: The Lancaster Land Trust had submitted its Final Report on phase 1 of the upgrade to the Cook Conservation Land parking area. Lucy explained there had been a delay in the Report due to the need for a letter from the engineer confirming both paid (with grant funds) and donated services. On a motion made, seconded, and passed, the Council unanimously accepted the Final Report and approved payment of the remaining grant funds.

Lancaster 2024 Community Grant: This grant awarded to OneLancaster and the Lancaster Land Trust to raise public awareness of the Nashua River ran into a variety of issues, including a lack of volunteers to implement the project, which resulted in the Grant Agreement never being signed. In spite of efforts to get this program running, OneLancaster had to now decline to accept the grant award. The \$3,250 grant award is now available for other Contractual uses. No action was required by the Council.

Pepperell 2024 Community Grant: The Pepperell Native and Invasive Plant Committee had submitted its Final Report which funded hiring a consultant to advise them on the removal of Phragmites, providing supplies for a second town-wide Garlic Mustard pull, and the purchase of native seeds to apply to areas disturbed by removal of invasive plants. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously passed, the Final Report was accepted and final payment of grant funds approved.

Shirley 2024 Community Grant: This grant funded a program initiated by the Shirley Greenway Committee to develop and print a brochure to educate private landowners on management of their riparian lands. The project work has been completed and the grantee would like to amend the grant to use the remaining \$400 in grant funds to print a generic brochure on riparian lands management that Council members could distribute in their towns. Beth suggested the brochure be made available as a PDF so additional copies could be made available electronically. On motion made, seconded and unanimously passed, the Council approved the request for an amendment.

Shirley2023 Land Protection Grant: The Shirley Conservation Commission was awarded this grant for due diligence related to a particular land acquisition. Due to unforeseen circumstances, that acquisition did not go forward. Therefore, the grantee was seeking to use the funds for another potential land acquisition. Substantial legal costs may be involved as part of the due diligence due to issues with title transfer between generations of the owner's family. At the moment, there is no proposed budget on the use of grant funds; rather the grantee was seeking approval to proceed with this alternative property. The Council agreed to the request and will approve an amendment once the budget has been finalized.

Forest Legacy Project

Lucy presented an invoice in the amount of \$1,562.50 from the North County Land Trust for coordinator services from July 1 – December 31, 2024. On motion made, seconded, and unanimously voted, payment of the invoice was approved. Lucy added that steady progress continues to be made on this important project.

Updates and Announcements

Turtle Program at the NRWA: Wynne announced an upcoming program on freshwater turtles being held at the NRWA River Resource Center on February 11th at 7 PM. Michela Coury, MassWildlife freshwater turtle biologist, will be the featured speaker.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

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