

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF MARCH 17, 2022 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Bolton: Rebecca Longvall; Brookline: Drew Kellner; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Alix Turner; Pepperell: Ken Hartlage and Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

NRWA: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman

NPS: Emma Lord

DEC: Neil Angus

MA F&W: Anne Gagnon

Guests:

Martha Morgan, NRWA Water Programs Director

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. Due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic the meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

Administrative

The minutes of the February 17, 2022 meeting were approved as presented.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported on the status of the FY22 budget, noting that Congress had recently passed the budget for the balance of FY22 which included a funding increase for the NPS's Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Program. As of now, Emma does not know how significant an increase, if any, there will be to our FY22 budget, adding that the FY22 budget was based on the expectation of receiving \$165,000. Given that, she recommended that in preparing our FY23 budget to be submitted to the NPS at this time, we assume receipt of \$165,000 with the potential for additional funding coming due to the recent increase in the PWSR Program's revised FY22 appropriation.

Emma reminded members that the next Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers quarterly meeting will be held from noon to 1 PM on March 23rd. There currently are 16 PWSRs in this informal consortium. Emma will send a link to the meeting once it has been set up by Alison Field-Juma, Executive Director of OARS.

Finances

Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell gave a brief update on February expenses: \$3,492.79 for services rendered by the NRWA on behalf of the Council. The balance of her financial report would be covered in the discussion on the FY22 and FY23 budgets.

FY22 Budget

Elizabeth screen-shared “A Look at Remaining FY22 Funds Budget Line Items” for the use of the remaining \$125,872.06 in FY22, allocated by the general NPS financial reporting categories.

NRWA Program Support: \$32,564.27

- *Personnel* - \$21,676.10. This will cover staff support of several Council projects, including signage at road-river crossings, updating the website, and holding 3 educational aquatic investigations. An additional project being proposed for approval by the Council would be staff oversight of water chestnut hand pulls in the ~140-acre impoundment upstream of the Pepperell Hydro Dam and at the Oxbow NWR Bill Ashe Visitor Center. Funds would be spent in both FY22 and FY23.
- *Travel* –\$2,000.63. Most of this will be rolled over to FY23.
- *Supplies* – \$1,517.60. Elizabeth expects that as much as \$640 could be spent on supplies for existing programs. She reminded members of the discussion at last month’s meeting to use funds to purchase tools to lend partners for the removal of invasive plants, or to purchase hats or tee shirts for PR events. There was no decision on how best to use the balance of these funds.

Contractual: \$81,865.25

Elizabeth noted this category has the largest amount of unspent funds. However, several projects approved at last month’s meeting now have firmer cost estimates, so there is a clearer understanding of how these funds can be spent or obligated.

- *Community Grants* - \$46,546. This represents \$12,000 for the 2021 grants, which Elizabeth believes will be zeroed out by June 30th as final reports are submitted and approved; and \$38,546 recently approved for the 2022 grants.
- *Outreach and Education* - \$4,500. This includes:
 - Updating the Council’s website, currently estimated to be \$2,500.
 - Purchase of 26 signs for the river crossings signage project (13 road crossings of the Nashua, Squannacook or Nissitissit Rivers) estimated to be \$2,000. Al Futterman suggested adding signage at the various canoe/kayak launch sites, both on public and private land. Martha Morgan noted that the size of signs depends on the road speed and that their design and color needs to comply with NPS requirements. Paula reminded the members that permission for road signs would need to be obtained from the towns’ selectmen or DPW. Rebecca suggested that each member get the appropriate permission for signage in their towns. Al will send out a list of the location of the road/river crossings and a list of the location and ownership of the canoe/kayak launch sites. He added it would be helpful for the local representatives to seek permission for these signs as they would be more likely to have a relationship with the landowners. Ken Hartlage asked if local land trusts that have launch sites on their properties could purchase signs through the Council. Elizabeth acknowledged that she needs to verify that the purchase of

the signs could be included in contracted services if purchased from the Massachusetts Correctional System. Al reminded the Council that posts are a substantial cost and need to be included in this project.

- *Projects and Plan Implementation* - \$30,819.25. This includes:
 - *EZ Dock in Pepperell at the Marion Stoddart Conservation Area.* Since our last meeting Paula Terrasi had gotten updated costs from the vendor. This project now targeted at \$6,860.
 - *Invasives Workshop:* Michele Girard had reached out to consultants to hold one webinar and a couple of field workshops this spring for an estimate on the cost of their services. This project is now targeted at \$1,900. Beth Suedmeyer suggested broadening this effort to form a regional collaborative on invasives species management similar to CISMA in the SuAsCo watershed. Rebecca Longvall felt we should first investigate what regional programs currently exist. Lucy added that doing this first workshop would be a good way to gauge the level of interest and need for a greater effort.

With these projects obligating an estimated \$8,760, there would be approximately \$22,059 remaining in Projects and Plan Implementation subset of the Contractual category. At the February meeting there had been discussion of creating a Land Protection Grant Program which could be funded with these remaining funds. Drew Kellner reported there is a project in Brookline to purchase approximately 300 acres along the North Stream, a tributary of Lake Potanipo and, therefore, a headwater stream of the Nissitissit River. He asked if these grant funds could be used for acquisition of conservation easements as well as fee. Lucy explained that the intent was that the funds could be used for a myriad of costs associated with land protection, ranging from due diligence title searches to actual acquisition of land interest. Drew added that the Brookline Annual Town Meeting had approved the borrowing of funds to purchase this acreage (involving three separate landowners), but that proponents were continuing to fundraise so as to lessen the amount to be borrowed.

The Council approved the creation of a 2022 Land Protection Grant Program. Lucy noted that the draft RFP and grant application would be reviewed after approval of the FY23 Budget and Work Plan.

The Council approved by consensus “A Look at Remaining FY22 Funds Budget Line Items,” including the aforementioned NRWA staff oversight of water chestnut hand pulls and the three educational programs.

FY23 Draft Budget and Work Plan

Elizabeth reported that she had been working with Emma and Jim MacCartney in finalizing the FY23 Budget, adding that the Budget Narrative had been prepared by Emma. Emma noted that the Budget Narrative had been written broadly, to balance flexibility to respond to opportunities that could arise in the coming year, with some level of specificity to give the NPS an understanding of our proposed activities. Elizabeth then walked the Council through the various NPS budget categories.

NRWA Program Support: \$61,742

- *Personnel* - \$44,951.
 - Outreach and Project Coordinator at approximately 10 hours/week: \$18,057.
 - NRWA Staff Support of Programs. In addition to support for implementing Council projects, would include assistance in advancing other aspects of the Wild & Scenic designation: \$26,894.
- *Fringe* – This is calculated at 34% of Personnel: \$15,283
- *Travel* – With most of FY22 travel being rolled over, only a minimal amount of funding is anticipated to be needed: \$100
- *Supplies* – For miscellaneous materials for support programs: \$1,400

Contractual: \$88,266

- *Outreach & Education* – Various projects and materials to do outreach in the Wild & Scenic Rivers' towns and to further engage and inform the public on Council activities, such as continuation of the signage project, completing the website upgrade, and speakers for the Conservation Networking Gatherings: \$6,000
- *Projects and Stewardship Plan Implementation* – On-going projects were highlighted, as invasive plant management workshops, development of additional canoe/kayak launch sites, and land protection initiatives such as the Forest Legacy Program and a Land Protection Grant program: \$52,266
- *Community Grants* – Expecting continued interest in this program, allocating \$10,000 more than the FY22 program: \$30,000

Fiduciary/Indirect: \$15,000

- *Set Percentage* – 10% of the total of the above (\$150,000): \$15,000

Lucy asked if there were any questions on the proposed budget. Members felt the budget was in line with the draft that had been presented and approved at the February meeting and, therefore, they had no additional questions. There was a brief review of possible projects and associated costs, such as \$10,000 for another canoe/kayak launch site upgrade, a watershed study for \$18,000, allocating \$10,000 for another Land Protection Grant cycle, and installation of a fish ladder at the Lake Potanipo outlet.

Lucy then asked Emma to explain a new project we could consider: the NPS/USGS Dragonfly Mercury Project. This is a nation-wide study to determine the level of mercury in rivers based on the level found in Dragonfly larvae and skeletons. It would involve gathering samples at one site at each of our rivers. She added that SuAsCo has been participating in this study for a few years, using volunteers with some staff support (including Emma). The cost of the laboratory equipment (vials, etc) and analysis per site is approximately \$1,800; we would have to supply nets and miscellaneous materials. If we are interested, Emma would need to submit a notice of interest by April 15th. In addition to the SuAsCo sites, the NPS and USGS has sampled sites on the Merrimack River in Lowell/Lawrence area and the Merrimack's headwaters in the White Mountains. The Council agreed to participate in this project. Some NRWA staff time may be required before June 30th to locate sites and to recruit and train volunteers for collecting samples.

Lucy requested that the Council approve the FY23 Budget Narrative, reminding members that there may be minor future changes should we receive more than \$165,000 in FY23. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously passed to “approve the preliminary FY23 budget and narrative contingent on NPS’s final funding allocation.”

Land Protection Grant Program

Lucy reviewed the draft “2022 Request for Proposals” and “2022 Application” for this program, noting it was based on the RFP and application used for the Council’s Community Grants Program. The Council unanimously endorsed both documents.

Squannacook River WMA

Lucy reported that there was no new information to share with the Council. To date, we know that a list of abutters has been requested and obtained from the Shirley Assessors, but a Notice of Intent has not been submitted to the Conservation Commission. As the cutting season was expected to end in mid-March (due to turtle movement), it seems cutting will not begin this season. Al and Heidi Ricci asked Anne Gagnon if she had any knowledge of the status of this project. She noted her knowledge is limited as she is not directly involved in it. While she believes the plan is still being finalized, she added it will be presented at the Conservation Commissions’ hearings. Anne believes cutting will not begin until next fall. Heidi asked if this project was subject to MEPA review as the WMA is within the Squannassit ACEC. She also asked if it would be subject to review by the Division of Ecological Restoration. Again, Anne could not provide a definitive answer as she is not part of the project team. She did offer to let us know when she has gotten a copy of the plan. Lucy thanked her for sharing any information she had with the Council.

Elizabeth added that the NRWA is keenly interested in this project and discussing it at all levels of staff and Board members.

2021 and 2022 Community Grants

Forbush Mill Still River Trail Grant: Lucy reported that the Bolton Conservation Commission had submitted, and members had received, the final report on this 2021 Community Grant. She complimented Rebecca on an excellent report, especially the signage along the trail. At Lucy’s request, the Council accepted the final report. The remaining grant funds will now be remitted to the Town of Bolton.

Harbor Pond Canoe Launch Improvement Grant: Joan Wotkowicz explained that the permitting for the launch improvement, for which this 2022 Community Grant was providing funds for consultant services, was not as onerous and complicated as originally thought. Therefore, the grantee, Squannacook Greenways, did not need to retain the services of a consultant. As the adjacent parking area was contributing to sedimentation of Harbor Pond at this site, the grantee was requesting permission to use the grant funds for grading the parking area and installing a ditch to intercept run off. The Council unanimously approved this change in scope of work.

Groton Knotweed Removal: Diane Carson shared her understanding that Brian Bettencourt, the project leader, had not received any emails regarding the Council’s concerns. Lucy reported she had sent two emails to him at the email address on the application, a town email. Diane offered to send her Brian’s personal email so she could reach out to him. The Groton Invasive Species Committee will be meeting on March 21st to discuss this project.

Other

Lancaster-Capital Group Project: Alix Turner gave a brief update on this project on Rte 70 and near the North Nashua River, Cook Conservation Area, and Lancaster Town Forest. In addition, a portion of the site is within the Central Nashua River Valley ACEC. The project includes a few warehouses, the largest being over 1 million square feet, and a proposed residential development of up to 1,100 units. The latter will require rezoning the residential portion of the site under Chapter 40R. Before this project goes forward, it will require a vote for the zoning bylaw change at the May 3, 2002 Town Meeting. She will send the Council a link to the packet for the January 19th Selectmen's meeting which included information on the project. She is very concerned about its impact on the environment.

[Emma left the meeting at this time]

Conservation Networking Gatherings: Al is looking for speakers for the Conservation Networking Gatherings and suggested inviting someone to speak on the proposed multi-family housing zoning requirement for MBTA-served towns. Lucy explained this includes not only towns with MBTA stations, but also towns adjacent to them. Al noted this would impact many of the W&S towns. Members felt is a timely and important topic for discussion.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, April 21st at 7 PM by Zoom