

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF JANUARY 19, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Groton: Stacey Chilcoat and Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard;

Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

NRWA: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell and Al Futterman

NPS: Emma Lord

MF&W: Anne Gagnon

DEC: Neil Angus

Guests: Jennifer Keegan and Martha Morgan, NRWA staff; Sarah Widing, NRWA Board of Directors; Pat Huckery and Leslie Gabriliska, MF&W NE District Office;

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.

Lucy opened the meeting by introducing Jennifer Keegan, NRWA's new Executive Director who began work on January 3, 2023. She added that Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell is continuing for the month of January as Transition Coordinator. Lucy gave Jennifer an opportunity to introduce herself, followed by a round of introductions by Council members.

Minutes of December 15, 2022: Pat Huckery asked who had attended the Muddy Brook site walk, with Al Futterman, adding that she felt he was providing a biased view of MassWildlife (MW) restoration efforts. She asked that if future walks of Council members are conducted on Muddy Brook they be accompanied by MW staff. Lucy reminded her that Muddy Brook is open to the public. Elizabeth asked that NRWA staff not be called out by name.

Pat requested an amendment to the minutes; the minutes were then approved as amended.

NPS Update

Emma Lord shared some brief updates. First, we should expect to receive the same level of funding (\$210,000) in FY 24 as we did in FY23. There is a slight increase in the overall funding for the Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers (PWSR) program to cover the addition of two new PWSR rivers: the York River in Maine (which was undergoing its Study the same time we were) and the Connecticut section of the Housatonic River. She announced that there are two rivers in Florida in the PWSR Study phase: the Little Manatee and the Kissimmee.

Finances

Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell gave a brief report on the status of the Council's finances as follows:

- Total expenditures in December came to \$3,666.32 which included \$1,250 to the Harvard Conservation Commission upon completion of its 2022 Community Grant, \$728.48 for Anne Gagnon's travel to the PWSR Conference in Florida, \$1,354.54 for NRWA staff support, and \$333.30 for fiscal agent services.

- Elizabeth also shared her chart by which she tracks the status of funds disbursed and obligated in both the Community and Land Protection Grant Programs and other Contractual obligations. Lucy reviews this chart as well, comparing it to her tracking of Community Grants and Contract obligations.
- Elizabeth then reviewed a summary of Council funds as of December 31, 2022, showing a balance of \$222,037.84. She added that this balance includes funds from prior fiscal years that have been carried forward into the current one. She noted there is \$113,860 remaining in the Contract category and approximately \$44,000 in the Personnel category for NRWA staff support, as well as \$1,237 for travel, and \$2,565 for supplies. Elizabeth reminded the Council that NPS would prefer we spend down this balance as much as possible to minimize the amount carried forward into the next fiscal year.

Community Grants

2022 Ayer-PACE Final Report: PACE has submitted its Final Report for “AYER Community PULL! A Campaign to Remove Water Chestnuts at Grove Pond.” Lucy noted that there was \$181.19 in unspent grant funds which PACE would like to use for purchasing supplies and materials for next year’s community pull. Upon motions made and seconded, the Council unanimously accepted the Final Report and approved expenditure of the \$181.19 as requested. With the reports acceptance, Lucy can authorize disbursement of the remaining grant funds.

2022 Ayer-Devens: Lucy reported on a request to amend the grant to the Devens Enterprise Commission, “Beautify and Improve Access to the Nashua River in Ayer,” to extend the grant period to June 30, 2023. Neil Angus explained that there had been delays in finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding between the Devens DPW (who will be doing the work) and the US Fish & Wildlife Service (the site is within the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge). He added that this project will provide access to the river in Ayer, for which currently does not have a safe, public access. On motion made and seconded, the Council approved the requested extension. Neil abstained from the vote.

2023 Community Grants: Lucy was asked if we had received any applications for the 2023 Community Grants. She replied she only had a request for the application as a Word document (it is posted on websites as a PDF). Although the Request for Proposals was posted on both the NRWA and Council websites and notices sent to the towns in December, Council members were encouraged to reach out to their respective communities to remind them of this grant opportunity. Lucy asked if the Executive Committee could extend the current February 1st grant deadline to February 15th if we do not receive many applications. The members approved her request.

Native American Outreach

Al reported on his efforts to find a contact with a Nipmuc tribal representative. He had spoken with Clarisse Hart at Harvard Forest who has been working with Indigenous People. He added that Mt. Grace Conservation Land Trust recently contracted with Andre Strongbearheart Gaines to conduct cultural inventories. He suggested we might want to similarly contract with Andre or another Nipmuc consultant, adding other possible contact might be Erica Campbell or Nia Holley, daughters of Cheryl

Toney Holley, a Nipmuc female sachem. Al asked if there was interest in forming a small working group to pursue this, noting Beth Suedmeyer had previously expressed such an interest. Michele Girard volunteered to be part of such a group. Lucy suggested that if others were interested, they should contact Al. Neil suggested Al reach out to the United Native American Cultural Council based at Devens.

River Management Society

Emma provided an update on the River Management Society's proposed workshop on assessing and improving canoe access in collaboration with the Stewardship Council. The NRWA has offered to allow it to be held at the River Resource Center and, in preparation for this workshop, Al, Emma, and Diane Carson had met earlier this week with the planning group to discuss possible sites on our Wild & Scenic Rivers. Emma suggested organizing the workshop like a charrette, with teams developing design plans for a given site. The working planning group will be meeting monthly in preparation for a workshop early in the fall of 2023. Emma suggested that she, Al, Jen, and Lucy meet to discuss the logistics of using the River Resource Center for the classroom portion of the workshop.

Squannacook River WMA (SRWMA)

Proposed Oak Woodland Project: Lucy reported that she and Elizabeth were scheduled to meet with Pat the last week in December as follow up on the November and December meetings, but had not been able to due to a change in Pat's schedule. With Jen now on board as the Executive Director there is a need to include her in the discussions as well. Lucy added that she had prepared an overview of the SRWMA matter for Jen as background prior to a meeting with her. Pat announced that MW was planning a public site walk in March or April led by herself, Tom Wansleben, Chalis Bird and, hopefully, Chris Buelow. In addition, her office will be offering a vernal pool workshop, although the number of attendees will be limited. Lucy reported that we continue to track for notice of the MEPA filing for this project, noting that when she spoke with Brian Hawthorn last fall his staff was stretched and work on the MEPA Environmental Notice Form (ENF) is still be drafted. Pat added that at the request of the Shirley Conservation Commission, the Notice of Intent (NOI) would be refiled in both Shirley and Townsend in September. Heidi Ricci asked whom we could reach out to should we want more information on this project. Pat noted all staff is "out flat" and could not suggest a person to contact who would be able to respond in a timely manner.

Other Business

Future Council Projects: Jen asked for suggestions on projects the Council would like to pursue, given the availability of funds. Lucy added that with the filing of the Forest Legacy Program application, we now had more NRWA staff time available for projects. Martha noted that last summer the Council covered the cost of hers and Jessica's time in training and oversight of the water chestnut rapid response team doing the hand pulls in areas on the Pepperell Pond not covered by the herbicide spraying. The team's time and equipment is covered by funds provided by Pepperell Hydro as part of its FERC license to a regional collaborative. Emma asked if the Council would like to participate again in the Dragonfly Mercury Project; Michele noted that we had set aside funds for a second invasives workshop on Devens.

Conservation Networking Meetings: Al presented a schedule of the next three meetings to be held jointly with the NRWA's Climate Impact Committee by zoom at 4 PM:

February 15th: "Depaving" to be given by Green and Open Somerville (Renne Scott, Leigh Meunier, and Candor Pricejones).

March 15th: "Degrowth and the Green Infrastructure New Deal" to be given by Andrew Ahern

April 19th or May 16th: "Climate Adaptation Science" to be given by Emma Gildesgame (The Nature Conservancy, MA).

BioMap: Pat announced that an updated version of BioMap had just been released. She encouraged members to review it on the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife website. Lucy suggested there be a link to it from both the NRWA and Council websites.

Lancaster 2021 Community Grant: Justin Smith provided an update on the 2021 Community Grant to the Lancaster Conservation Trust. He had contacted Bob Lidstone, the current President of the Trust, who will sign the grant agreement if Lucy sends it to him. Lucy explained she was holding the agreement pending receipt of a budget, which needed information on in-kind services. Lucy will follow up with Bob.

Lancaster Zoning: Justin also gave a report on the status of rezoning a fairly large area off Rt 70 (south of Rt 2) for both up to 3.4 million sq ft of warehousing and a 40R residential development. While the zoning amendment had been defeated at a Special Town Meeting last fall, a group of petitioners had been able to call another Special Town Meeting to reconsider the proposal. This site, while abutting the North Nashua River, is upstream of the Wild & Scenic designated Nashua River main stem which, therefore, could be impacted by its development.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, February 16, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom