

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF MARCH 16, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Brookline: Drew Kellner; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NRWA: Jennifer Keegan and Al Futterman
NPS: Emma Lord
MF&W: Pat Huckery
Guest: Leslie Gabriliska, MF&W

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

Lucy opened the meeting by announcing that the Council's Forest Legacy Program (FLP) application had ranked nationally 6th out of 26 projects applying for FY25 FLP funding. While the budget for the FY25 FLP will not be known until Congress passes its budget, our project has a high likelihood of being funded. She will call a meeting of the FLP Steering Committee to determine how best to prepare for implementing this project. In the meantime, Council members can share this news.

Minutes: The minutes of the February 16, 2023 meeting were approved as amended.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported on two upcoming events. First, that the next Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers speaker series event will be held on March 22nd from noon to 1:30. The topic will be on invasives species management. If Council members are interested in attending and have not gotten a Zoom invitation, they were asked to contact Emma for that information.

Secondly, Ayer will be hosting its second annual Earth Day event on Friday, April 21st from 2 – 6 PM. McPherson Road will be closed again for bikers and walkers, and information tables will be located near the intersection of McPherson and Bishop Roads. Emma will be there with information on the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit (NSN) Wild & Scenic Rivers and Stewardship Council. She asked for volunteers to join her.

Finances

Jennifer Keegan provided an update on the Council's finances.

- In February 2023 the Council spent a total of \$11,799.08 as follows: \$6,706.50 Community Grant disbursements; \$4,019.94 NRWA Staff Support; and \$1,072.64 Indirect & Fringe.
- The combined FY21 - FY23 NPS funds (\$278,785.58) less funds spent through February 28, 2023 (\$74,406.38) leaves a balance of NPS \$204,379.10. Of this amount, \$40,592 is obligated for Community and Land Protection grants.

- The Council has awarded a total of \$95,365 in FY21 – FY23 funds through its Community Grants Program, Land Protection Grants program, and special projects (Dragonfly Mercury project, EZ Dock at Marion Stoddart Conservation Area in Pepperell, and for Janet Morrison’s FLP consultant services).

FY24 Work Plan and Budget

Lucy and Emma explained the proposed Work Plan and Budget to be submitted to the NPS Finance Team for review and approval. Lucy noted that the first two pages of the Plan are the same as submitted in past years. As the NPS reviewers change year to year, it is important to provide a brief summary of the NSN Stewardship Council’s organization and a description of the general activities the Council has undertaken to implement its *Stewardship Plan*. The remaining three pages provide the budget in greater detail, allocating funds according to the NPS categories of Personnel, Fringe Benefits, Travel, Supplies, Indirect, and, our largest category, Contractual. Lucy went on to explain that Personnel includes both the Outreach and Project Coordinator and NRWA Program Support, while Contractual includes Community Grants and other projects the Council may pursue in the coming year. Emma added that she provides examples in the Budget of the types of activities that may be undertaken in the given categories, but that these are not the only ones we could elect to do.

Lucy pointed out that the budget includes \$40,000 for Community Grants (Contractual) as we had for FY23, but that we had only awarded approximately \$30,000 in grants this year. She asked if next year we might want to increase the cap on individual awards from \$5,000 to \$7,500.

The total funding from NPS for FY will be \$210,000. On motion made and seconded, the Council unanimously approved the FY24 Work Plan and Budget.

Update on FY23 Projects

Interpretive Signage (aka Kiosks): Al Futterman went over the recommendations developed by the working group (Diane Carson, Joan Wotkowicz, Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold, Emma, Lucy, and Al) for interpretive signage at various locations on the NSN rivers as outlined in the 3/14/23 “NSN Interpretive Signage Project” sent to the Council prior to the meeting. He shared a map showing one sign in Brookline on the fishing pier overlooking the Nissitissit River, and two optional locations on the Squannacook (Harbor Pond canoe launch or Adams Dam in Townsend) and Nashua (Petapawag or Groton Place in Groton). The proposal is for one sign per river being created and installed this year, with additional signage in coming years. Therefore, the signs will be fairly uniform, with information on the NSN Wild & Scenic Rivers, a map and other graphics, and a short paragraph regarding the river at the given site. Al has reached out to the landowners of the two Groton sites, as well as the Town of Brookline regarding the Nissitissit site; Joan will speak to the landowners of the Townsend sites. Emma shared photographs of the proposed signage: an aluminum frame, being roughly 3’ by 2’ installed with the sign. The working group recommended investing in permanent signs (fiberglass, embedded signs) to be designed by a graphics consultant. The cost for design and fabrication was estimated to be \$1,600 per sign; staff support (to reach out to landowners, provide maps and other content material for the graphics designer) was estimated to be \$7,200 for a total cost of \$12,000 for three signs. Jennifer asked if we would be required to issue an RFP for this work; Emma replied the project was small enough in scale that an RFP would not be necessary. The Council members authorized proceeding with this project.

Regional Conservation Planning Workshop: Lucy reported that Al had reached out to several conservation organizations for recommendations on facilitators, whom he had contacted regarding

facilitating our workshop. He had heard back from two: Ann Budner and Robb Johnson, as well as Peter Forbes who indicated he was too busy at this time. Ann Budner's and Robb Johnson's proposals were included in material sent to the Council prior to the meeting, along with a summary of the proposed workshop ("March 15, 2023 Proposed Squannacook Regional Conservation Plan"). Ann's fee of \$3,000 was nearly twice that of Robb's fee of \$1,200 plus travel; both would provide essentially the same services preparing and conducting the workshop, and writing a summary report of the outcome.

Pat Huckery questioned the need for another planning effort when the *Stewardship Plan* already provides a comprehensive plan for these rivers. She also asked why this initial workshop would focus on the Squannacook River when it is already well studied. Heidi Ricci felt the intent of this workshop would be to develop an overall blueprint of land stewardship under the management of several public and private entities. She felt this would be an important way to engage landowners and to encourage collaboration in addressing shared issues and opportunities. A lengthy discussion followed regarding the value of a regional approach, the need to include private landowners whose lands may not be protected, and for outreach and education. Michele Girard wondered if this workshop could be pulled together before the end of June. Pat asked if we might consider holding it later in the summer or early fall, as she would not have the time to participate before then. It was agreed that it is important for Pat to be a participant; Lucy suggested initiating preparation for the workshop now and plan to hold it late summer/early fall. She also proposed bringing a budget and timeline to the April Council meeting. The Council concurred with proceeding with this project.

Dragonfly Mercury Project: Lucy reminded the Council that it had agreed at last month's meeting to support expending \$5,400 to collect samples at three sites (one on each of our rivers). Emma will work with Martha Morgan, Jessica Veysey Powell and other NRWA staff in recruiting volunteers.

Water Chestnut Management: Lucy also reminded the Council that at last month's meeting Martha Morgan had asked if the Council would be willing to fund NRWA staff time to manage volunteers pulling water chestnuts in various locations on the Nashua River. The Council agreed to support this request for \$5,000.

Website: Joan gave a brief update on her work with Wynne on upgrading and reorganizing the Council's website. She encouraged Council members to look at it, noting as it is still a work in progress she would be interested in their comments. There will be a link to the StoryMap from the website, and vice versa.

Engaging Indigenous Peoples – Land Justice: Al reported the status of this working group (Emma, Michele and Beth Suedmeyer) and their efforts to engage representatives of local Indigenous People. They will be attending a meeting with Andre StrongBearHeart Gaines next week, adding there is interest in doing a cultural inventory along one of our rivers. Andre's fee would be \$150 per hour. Al asked the Council consider setting aside \$2,000 for this potential project.

Other Business

Policy on Meeting Guidelines: Lucy asked the Council to approve this Policy which was based on a draft presented at last month's meeting. On motion made and seconded, the Council unanimously supported adopted of the Policy.

Select Board Annual Report: Referring to the "2022 Report to Town Select Boards" prepared by Joan, Lucy asked Council members to seek time on their respective town Select Boards to present the Report. She added that this is a good way to raise awareness of our work, especially the opportunities for funding local projects.

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

Next meeting: Thursday, April 20, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom