

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF JUNE 16, 2022 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Dunstable: Leah Basbanes; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Pepperell: Ken Hartlage; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

NRWA: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman

NPS: Emma Lord

Guests:

Sarah Widing, Shirley resident and NRWA Board member

Martha Morgan, NRWA Water Program 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

Lucy welcomed Justin Smith as the new Representative for Lancaster. After Justin introduced himself and his interests, the Council members introduced themselves to Justin.

On motion made and seconded, the minutes of May 19, 2022 were approved as presented.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that the first of the Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers speaker series will be held by Zoom on June 22nd during the regular quarterly PWSR meeting (noon to 1:30 PM). The topic will be "River Stewards Program." Emma will send a link to the meeting to Council members.

Finances

Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell reported that a total of \$3,844.72 had been expended in May, comprised of \$3,144.72 for services rendered by the NRWA and \$700 paid to PACE under an amendment to cover additional testing under its 2022 Community Grant. Lucy noted that she is still waiting for a revised budget from the Lancaster Land Trust in order to issue the 2022 Community Grant awarded to the Trust for improvement of the parking area at the Cook Conservation Land. She added that the 2021 Community Grant to the Townsend Historical Society for restoration of the Cooperage seems to be in limbo due to lack of overall funding. Joan offered to reach out to members of the Historical Society to learn more about the status of this project.

Elizabeth then shared a chart which showed a balance of \$94,457.29 remaining in FY21 and FY22 funds, \$61,192.25 of which is categorized as Contractual. With \$46,573 of those funds obligated for the 2021 and 2022 Community and Land Protection Grants there would be \$14,619.25 available for projects being undertaken by the Council this spring and summer as FY22/FY23 projects, including:

- Invasive Species Workshop: \$1,900
- EZ Dock: \$6,319
- Dragonfly Mercury Project: \$5,400
- FLP Consultant, Janet Morrison: \$2,500

The total obligated for the above projects is \$16,119, which will use the balance of FY22 Contractual funds (\$14,619.25), as well as a portion of the FY23 Contract funds (\$1,499.75).

Elizabeth addressed the balance of \$24,678 remaining in the NRWA Program Support category at the end of May. Some, but most likely not all, of the funds in Personnel will be earned by the end of June. She expects a small portion of the \$1,518 remaining in Supplies likewise to be spent by the end of June for the upcoming three family environmental education programs. In addition, a very small amount of the budget for Travel may also be spent by the end of June. Those funds remaining at the end of June in the Program Support category will be carried forward into FY23.

FY23 Budget

Emma reported she has been providing the Financial Assistance Team, which is reviewing the FY23 Budget, additional clarity on some of the projects in the Work Plan. She still expects that the FY23 funds will be available on July 1st.

Forest Legacy Program

Lucy provided an update on the work of the Steering Committee which had been focused on considering different ways of organizing the tracts in the application as they relate to the three rivers within the Nashua River watershed or the Squannacook and Nissitissit subwatersheds. The FLP application is to be filed with the MA Forest Legacy staff of the Department of Conservation and Recreation on July 11th for its review and comments, after which we can further revise it. The final application is due in the fall, with submittal to the FLP national review committee on October 3rd. Joan Wotkowicz asked why our application had not been awarded funding this year. Al Futterman responded that the FLP had sufficient funds to only cover the top 15 applications; we ranked 20 out of the 44 FLP applications reviewed. Elizabeth added that Ron Scott, Forest Service Specialist, had attended our last Steering Committee meeting and offered useful advice and suggestions for our proposed resubmitted application. Ken Hartlage asked if we could review the winning applications to find ways to improve ours. He also suggested that we mention the state's interest in preservation of forests for carbon sequestration in meeting its goals with respect to its goals in addressing climate change.

Squannacook River WMA

Lucy reported on developments since the last Council meeting, the primary one being a meeting with MassWildlife, which had been requested by the NRWA and arranged by Bob Durand, member of the MA Fisheries and Wildlife Board, Northeast District representative. The meeting was held on May 25th; participants included: Brian Hawthorne and Tom Wansleben, members of the MassWildlife SRWMA restoration team; Bob Durand; NRWA staff Al, Elizabeth, Martha Morgan, and Jessica Veysey Powell; NRWA Board Vice President Ralph Baker; and Lucy, representing both the NRWA as Board President

and Chair of the Stewardship Council. A few hours after the meeting, Brian contacted Lucy to let her know that MassWildlife was “resetting” the project and would request postponement of the Notice of Intent hearings before the Shirley and Townsend Conservation Commissions as MassWildlife proceeded with preparation and submittal of an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) to initiate a MEPA review of the project. Elizabeth received a similar message from Bob Durand as well. During this process, there would be opportunities for greater public engagement and education regarding the proposed restoration.

In addition and at the request of NPS, Al led a site walk for Jamie Fosburgh and Emma, which was joined by Lucy, on June 14th. Jamie is considering the appropriateness of a letter from NPS concerning this project and its impact on the Wild & Scenic Squannacook River. There was some discussion during the walk about retaining the services of a forestry consultant or fluvial hydrologist.

Emma agreed it would be appropriate to use Council Contractual funds for consultant services, adding that she is investigating the possibility of a NPS forest ecologist being available for a site walk. She noted that the areas walked with Al struck her as being a healthy forest, so its removal was hard to imagine.

Sarah Widing has been doing mapping of the site, focusing on its hydrologic characteristics, such as oxbows and abandoned channels. She has also added a layer with the 100-year floodplain and a soils layer. She noted the soils in areas designated for cutting are highly erodible, especially in the southern portion of the site and she said this could have a substantial impact on the river at this site and downstream due to increased sedimentation.

Ken commented that MEPA is all about “getting to yes” and rarely denies a project, rather may modify and limit its scope. That said, raising external factors and the impact of the project may have an influence MEPA’s decision and, therefore, important to raise.

Al was concerned by MassWildlife’s identification of this project being Phase 1, indicating additional restoration projects in the SRWMA are planned. Under MEPA, all of the phases are to be considered and reviewed, a request we should include in our comments. He reiterated his concerns regarding the impact of herbicides on the river and groundwater, especially given Sarah’s comment regarding the pervious nature of the soils. In addition, he is concerned about the decline of this cold water fishery, which is already stressed, by removal of the forest canopy and greater run off of warmer surface waters into the river.

Elizabeth asked about the timing of when we might engage a consultant and how we might select one. Sarah offered that she might identify a geomorphologist through her professional connections. Al felt having a consultant to provide an objective, outside opinion would be important in validating our comments to MEPA.

After some additional discussion it was agreed we should begin to compile a list of our concerns and comments to submit when the ENF is published. Lucy asked that members send their questions and comments to Al who will then compile them. Martha Morgan suggested reaching out to a professor and/or consultant for their response to the proposed project as described in the ENF, but without sharing

our concerns. This might enable us to get an unprejudiced assessment of the project and possible responses to the ENF we may not have otherwise considered.

A deadline of July 1st for submittals to AI was set. Lucy will send an email the Council (to bring those not present up to speed) with a summary of this discussion and request that comments be sent to AI.

Community Grants

The Squannacook Greenways “Harbor Pond Canoe Launch” final report had been sent to Council members prior to the meeting for review. Lucy asked for comments on the project, noting it was one of the 2022 Community Grants and, as such, had completed the project in record time. On motion made and seconded, the report was unanimously accepted. The remaining grant funds can now be paid to the grantee.

Other Business

Stratton Hill Development, Ayer: AI announced that the developer has submitted a new proposal for development of this site. There will be 35 residential units on approximately 18 acres, leaving 130 acres as open space. He noted the project is much improved. The Planning Board hearing is scheduled for June 28th.

Networking Gatherings: AI reported that the next gathering will be on July 20th at 4 PM. We will be joining NRWA’s Climate Impact Committee’s meeting which will feature Gillian Davies and Keith Zaltsberg-Drezdahl of the BSC Group discussing Nature Based Solutions.

Education Programs: Elizabeth reported that the NRWA Environmental Education staff has developed a series of three family-oriented programs, each one of which will be held on the Nashua, Squannacook or Nissitissit Rivers and focused on the life in the river and along its shores.

Invasives Workshop: Emma reminded the Council of the upcoming in-person field workshop on managing invasives to be held at the Williams Barn in Groton on June 25th from 9 AM – 1 PM. A virtual workshop was held in May. She will send out information for registering for the workshop.

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

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