

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF AUGUST 18, 2022 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Bolton: Rebecca Longvall; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat; Harvard: Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci
NRWA: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman
NPS: Emma Lord
MA F&W: Anne Gagnon

Guest: 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

On motion made and seconded, the minutes of July 17, 2022 were approved as amended (to correct a typographical error).

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported on two items. First, the second of the Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers speaker series will be held by Zoom on August 31st during the regular quarterly PWSR meeting (noon to 1:30 PM). The topic will be “Tribal Engagement with Wild & Scenic River Councils.” Emma will send a link to the meeting to Council members.

Second, Emma has been coordinating with NRWA Staff members Martha Morgan and Jessica Veysey Powell in selecting and setting dates for sampling for the Dragonfly Mercury project. Sampling will occur on one site in each of our three Wild & Scenic Rivers sometime during the first three weeks in September. Emma encouraged members to volunteer to help and, if interested to contact her.

Finances

Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell reviewed the Council’s finances as of July 31, 2022. First, cash expenditures made in July on behalf of the Council totaled \$18, 437.14, comprised of \$7,567.89 for NRWA Staff and fiduciary charges, and \$10,869.25 for Contractual costs. Contractual costs included payments to grantees under the 2021 and 2022 Community Grants and 2022 Land Protection Grants programs. It also included expenses related to four Council projects: Invasives Species Management Workshop; Dragonfly Mercury; EZ Dock; and consultant services related to the Forest Legacy Program application.

Second, there is approximately \$32,000 in obligated funds for active projects in the 2021 and 2022 Community Grants and Land Protection Grants. Taking into account the obligated funds, no outstanding balance in the Contractual category were carried forward into FY23.

And lastly, Elizabeth shared a budget chart showing the balance of FY 21 and FY 22 funds through June 30, 2022 being carried forward into FY 23, as well as the expenditure of FY23 funds as of July 31, 2022. As of July 31, 2022 there is a combined total of \$260,348.44 available through our Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service.

Lucy asked if Council members had any questions or comments on the state of our finances. Heidi Ricci thanks Elizabeth for providing detailed and clear reports on fund expenditures, obligations, and balances.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP)

Al Futterman reported on the status of our FL application. Following submittal of a draft application to the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation's Forest Legacy Committee (DCR/FLC) for review, the FLP Steering Committee had received several comments which have been incorporated into the application. The Steering Committee has continued further refinement of the application and accompanying map and photographs. A final FLP application is due to the Northeast Area FLC by the end of August. On September 20th there will be a Mock Panel Review by a committee composed of DCR/FLP staff and others who have reviewed applications at the national level. The results of the Mock Panel Review will be shared with the Steering Committee, thereby offering another opportunity to further refine the FLP application before it is due on September 28th. It then will advance to ranking by the Forest Service FLP Review Committee.

Al then reviewed the map and application, noting changes made since July. Lucy asked if the Council members had any questions or comments. Heidi complimented the Steering Committee on preparing a strong application, filled with important information available in a visually accessible manner (through the map and photographs), as well as the text. Al commented that the application demonstrated the value of working with multiple partners in a collaborative way. He added that recently passed federal legislation may increase the funding of the FLP over the next ten year by \$700 million.

Anne Gagnon reported that the acquisition of the Hollingsworth and Vose (H&V) property had slowed down, suggesting that should one of the tracts in the current application drop out and H&V had still not closed perhaps it could be substituted into our application.

Squannacook River WMA (SRWMA)

Al reported that MassWildlife had posted an article, "Oak Woodland Restoration at Squannacook River WMA" on its website explaining the reason for converting this area from the current forested mix, which is predominately eastern white pine and red maple, to an oak woodlands system. MassWildlife biologists and restoration ecologists believe the site originally was an oak woodland system but that since the 1800's human activity was such that the woodlands were subsumed by the current pine/maple forest. The piece also describes the restoration process, and, in particular, the impact on the river.

Heidi commented that she found the information provided by MassWildlife to be "sketchy," as she had with the information filed with the Notice of Intent. While she has great respect for the MassWildlife staff and their passion for their work, she would like to see more granularity and detail in their current

public documents. She added that through her work she is aware that the MEPA permitting process is being reviewed with the aim of making it less onerous. One of the options being considered is that if a restoration project has been approved by the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) may not be required to go through a MEPA review. She is concerned that this will limit the public's ability to comment on projects such as the SRWMA. On the other hand, another proposed change would require increased review of projects impacting forests. Lucy commented that there would be a 30-day public review period of any proposed changes to the MEPA permitting process.

Lucy reported that the ENF for SRWMA, which we had expected would be released over the summer, had still not been noticed. She suggested two possible reasons: 1) the level of detail required for the ENF is such that it is taking longer than expected to complete it; or 2) MassWildlife is awaiting a change in the permitting process which would exempt this project from MEPA if approved by DER. After some discussion about possible next steps, she agreed to reach out to Brian Hawthorne or Tom Wansleben for an update on filing the ENF.

At the Council's last meeting, Al and Heidi agreed to identify possible consultants the Council may want to retain either to provide a baseline of the SRWMA's current conditions or provide guidance in our response to the ENF. This led to a discussion of procurement requirements, given federal funds would be involved. Emma reported that there are no general procurement requirements from the NPS; however, the Council's fiscal agent can set the procurement standards. As long as the standards assure objectivity in selecting a consultant, the NPS would approve. The Council discussed the pros and cons of retaining consultant(s) before the ENF is issued to assess specific characteristics of the site (hydrology, soils, forest ecology, etc.) or waiting for the ENF. Rebecca Longvall felt it would be appropriate to seek consultant services for both tasks. Several consultants were suggested; Al and Heidi will continue to seek recommendations from colleagues. Al, Emma, and Lucy will draft a request for consultant services for review at the next Council meeting.

Nominations

Lucy reported that there had been no nominations for any of the four officer positions and that she had again reached out to the current officers who all agreed to serve another term. She asked for a motion on the following nominations: Chair - Lucy Wallace; Vice Chair - Heidi Ricci; Treasurer - Rebecca Longvall; and Secretary – Joan Wotkowicz. On motion made, seconded and unanimously approved, the slate as presented was approved. Lucy thanked them for their willingness to continue, especially given their other obligations.

Community Grants

The Brookline Conservation Commission's final report on the 2022 Community Grant supporting the acquisition of three parcels had been sent to Council members prior to the meeting for review. The Council accepted the report which will enable the release of the remaining grant funds to the Brookline Conservation Commission.

Other Business

Pepperell Dump Site: Paula Terrasi reported that that case involving a proposed toxic landfill site adjacent to the Nashua River had recently concluded with a finding in favor of the Select Board. She added that the case was brought by the Select Board against the issuance of a permit by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

DCR Landscape Designations and Management Guidelines: Anne noted that DCR will be holding a series of hearings over the next month for comments on the proposed guidelines. She offered to send a link to the Council.

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

Next meeting: Thursday, September 15th at 7 PM by Zoom