

## **N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council**

### **MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 15, 2022 MEETING**

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

*Towns:* Bolton: Rebecca Longvall; Dunstable: Leah Basbanes; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat; Harvard: Lucy Wallace; Lancaster: Justin Smith; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz  
*NRWA*: Al Futterman, Martha Morgan  
*NPS*: Emma Lord  
*DEC*: Neil Angus

Guest: Jackie Dias, NPS Hispanic Access Foundation Fellow

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 August 18, 2022 were approved as presented.

#### NPS Update

Emma Lord introduced Jackie Dias, the NPS Hispanic Access Foundation Fellow who is based in western MA, noting that Jackie had participated in the Mercury Dragonfly samplings recently completed on one site on each of our three Wild & Scenic Rivers.

Emma had two items to report. First, the Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers will be holding an in-person gathering December 7-9, 2022 (the first since before the COVID pandemic). It will be held at the Wekiva Wild & Scenic River which is just north of Orlando, FL. Each partnership council is encouraged to send one or two representatives. Emma noted that travel will be covered by the Council's travel budget; Lucy added that Anne Gagnon had represented the Council at the last such gathering which was held in New Jersey in 2019. For more information, members can contact Emma or Jackie. We need to respond by October 3<sup>rd</sup> if we will be sending a representative. Lucy will send information she received on the gathering to Council members.

Second, the NPS Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers and River Management Society are planning an in-person 2 ½ day training and workshop in late April-early May on evaluating and improving river access. This program will involve class time, as well as site visits to pre-selected sites. Emma has reached out to Linh Phu about possible sites within the Oxbow NWR. Linh was amenable to using sites on the refuge but does not have the staff to assist with the actual workshop. Emma has also been working with Al Futterman about possible sites to visit, should we host the workshop. Three possible sites would be the boat launch at the end of Still River Depot Rd and at the Bill Ashe Visitor Center, both of which are on the refuge. The third site could be the Petapawag launch in Groton. Emma anticipates about 30 attendees. Possible locations for the classrooms are the Bill Ashe facility (not heated but has sliding doors to enable closing the otherwise open sides) and the NRWA River Resource

Center. Stacey Chilcoat noted that NRWA's River Classroom is held in May and June, so this workshop should not interfere with that program.

Lucy asked Emma, Al and Stacey to develop a plan, should we want to host this even. Neil Angus offered to work with them as well.

### Finances

Given Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell's absence, Lucy provided a brief report on the Council's finances as of August 31, 2022. Cash expenditures made in August on behalf of the Council totaled \$9,854.60, comprised of \$4,854.60 for NRWA Staff and fiduciary charges, and \$5,000 for Contractual costs, a single payment to the Brookline Conservation Commission upon completion of its acquisition project funded by a 2022 Land Protection grant

### Forest Legacy Program (FLP)

Al Futterman reported that the FLP application had been reviewed and revised based on input from the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). It now will go before representatives from the US Forest Service's Eastern Region for a "mock panel review" on Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>. Based on feedback from that review we will be able to further revise our application before submitting a final version to DCR on September 28<sup>th</sup>. DCR will then submit it for national review to be held in November. Lucy noted we will not know if we could be funded until after the President's Budget comes out next March. However, the Forest Service may list the projects' rankings and amounts requested before the President's Budget is released, which could give us some idea of the possibility of being funded.

Leah Basbanes asked for a copy of the application. Al will send a PDF file to Lucy to forward to the Council members.

### Squannacook River WMA (SRWMA)

Lucy reported that an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) had not yet been published in the Environmental Monitor. She added there could be two possible reasons. First, as Heidi had reported at last month's meeting, MEPA regulations are currently undergoing a review. One of the proposals would be to eliminate the requirement that ecological restoration projects, which this one is, would be exempt from MEPA if they receive approval from the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER). Given this possibility, MassWildlife may be waiting for a determination before completing an ENF. The other possibility is that the ENF is still being drafted. Lucy reported that she had spoken with Brian Hawthorne after last month's meeting and learned he did not have all the staff he needed to complete the ENF, especially given Tom Wansleben's reassignment to other projects.

At last month's meeting there had been discussion about retaining the services of consultants. Elizabeth offered to work with Emma on finalizing a procurement policy, and Al and Heidi Ricci had developed a list of approximately ten consultants to consider retaining, including both individuals and firms such as BSC and Inter-Fluve. Given the ENF has not been published and, therefore, we do not have specifics about the project to comment on, Lucy wondered if we should retain one or two consultants to prepare a

baseline assessment of the site. Al added that a couple of consultants on the list could provide such a baseline: one on forest ecology and the other on geomorphological and riparian habitat. Lucy noted the Council had previously authorized the Executive Committee to expend up to \$30,000 for consultant services. If a baseline assessment could be done for \$5,000 or less, then perhaps it would be a worthwhile expenditure.

Rebecca Longvall suggested retaining a firm, such as BSC, that would have a large “stable” of experts to draw on. Al commented that Ayer had retained BSC to do a conservation analysis of the proposed Stratton Hill development and offered to obtain a copy of the scope of work.

Lucy suggested a small working group draft a scope of work for baseline assessments to bring to our October meeting. Neil, Rebecca, Al and Heidi (whom Al will reach out to) will prepare a draft. Martha Morgan and Leah Basbanes offered to review the draft scope as well. Rebecca commented that it was very important for the scope to be objective and not appear to seek a specific outcome. Neil agreed, noting it should be a high level assessment.

On another note, Al reported that Stacey and Diane Carson will attend the next Groton Conservation Commission’s meeting which has on its agenda disposition of a 15-acre parcel owned by the Town of Groton land (across from the Bertozzi Conservation Area) that abuts the SRWMA restoration project. He also reminded the Council of the 70 acres upstream of SRWMA, also owned by MassWildlife, which had been graveled and seem quite suitable for an oak woodland restoration project. Leah added that MassWildlife has a similar holding (an old graveled site) in Dunstable along the Nashua River

### Community Grants

The Pepperell Native & Invasives Plants Committee’s Final Report for its 2022 Community Grant supporting the mapping of invasives near stream culverts 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 Town of Pepperell.

### Mercury Dragonfly Project

Emma reported that she, Jessica Veysey-Powell, Martha, and Jackie, along with several volunteers, had collected at least 20 larvae samples of dragonflies at each of the three sample sites for this nation-wide survey. The sample sites were the West Groton Water Supply District land on the Squannacook River, the Millie Turner dam site on the Nissitissit River, and the boat launch at the Marion Stoddart Conservation Area on the Nashua River. The samples will be frozen, then packed in dry ice to be sent to a laboratory in Oregon for analysis of mercury levels. The results should be available next spring or summer.

### Other Business

*Fredonian Park, Shirley:* Volunteers are sought to participate in an invasives pull and clean up in Fredonian Park the weekend of September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>.

*Ken Hartlage Farewell:* Paula Terrasi is organizing a farewell gathering on September 22<sup>nd</sup> for Ken Hartlage who is moving to Georgia.

*Water Chestnuts at Pepperell Dam Impoundment:* Martha reported on a multi-year program funded by the DCR Partnerships Matching Funds Program with a grant to the Town of Pepperell. Matching funds to the Town of Pepperell are provided by Pepperell Hydro as part of its FERC license. DCR has contracted with Solitude Lake Management to spray herbicides targeted at water chestnuts which have been a long-time and growing concern. The program has been fairly successful, but apparently does not have sufficient funding to cover spraying the full extent of the impoundment. She noted that water chestnuts repeatedly have not been treated at the Marion Stoddart launch site, although other areas of the river look much better. She added if treatment covered more of the river, volunteers could keep infestation down with annual pulls. Lucy suggested Martha draft a letter to DCR to review at the October meeting.

*Conservation Network Gathering:* Al reported that Michele Girard had suggested inviting Juliette Nicole Rooney-Varga, a professor at U Mass Lowell and head of its Climate Change Initiative, to the next gathering. Al will reach out to Juliette; the date of the next gathering is still to be determined.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, October 20<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM by Zoom