

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 17, 2022 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Bolton: Rebecca Longvall; Dunstable: Leah Basbanes; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Lancaster: Alix Turner; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NRWA: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman
NPS: Emma Lord
DEC: Neil Angus
MA F&W: Travis Drudi

Guests:

Martha Morgan, NRWA Water Programs Director
Justin Smith, Lancaster resident and possible Alternate from Lancaster

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 and Announcements

The minutes of the January 20, 2022 meeting were approved as presented.

Heidi Ricci announced that Neil Angus has been recognized as a Fellow of the American Institute of Certified Planners. Neil noted the recognition was for his work advancing green infrastructure, green building, and low impact development. The Council applauded this recognition.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that approving our FY23 Budget and Work Plan at our March Council meeting would put it on track for review by the Finance Assistance Team and approval by July 1, 2022, the start of our fiscal year.

Emma noted the next meeting in a series of Roundtable webinars sponsored by the River Management Society will be on February 22nd. She posted a link to the Roundtable in the Zoom meeting chat (Roundtable: Land Acknowledgements: Purpose, Practices, and Perspectives (river-management.org)).

Finances

Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell reported on the NRWA's February invoice in the amount of \$4,395.99 for services rendered to the Council, which Lucy had approved for payment. The invoiced amount included some minor "catch up" for work by NRWA staff during the period October 1 – December 31, 2021 that had not previously been accounted for in earlier invoices. This included time spent by Al Futterman on general environmental issues of interest to the Council, such as the proposed trucking facilities in Lunenburg and Lancaster, and by Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold, NRWA Communications Director, on press releases for the 2022 Community Grants Program and the Council's website.

Second, in preparation for the upcoming discussion on FY22 funding, Elizabeth screen-shared a chart showing \$81,865 NPS funds designated for Contractual work and \$27,563.23 designated for NRWA Program Support remaining to be spent or obligated by June 30, 2022. She added that the amount in the Contractual category includes \$8,000 in FY21 Community Grant Project funds which will be paid to grantees upon project completion and submittal of final reports to the Council. It is expected these grant funds will be disbursed by June 30th.

FY22 Budget

Elizabeth explained the proposed use of remaining FY22 funds being recommended by the Executive Committee, with input from Emma, by NPS categories.

NRWA Program Support:

- *Personnel* - Elizabeth believes the \$24,065 remaining in the Personnel category will be spent by June 30th by AI's ongoing work as Project Coordinator, and, should the Council approve, the Environmental Education Team offering 2 aquatic investigations, initiation of the road crossing signage project led by Martha Morgan, and continued work on updating the Council's website. Council members agreed these projects should go forward.
- *Travel* – Subject to NPS approval, the \$2,000.63 will be rolled over to FY23. This account was funded in anticipation of being able to attend in-person meetings. A second year of Covid restrictions precluded this. In the coming year, there may be more opportunities to attend meetings.
- *Supplies* – This account has a balance of \$1,517.60, approximately \$640 of which will be spent for the aquatic investigations program. At the last Council meeting various ideas were offered for use of these funds, such as purchasing tools for individuals or groups to borrow for invasive plant removal or purchasing t-shirts or hats branded with our logo. As members were still interested in these ideas, Lucy asked if a couple of members would look into the costs.

Contractual:

Elizabeth noted that, after payment of the \$8,000 obligated for the FY21 Community Grants, there will be \$73,865 remaining to be spent from this category on Council projects. She added that there are several variables to keep in mind as projects are considered. First, the total amount requested by the nine 2022 Community Grants is \$38,546, \$18,546 more than currently budgeted. If the Council decides to fund the applications up to the full amount requested and the four projects suggested at last month's meeting are approved at the estimated cost, there will be approximately \$24,619 remaining in the Contractual category to be spent or obligated by June 30th.

At previous meetings Drew Kellner has asked about establishing a *Land Protection Fund* which could be added to each year, thereby over time creating a meaningful amount of funding for land acquisition projects. At the Executive Committee's request, Emma had investigated the feasibility of such a multi-year fund, noting all funds would need to be spent by the end of the Cooperative Agreement (in 2025). In the past the NPS may have supported such multi-year funds, but the NPS would now like to see each

year's funding spent that year. However, she found that the NPS would support creation of a *Land Protection Grant* program to fund the due diligence required for land acquisitions, such as surveys, title work, and baseline reports. Grants could be awarded on a rolling basis or at fixed intervals during the year. We could create such a grant program for this year which would require going public with it by the end of March/early April so grant funds could be awarded and obligated by the end of June. Diane Carson asked if we expected people to apply this year and, if not, what would happen to the funds. Lucy suggested that in the next month we approach our local conservation commissions and land trusts to alert them to the program and see if there would be any interest. Emma added that unspent or unobligated funds probably could be rolled over to FY23, if needed. The Council members felt this idea was worth considering.

Elizabeth noted that watershed studies would be another possible use of the \$24,619.

With these options in mind, Elizabeth walked the Council through the projects suggested at last month's Council meeting for confirmation that we do them.

- *EZ Dock in Pepperell at the Marion Stoddart Conservation Area.* Paula Terrasi had quoted \$5,000 for the dock, \$5,500 for the dock and its installation. She had suggested saving \$500 by having the Pepperell DPW install the dock. There was some discussion about the location of the dock, and confirmation that a canoe/kayak cradle and ramp to the dock were included in the cost. Given parking immediately adjacent to the proposed location of the dock is not feasible, this is not intended to be ADA compliant. Lucy suggested it would be wise to have EZ Dock do the installation this year, with the DPW observing so it would not be inadvertently damaged in future years when removed and re-installed. Diane raised the issue of permitting, noting that the dock for Nashoba Paddler does not qualify for a DEP Chapter 91 Permit, but rather must get an annual permit from Groton's Harbormaster. Rebecca Longvall suggested that Paula reach out to the DEP local circuit rider for clarification on permitting requirements. The Council felt this project was worth pursuing. Lucy asked Paula to confirm the costs so we would have final numbers for the March meeting.
- *Road Signage.* This project would involve the installation of 24 signs (one in each direction) at crossings of the Nashua main stem, Nissitissit and Squannacook Rivers. The Council agreed to proceeding with this project, which has an estimated contract cost of \$2,00 (not counting staff time), noting that such signage was an effective way to educate the general public about the Wild & Scenic designation of the rivers.
- *Invasive Plants Workshop.* Michele Girard had offered to organize a workshop this spring on invasive plants' removal. The workshop, which would be open to the public, would consist of a virtual training, followed by a field, hands-on training. She imagined the field training might need to be broken into groups of 10. The estimated cost for this one-time program was \$1,200 to cover consultants and supplies. The Council agreed this was worth offering. Michele will follow up with engaging consultants and confirming the cost.
- *Website Update.* Joan Wotkowicz met with Wynne and Elizabeth to consider the most cost-effective way to update, improve, and keep current the Council's website. While the current

platform is adequate, they felt we would benefit from some consulting services. The estimated cost at this time is \$2,500. The Council agreed to this project as well.

With these four projects agreed to, final decisions on a Land Protection Grant program and/or watershed studies and associated level of funding will be postponed to our March meeting. In the meantime, a draft grant application and program parameters can be developed in the event it is launched. In addition, information can be gathered on the type of watershed studies we may want to initiate. Finally, once the 2022 Community Grant applications have been reviewed and amounts awarded, we will have more certainty on the funds to apply to one or both of these programs.

FY23 Draft Budget and Work Plan

Elizabeth reviewed the proposed budgets within the various NPS categories.

NRWA Program Support: \$61,742

- *Personnel* - This would include the Outreach and Project Coordinator at approximately 10 hours/week. She noted that AI has reduced his hours at the NRWA from 32 per week to 20 per week. Other staff time included in this category would also be included. \$44,957
- *Fringe* – This is calculated at 34% of Personnel. \$15,285
- *Travel* – With all of FY22 travel being rolled over, only a minimal amount of funding is anticipated to be needed. \$100
- *Supplies* – For miscellaneous materials for support programs. \$1,400

Contractual: \$88,258

- *Outreach & Education* – Various projects and materials to do outreach in the Wild & Scenic Rivers' towns and to further engage and inform the public on Council activities. This could include a continuation of the signage project, completing the website upgrade, the brochure project and similar outreach product. \$6,000
- *Projects and Stewardship Plan Implementation* – On-going projects were highlighted, such as speakers for the Conservation Networking Breakfasts, additional canoe/kayak launch sites' improvements, preliminary work related to the Forest Legacy Program, watershed studies, a Land Protection Grant program. \$52,258
- *Community Grants* – Based on the number of grant applications received this year, it was agreed to set aside more funding than provided in the last 2 years. \$30,000

Fiduciary/Indirect: \$15,000

- *Set Percentage* – 10% of the total of the above (\$150,000). \$15,000

Lucy asked if there were any questions on the proposed budget. Elizabeth noted that the descriptions within the categories would be written broadly in order to give the Council flexibility in responding to opportunities or situations that might arise during the year. Beth Suedmeyer suggested adding language to Projects and Stewardship Plan Implementation to cover a river festival. Elizabeth suggested broader

language, such as “public events” or “public engagement,” be included. Leah Basbanes asked for and received confirmation that the Land Protection Grant would include all due diligence related to acquisitions, including baseline reports for properties to be subject to conservation restrictions.

Lucy requested and received unanimous approval by the Council of the draft FY23 Budget and Work Plan. A final version will be approved at the March Council meeting.

Review of 2022 Community Grant Applications

Lucy led the Council through a review of the 9 grant applications submitted for 2022 funding and asked that decisions be made regarding awarding grants to each and, if so if for the full or a partial amount. She reminded members that we had set aside \$20,000 for this program, but the total amount requested was \$38,546. However, we have sufficient funds to fully fund these grants, should we so desire.

- *Ayer Community PULL! Campaign to Remove Water Chestnuts from Grove Pond:* PACE (People of Ayer Concerned about the Environment) requested funds to do chemical testing of water chestnut plants in Grove Pond to ascertain if there are chemicals in the sediment or plants that could be harmful to humans (who will be pulling plants) or the environment (appropriate plant disposal). If safe to remove, there will be hand pulls in July and August. The Council agreed to fully fund this application at \$4,995.
- *Beautify & Improve Access to the Nashua River in Ayer:* The Devens Enterprise Commission (DEC) is the lead agency partnering with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Town of Ayer. The proposal is to improve Ayer’s access to the Nashua River at the junction of McPherson and Bishop Roads. The plan includes creating an interpretive trail to the river with signage, improving the parking area and installing a bike rack, and planting a pollinator garden. The Council agreed to fully fund this application at \$6,930.
- *Managing and Monitoring Invasive Japanese Knotweed on the Nashua River:* The Groton Invasives Species Committee proposed removal of Japanese Knotweed in 2 town-owned locations adjacent to the Nashua River: the Campbell Well Site and Nod Road. Following removal, the sites would be replanted with native vegetation and monitored for future Knotweed growth. The Council had several concerns, including the seeming lack of professional guidance on the project. Subject to the applicant’s willingness to amend the use of funds per the Council’s recommendation, the Council agree to set aside the requested amount of \$2,540.
- *Harvard Waterways and Watershed Awareness:* The Harvard Conservation Commission proposal is to place signage in each direction at 11 road crossings along Bowers Brook, a tributary of the Nashua River. In addition, a map will be prepared for posting in public locations and on-line showing Bowers Brook and its watershed to raise awareness of this resource. The Council agreed to fully fund this application at \$2,500.
- *Cook Conservation Parking Area:* The Lancaster Land Trust proposed a 2-Phase project, the first to be funded by this grant. Phase 1 involves a survey by a certified land surveyor of the existing parking area and entry from Rt 70 for expansion and improvement. In addition, the culvert under the entry access will be replaced. Phase 2 would involve implementation of the planned improvements. The Council agreed to fully fund this application at \$5,000.
- *Mapping Invasive Plants Near Stream Culverts:* The Pepperell Invasive & Native Plan Advisory Committee will contract with a GIS consultant to map the invasive plants on town-owned land or in rights-of-way around culverts of tributaries of the Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers. Once mapped, a plan will be developed with the town’s DPW to manage the invasives. The Council agreed to fully fund this application at \$3,625.

- *Fredonian Park Invasive Plant Removal & Management:* The Shirley Select Board will lead this effort to improve a 7-acre park in Shirley Village which includes a small pond and a nature trail between the pond and Catacunemaug Brook, a tributary of the Squannacook River. Invasive plants have overtaken the pond and brook banks and need to be removed as a requirement to making the Park ADA accessible. Funds will be used to contract for consulting services to develop a site assessment and management plan, as well as training volunteers for plant removal. Local businesses are partnering with the Town in this effort. The Council agreed to fully fund this application at \$4,423.
- *Stabilize the Canoe Launch on Townsend Harbor Pond:* Squannacook Greenways intends to stabilize a popular canoe/kayak launch site adjacent to the Squannacook Rail Trail with crushed stone. The launch will be intended for hand-carried boats, and not boat trailers. Funds are requested for consultant services to assist in state required permitting, application fees, and construction of the improvements to the launch. The Council agreed to fully fund this application at \$4,000.
- *Adams Dam:* This is Phase 2 of a multi-phase project to stabilize and improve a highly popular access to the Squannacook River at Adams Dam. The Town will retain a consultant to recommend a process for stabilizing the bank, evaluate the feasibility of an ADA accessible trail, develop plans for future, safe community access and possible recreational uses along the river at this location. The Council agreed to fully fund this application at \$4,533.

Resolve FY22 Spending

Having reviewed and fully funded the applications, the Council turned back to the FY22 Budget and expenditure of the remaining \$24,619 in the Consultant category. It was agreed that the Executive Committee, Elizabeth and Emma would further look into the two options previously suggested: watershed studies and creation of a Land Protection Grant program. Beth commented on the level of interest in our towns in invasive plants management and wondered about our forming a regional collaborative or doing a watershed study on invasives. There was also considerable support for the Land Protection Grant program. Lucy noted that the remaining funds could be split between these two options. A recommendation to and final decision by the Council will be made at the March meeting

Squannacook River WMA

Lucy reported that information is continuing to be gathered on the status of this project and intends to have time at the next meeting for the Council discussion. In the interim, Al will set up at least one site walk for Council members.

Other

Lucy reported that Hill Week will be held virtually March 8 – 11, 2022. It is an opportunity for us to meet with our Congressmen and Senators regarding the Wild & Scenic River Program, the work of the councils, and importance of funding them. Those interested in attending should contact Elizabeth or her.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 17th, at 7 PM by Zoom