

N-S-N Wild & Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 17, 2020 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Members Present: Beth Suedmeyer (Ayer); Rebecca Longvall (Bolton); Tom Rogers (Brookline); Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace (Harvard); Ken Hartlage and Paula Terrasi (Pepperell); Heidi Ricci (Shirley); Joan Wotkowicz (Townsend)

NRWA Staff: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman, and Martha Morgan

NPS: Emma Lord

Guests: Linh Phu (USFWS Eastern Complex Refuges Manager); Neil Angus (DEC); Mike Fleming (former MA DCR and current NRWA Director); Warren Kimball (former MA DEP and NRWA Director)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Interim Chair, Lucy Wallace. Due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic the meeting was held virtually by Zoom. Lucy invited Linh Phu to give an update on activities associated with the Oxbow NWR. Linh reported that there has been an uptick in both the number of visitors to the refuge, but also challenges, noting the former exceeds the latter. Lucy then asked new Brookline representative, Tom Rogers, to introduce himself. Tom explained that, like Jordan Bailey had been, he was a member of the Brookline Conservation Commission and is co-chair of its Trails Committee. Lucy then quickly introduced the other Council members to Tom. Heidi Ricci reported she had recently been made Director of Policy at MassAudubon.

Administrative

The minutes of the August 20, 2020 meeting were approved as presented.

NPS Updates

Emma Lord reported that the Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers newsletter, which had been discontinued, was starting again as a monthly newsletter in August. The first issue would focus on the Lower Farmington River. Future issues will highlight Partnership Rivers and Emma hopes the Nashua, Squannacook and Nissitissit will be featured soon. Emma will send a link to the newsletter so that members can subscribe to it. At Lucy's request, she also will send an updated members' list with emails.

Policies Committee Update

Lucy led the Council members through a review of the two policies, dated 9/9/20, which had been reviewed at the August Council meeting and subsequently revised by the Policies Committee.

1. *Activity Review and Advocacy:* Lucy reviewed the revisions to the policy as suggested at the August meeting. Heidi suggested changing "impact" to "effects" in the first bullet under "Evaluation of activities that might affect the rivers." With that amendment and on motion made and seconded, the policy was unanimously approved.
2. *Advisory Committee – Purpose, Structure, and Appointment:* Lucy noted the addition of entities to be considered for members of the Advisory Committee and a small correction on the Membership Recommendation form, as recommended at the last meeting. On motion made and seconded, the policy was unanimously approved.

Lucy then led the Council members through review of the drafts of three new policies, dated 9/9/20, and one proposed process for this year only.

1. *Budget and Financial Expenditures*: Lucy reported that the first item to be addressed was definition of the fiscal year: should it comport with the fiscal agent's fiscal year (July 1 – June 30) or the federal government's fiscal year (October 1 – September 30)? The Policy Committee was proposing that the Council's fiscal year be the same as that of the fiscal agent, NRWA. Emma pointed out that the National Park Service's funding does not often run with the federal fiscal year and, furthermore, that the Cooperative Agreement was structured to run with the fiscal agent's fiscal year. The Council agreed that the fiscal year be the same as that of the fiscal agent. The next item to be considered was the responsibility for preparation and oversight of the budget. Lucy noted that some stewardship councils have a separate Budget or Finance Committee. Others have an Executive Committee, composed of the council officers, as being responsible for the budget. She reported that the Policies Committee felt that, given it was proposing creation of an Executive Committee, the Executive Committee should be charged with preparing the budget and overseeing expenditures. Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell reminded the members that the Council was responsible for approval and adoption of the annual budget. The Council members were in agreement that budget preparation and financial oversight should reside with the Executive Committee. Lucy then walked the members through the remaining provisions of the policy. There were no suggested revisions on the draft policy. Therefore, on motion made and seconded, the policy was unanimously approved.
2. *Conflict of Interest*: Lucy began review of this policy by noting it was based on the NRWA's current conflict of interest policy. Tom Rogers noted that he signs many conflict of interest policies in conjunction with his work and found this one to be fairly standard. Heidi also felt it was within the range of similar policies she had signed. Linh asked if members of the Advisory Committee would be required to sign it, even though they would be non-voting members of the Council. She added that conflict of interest usually refers to personal gain being the basis for establishing a potential conflict. Tom opined that having the Advisory Committee sign a conflict of interest form simply for being named to this standing committee might discourage them from joining. Instead, he suggested, they be encouraged to sign if they were actively participating in a Council discussion and decision. After some additional discussion, it was agreed that the Policy Committee would revisit that section of the policy and bring a revised draft to the October Council meeting. Joan Wotkowicz asked if the duty to recuse should come before duty to disclose in the section, "Duty to Disclose and Recuse." The members felt the current order was appropriate and, therefore, it will be left as presented in the draft.
3. *Executive Committee*: Lucy reviewed the responsibilities of the Executive Committee, which would be comprised of the Council officers, as set forth in the policy. The Council members agreed with the purpose and responsibilities being assigned to this Committee and, on motion made and seconded, unanimously approved the policy.
4. *Process for Nomination and Election of Officers*: Lucy explained that this process would be for this year only. The Bylaws require that officers be elected in September or at the first meeting thereafter which, this year, would be the October meeting. Given the establishment of an Executive Committee it is important that it officers now be elected. Over the course of the coming year the Policies Committee will develop and bring to the Council for approval a policy on nomination and election of officers. On motion made and seconded, the Process was unanimously approved. Lucy then asked that volunteers or nominees for officer positions be emailed to her by October 1st. The Policies Committee will then meet to prepare a slate to bring to the October Council meeting.

Land Stewardship Committee Update

Project Prioritization: Ken Hartlage shared a chart showing a draft prioritization of nine proposed projects. He explained that one goal was to have at least one Committee member take ownership of each project. In addition to the project name and owner, the chart identified a proposed start date, budget, and goal(s) of the *Stewardship Plan* met by the project. Before the October meeting Ken will meet with each project owner to develop a budget and further “flesh out” how the project will be accomplished. The Committee’s goal in providing this information would be to enable the Council to approve project(s) to go forward this year as a Council Project. Ken then asked for comments on the proposal. Elizabeth felt having multiple owners was a good idea, adding that having costs would be important in evaluating projects’ feasibility. Mike Fleming noted that the federal Great American Outdoor Act, which is funded with Land and Water Conservation Funds, had made a substantial amount of funding available for Forest Legacy projects. Al Futterman noted that a Forest Legacy project had not been submitted for Massachusetts this year, and, therefore, was hopeful a project focused on our Wild and Scenic Rivers’ towns would be doable for 2021. He asked if the Council would agree to looking beyond our 11 towns as well in putting together an application. The council was agreed to his suggestion. Al will set up and let members know when there will be a meeting with Lindsay Nystrom, MA Forest Legacy Program Coordinator, to further discuss the possibility of pursuing a Forest Legacy project as a Council project in the coming year.

Shoreline Survey: Al Futterman provided an update on the shoreline survey project. As he had at the August Council meeting, he shared a map of the rivers segments already covered (14) and remaining to be covered (2) in the next couple of weeks. He will prepare a spreadsheet on data collected, concerns, highlights, and other noteworthy information to present at the October Council meeting. Emma shared her ability to track and record particular points of interest using her phone, which information could then be shown on Google Earth, with links to the designated points for notes and photographs.

Heidi asked if anyone had any photographs of the impact of the drought on rivers or streams to share with the Mass Rivers Alliance which is compiling a photographic record of the drought. Martha Morgan offered to send photographs she had taken over the summer.

Warren Kimball noted that the USGS stream gauge in the Squannacook River would provide a record of high and low flows both currently and historically, which could be extrapolated over the larger region to assess the severity of the drought.

Update on Council Projects

Conservation Networking Breakfasts: Al reported that the recent program on freshwater mussels given by Jason Carmignani, Aquatic Ecologist at MA Natural Heritage, had been well attended. While Jason is relatively new to this position, Al felt it was good to raise his awareness of our rivers. Al reported on two upcoming programs: 1) Nick Nelson, a fluvial geomorphologist and Vice President, Education, at Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, will make a presentation on October 20th; and 2) Lynn Hoffer, Director of MA Natural Heritage, will make a presentation on December 1st.

Canoe Access: Al reported on the canoe access site that he has been exploring adjacent to the former David Ross Associates property in Ayer. After reviewing that site and an adjacent site likely on state Department of Transportation (DOT) land with Joanne Crystoff, Ayer Conservation Agent, it had been determined that the DOT site was preferable for boat and fishing access. Al felt the Buddhist center which has purchased the David Ross Associates property, may be willing to provide some financial support to this potential project, which would be welcomed.

Updates to Towns

Lucy suggested that it would be appropriate for Council members (Representatives and/or Alternates) to make a report to their respective Boards of Selectmen and that we should do so before December 31st when Selectmen begin work on budgets for the coming fiscal year. She added that it would be important to both thank them for their support of the designation and let them know the work the Council has begun. Beth Suedmeyer agreed and suggested that we prepare a universal summary of our work over the last year so that we are delivering a consistent message. Rebecca Longvall suggested written material would be important to have included in the Selectmen's meeting packets so they could review it before the public meeting with Representatives. Elizabeth suggested that the report include pending, as well as on-going projects. Heidi added that the report should reference funding available to the Council, such as through the Great American Outdoor Act, which will help advance preservation of important conservation lands. Ken noted that towns are often concerned with the economic benefit of projects and that the report should acknowledge the value of designation in bringing increased eco-tourism activities: hikers, bikers and boaters who patronize local businesses. Elizabeth felt the report could announce the Community Grants program, if we have developed and adopted a policy.

Ken, Joan and Paula Terrasi volunteered to draft a report for the Selectmen and bring it to the October Council meeting.

Other Business

Elizabeth reported that the domain name had been renewed for one more year. Wynne Treanor- Kvenvold, NRWA Communications Director, was made the website administrator, replacing Cindy Knox who had originally set up the website.

There being no additional business, the meeting was adjourned. Next

Meeting: October 15, 2020 at 7 PM - by Zoom