

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF JANUARY 21, 2021 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Bolton: Rebecca Longvall; Brookline: Drew Kellner; Harvard: Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace; Hollis: LeeAnnWolff; Lancaster: Alix Turner; Pepperell: Ken Hartlage; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NRWA: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman, Martha Morgan
NPS: Emma Lord
DEC: Neil Angus
MA F&W: Anne Gagnon

Guests:

Warren Kimball (NRWA Director and former MA DEP)

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

The minutes of the December 17, 2020 meeting were approved as amended.

NPS Updates

Budget: Emma Lord reported that the current FY budget had been approved by Congress which included an increase in funding for Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers (*PWSR*). The Budget Office is now reviewing and finalizing the allocation of funds, but we should expect at least \$150,000 for the next year, and possibly as much as \$165,000. The schedule for receipt of our annual budget and work plan, therefore, should proceed with the goal of submitting it to the NPS in March.

PW&SR: Emma reported that the March issue of the *PWSR* newsletter was going to feature an article on each of the New England PWS Rivers designated in March 2019 (Lower Farmington, Wood-Pawcatuck, N-S-N). It was suggested we highlight the Forest Legacy Program, Shoreline Survey, and Conservation Networking Breakfasts. Emma will prepare an initial draft article which Al Futterman, Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell and Lucy will review. She added that the *PWSR* newsletter may include interviews with the chairs of these three rivers' stewardship councils.

Community Grants Program

Lucy reported that the Request for Proposals (RFP) and Application for funding through the Community Grants Program approved at our November meeting were now posted on the Council's website. In addition, the NRWA had sent an e-news notice regarding the RFP and grants to the 11 river towns. She asked if the Representatives had been doing outreach in their own towns, noting that Michele Girard had done an excellent job of contacting boards and organizations in Harvard. Michele reported that she had not received any responses to her outreach; she intends to do more, including posting on NextDoor Harvard.

Joan Wotkowicz reported that notice was posted on Townsend's website and that she had notified the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board and Conservation Commission as well. Drew Kellner reported that

the Brookline Conservation Commission and Beaver Brook Association will probably submit applications. Lee Anne Wolff will reach out to the Hollis Conservation Commission. Ken Hartlage noted that information has been posted on the Pepperell town website and he has contacted the Board of Selectmen. He asked if it was appropriate for information to be posted on the Nashoba Land Trust and local chapter of Trout Unlimited websites. The Council members thought that was appropriate, as we want to broadcast the availability of this program as widely as possible. Martha Morgan reported that PACE (People of Ayer Concerned about the Environment) may submit an application, possibly to support an outreach position it is seeking to fill.

Ken then raised the issue of possible conflict of interest if Representatives or Alternates are involved with organizations submitting applications. Lucy noted that this issue had recently been raised to her. She suggested this be resolved at the February meeting and that in the meantime she would draft some guidelines to consider. Beth Suedmeyer asked if it was appropriate for Council members to speak to applicants. The Council agreed that it was.

Land Stewardship Committee Update

Ken provided a brief update on the Committee's work, referring to the chart previously distributed in the meeting packet.

Brochure for Riparian Landowners: The brochure is now 80-90% complete. He will bring it to the February meeting for final approval.

Off Highway Vehicles (OHV): Ken and Paula Terrasi have been continuing their outreach to law enforcement officials. He hopes to have a meeting of Pepperell Police and MA F&W enforcement officers in April to coordinate efforts at controlling OHV use of state conservation lands.

Invasives: LeeAnn reported she has determined that given the range and variety of invasive-related issues, a "tool kit" containing information on recognizing and addressing invasives would be the most useful item to distribute to towns and interested citizen groups. Her content is drawn from UNH Extension materials, but would be happy to have any additional information we might provide. She is willing to act as a resource to any group that asks for it. Her goal is to have a draft tool kit by February and final in March for Council approval. Beth suggested she reach out to town staff to see if they might be interested in partnering. For instance, ask the DPW to pick up bags of pulled invasives which volunteers would leave in designated locations.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP): Al reported that the FLP steering committee has been meeting weekly and that ~750+ acres have been identified for possible inclusion in a Massachusetts FLP application. His goal is at least 1,000 acres in order to make the application nationally competitive. The application is due in July, so time continues to be of concern.

The Council, by unanimous vote, went into Executive Session to discuss potential properties and would return to Open Session at the conclusion of the Executive Session.

The Council returned from Executive Session to Open Session.

Lucy explained that the FLP application requires both a project applicant and project proponent, the latter being a 501c(3) organization. In this case, Massachusetts DCR would be the project applicant. As the Council is not a 501c(3) organization, it needs to find a partner to fill this role. She added that the NRWA could act in this capacity should the Council so desire. Elizabeth noted that the Council could, obviously, select another 501c(3) organization, such as a local or regional land trust. In anticipation of a possible

request, at its meeting a week ago the NRWA's Executive Committee had endorsed recommending to the NRWA Board next week that NRWA act as the project proponent, should the Council so desire. By motion made and unanimously approved, the Council requested that NRWA serve as project proponent.

There followed lengthy discussion on landowner outreach. Al reported that the North County Land Trust has offered to partner with the FLP steering committee on holding a virtual landowner outreach meeting to explain FLP. MassWoods offers grants for up to \$5,000 to cover outreach activities. Rebecca Longvall noted she has received such a grant and found it straight forward to manage. It covered event costs, ranging from mailings to food. The timing of such a landowner meeting remains to be determined but could occur in the next couple of months.

Al said he will continue to draw on Representatives' help in contacting landowners, as it is critical to have the local relationship with landowners.

Shoreline Survey: Al has been compiling a spreadsheet on findings from the shoreline survey, which will include identifying one project on each river that could be pursued this summer. He suggested clean up of a tire dump on the Nissitissit, stabilizing the shore at the Bertozzi conservation land on the Squannacook, and continuing annual hand pulls of invasive Water Chestnut in Pepperell Pond on the Nashua.

Update on Council Projects

Canoe Access: Al's focus continues to be a site on the Nashua in Ayer. He is in the process of ascertaining the best way to reach out to New England Power as the most suitable site, although the old dead-end of Groton-Shirley Road site is also still under consideration.

Conservation Agents Networking Breakfasts: Al reported that Sarah Widing of InterFluve will be speaking at the February 23rd breakfast on the importance of headwater streams. He suggested that Council members might be interested in attending and, if so, to contact Emma in order to receive a Zoom invitation. He hopes to have a program on OHV/ATVs in April. Martha suggested a future topic could be dam removal and culvert replacement, part of a presentation she is giving. She also offered to speak on the water data loggers project funded through a MET grant which are monitoring cold water streams. Ken suggested that a talk on dam removal and culvert replacement would be valuable, especially in light of the impacts of climate change on cold water fisheries.

Financial Update

Elizabeth reported that Form 425, an accounting of expenses under the Cooperative Agreement for the period July-December 2020, had been submitted to and accepted by the NPS. She explained that the categories in the budget approved by NPS last year did not quite match those on Form 425, which required her to adjust some previously invoiced costs. In making these corrections, she prepared a revised invoice from the NRWA to the Council for the period July – December 2020 in the amount of \$23,361.86. The invoice is mainly for internal accounting purposes (to move NPS funds held by NRWA as fiscal agent to NRWA as payment for services rendered). Both Rebecca, as Treasurer, and Lucy, as Chair, have concurred with these revisions.

Elizabeth also reported that Al's time is accounted for in two categories: as the Outreach Coordinator and for work on specific Council projects, such as the FLP. Michele asked if more of Al's time would be required if the FLP continues to move forward. Elizabeth noted that, at the moment, members of the FLP steering committee, such as Janet Morrison, are providing pro bono assistance. If an application is filed and grant awarded, there would be funds to pay for additional time by Al and/or the retention of a

consultant to shepherd the landowner enrollment process. Al acknowledged he does not want to be the project lead if the application is successful.

Al added that one of the current challenges is ascertaining a preliminary value of any properties to be enrolled in the FPL in order to determine the amount of funding being sought. Beth suggested the steering committee designate one or more “on call” appraisers who would be familiar with property values in the various towns to do the initial, preliminary appraisals. She added they might be funded with Council funds or through a grant for this work.

Other Business

Members who had attended that last Conservation Agents Networking Gathering commented on the excellent presentation by Professor Denise Burchsted on the geomorphology of our rivers and their changing courses. The presentation covered changes that were either naturally caused or human-made. It was felt her talk would be a good one to offer to the public at an evening meeting. Martha suggested an assessment of the more seriously eroded banks of the Nashua might be a Council project, noting the degradation of the bank on Groton conservation land caused by dogs. She added, however, that there are signs of bank erosion that do not seem to be caused by dog or human activity and felt these should also be included in an assessment.

There being no additional business, the meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting: February 18, 2021 at 7 PM - by Zoom