

Nashua River Wild & Scenic Study Committee
Notes from the Study Committee Meeting
NRWA's River Resource Center, 592 Main Street, Groton, MA
December 15, 2016

INFORMAL NOTES

Members Present: Beth Suedmeyer (Ayer); Lucy Wallace (Harvard); Bill Flynn (Lancaster); Heidi Ricci (Shirley); Bill Wilkinson (Townsend)

NRWA Staff: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman

NPS: Liz Lacy

Ex Officio: Libby Herland (USFWS); Jeff Barbaro (USGS); Anne Gagnon (DFW)

Guests: Mike Fleming (NRWA Board member); Drew Kellner (Brookline ConCom)

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM by the chair, Lucy Wallace.

Administrative

The November 17, 2016 meeting notes were accepted as presented. Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell noted the usefulness of the tri-rivers meeting recently held and thanked the NPS for organizing it

Update on Land Acquisition Project, Nissitissit River

Drew Kellner gave a brief Power Point presentation on the work of the Brookline Conservation Commission and the Nissitissit River Land Trust and Piscataquog Land Conservancy (PLC) and in acquiring two parcels, having a combined acreage of nearly 80 acres and approximately 2,600' of frontage on the Nissitissit River (the parcels are bisected by the River). The parcels will eventually be conveyed to the Town of Brookline's Conservation Commission with a conservation easement held by the PLC. This acquisition will tie together other protected lands along the river, extend trail access, provide a new fishing platform and 2 canoe/kayak launch sites, as well as another parking area on Rt 130. In providing a proper launch sites, they plan to restore a portion of the river bank which has been degraded by its informal use as a launch (as well as other factors). The parcels are over a high yield aquifer and would contribute significant biological/ecological, recreational and historic values those being considered in our Case Statement. Total purchase price is \$1.1 million, with approximately \$500,000 being raised privately and the balance covered by a borrowing. Drew mentioned that it had been very helpful to have Marion Stoddart meet with the potential funders. The presentation included footage shot by a drone.

The Committee commended Drew and his collaborators of this project, parts of which have been in the works for a very long time. It was also noted that given the resource values contained in these parcels complement those the Committee is advocating in the Case Statement the Committee is supportive and hopeful that the NH portion of the Nissitissit River can become a formal part of the sought after Wild and Scenic designation.

NPS Presentation: Eligibility and Suitability Section of Case Statement

Liz Lacy explained the focus of the Study to be prepared by the NPS as justification of designation. The Case Statement being drafted by Al Futterman will be incorporated into the Study by the NPS. She noted that the Reconnaissance Survey prepared by the NPS served as a preliminary evaluation of resources and contains a fair amount of good information which now needs to be further explored

in the Study. Al's Case Statement is a good starting point, but the ORRVs will need to be distilled for inclusion the Study. She suggested we look at the Lower Farmington River and 8 Mile River studies as examples of how ORRVs have been highlighted.

Using the Case Statement, Liz offered to develop a "spreadsheet of facts" for the ORRV subcommittee to work with at its January 9th meeting. This will help us tease out the resources that really rise to being outstandingly remarkable and carry the greatest weight for the case for designation. Al asked if the NH resources should be included. Liz felt that might be appropriate for the Study, and certainly for the Management Plan. She also encouraged us to cite experts and agency staff when describing the resources' value. The process now is to fine tune our information, fact checking it and focusing on the most important. Liz said that in addition to posing the question "is the resource river-related?" it can be helpful to pose the question "would the resource exist without the river?"

There followed a lengthy discussion on our ORRVs, beginning with the biological/ecological diversity of the study area:

- Libby Herland noted that the BoltonFlats/Oxbow NWR area contains the largest contiguous and unfragmented population of Blandings Turtles in the northeast. Anne Gagnon believes that the total Blandings Turtle population in the study area is the second largest in Massachusetts.
- The question arose if the Nashua River corridor with the second most important flyway, after that along the Atlantic coast (Plum Island and environs). Libby will check on the Oxbow NWR's status under the North American Flyway program.
- Elizabeth noted that it will be very helpful for the Committee to have Liz's input and assessment of our ORRVs and which will be important to the NPS and Congress.
- Drew cited a 1967 report which called out the importance of protecting the Nissitissit as a cold water fishery as it was the most eastern and closest such fishery to the Boston metropolitan area. Heidi Ricci added that many of the tributary brooks to the Nashua, Nissitissit and Squannacook are also cold water fisheries.
- Anne reported that she has organized a meeting of the state biologists, experts on fisheries, dragonflies, etc to review Al's draft Case Statement and assess the resource value of the rivers. Their input will also be helpful in drafting the Management Plan. Mike Fleming suggested tying the state's Wildlife Action Plan to our Management Plan. Liz felt this would be valuable, as our quest for designation is under the Wild & Scenic Partnership program and the more stakeholders we have engaged at all levels of government and NGO's the better. One group, in particular, to bring along is the state Department of Transportation. Roads cross rivers and, therefore, bridges can have a significant impact on river resources and integrity. Beth Suedmeyer suggested getting Tim Dexter, MA DOT, involved. He works with the Natural Heritage staff on tracking and reporting species road mortalities.
- Other resources were also briefly discussed. Elizabeth felt our strongest effort to gather data has been regarding the biological/ecological diversity, and that we are weaker on recreational and, especially, historic/cultural information. Beth commented that we need more focus on flora to which Al suggested we engage with the state botanist, Robert Wernerehl. There was discussion of obtaining information from various Native American tribal associations; Lucy recalled the information offered by Mike Volmar regarding the communal use of the Oxbow, the largest freshwater estuary in eastern Massachusetts. Marge Darby had also suggested to Al and Lucy when they met with her contacting Shirley Blancke, a consultant to the Concord Museum for information on Native American settlements. Denise Morrissey at Wachusett Mountain was also suggested for information on the Nipmuks.

- Bill Flynn will be meeting with the Lancaster Historic Commission in the next week or so. A question he intends to pose is “would Lancaster have happened without the river?”

Liz asked, after having had this discussion, what resources stand out.

- Al noted the value of the Nissitissit and Squannacook Rivers, which led to the passage of the Squannacook Sanctuary Act and the creation of two ACECs.
- Heidi cited the large network of waterways and protected lands in close proximity to major urban areas (Boston, Worcester and Nashua).
- Lucy and Beth cited the “Marion Story” and the transformation of the Nashua from one of the 10 most polluted rivers to its present water quality and suitability for recreational use.
- Drew added that legislation in the 1970’s targeting improvement of water quality in rivers led to the land preservation movement in Hollis and Brookline, with the result that roughly 75% of the river frontage in Hollis and 60% in Brookline has been protected by local land trusts.

Outreach Subcommittee

Al gave a brief update of the Subcommittee’s work. He and Robert Pontbriand have visited all of the town boards of selectmen except for Groton and Townsend. They also plan to visit the DEC. Lucy suggested they invite Thatcher Kezer, MassDevelopment’s VP for Devens, to that presentation. Al said the presentations had gone well, with few questions on the part of the boards. Bill noted that a Lancaster selectman had asked why Clinton was not part of the study area.

Al also gave a brief tour of the website, which the Subcommittee hopes will go live the end of this month or early in January. The Committee commented on the beautiful photographs Cindy Knox has taken and added to the website.

ORRV Subcommittee

Al reported that he had added Warren Kimball’s water quality report as Appendix A and “Special Designation in the Nashua River Watershed” as Appendix B of the Case Statement. As most of the ORRVs had been discussed earlier in the meeting there was little additional commentary.

- Drew encouraged us to think regionally about the resources: linkages in rail trails, for example.
- Jeff Barbaro suggested that we emphasize the amount of protected land, especially along the riparian corridors. This is quite unusual so close to urban and highly developed suburban areas.
- Beth recommended getting hard data from GIS maps. Elizabeth said Tim Purinton (MA DER) had offered to help and this might be an area that he could work on.

New Business

- Beth noted the plans for replacing the Jackson Rd bridge over the Nashua are 25% complete, so we are still within a comment period. Liz reminded us that once the study has been initiated, the Wild and Scenic protections exist and, therefore, the Committee would have standing to comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM. Next regular W&S Committee meeting January 19th at 7 PM.