

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF DECEMBER 17, 2020 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Bolton: Rebecca Longvall; Harvard: Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace; Hollis: Laura Bianco; Pepperell: Ken Hartlage and Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci;
Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NRWA: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman, Martha Morgan
NPS: Emma Lord
DEC: Neil Angus
MA F&W: Anne Gagnon, Travis Drudi

Guests:

Patricia Huckery, NE District Office Supervisor, MA Fish & Wildlife; 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.

Introductions

Lucy opened the meeting by reporting that the NE District Office of MA Fisheries and Wildlife and the Devens Enterprise Commission, the two agencies approved to become voting member entities of the Stewardship Council, had accepted the invitation and each had appointed a Representative and Alternate. Pat Huckery, District Supervisor for the NE Office of MA F&W was joining us to introduce her appointees: Anne Gagnon and Travis Drudi. Pat opened by acknowledging the importance of partnering with the Stewardship Council and appreciation in being asked to become a voting member entity. She acknowledged Anne's long involvement with land protection within the watershed; Lucy added that Anne had been an important participant on the Wild & Scenic Rivers Study Committee and the Stewardship Council. Pat introduced a newer member of her team, Travis Drudi, who will be working with landowners on land and resource management practices, doing boundary surveys to limit trespassing on MA F&G land, and address inappropriate use of All-Terrain Vehicles on state conservation lands.

Lucy then welcomed Neil Angus as the Representative from the DEC and, as with Anne, noted his long involvement with and participation in both the Wild & Scenic Rivers Study Committee and Stewardship Council. She added that both Neil and Anne had served on the Council's Bylaws and Policies/Procedures Committee, helping to draft the basic documents and policies needed for establishing the organizational structure of the Council. Lucy announced that Peter Lowitt had been appointed the DEC's Alternate.

Administrative

The minutes of the November 19, 2020 meeting were approved as amended.

NPS Updates

Emma Lord reported that while the current FY budget had not been approved by Congress (expected by early December), the expectation was that the next fiscal year National Park Service's (NPS) budget for Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers would be the same as this year. In other words, we should expect to receive \$150,000 in the next fiscal year. The NPS will be engaging in budget development with

Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers early in 2021. Therefore, we should begin developing our one-year budget and work plan after the first of the year and plan on bringing it to the Council for approval at its February meeting.

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, Lucy noted that Emma had drafted a short press release announcing the RFP and Application which she thought would be helpful for the Representatives to share with their towns. Lucy suggested asking that the town websites post the notice and provide a link to our website. Additional ideas were offered for sites and methods for getting the word out on this grant program. Neil Angus offered to post a notice on the DEC website, Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell offered to send an enews announcement to the 11 river towns on its distribution list, and Ken offered to reach out to the Squann-A-Tissit Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Al noted he has been working with a turtle monitoring group in Townsend and will let them know as well.

Land Stewardship Committee Update

Ken Hartlage provided a brief update on the Committee's work, inviting those members taking the lead in a given project to speak to it:

Brochure for Riparian Landowners: Rebecca Longvall reported a rough draft had been shared with Al Futterman and a couple of Council members for review and comment. There will be graphics showing the extent of the riparian resource area, as well as a legend. She hopes to bring a final draft of the text to the January Council meeting for approval before having the graphic mock-up prepared. The goal is to have a 2-sided pdf which can be downloaded from our website.

Off Highway Vehicles (OHV): Ken shared a possible information piece to post at trail heads regarding prohibition of OHV use on trails. He feels the biggest need is to educate residents and other trail users about the damage OHV can cause to fragile areas, such as stream crossings. This document could be expanded to be two sides of a single, PDF sheet available on and down-loadable from town websites. The first side could be basic information, such as whom to call to report OHV use (MA Environmental Police and/or local police), and the range of fines that can be assessed against OHV use, while the second side could carry more detailed information. There followed a lengthy discussion of additional items to include, such as the need-to-know local town bylaws regarding OHV use (so that local police could enforce violations). Heidi Ricci suggested this would be a good topic for the Networking Breakfasts. Ken will edit the document incorporating the Council's suggestions and circulate a revised draft before the January meeting.

Invasives: Laura Bianco reported that LeeAnn Wolff, who is the lead on this project, is reaching out to groups in Brookline and Hollis to learn what they are doing to manage invasives. Emma suggested that LeeAnn contact the SuAsCo Council as they have created successful invasives management programs. Ken asked to be included in the development of plans by LeeAnn, Michele Girard, and Emma. Paula Terrasi noted that Groton has a committee in place to deal with invasives and suggested it would be useful to reach out to them. Beth Suedmeyer suggested contacting DCR regarding its Lakes and Ponds Program. Michele reiterated that that purpose of the plan would be to educate landowners and the general public about the proper way to deal with invasives.

Shoreline Survey: As a next step, Al will compile a list of abutters on select Coldwater Fisheries Resource (CFR) tributaries (to the Nashua, Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers) whose approval for

access we likely will need to obtain for the purpose of surveying the tributaries' shoreline (from land and not from water). On a related matter, Martha Morgan has installed seven data loggers, mostly in the cold-water headwater streams of the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers. As the purchase of data loggers was funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, they are only located in headwaters located in Massachusetts.

Update on Council Projects

Conservation Networking Breakfasts: Al reported that a presentation on December 1st by Lynn Harper, recently retired Habitat Protection Specialist for the MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program at MassWildlife, was well received. Anne Gagnon asked if the talk had been recorded. Al offered to provide the Council with a link. The next breakfast on January 12th will feature a presentation on the changes in rivers due to human activity by fluvial geomorphology expert, Denise Burchsted, Associate Professor of environmental studies at Keene State College. Her talk, "Rivers Without (Modern) Humans: The Ecological Baseline is Messy and Complicated," will be open to interested Council members as well. Sarah Widing of InterFluve will be speaking at the February 23rd breakfast on the importance of headwater streams.

Canoe Access: Al and Ayer's Conservation Agent, Jo-Anne Crystoff, met with Doug Cameron, MA F&W Office of Fish and Boating Access, regarding the proposed access to the Nashua River at the dead-end of Groton-Shirley Road. Doug felt the site would be difficult to make ADA compliant, given the 30' difference between the top and base of the access onto the river. Al felt the New England Power land slightly downstream of this site might be more appropriate. Emma has been in recent contact with New England Power regarding their maintenance work adjacent to the river and felt they may be amenable to providing access. Once a New England Power contact has been established, Al will reach out to them to see if this would be feasible. Al added that Jo-Anne and Mark Phillips, a resident of Ayer, have indicated that Ayer is very interested in having access to the Nashua River.

Forest Legacy: Al reported that he has touched base with every town and nearly all the local or regional land trusts within the targeted watershed area. He believes there are approximately 500 acres that have agreed to be included (as of today) and that at least another 500 acres are in play. He will need at least 1,000 acres to have a competitive application. Al summarized his findings going through town-by-town.

Al has set early 2021 as the decision deadline to proceed with a MA Forest Legacy Program (FLP) application, although the RFP for applications has not yet been published. He added that he is not currently pursuing submitting a joint MA-NH FLP application lands in New Hampshire as there are many issues to address, including a NH state law that requires conservation easements to be held by the state as opposed to a municipality.

Michele Girard asked if the Council members should drop other activities and focus on helping Al. Ken felt that first he and Al needed to complete a plan for proceeding with an application, including a clear definition of the resources that will be needed to do this work. They intend to bring their plan to the January Council meeting. Lucy thanked Al for his incredible work and effort in reaching out to the communities and land trusts. Al noted that even if a FLP application is not undertaken, this work has resulted in good landowner outreach by land trusts and others as a result of the impetus of the Forest Legacy Program.

Other Business

Reports to Town Selectmen: Lucy asked if any Representatives had met with Selectmen to give an update on our work. As no others had, she and Michele reported on their meeting in Harvard. Both felt the update had been well received, although there were not follow-up questions. Heidi Ricci asked if the handout could be resent to her. Emma offered to resend it to all Council members.

Finances: Elizabeth reported on current expenses, reminding Council members that the last financial report and invoice to NPS had been for the first quarter of the fiscal year, July- September. She added that she had also prepared an invoice for October and November expenses in the amount of \$9,752 which had been approved by Lucy. Elizabeth had reviewed her accounting with Rebecca for approval. She noted that the spreadsheet had been organized to track the budget in our work plan. Ken felt the spreadsheet was an easy and effective way to understand the status and allocation of expenses. He asked that it be included in future meeting packets.

There being no additional business, the meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting: January 21, 2021 at 7 PM - by Zoom