

Minutes of TRI-TOWN
CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING REPRESENTING FAYSTON,
WAITSFIELD, WARREN

MEETING LOCATION: LAREAU FARM INN, WAITSFIELD, VT 12 JANUARY 2017

Attendees:

Warren Conservation Commission: Kate Wanner, George Schenk, Damon Reed, Rocky Bleier, Carolyn Schipa

Waitsfield Conservation Commission: Phil Huffman, Chris Loomis, Bruno Grimaldi, Tom Dean

Fayston Natural Resources Committee: Carol Chamberlin, Geri Procaccini, Fred Gilbert, Ned Kelly

Guests: Liza Walker of Vermont Land Trust, Corrie Miller of Friends of the Mad River and Josh Schwartz of Mad River Valley Planning District

7:14 P.M. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

ROUND ROBIN REVIEW OF EACH TOWN'S CON COM ACTIVITIES DURING 2016

Warren Conservation Commission: Name changes to town-owned lands on the river and new signage, to both educate public about values and uses, and management plans for town-owned lands along the river. Worked with VNRC and VTFW to update language in our town plan to incorporate connectivity and wildlife corridors. Planning commission supports our strong language for protection of these vital habitat areas and unfragmented corridors.

Worked with Arrowwood Environmental to analyze wildlife habitat of new town parcel. Valuable tool in having discussions with select board and planning commission. Studies revealed a lot of wildlife that remain here, but also demonstrates that we are in a critical period to conserve whatever wild is left. Work at this moment is critical to protect biodiversity and humans' dynamic connection to it.

Warren Wildlife Corridor Conservation Area parcel, has potential for both recreation and wildlife habitat protection, but WCC, in general, would like to see wildlife habitat protection be its major purpose.

WCC also supporting new tree planting in downtown.

Waitsfield Conservation Commission: Primary role is management of town-owned parcels: 640-acre Scrag Mtn Forest. Active management over past couple of years, completing first timber harvest since 1991, with help from Dan Singleton, on approximately 100 acres. Netted \$43K in revenue to put back into stewardship of town-owned lands. Feel really good about how it turned out and accomplished their objectives. It was a great opportunity to educate communities about sustainable forest management and return benefits to the town. They are also engaged in a 5-yr sugaring license over portion of the property, netting \$30K in revenue over 5 years, hopefully also to be put back into stewardship of town lands. The current proposal is to add the Gateway parcel (110 acres at \$450K) to Scrag, to provide better access. It is a now or never opportunity. VLT and Cindy Carr have helped tremendously to move this forward. Received state and federal funds, now in private fundraising phase. Hope to complete acquisition in the spring, then will move into management planning. Also struggling with balance point of competing objectives to determine right intensity and scope of human use.

Wu Ledges: own 150 acres, with easement over another 25 acres, have been working to enhance public access with better parking. Working on better signage and education. Struggling to complete acquisition of 25 acre easement on adjoining land.

Tardy property: across from Elusive Moose, 6 acres. Became staging area for rte 100 bridge reconstruction. Ended up getting rid of most of post-Irene gravel pile. Significant infestation of knotweed in gravel, but got carried over to Waitsfield gravel pit and are now trying to deal with it (through cutting and herbicide).

Austin parcel - 3 acres on east side of 100, south of Mill Brook, across from Mad River Massage. Infested with knotweed and other woody invasives. Engaged with Friends of Mad River and VLT to develop report of infestation and recommendations for action.

Fayston: Preliminary steps to cooperate with owners of Tenney farm to improve habitat and do firewood project on town forest (across from elementary school and off Mad River Path). Walked through with Caitlin Cusack of VLT for forestry planning.

Big project working with CTA, Mad River Path and Mad River Riders, to replace bridge that collapsed at town forest entrance across from elementary school. Done now, with stairs, siding and ramps in the spring.

They realized they need to recruit younger folk as volunteers. Gives them ownership.

Working with planning commission on written information and web page for residents to get better sense of conservation and stewardship that a landowner/homeowner could do on their own parcel.

BRIEFING OF “RIDGE TO RIVER” PROGRAM AND HOW CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS CAN ENGAGE AND BENEFIT FROM PARTICIPATING

Corrie Miller, Friends of the Mad River

Ridge to River came about from folks that attended Leahy Environmental Summit in 2015 focused on how to work together across 5-town watershed to create better resiliency. Focus is to reduce vulnerability to flooding by sinking stormwater runoff into ground before it gets into streams. Have to think about it at watershed scale...connect uphill neighbors to downhill neighbors and upstream neighbors to downstream neighbors. Successful with High Meadows Fund grant. 2 year planning process to figure out what kinds of land use practices are causing worst stormwater runoff problems, and what is currently in place to regulate that. Are plans being correctly enacted?

Goal is to take the information they've gathered and turn it into action. 1 planning commissioner and 1 select board member from each town, as well as Sugarbush, and other community members, to work together to reduce velocity, volume and load of stormwater runoff.

What they've learned that is relevant to our work as conservation commissions:

1. Water quality is a measure of success of our stewards of the land. Contributors to stormwater runoff: Public roads, private roads, driveways, agriculture, residential development, forestry, resort development in headwater areas and village development along main river corridor.
2. Forest cover really matters. In Pacific NW, subwatersheds that have less than 65% forestcover, experience much worse water quality. We have three sub watersheds that are below 65% and others that are getting close to that threshold. Out 2001-2011, lost 500 acres of forestland in MRV (450 to herbaceous, 50 acres to developed).
3. Roads are quick avenue to streams and can carry a lot of dirty sediment into waterways. It appears that steep dirt roads are currently the largest contributor to water quality and flooding issues, but if we lost the majority of forestcover, we would be even more vulnerable.

There are 437 miles of roadways in MRV. 1.3 km per km², which is higher than more rural watersheds of Chittenden Co. Density of roads to stream crossings. 1.2 crossings per km². Both of those are indicators of problematic storm water conditions.

4. 33% of our road network is private and managed by private homeowners and not under any town or state regulations. Of those private roads, 40% of them have slopes greater than 15%. R2R have found real traction working with landowners on private roads and private land to decrease stormwater impact. 2015 laws now better regulate municipal roads, so determined R2R had a bigger role with private roads. Piloting program called StormSmart, a stormwater audit on private land, and share suggestions on how they can fix their problems, and also save them money.
5. Will be presenting again this late spring at a public form.
6. New state booklet coming out soon “Stormwater management for homeowners and small businesses.”
7. How do we work with second homeowners that are completely disconnected, especially when managed by property managers? Trying to improve stormwater literacy, which is 10-50 year project.
8. How do we deal with erosion on ski trail and other recreational trails?
9. Encourage everyone to take survey at RidgetoRiver.org
10. New requirement in 2018 that any “hydrogeologically connected” municipal roads will need to be mitigated.

Other Discussions: How does sugarbush affect wildlife connectivity?

Large theme of community engagement, every single person needs to take responsibility for our impacts, and also small steps can have a large impact if done by the majority.

Theme of overlapping of forestland conservation for wildlife health, watershed health and human health. Balance /conflict of different values of recreation and forest cover vs sustainable farming at higher elevations.

BRIEFING OF MRVMOVES PROGRAM AN HOW CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS CAN ENGAGE AND BENEFIT FROM PARTICIPATING

Josh Schwartz, Mad River Planning District: MRVMoves Active Transportation Plan, new collaboration between VTRANS and ACCD that looks at planning at intersection of transportation and land use. Long range vision for human-powered active transportation.

Future opportunities map, guidance for future trail and parking location, funding, permitting.

Major Findings: off road path along rte 100 in valley is most desired new facility

- topography and distance are a challenge
- connected and close-to-home trails very important
- Dogs are important management and use considerations for trails in the valley
- Trail tourism is a strong economic consideration in valley
- Barriers to people walking and biking: hills, rte 100 too dangerous, safety concerns

Existing Conditions Map: Identified nodes of interest: schools, trailheads, swimming holes, business centers, recreation centers, etc.

Future Opportunities Map: future connections between nodes (major and minor on-road and major and minor off-road connections)

Recommendations: education and outreach, permitting and approvals, easements, mapping, promotion, municipal policies, analysis of existing town plans and have specific recommendations, funding opportunities. Takes a full community to move something of this magnitude forward. Need more regional coordination.

All available online at MRVMoves.org including a lot of information about trail standards and facility design guidelines.

Trail counts in August 2016: Blueberry Lake had 96 users per day. Waitsfield village path 66 users per day, Waitsfield sidewalk, 130 per day. Revolution trail, 106 per day. Economic impact analysis showed Blueberry Lake visitors demonstrated 33,000 visitors a year to the Blueberry Lake trail network, = \$1.8 million annually in the Valley.

Kate Wanner, note-taker, had to leave the meeting at 9:20 PM. The following minutes were added by Damon Reed.

DISCUSSION OF MANAGEMENT OF INVASIVE PLANTS IN THE MAD RIVER CORRIDOR A provocative question was raised to ponder for future discussions: Is the presence of invasives within the Mad River Corridor the "new normal"?

TRI-TOWN WILDLIFE CORRIDOR STUDY: There was an interest expressed by all three towns to discuss this possibility at a future date.

REMINDER OF iNATURALIST.ORG FOR REPORTING WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS BY THE PUBLIC WITHIN THE MAD RIVER VALLEY

10:00 P.M. ADJOURN