

Meeting Notes

Tri-Town Conservation Commission Meeting

Towns of Waitsfield, Fayston, Warren, VT

Hosted By: The Town of Waitsfield Conservation Commission, via Zoom

June 24, 2020

Moderator Bruno Grimaldi opens the meeting at 6:31 and welcomes the group.

Phil Huffman, Chair of the Waitsfield CC, takes the lead and notes the meeting is on the Town Zoom Account and is being recorded.

Attendees do a round of introductions. Those present include:

Lisa Koitzsch, Co-Chair of Fayston CC; Ned Kelly, Member of Fayston CC and Friends of the Mad River (FMR); Phil Huffman, Chair of Waitsfield CC; Jito Coleman, Chair of Warren CC; Damon Reed, Member of Warren CC; Bruno Grimaldi, Treasurer of Waitsfield CC; Curt Lindberg, Member of Waitsfield CC; Ross Saxton of Mad River Path Association (MRPA); Corrie Miller, Co-Chair of Fayston CC and Executive Director of FMR; Joshua Schwartz of the Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD); John Atkinson of the Mad River Riders (MRR) and Moretown Recreation Committee, and Chris Loomis, Secretary of Waitsfield CC and notetaker for the meeting.

Phil hands the meeting lead back to Bruno.

Bruno hands the lead to Jito for his presentation for the Town of Warren CC:

Jito reports that the Town of Warren annual budget included an \$18,000 line item for knotweed control but these funds were pulled back due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduces the group to the “Knotweed Lab”, a group attempting to quantify the use of knotweed control methods. Continuing to experiment with control practices.

Reports on efforts to develop Zoning Bylaws governing wildlife corridor areas. Working with Warren planning commission to implement findings and recommendations into formal zoning regulations.

Knotweed removal to the knotweed dump at Sugarbush snowmaking pond area. Stacked knotweed system and dead in 2 weeks!!

Heavy time invested in knotweed research

Jito continues to describe the process of researching the viability of various knotweed control and regeneration experiments with dried plant matter. Collaboration with interns, volunteers, Intervale Conservation Nursery.

Overall, good news on knotweed control potential

Jito wraps up the Warren CC report.

Q and A on Warren report:

Lisa – how to keep track of all the knotweed sites – Warren Knotweed project database on i-Naturalist. Google drive database and reporting.

Bruno – possible to share the data? Jito - yes

Ned – 10 days after new shoots come up – easy to remove and takes them longer to come up each time. Keep after it folks – it may not be as debilitating as we thought it might be.

Bruno hands off to Lisa Koitzsch for her presentation from the Fayston CC.

Fayston increasing efforts to eradicate knotweed in the town. Potential “adopt a knotweed site” program being developed.

Biggest item – generous 93 acre gift to Town at top of Boyce Hill road – named “Boyce Hill Town Forest” . VLT holds an easement on the property. The previous landowner, Bob Newis, had developed a road and extensive clearing. CC and SB developed an Interim mgt. plan as required by the easement. Working toward long term plan. Phase 1: learn about the property – resource studies. Public education events postponed due to COVID-19. Phase 2 - Public input process to be implemented once the studies from Phase 1 are complete.

Currently in the process of developing an RFP for Natural Resource Inventory/Ecological Assessment. The Vermont Master Naturalist Program is conducting an oral and written cultural history study. Fayston road crew improved the road and constructed a parking area. Steering committee widened to include more members. Big thanks to Corrie Miller for her efforts.

CC took on coordination of Green Up Day in Fayston this year and expects to continue in this role.

Fayston CC is also focused on composting in response to the July statewide change to mandatory composting – community compost workshops and other resources. Geri Procaccini, FCC member is working on a community wide effort for composting, and interested in collaborating with representatives from the other towns on a Valley-wide effort.

Lisa and Corrie are now Co-Chairs of the FCC. Akhil Kaplan is the FCC recreation representative. Looking for one more member.

Lisa wraps up and takes questions.

Bruno – hands off to Phil Huffman for the Waitsfield CC report.

Phil notes that Liza Walker of the VT Land Trust (VLT) and Mad River Valley Recreation District (MRVRD) has joined and notes that meeting is being recorded.

Scrag Mtn Town Forest – primary focus on Gateway Parcel, acquired in 2017. Inventory and planning work: Forest Stewardship Plan prepared pro bono by Former Washington County Forester Dan

Singleton, building on data from forest stand inventory by Birdseye Consulting. Natural Communities Inventory conducted under small contract by recent alumna of UVM Field Naturalist Program. Forest Bird Habitat Assessment prepared pro bono by Audubon Vermont. Commission now finalizing Amendment specific to Gateway parcel for the Scrag Forest master Management Plan. Huge thanks to VLT Staff Forester Caitlin Cusack and AmeriCorps member Jack Minnich who provided great help in drafting the amendment. CC hoping to finalize amendment with Selectboard by mid –August.

Priority to develop a thoughtful expansion of trail network at Scrag. Need to do trail study on Gateway Parcel similar to the work done several years ago by Sinuosity on other Scrag Forest lands.

Wu Ledges Town Forest: Ongoing focus on public access management - limited parking and challenging overall public access. Hastings Meadow had a parking problem particularly exacerbated during early stages of COVID-19 crisis as so many other public access points were closed off. Big thanks to Bob Cook for great effort to address issues of parking and trail access at Hastings Meadow and Pine Hill Lane through signage and outreach with users, and in dialogue with neighbors. Big success here and the situation has now been alleviated as more recreation opportunities were opened up with relaxed distancing rules.

Austin parcel: Great collaborative effort over last 2 years with MRPA, FMR, and Intervale Conservation Nursery to mitigate invasive species and re-establish a floodplain forest with native seedlings – 100's of seedlings have been planted. Big thanks to all who worked on the project. Knotweed is surging again as of this meeting – interior areas have waist high knotweed and will need to be addressed soon.

Liza – supports the work on trails at Wu and asks about recent VR article about the alleviation of parking concern – access availability? Ok to go through cemetery?

Phil – no changes to legal access, simply alleviation due to easing of restrictions on access at other sites. The only current accesses are via Hastings Meadow and Pine Hill Lane (pedestrian and bike only). No approved access through the cemetery.

Corrie – from FMR perspective – thanks for the work on Austin parcel and for taking the project on. Katie Kain from US Fish & Wildlife Service visited the project for the first time in several years and was very impressed.

Bruno takes the lead - hands off to Liza Walker

Liza – VLT - Conservation work has seen impacts from COVID – esp. in funding. Statewide the VLT will do 50% of the projects they had hoped to do. Longer queue for funding. Farmland and forestland projects are steady and the VLT is actively looking for donations of land. 400 ac and up very attractive for donations. Keeping forestland and biodiversity intact helps to mitigate effects of viruses etc.

No projects to discuss at this time.

Liza moving out of Wait House and will be working from home and out of VLT's Montpelier office, mainly for budgetary reasons.

Mad River Watershed Conservation Partnership, made up of FMR, MRVPD and VLT, has been a strategy and decision making body over the last 3 decades. Helped to pay for Liza's time dedicated to the MRV –

funding to pay salary and to leverage other conservation funding. Together it has helped to coordinate 47 projects and 5 town forests over past 30 years.

The Partnership is now seeing a change in overall conservation activity and planning and has decided to formally evolve into a lower intensity role in the greater network of conservation organizations and is essentially “fading out”. But Liza’s work on behalf of VLT in the Valley will continue. She gives great thanks and kudos to all for the good work in her time working here in the valley.

Phil gives a big thanks for the work the Partnership has done and participated in over its time and notes the evolution of the Partnership and its impacts in the valley. Notes this is really a transition not an ending, and notes the legacy the Partnership will leave behind.

MRV Recreation District –

Hiring - growth mode – seeking an employee. Job description online soon.

Strategic vision as a leader and supporter of recreation in the valley – helping the valley grow into a recreation home and destination in partnership with land managers and stewardship.

Bruno hands the lead to Corrie Miller for the FMR report.

FMR – COVID impacts the work but are financially stable – expecting most grant funding to be reliable but there have been changes with staff announcements - Community Climate Conversation program and staff member hiring process delayed.

Programming

Vermont Master Naturalist MRV program work was delayed due to COVID

Lisa Koitzsch is the new Mad River Watch Coordinator – changes to the program due to state funding changes – only doing *E. coli* testing at the 12 swimhole sites, no turbidity, nitrogen or phosphorous testing this year.

Committed volunteers but less work for them at this point. So, FMR is testing a site stewardship program similar to Adopt a Site at Austin, Riverside, Ward access, Waitsfield sites. Stewardship needed. Swim holes, tree planting sites, Green Stormwater Infrastructure, and so on.

Potential to have conversations and programs around climate resilience

28 30% engineering designs complete within the municipalities in the MRV for stormwater fixes.

80 property assessments in the Storm Smart Program

Re-vamping tree planting program and focusing again on riparian areas but also now doing lawn replacement projects.

Aquatic Organism Passage work – next culvert to be replaced with bigger more compatible structure is on German Flats Rd in Fayston; the project is engineered but FMR is raising \$400K for construction.

Ridge to River – Focused on flood resilience and clean water – quarterly meetings on 5th Thursday, with working group meetings in between. Inviting CC members to join the meetings – look at the value of forests and roads and runoff. Hosting a meeting on July 30 with Jamey Fidel and Jon Groveman from VNRC focused on legislation and value of forests. All Valley CC members welcome; Corrie will send invite.

Bruno hands the meeting to Joshua Schwartz –MRVPD

Kati Gallagher – working on housing – community indicators project

MRV Unified Trailhead Kiosk and Mapping Project

Implementation of portion of the MRV Moves action plan

Products

Kiosks and paper maps and digital maps

Each CC was a partner in kiosk development and install

MRR soon to install more

44 major and minor kiosks

2018 – 2019 and finishing this year

Challenges and complication surrounding the usage - especially during COVID - well timed to have clear signs installed and a great place to store and share information.

MRV trail map 4th edition includes all the kiosks, trails and trailheads

1,000 free maps are gone

Digital format – Trailfinder – VT and NH website at: trailfinder.info

Upper Valley Trails Alliance oversees the site in collaboration with VT FPR and NH extension – significant increase in use of the site with COVID

Curt asks about Trailfinder. Josh provides the website info.

Bruno hands the lead over to Ross Saxton – MRPA

Path focused on connections between various trail segments

Original goal for a path form Warren to Moretown

Seeking alternative ways and connections to increase human powered travel in the area, such as a potential path connecting Irasville with the Long Trail.

Expansion through Yestermorrow property. Other northern areas. West Greenway project potential expansion.

Big Pic project is now not going to happen due to landowner having a change of situation.

Looking to spend that time on other priority projects such as Mill Brook trail and Yestermorrow project.

Master Naturalist Program will be providing habitat assessments on the Yestermorrow path expansion project.

Path will now also take on the task of engaging the public with conservation and nature education opportunities as associated with the path corridor.

Austin project work with trail steward labor.

Questions –

Phil – Irasville to Long Trail connector? Ross – very preliminary, looking at potential connections of Millbrook trail, Howe Block, Tucker Hill Road and Harris Hill, Chase Brook Town Forest, Fayston Elementary School, Mount Ellen Base, up Mount Ellen.

Tucker Hill Road and Howe Block is a priority connection.

Bruno – hands the meeting to John Atkinson

Mad River Riders:

Lincoln Peak to Waitsfield – priority connection.

Irish pond to Swell Hill to Tucker Hill road is complete.

2 miles of new Evolution 2 Trail “EVO 2”

There is now a direct connection from Lincoln peak to Waitsfield village, mostly intermediate trail.

Currently upgrading Revolution, which has seen 700,000 visits since its development.

Creating a new trail to Featherbed Inn from Revolution.

Moretown Rec Committee:

\$50,000 grant to upgrade trails on Moretown town forest for skills park and young persons riding

SB and PC working on forest management plan of the town forest and there is movement toward creating a Moretown Conservation Commission.

Lisa to John – Would Moretown Rec Committee and CC be one or two entities? John – two is the vision

Attention created with large parcels coming up for sale. A group of residents are working on potential formation of a MCC.

Phil / WCC offers to help with potential creation of a MCC

Corrie – same offer and happy to share lessons learned with Boyce Hill Town Forest process.

Bruno – specific questions or points to share in last 8 min?

Curt – notes the natural spread of projects and knowledge around knotweed – question – common planning across towns could be beneficial – quote from E.O.Wilson’s Half-Earth about invasives impact on biodiversity.

Bruno – agree – recommends a representative or two from each town to form a group to lead these efforts.

Jito – fully support the effort to mobilize, steer, activate community efforts. Warren happy to share

Corrie – sees three near-term areas for tri-town CC collaboration:

- invasives management

- compost coordination

- intact forests, wildlife habitat and corridors – building on Forests, Wildlife and Communities Project and Warren’s work on wildlife corridors

Jito – Warren’s current plan is to adopt zoning laws that are consistent with the information in the town plan. Potential other tactics that may require community action – need control mechanism to defend the things that the town plan requires. Zoning laws are the key for wildlife corridors and habitat protections.

Corrie – notes this work was featured at the last tri-town meeting

Phil – agreement with habitat and corridor work as well as the efforts noted by Fayston CC

- Forest Wildlife and communities project – very helpful info for corridor establishment

- Incredible group of a much bigger circle of entities and partners. Volunteer, Professional capacity and experience critical to the collective impact.

- Funding for conservation projects – national legislation Great American Outdoors Act that would provide permanent full funding for the Land & Water Conservation Fund has passed the US Senate. In the House. Prospects look good for passage into law. Would have significant benefits for conservation projects in VT and nationwide.

Liza – LWCF supports municipal acquisitions like MRV recreation fields in 2017, along with state and federal land acquisition and forest legacy program.

8:04 Bruno wraps up

Thank you to all

Looking forward to Moretown joining in as a Quad-Town meeting in the future!