

Waitsfield, Warren and Fayston, VT
Tri-Town Conservation Commissions
Annual Meeting
Hosted By the Waitsfield Conservation Commission
May 26, 2021

Meeting Minutes

Bruno Grimaldi, Treasurer of the Waitsfield Conservation Commission (WCC) opens the meeting at 7:03

Present at the meeting (held virtually via Zoom):

Curt Lindberg, Chair-WCC, Chris Loomis, Secretary-WCC, Bruno Grimaldi, Treasurer-WCC, Ted Joslin, member-WCC, Bob Cook, member-WCC, Damon Reed, member-Warren CC, Kate Wanner, member-Warren CC, Carolynn Schipa, member-Warren CC, Amy Polaczyk, member-Warren CC, Rocky Bleier member-Warren CC, Lisa Koitzsch, Co-Chair Fayston CC, Corrie Miller Co-Chair Fayston CC and Exec. Director of Friend of the Mad River, Ned Kelly, member-Fayston CC, Ross Saxton, Exec. Director of Mad River Path Association, Margo Wade, Warren resident, representing Sugarbush Resort, Eric Friedman, Exec. Director of Mad River Chamber of Commerce, Liza Walker, President of the Mad River Recreation District and Regional Director for the Vermont Land Trust, Ryan Carr, member-Mad River Riders.

Agenda review – Grimaldi suggests moving “Living with Bears” item within agenda item #3 to the beginning of the meeting to accommodate Margo Wade’s schedule. All agree.

Item 3 – sub item 5. Margo Wade presents on an initiative conceived at Sugarbush to involve all the valley towns in a comprehensive effort to educate residents and increase overall communications regarding bear populations and their interactions with humans. Looking for one volunteer from each commission to join in an effort to discuss and develop strategies to support this effort.

Introductions – each participant introduces themselves and the organization(s) they represent.

Item 2 – Town Sharing

Warren CC member Kate Wanner presents a summary of current priorities, including:

2021 Town of Warren budget item was passed, granting \$20k to the town Conservation Reserve Fund.

Town-wide conservation plan is being developed with a focus on disseminating info to landowners.

Efforts to provide information to the Planning Commission as they work on a draft Town Plan and zoning bylaw update, including habitat mapping and connectivity issues, as well as other resources useful in developing these updates. Recommendations submitted to the Planning Commission by the Conservation Commission.

Working with the Mad River Path Association (MRPA) on the bird and bat houses initiative.

Currently have 5 UVM interns working on the knotweed initiative, performing mapping and cleanup of knotweed sites.

Fayston Conservation Commission Co-Chair Lisa Koitzsch presents a summary of current priorities, including:

Activities on the newly acquired and created Boyce Hill Town Forest. Currently working on Long Term Management Plan with a steering committee established. An interim management plan is in place in compliance with the property's conservation easement. Current priority is work on invasive species and ecology. Public input phase of long term plan development is in progress. A series of public meetings is planned, with two completed. Topics addressed so far include Land Management and Natural Resources. Upcoming meeting focused on Recreation. An online survey is available for additional input. They are currently in search of a consultant to synthesize public input and resource information for use in plan development.

John Atkinson – Mad River Riders representative joins the meeting at this time

Chase Brook Town Forest - A new trail, named for long-term Fayston resident and former Conservation Commission member Fred Gilbert. The trail was designed to provide a loop option for dog walkers on the Chase Brook forest, as the trail had currently run to trail on private land which does not allow dogs. Also on the forest, the barn is receiving some maintenance and upgrades.

The commission is involved in a knotweed identification and mitigation project in the upper reaches of the watershed.

The commission has taken the lead on organizing Green Up Day.

Fayston Conservation Commission is seeking volunteers to fill 3 vacancies.

Waitsfield Conservation Commission Chair Curt Lindberg presents a summary of current priorities.

WCC member Ted Joslin provides an update on the status of the Austin Parcel invasive species mitigation and floodplain forest restoration effort. Notes collaboration with FOMR, MRPA, Intervale Conservation Nursery and UVM Master Naturalist Program. Notes that the project recently received a tree steward award from the VT Urban and Community Forest program.

WCC member Bruno Grimaldi provides an update on trail planning efforts on Scrag Mtn Town forest, with support from member Chris Loomis. Since the acquisition of the

Gateway Parcel addition, WCC has re-engaged with contractor Sinuosity to develop additional trail recommendations and to assist with public input gathering. Current phase of the project is that the WCC has received substantial public input, Sinuosity has developed recommendations based on resource studies, public input and field analysis. These have been presented to the WCC, which has delegated further analysis to a working group/subcommittee. This group will present recommendations to the WCC at its next scheduled meeting in June.

WCC Chair Lindberg provides an update on the collaborative process ongoing between the WCC and Waitsfield Planning Commission, with assistance from the VT Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont Natural Resources Council, as part of the current town plan update, specifically addressing Act 171 legislation requirements. This work is focused on identifying significant wildlife habitat and connectivity as well as wildlife crossings on highway infrastructure. The recent presentation made to the full Planning Commission is available for circulation, please reach out to Curt if interested in receiving the presentation.

Item 3 – Partner Sharing

Mad River Watershed Conservation Partnership – Liza Walker presents on behalf of the Vermont Land Trust (VLT).

Notes that conservation of a parcel of land is the beginning of a lot of work, noting the effort that the Town of Fayston has put into the Boyce Hill Tract since its acquisition. Notes that the VLT works with 45 landowners in the Mad River Valley on stewardship efforts within their conserved lands. Provides an update on the Spaulding Farm cropland parcel, a 66 acre vacant parcel with long frontage on the Mad River. The VLT has a purchase agreement in place and will place an easement on the property, which will include riparian restoration and protection language as well as elements of conservation design and public access.

Mad River Valley Recreation District (MRVRD) – Liza Walker provides an update

The MRVRD has a paid staff person who now supports the efforts of the organization. A website providing information on recreation opportunities in the MRV is in the works. The group is heavily engaged with the MRV Trails Collaborative, which helps to take the burden of this initiative off the Mad River Valley Planning District. The unified kiosk project has a few more kiosks to install but is largely complete. An application for grant funding is underway to capture funding from the VT Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) program. The Steward MRV initiative is being supported by the MRVRD staff person.

Eric Friedman – Mad River Valley Chamber of Commerce provides an update

Describes the genesis of the “Steward MRV” initiative, noting that outdoor recreation is the MRV’s “calling card”. This initiative aims at developing strategies to keep trailheads

clean of waste and generally in good and attractive conditions. The initiative aims to target a small number of high profile sites to set the bar for expansion of this effort in future years. Bridge Street and Lareau swimholes are the target for this season. Funding for the initiative is targeted at \$40,000 for this season, with \$10k coming from Bourne's energy, \$10k matching grant from Lawson's and \$10k committed by the Chamber of Commerce. Sustainability of the initiative is in the forefront of thinking, with discussions ongoing among stakeholders, to determine the landowners' needs and desires as well as developing plans for each major recreation access point to deal with litter, restrooms and determine "site stewards". More information can be found at [Madrivervalley.com/Steward MRV](http://Madrivervalley.com/StewardMRV).

Corrie Miller - Friends of the Mad River (FOMR)

Announces two new members – Amy Polaczyk and Rebecca Diehl. Notes the re-launch of the Mad River Watch program, which has been in place for 37 years, including new and different observations as well as the data previously reported. The program is pairing with Steward MRV and will be adding "Sentinel Sites" to track data over time. The program is being sponsored by Lawson's.

The FOMR "Ridge to River" initiative is looking to add representatives from each Conservation Commission. Currently there are representatives from each MRV town Planning Commission and Selectboard.

Ross Saxton – Mad River Path Association – (MRPA)

A big focus of the MRPA in 2021 is the Steward MRV initiative. There are a number of new sections of the path in development: a 1-mile loop on lands of Yestermorrow which will be open April through October due to the presence of deer yard and; the link between Irasville Common and Fiddler's Green will be updated and will incorporate a project to control the runoff from the parking lot. This is an example of the transition of the MRPA toward ecological thinking influencing their decisions. The MRPA stewardship manager has been working on knotweed cutting on the Austin parcel in Waitsfield, additional projects include Bluebird, Wood Duck and Bat houses.

John Atkinson – Mad River Riders – (MRR)

1,000 hours of volunteer time so far in 2021, current membership is 610. The Mad River Rippers kids program is a huge success, with over 100 kids participating on a weekly basis. Stewardship efforts include a "trail adopters" team to keep specific trails in shape. New trail efforts include: Featherbed Connector (completed), Moretown Skills Park, Goodnight Irene. Additional work includes updates and repairs at Blueberry Lake trails. The MRR plans to have 6 trail days in which representatives are present on heavily used trails to disseminate information promoting respectful use of trails. There is an initiative underway to build better access to public parking and avoid "neighborhood" trailheads. Moretown Phase II planning is underway as part of the Long Range Management Plan for the town forest. Grant application is in process for annual Rec Trail Planning grant, as well as assistance with the VOREC grant noted above. Other projects include

potential bridge connecting lands of the Local Folk Smokehouse to the trails on the south side of the Mill Brook (Dana Hill area), collaboration on the VELOMONT trail and collaboration with WATA and RASTA trail groups.

Item 4 – Cross-Town threads

A Q&A / discussion session included the following threads:

How to find interested community members to serve on the various Conservation Commissions / fill vacancies.

Wildlife and not recreation efforts as a focus of Conservation Commissions moving forward.

Boyce Hill town forest planning – how to weigh in. How to avoid having recreation undermine conservation. Jun 9 public forum for the Boyce Hill forest on June 9 – focused on recreation aspects.,

Further comments on living with bears, including composting and camping within bear habitat.

Comments on State level focus on trails – is it in balance with natural resource constraints? Suggest a cross-CC conversation regarding this balance. Also potential branding opportunities.

A comment reminding participants that hunting is a traditional recreation use and to keep that in perspective while planning. A note that trails have impacted deer hunting opportunities, leading to issues with regeneration of native species due to heavy browsing.

Discussion of the disconnect between newcomers to the valley and traditional uses such as hunting and open land ethic, specifically on newly acquired large properties. A reminder of the “welcome wagon” program aimed at new owners of properties over 25 acres, which included a sap bucket full of land-based educational info and “goodies”. This was a program which didn’t really get traction but might be worth trying again.

A discussion of the concerns that the Warren CC had regarding the suggested zoning bylaw and town plan revisions provided to the Planning Commission and Selectboard as part of the planning process – these were largely not incorporated into the plan and bylaw updates. Suggestions were concerned with wildlife corridors and adjacencies to public lands. Specific examples were not available for discussion as the lead for the Warren CC was not present at the meeting.

Next meeting – will be hosted by Warren Conservation Commission. Time and date to be determined.

Submitted by:

Chris Loomis, Secretary, Waitsfield Conservation Commission