

Tri-Town Conservation Commission Meeting
November 8, 2018
Minutes - DRAFT

Attendees: Members of the Fayston, Warren and Waitsfield Conservation Commissions; Mad River Path Association, Mad River Riders, Mad River Planning District, Friends of the Mad River, Catamount Association, Vermont Land Trust, George Schenk, Curt Lindberg, Randy Graves, and John Jamieson.

Lisa Koitzsch, Fayston Conservation Commission, welcomed everyone and reviewed the evening's agenda. George Schenk, Lareau Farm Inn/American Flatbread, introduced Curt Lindberg, Waitsfield resident, who presented information on E.O. Wilson's Half-Earth Project, an initiative with a goal of preserving half the land and the sea in the world in order to safeguard biodiversity for future generations. George and Curt had attended a Half-Earth event at the American Museum of Natural History recently. Tri-town attendees watched an interview with Wilson by a reporter from PBS and Curt talked about wanting to connect the Valley conservation organizations with this important global initiative.

George Schenk followed up the Half-Earth presentation by talking about starting a community-wide conversation about our environmental legacy, and how local groups could come together to discuss how to implement this. Curt offered some complimentary copies of Wilson's recent book "Half Earth" and reiterated his hope that Vermont would become a leader in this movement. Kate Warner, Warren Conservation Commission, agreed and stated that commissions should work on conserving land within their towns. John Atkinson, Mad River Riders, said that he believed that saving 50% of the land on Earth isn't going far enough and that we should do more.

Conservation Commission Reports

Fayston: Lisa Koitzsch reported that her group had recently changed its name from the Fayston Natural Resources Committee to the Fayston Conservation Commission. The group's main focus this summer has been the reconstruction of the Chase Brook Bridge, a gateway to the Chase Brook Town Forest. The lower bridge access has been removed and the new bridge is finished. A new trail has been constructed and two older trails have been blocked off. Lisa thanked the Mad River Path Association for all their work on the project and for their funding efforts. She also thanked Mad River Riders for their bridge and trail work. Ned Kelley of the FCC also thanked Corrie Miller, Friends of the Mad River, for being instrumental in siting the bridge and helping create proper storm water management. The FCC said goodbye to longtime member and Chair, Carol Chamberlin, and welcomed new members Corrie Miller, Friends of the Mad River, and Akhil Kaplan, Three Moons Wellness. The FCC will be creating a dog-friendly trail in the Chase Brook Town Forest next summer, working on possible wildlife crossing signs, and coordinating with students from the Fayston School on a possible nature trail.

Warren: Jito Coleman reported that the Warren Conservation Commission had been working on identifying wildlife corridors and have installed several road signs throughout the town. He apologized to Waitsfield for putting a sign on their side of the Warren/Waitsfield town line and presented Fayston with a wildlife corridor sign to put up on the Fayston side of the Warren/Fayston town line. He explained that Arrowwood had conducted a survey of wildlife corridors throughout Warren and had used 6 key animal species (such as black bear, bobcat, fisher, moose, etc.) to determine corridor movement. Jito mentioned the iNaturalist app where citizen scientists can post their wildlife observations and said that Warren residents are encouraged to report any wildlife sightings. One area where Warren did not post a wildlife sign was on Lincoln Gap Road as the wildlife habitat there is quite robust.

Waitsfield: Phil Huffman reported that the Waitsfield Conservation Commission's primary work has been to steward 900 acres of town-owned land, including Scrag Mountain Town Forest and Wu Ledges Town Forest. He said that Waitsfield is looking at some possible land acquisitions including a 100-acre parcel adjacent to Scrag that UVM graduate program interns helped inventory. He talked about working on public access to the town-owned lands including a new parking lot at the end of Bowen Road and trying to find a solution for parking at Wu Ledges as the current small parking area at the top of Hastings Road is inadequate for the volume of people using the trails. Waitsfield will be working on creating a few new recreation trails on the Scrag Mountain Town Forest that will be compatible with wildlife needs. Phil also detailed the Waitsfield CC's ongoing efforts to deal with invasive Japanese knotweed on the town-owned Austin parcel, just downstream from the Lareau Farm Inn. He reported that the town had hired a company (who worked with numerous volunteers) to help them rid the area of invasives, including buckthorn and honeysuckle, and to re-establish native plantings.

Liza Walker, Vermont Land Trust, told the attendees that 3500 acres of land is currently for sale in Moretown and asked if anyone had any ideas as to how we as a community can take advantage of opportunities that come up such as this one. She said that funding was available to long term land stewards who want to conserve land and that communities needed to speak up about what they wanted to do with available land.

Joshua Schwartz, Mad River Valley Planning District, reported on the current status of the Mad River Trail Kiosk project. The project grew from the need for a unified system of trails in the valley and with support from all three Valley towns that each contributed \$8,500, the MRVPD has helped spearhead the creation and future installation of 53 trailhead kiosks – 21 larger kiosks and 32 small ones. The first prototype sign was installed in July at the Scrag Mountain Town Forest and the second one was installed in October at Mad River Park. Chase Brook Town Forest, Camels Hump State Forest at the top of Tucker Hill, and Lareau Farm Inn/American Flatbread will be installed by the end of November. Throughout the upcoming winter, work will continue on the remaining signs with the goal of installing them all by the end of the summer. The signs have been designed and produced by Wood & Wood and

the kiosk structure was designed and built by Seth Henry. A recent grant of \$13,500 has been received and MRVPD is waiting to hear about another grant from the Department of Health.

Corrie Miller, Friends of the Mad River, reported on the Ridge to River Project, an initiative to help sink stormwater into the ground before it runs off into sensitive waterways. She stressed the need for clean water in our Valley and focused on the need for good road management, especially on private roads where there are currently no standards. She pointed out that tree cutting along roadways affects water storage and water damage mitigation. Friends of the Mad River has hired a second staff person as a stewardship coordinator who helps educate landowners on water management. This person is available for driveway consultations and property surveys for anyone living in the Valley. Recently the organization has been working with all five Valley Towns to develop a master plan for stormwater runoff. Twenty projects per town have been identified and the top five will be chosen as the most critical. Some of these projects include large parking lots, long driveways, and big roof lines. Corrie praised the Town of Warren for constructing an underground chamber near the Warren School to manage runoff and for building a rain garden to help mitigate storm water damage. She spoke about culverts being fish “friendly” and that helping aquatic organisms move across the land and through waterways is critical to the health of the Valley’s rivers and streams. \$300,000.00 has been raised to construct a culvert on Lincoln Gap Rd. and similar funds will need to be raised to replace a culvert in Fayston on German Flats Rd. Corrie ended by mentioned that Cory Stephenson, Moretown Librarian, is bringing the Vermont Master Naturalist program to the valley and would like to involve the Conservation Commissions.

John Atkinson, Mad River Riders, talked about Amenta’s Way, the newest trail in the Blueberry Lake network and that all the trails have been upgraded thanks to a grant of \$20,000. Phase 2 of the trails above the Lareau Farm Inn (and supported by American Flatbread and Zero Gravity) is in progress and the Riders have an extensive plan for sustainable trail design throughout the Valley. He mentioned the Chase Brook Town Forest trails as a prime example. There will soon be a new trail from Butternut Condos and the organization is working on long term plans with Camel’s Hum State Forest. He reported that there have been some major upgrades to the trails in the Moretown Town Forest and he hopes one day to connect these trails to the rest of the Valley. John also announced a Saturday shuttle from Sugarbush to the Waitsfield Farmer’s Market in order to reduce traffic on the roads from mountain bikers driving up to ride. He reminded everyone that mountain bike trails managed by Mad River Riders are closed during hunting season and whenever trail conditions warrant closure.

Ned Farquar, Mad River Path Association, told everyone that his organization’s mission is to get people of all ages, abilities, and incomes outdoors. He thanked the many volunteers who helped construct the new Chase Brook Bridge and who helped upgrade the trail in the Town Forest to help with erosion and proper storm water management. Ned spoke about the Austin Parcel Project as a valuable example of a community working to create and protect flood plain forests. He mentioned that some of the Path’s board members are working to educate the public on the dangers of dog waste in our water supply and

the need to pick up after our pets! Ned detailed the progress that had been made on the trail from the Waitsfield School to the Senior Center.

Matt Williams, Catamount Association, spoke about his organization's collaboration this summer with the Mad River Riders and the MRVPD and mentioned a new back country chapter program near Brandon Gap, that ties forest management plans with efforts to control illegal trimming of forests for back country skiing. The Mad River Valley will be kicking off its own back country chapter on December 7 at Mad River Glen. All are welcome to attend.

Bruno Grimaldi, Waitsfield Conservation Commission, encouraged the three commissions to identify one member from each commission to meet more frequently with each other in order to foster better communication within the Mad River Valley. He said it would provide good synergy and help the commissions to work together and with some of their Valley partners – Vermont Land Trust, Mad River Path, Friends of the Mad River, Catamount Association, and Mad River Riders. Ned Farquar, Mad River Path Association, reiterated that Conservation Commissions should connect with the Planning District and local Select Boards about sensible development. Liza suggested that the three commissions collaborate on education programs in order to bring the larger community together. All agreed and Lisa mentioned an event being sponsored by the Town of Cornwall as an example. Some attendees, including John Atkinson and Liza Walker, expressed their hope that Moretown would soon start a conservation commission.

The final topic of discussion for the evening was based on invasive species, especially plants, in the Mad River Valley and what local communities could do about it. Bruno Grimaldi reported on efforts on the Austin parcel and said that a collaborative effort is needed in order to make any headway. He encouraged people to concentrate on specific target areas as trying to remedy the situation on a valley-wide scale is quite daunting. All agreed that these plants needed to be managed but probably could not be completely eliminated. The Waitsfield Conservation Commission spoke highly of the Intervale Conservation Nursery as a great company to help initiate projects to eradicate invasive plants. Jito Coleman reiterated that the Valley needs a large communal effort to fight the invasive plant problem. He suggested that money be raised to coordinate a long-term effort to manage knotweed and to possibly hire a full-time invasive plant eradication position.

Lisa Koitzsch thanked George Schenk again for his hospitality and for providing delicious food. The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.