

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF DECEMBER 21, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Brookline: Drew Kellner and Greg Martin; Groton: Stacey Chilcoat; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

NPS: Emma Lord

NRWA: Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold

MassWildlife: Pat Huckery

DEC: Neil Angus

Guest: Will Collier, NRWA staff/FLP Project Coordinator

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. The meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

Administrative

The minutes of the November 16, 2023 meeting were approved as presented. Will Collier was introduced as NRWA's new Land Program Director and Project Coordinator for the FLP project. The Council members then introduced themselves to Will.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that the results of the 2022 Mercury Dragonfly sampling had been received. Data for the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers sites was within the normal range while data collected at the Nissitissit River site indicated a high mercury content. Emma will send the report to Council members. She also offered to reach out to Sara Nelson of the Appalachian Mountain Club, who oversees this sampling program, to see if she would be willing to make a presentation to the Council.

The FY24 budget and status of expenditures should be reviewed before drafting the FY25 budget begins in February. As FY 25 is the final year of the current Cooperative Agreement between the NPS and Council, we will need to negotiate a new Cooperative Agreement before the end of our fiscal year, June 30, 2025.

Finances

Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold reviewed the Council's finances, referring to a Summary of Council NPS funds through November which tracked spent funds, funds committed for Council projects, and balance of remaining funds. Since our November meeting, Wynne has been working with the NRWA bookkeeper and Lucy to correct some errors noted in the October summary. With these adjustments, the current status of the Council's budget is as follows: Contractual Activities have spent approximately \$209,167 and committed \$54,365, leaving a balance of approximately \$155,191. Similarly, NRWA Program Support has expended just over \$184,812 and committed approximately \$89,169 to ongoing staff program support, travel and supplies, leaving a deficit balance of \$24,521, if all the estimated staff time is used by June 30th. There are several possible reasons for the deficit, one being that the budget had not anticipated the FLP project, which will require significant staff support, starting this year.

Taking into account the funds expended and committed for fiduciary expenses, total expenditures as of the end of November were approximately \$433,040 and total committed funds were \$157,888, leaving a balance of \$144,073.

Wynne will set up a meeting with Lucy, Jen, and Beth Suedmeyer to refine the projected expenses and address the projected deficit in NRWA Support. Lucy noted that with the termination of Janet Morrison's contract for the FLP project, more NRWA staff time would be required; hence Will taking on the role of Project Coordinator. We can ask the NPS to approve moving some funds designated for Contractual Activities to NRWA Staff Support.

Update on Current Projects

Interpretive Signage Project: Wynne reported that the illustration is over 50% complete. The revised text was shared with the Council which concurred with its content. Pat Huckery suggested a small editorial change; however after some discussion there was no agreement in the wording. It was suggested that the working group finalize the text.

Nissitissit and Nashua Rivers Regional Stewardship Workshops: Drew Kellner shared his impression of the recent Nissitissit River Regional Stewardship Workshop which was attended by approximately 22 people. It began with a round of introductions by participants followed by an overview of the many resources along the river corridor illustrated through several mapped layers. The participants then broke into four working groups to identify the assets and problems they felt were important to consider in stewarding the resources of the Nissitissit River. Drew felt the feedback offered by the working groups following the break-out sessions was quite good. Lucy thanked Bernadette McQuilkin for working with Peter Smith in putting together an excellent TED talk on the historic industrial uses of the Nissitissit River, accompanied by a PowerPoint and historic photographs. Bernadette will look into the possibility of posting the talk on our website.

Lucy noted that the Nashua River Regional Stewardship Workshop will be held on January 26th at the River Resource Center and will follow the same format as the other two. February 2nd is being held as a snow date.

Wild Inside: Talks continue to be given by NRWA staff in the Wild & Scenic Rivers' towns. Lucy reported that in spite of multiple requests, Dunstable had not responded to NRWA's staff to give a talk given at its public library. In addition, we had been contacted by Ashby requesting this talk. Stacey Chilcoat offered to reach out again to Dunstable one more time to offer the program.. It was agreed we would offer the talk in Ashby even if it is given in Dunstable, provided there is sufficient funding for NRWA Staff Support to cover an additional talk.

Phosphorus and TMDL: Wynne reported that Jennifer Keegan and Martha Morgan had met with representatives from MA Department of Environmental Protection to discuss applying for a 604B non-point source pollution grant. The application will be due in March.

Resource Management Plan: Wynne reported that she and Marisa Browning-Kamins will be meeting in January with representatives on the Lancaster Conservation Trust to ascertain their interest in working with the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) on a Resource Management Plan for the Central Nashua River Valley ACEC. Wynne noted that funding for this program had been cut several years ago during a budget down-turn leaving the DCR manager, Nancy Putman, without the resources to help organizations develop these plans or the state to review and approve them. Lucy noted that development of such a plan would be comparable to the study done to justify the Wild & Scenic

designation of the Nashua, Squannacook & Nissitissit Rivers. Pat felt it would be better to use our limited resources for implementation of activities called for in the Stewardship Plan such as invasives management, rather than developing another plan.

It was noted that Marisa has organized a small working group comprised of representatives from Groton, Shirley, and MassWildlife to discuss potential land acquisitions in the Squannacook River corridor. This meeting will be conducted as an “executive session” to assure confidentiality of properties of interest. This working group is a follow-up to the Squannacook River Regional Conservation Stewardship Workshop held in July.

Forest Legacy Program Project

Lucy reported that Will had led a meeting of the Steering Committee in late November to review the status of all 19 tracts. Will reported that since that meeting a tract in Lancaster had been sold to a developer so the project now was down to 18 tracts. The next meeting of the Steering Committee will be in January. Will added that he has been discussing with Emma on the best ways to “tell the story” of the FLP using various social media platforms.

Community and Land Protection Grants

Two final reports for Community Grants were considered for acceptance:

- 2022 Ayer/DEC Trail Improvement & Pollinator Garden; and
- 2023 Harvard Conservation Commission Culvert Mapping

On motion made and seconded, both final reports were accepted and disbursement of remaining grant funds was authorized. Neil Angus abstained from voting on the Ayer/DEC final report.

The Shirley Greenway Committee had requested reallocation of unspent funds for supplies to additional funding of contracted services. Lucy noted that the contractor had donated pro bono time to the project above the billed time. On motion made and seconded, the requested budget reallocation was approved.

Lucy noted that the RFP for the 2024 Community and Land Protection Grants was to be posted in early January. However, given the possible need to shift funds from Contractual Activities to NRWA Staff Support to cover the FLP project, she suggested that the RFP drop the reference to Land Protection Grants at this time, adding that the FLP project is, in itself, a major land protection activity. Drew asked that a decision be made by the end of February as the Brookline Conservation Commission will be going to the March Annual Town meeting requesting funds for another land purchase and having an application for a Land Protection Grant would be beneficial.

Annual Reports to Select Boards

Following last month’s meeting, Joan Wotkowicz revised the 2023 Annual Report to incorporate edits and additions. A proposal was made to add the Council’s website to the report along with the contact information. Wynne reported that the NRWA had received two National Park Foundation grants due to the NRWA’s partnership with the Council and suggested that language be added to the report regarding the value of partnerships. She will work with Joan to develop appropriate wording which will be shared with the Council. Joan asked that any comments/edits be sent to her. Wynne will also check with Jen to see about including the Annual Report in an upcoming NRWA e-news.

Other

Several member towns only have one Representative or have not had a Representative or Alternate attend a meeting for over a year. Lucy asked that members reach out to their Select Boards to have appropriate substitute or new representatives/alternates appointed. Heidi Ricci is working on having an Alternate for Shirley approved by the Select Board. Michele Girard reported there is a new conservation agent in Lancaster; she will send Lucy the contact information.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, January 18, 2024 at 7 PM by Zoom