

N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 16, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

Voting Member Entities Present:

Towns: Bolton: Rebecca Buccialgia; Brookline: Drew Kellner; Dunstable: Marijan Andacic;
Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin;
Lancaster: Justin Smith; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz
NRWA: Jennifer Keegan and Al Futterman
NPS: Emma Lord
MF&W: Pat Huckery
DEC: Neil Angus
Guests: Martha Morgan, NRWA staff; Jackie Dias, NPS; Sherry Anders, Shirley Greenway Committee

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair, Lucy Wallace. Due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic the meeting was held virtually by Zoom.

Administrative

Minutes: The minutes of the January 19, 2023 meeting were approved as presented.

Code of Conduct: Lucy reminded members that the Council had adopted policies and procedures to guide its actions, one of which was Voting Member Entity Responsibilities. She noted that among other requirements, members are to “show respect and civility at Council meetings and to Council members.” She added that following last month’s meeting she had asked Emma Lord to research codes of conduct or civility, which Emma had incorporated into a draft “Meeting Guidelines.” Lucy asked for comments from Council members, who responded affirmatively in the value of the draft. It will be redrafted as a Council policy and presented at the March meeting for formal adoption.

NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that the Council will be receiving \$210,000 for FY24. She will work with Lucy and Jennifer Keegan in drafting the FY24 Budget and Work Plan to bring to the Council in March. As with this year’s Budget and Work Plan, funds will be allocated among several categories: Council Outreach and Project Coordinator; Outreach and Education; Projects and Stewardship Plan Implementation; Community Grant Program; NRWA Program Support and Implementation; and various miscellany (travel, supplies, fringe and indirect costs). Emma offered to send the current Budget and Work Plan to members so they can familiarize themselves with the format in preparation for considering next year’s document.

Pat Huckery asked how projects are selected and who approves them. Lucy explained the process as being iterative, often coming from topics raised at meetings that the Council determines merits further consideration and possible funding. The Council then votes to expend funds on a specific project. She cited the Forest Legacy Program as one such program wherein the Council approved expenditure of funds for both NRWA staff and consultant time. Emma added that the elements within each of the Budget/Work Plan categories are used as examples to provide some level of specificity for the NPS Financial Assistance Team, but still while allowing the Council flexibility to take advantage of opportunities that may arise during the year.

Jackie Dias reported that the next Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers lunch meeting and speaker will be held in March. She will send information on the date and speaker, as well as a schedule of upcoming speakers.

Community Grants

2022 Shirley Select Board Final Report: The Shirley Select Board has submitted its final report on the “Fredonian Park Invasive Plan Removal and Management Plan.” Council members commented on the success of the work undertaken by volunteers in clearing invasives. On motion made and seconded, the Council unanimously accepted the Report.

2023 Community Grant Applications: Lucy led the Council through review of the eight applications received for funding this year.

- Ayer/PACE “Community PULL!” This is the second year of a multi-year effort to remove water chestnut from Grove Pond. Based on the work last summer, PACE intends to hold the major volunteer pull in late spring/early summer, followed by smaller individual pulls until mid-August. Funds will be used for supplies, including the purchase of two canoes. The Council approved the request for \$4,940.
- Groton Trails Committee “Tinker Trail.” This project will extend the current 0.2 mile accessible Tinker Trail by another 0.2 miles as an accessible trail, as well as add signage and places to rest and observe the Nashua River and environs. The Council approved the request for \$2,500.
- Harvard Conservation Commission “Culvert Mapping.” Funds will be used to have the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission map culverts which will be used to assess replacement or redesign to improve the flow for town waterways, especially with anticipated increases with climate change. The Council approved the request for \$1,050.
- Harvard Conservation Trust “Crescent Valley Boardwalk.” The Trust will install a boardwalk over a section of wetlands on this newly acquired conservation land adjacent to Bowers Brook. It will facilitate connection to trails on adjoining conserved lands, providing linkage between Ayer and Littleton Roads. The Council approved the request for \$2,425.
- Pepperell/INPAC “Invasive Plant Management.” This project is a follow-up to last year’s grant to fund mapping of invasive plants along town roadsides and culverts. It is being expanded to target specific culverts that drain into the Nissitissit River, as well as initiate a Garlic Mustard clean up on town and private lands. The Council approved the request for \$3,000.
- Shirley “Fredonian Park Invasive Management.” This is the second year of funding for invasive plant removal from Fredonian Park. In addition, areas where invasives were removed last year will be reseeded with native species. The Council approved the request for \$5,225.
- Townsend “Adams Dam Invasives.” Part of a multi-year effort to improve the Adams Dam area and protect the Squannacook River, this project will focus on training town employees and volunteers in invasive plant removal and develop an invasive plant management plan. The Council approved the request for \$2,263.
- World Farmers “Mentor Flats.” This grant will fund the necessary engineering to develop a plan for the possible installation of culverts in a levee road to restore the flow of seasonal flood waters

from the Nashua River into the Still River (which then flows back into the Nashua). The Council approved the request of \$6,315.

Total funding approved for these eight projects was \$27,718.

Finances

Jennifer Keegan provided an update on Council finances. In January, the Council spent a total of \$5,859.57 as follows: \$2,497.50 Community Grants; \$2,829.38 NRWA Staff Support; and \$532.69 Fiduciary and Indirect. Jen then shared a chart showing remaining NPS funds, comprised of not only current fiscal year funds, but also carry-over funds from prior fiscal years. As of January 31, 2023 there was \$136,163.50 remaining in Contractual funds, a portion of which are obligated for approved 2021 and 2022 Community Grants, but will also be obligated by the \$27,718 just approved for 2023 Community Grants. Nonetheless, we will have both Contract and NRWA Staff Support funds available for additional projects to be spent or obligated before June 30, 2023.

Potential Projects

Lucy reported on two projects the Council has considered in the past and are being presented tonight for approval.

Regional Conservation Planning: In the last few meetings Heidi Ricci has suggested the Council host a gathering of the landowners of conserved lands along our three rivers which together comprise a significant protected corridor. Al Futterman, Heidi, Lucy, and Jen had met recently to further discuss this project and were recommending the Council undertake a pilot project focused on one of our rivers as a first step. They were recommending the Squannacook River for this pilot project, given the range of state agencies, municipalities, and private entities/landowners holding an interest (fee or conservation restriction) in these lands. Heidi elaborated on her idea by recalling the “Communities Connected by Water” project led by the NRWA in the early 2000’s which brought together many interested parties in a regional planning effort. She added that the lands along the Squannacook offer an extensive, interconnected corridor for wildlife, trails, and, as it is mostly forested, climate resiliency. Bringing landowners together to share stewardship and management plans, as well as concerns, would be extremely beneficial. In addition, gaps in protected lands could be highlighted, perhaps for future protection. Lucy added that this gathering could be held at the River Resource Center, perhaps on a Saturday, so participants could share maps and ideas. She added that the Council could pay for a facilitator to run the meeting.

Pat again asked how projects are selected and Lucy reiterated the process used for this one as an example. In addition, the Council seeks to be flexible and able to respond to opportunities that arise during the year. Rebecca Bucciaglia added that the Work Plan provides a general framework for the types of projects the Council is interested in pursuing, all of which are designed to advance implementation of the *Stewardship Plan*. Emma noted that the Land Stewardship Subcommittee had developed and prioritized a list of projects, some of which have been advanced.

Lucy asked for the Council's approval of the proposed Regional Conservation Planning project. If approved, a budget can be further refined, a facilitator sought and possible date(s) selected. This information will be brought back to the Council in March. She also asked that the Executive Committee be authorized to spend up to \$15,000 should the need arise between Council meetings. Pat reported her staff would not be able to attend a Saturday meeting as it is stretched with current work.

On motion made and seconded the Council voted to proceed with this project and to authorize the Executive Committee to expend up to \$15,000. Pat voted against the Squannacook River corridor being the site of this pilot project.

Information Kiosks: Lucy reported that Al had been tasked with identifying sites along our three rivers that would be good locations for kiosks with information on the Wild & Scenic rivers and the resource values of the particular river at that site. He shared a map of nine possible sites and suggested we consider only three to four kiosks at this time, with at least one on each river. If acceptable to the Council, the next step would be to reach out to landowners of the chosen site to seek permission and learn if they had any specific requirements for the kiosks. Al also shared photographs of various kiosks, including style, material, and cost. Rebecca suggested adding QR codes to the information offered in the kiosks. The Council agreed to proceed with this project, with up to two sites on the Nashua River and one each on the Nissitissit and Squannacook Rivers. The Council also agreed to set aside up to \$10,000 for up to four kiosks. Joan Wotkowicz, Diane Carson, and Emma agreed to work on this project and bring a more detailed proposal to the March Council meeting.

Dragonfly Mercury Project: Emma asked if the Council would like to participate for a second year in this nation-side project designed to assess mercury in water based on mercury levels in dragonfly larvae. The cost would be the same as last year - \$5,400 to collect samples at three sites (one on each of our rivers). The Council agreed to participate again this year.

Water Chestnut Management: Martha Morgan asked if the Council would be willing to fund NRWA staff time to manage volunteers pulling water chestnuts in various locations on the Nashua River, extending from the Pepperell Pound impoundment upstream to the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. Supplies and other expenses associated with the activity would be covered by other funding sources. The Council agreed to support this request.

Website: Lucy reported that Joan has met with Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold as the first step in upgrading the Council website. Due to lack of time, the proposed upgrade was not shared; hopefully there will be time in March to share more information on this project. The goal is to have an easily navigable, informative, and visually engaging website. The current site was developed as part of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Designation Study.

Story Map: Jackie noted work continues with this project. Bernadette McQuilkin has been editing the content. Eventually there will be a link from the Council's website to the Story Map.

Engaging Indigenous Peoples: Al gave a brief update on his efforts to develop a contact with a Nipmuc tribal representative. He has reached out to Mt. Grace Land Trust which has retained the services of a Nipmuc consultant to work with a subcommittee formed to address Indigenous People. Al will be

attending a meeting at Mt. Grace with their consultant on March 22nd. He mentioned that Mt. Grace Land Trust is considering naming this subcommittee “Land Justice.”

Other Business

Networking Gatherings: Al reported that there had been a presentation, “Depaving” given on February 15th by Green and Open Somerville. The meeting was held jointly with NRWA Climate Impact Committee. Upcoming meetings include:

- “Degrowth and the Green Infrastructure New Deal” on March 15th to be given by Andrew Ahern
- “Climate Adaptation Science” on April 19th to be given by Emma Gildesgame of The Nature Conservancy – MA.

The upcoming talks are also being held jointly and by Zoom with the NRWA Climate Impact Committee.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 16, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom