

## N-S-N Rivers Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

### MINUTES OF MARCH 18, 2021 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

#### Voting Member Entities Present:

*Towns:* Ayer: Beth Suedmeyer; Bolton: Rebecca Longvall; Harvard: Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowitz  
*NRWA:* Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman, Martha Morgan  
*NPS:* Emma Lord  
*DEC:* Neil Angus

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

The minutes of the February 18, 2021 meeting were approved as presented.

#### NPS Updates

*PW&SR:* Emma Lord reported that the March 2021 issue of the PWSR newsletter, *River Currents*, will be out within the week. It would be featuring the several New England rivers, including the Nashua. Emma also reported that the NPS is setting up quarterly meetings for the PWSR coalition. The current proposal is to limit the meetings to one hour, covering one topic of mutual interest. Lucy added that it was suggested that the meetings be held at noon.

#### Financial Update

Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell reported on on-going discussions between herself, Lucy, Emma, and Jim MacCartney regarding moving funding between categories in the current fiscal year's budget and planning for next year's budget. Lucy reminded Council members that the FY22 Work Plan and Budget had been approved at last month's meeting, with the understanding that allocation of funds between categories might be slightly amended and reviewed by the Executive Committee. She added that substantial changes would be brought back to the Council.

*FY21 Budget:* Elizabeth reported that an invoice in the amount of \$6,238 (\$5,671 in expenses; \$567 in fiduciary and indirect costs) had been submitted and approved on behalf of the Council by Lucy. In looking ahead to closing out the current year, she reported that there had been several conversations seeking clarity on caps on re-allocating funds between categories and amount allowed to be carried forward to FY22. Jim and Emma had researched current, updated NPS policy and direction (given the COVID pandemic) and found that in general there would be greater leniency in both areas. Elizabeth went on to explain that there is a 10% cap in moving funds between categories without special dispensation by NPS and that grantees were encouraged to spend funding within the given fiscal year.

Elizabeth reminded Council members that Jim had advised against the Council contracting for Al's time on the Forest Legacy Program project (FLP), but rather account for it under personnel. Assuming Al and other NRWA staff continue to spend time for the balance of the year (March-June) at the current rate, we will

overspend the current personnel and fringe benefits categories by approximately \$14,000, which would be taken from the Contracts category. Jim had advised Elizabeth and Lucy that moving that amount would be acceptable. Elizabeth asked if the Council members accepted this shift which they did.

Elizabeth summarized the potential expenditure of non-personnel and fiduciary/indirect funds through June:

- \$92,000 -Total Contract Category
- 20,000 - Community Grants
- 15,000 - Janet Morrison's FLP services
- 14,000 – Additional costs for AI and other NRWA staff on FLP
- \$43,000 – Balance

Of the remaining funds, Elizabeth cautioned the Council that it may contract for an additional \$15,000 for Janet's assistance on the FLP and some amount for requisite restricted appraisals of lands being included in the FLP application, the latter of which may be reimbursed by MA DCR. (See later discussion on FLP.)

*Potential Projects:* Given there may be a need to expend funds on contracts for specific projects by the end of the current fiscal year, AI had developed a list of projects that could probably be completed over the next few months, which he presented to the Council members. He added that the Land Stewardship Committee had not met recently and so had not reviewed this list. He had shared it with Ken Hartlage, however. The list, which was screen shared, was not in order of priority. (See discussion on Budget FY21)

AI added that a project that the Council may want to focus on next year is shoreline surveys of those tributaries of the Squannacook, Nissitissit, and Nashua Rivers which are suitable for cold water fisheries.

#### Land Stewardship Committee Update

*Status of Current Projects:* AI gave the following brief report on a few of the current projects being pursued by members of the Land Stewardship Committee:

- ATV Signage: Text is ready to go; signs would be placed on trails and in kiosks.
- Riparian Landowners' Brochure: Rebecca Longvall expects to finalize it in the next week or so.
- Invasives Toolkit: On hold, as LeeAnn Wolff has not been able to work on it.

*Forest Legacy Program (FLP):* AI provided an update on the status of this rapidly evolving project. At the moment there are about 28 parcels with interested or willing landowners in play representing approximately 2,500 acres. Most of the parcels are 30 acres or more. This does not include a large New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) property, Wharton Plantation, in Groton which would add another 700 acres if enrolled in its entirety. Another large property under consideration is Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, which is now owned by The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR). Depending on amount of frontage to hold out, this property could add another 115 or 130 acres to the project.

AI noted that there are many partners involved in this effort and, as a result, we are on track for having a good application. That said, if a FLP grant is awarded, some property owners may drop out after the Yellow Book appraisal which sets the value of the land, if sold in fee or with a CR, and, therefore, the amount the landowner could receive, depending on whether or not a bargain sale has been agreed to as well. In addition, some properties that may not be included in this round may qualify for a second, Phase 2, submission. Landowner outreach has been quite extensive and good.

Neil Angus reminded Al that TTOR was to have acquired a CR on a section of Lower Cold Spring Brook west of Barnum Road in Devens. He suggested that could be contribute by MassDevelopment to the FLP at no cost, perhaps as part of the 25% cost share required by FLP. Al offered to get his contact at TTOR, Vanessa Farney, to speak to Neil.

As part of the application process, a restricted (aka preliminary) appraisal needs to be done on each property. Elizabeth asked and Al confirmed that the cost of these appraisals would not be reimbursable with future FLP grant funds. The average cost of such an appraisal is \$1,500, although it varies with the size and nature of the property. Assuming 30 properties at \$1,500 we will need \$45,000 to cover these appraisals. Al noted that the Council is submitting a grant application to the Fields Pond Foundation for \$15,000 to cover the cost of appraisals on ten properties and he is quite confident that we will be funded. He noted that Lindsay Nystrom, FLP Coordinator MA DCR, had indicated there were unspent FY21 administration grant funds which could be used for developing projects, including restricted appraisals of the remaining properties. As these funds would be available on a reimbursable basis, the Council would need to front the cost (up to \$30,000). Rebecca asked if the Council would be reimbursed if a landowner decided not to participate after the appraisal was done. Al confirmed that we would be reimbursed regardless of the outcome. As a follow-up, Rebecca asked how we would account for the reimbursed funds and would we need to spend them by June 30<sup>th</sup>. Emma noted that there is more flexibility this year in carrying unspent funds forward into the next fiscal year. Elizabeth added that as the cost of the restricted appraisals would come from the Contract category, Jim MacCartney had advised her that the reimbursed funds would be accounted for as Program Revenue.

Heidi Ricci suggested we get a written agreement from MA DCR regarding reimbursement of funds. Rebecca concurred, adding the amount to be reimbursed should be specified. Al noted the cost for the remaining appraisals would be between \$20,000 and \$30,000. Michele Gerard asked if the Council for some reason is not reimbursed by MA DCR, is this a good use of our funds. It was felt this would be an appropriate use of Contract funds. Elizabeth noted the appraisals would need to be done and paid for by June 30<sup>th</sup> to apply to this year's budget.

Lucy asked for a motion approving this expenditure. A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously as follows: "The Council agrees to front the cost of restricted appraisals for up to \$30,000 to be reimbursed by MA DCR."

### Council Projects Update

*Conservation Networking Breakfasts:* Al reported that the recent breakfast speaker, Sarah Widing, was well received. An upcoming meeting will feature Paula Terrasi and Joe Gould, MA DER, to discuss Sucker Brook restoration, a priority project in Pepperell. Martha Morgan noted that she is offering a series of talks through a grant to the NRW from Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET), including: March 25<sup>th</sup> on return of river herring to the Nissitissit headwaters at Lake Potanipo; April 27<sup>th</sup> on brook floater mussels and dam removal; and May 13<sup>th</sup> on brook trout climate refugia. She will send the Council members registration links on all the talks which are given in the evening.

### Community Grants Update

Lucy reported that she has received three grant applications and has had seven inquiries. She expects some of those inquiries will result in applications being submitted by April 1<sup>st</sup>. Unfortunately, one of the applications was for turtle surveys on Salmon Brook in Nashua, NH, which is outside our service area. Al suggested she put the applicant in touch with Jenn Petite, the "turtle woman," who lives in Townsend; perhaps they could do a combined application which might give the Salmon Brook work standing.

Lucy noted that it would be helpful to have a matrix to use in reviewing the grant applications and, to that end, she had asked Emma for a sample. Emma had sent one used by Missisquoi W&S Council which Lucy was going to send to Warren Kimball for his input. She reminded members that Warren had developed a similar matrix at the end of the Study period when we were considering projects we might undertake while waiting for federal designation.

### Budget: FY21 and FY22

*FY21:* As noted previously in the meeting, with shifting funds from Contracts to Personnel to cover AI and other NRWA staff time on FLP, the Contract account would still have funds (approximately \$43,000) to spend before June 30<sup>th</sup>. The decision to spend these funds was now not as urgent, given the decision to front up to \$30,000 for FLP restricted appraisals. Prior to this meeting, AI had developed a list of possible projects to do this spring, which he shared as possible projects to pursue either this spring (if funds were available) or next year. He will send the list to Council members. The potential projects included:

- EZ Dock purchase and installation on the Nashua River at the Marion Stoddart Conservation Area, Pepperell
- Display for the kiosk at Lake Potanipo regarding Wild & Scenic Rivers and the return of alewife
- Legal research on Article 97 lands with respect to FLP and determining if all town conservation lands are indeed subject to Article 97 protection
- Addressing the erosion on both shorelines at the Bertozzi Conservation Area in Groton and Shirley
- Addressing flooding issues caused by dirt access road on the Flats Mentor Farm in Bolton
- Drone flyover sections of the rivers

Neil mentioned he could provide a contact of a commercial drone operator who has done work for MassDevelopment. He also noted the old Filter Road bridge on the North Post, Devens, which had been removed but might be rebuilt as a pedestrian bridge. AI pointed out this was on Oxbow NWR land and that Neil should contact Linh Phu.

Martha suggested a doing a baseline survey of invasives on the Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers, and sections of the Nashua that had not yet been surveyed.

Elizabeth suggested that one or two projects might be undertaken and completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> if we have funds to spend, but that the others could be held for next year.

*FY22:* Lucy reminded Council members that the FY22 Work Plan and Budget had been approved at the February meeting, subject to slight modifications in amounts allocated to various categories as NPS provides additional guidance. The Executive Committee will review and approve the final budget and if there are significant changes the budget will be brought to the April Council meeting for consideration and approval.

### Other Business

Joan Wotkowicz reported that the Townsend Conservation Commission and Selectmen are considering a proposal to rebuild a bridge over the Squannacook at Meetinghouse Road which would be limited to pedestrian use only. The bridge would provide linkage to the rail trail and open this part of the town to more walkers. An anonymous donor has offered to design and build the bridge.

Heidi reported that Mass Audubon had recently held a webinar on siting solar fields. Once it is available, she will send a link to Council members so they can watch the webinar.

Next meeting: April 15<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM by Zoom