

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

### MINUTES OF APRIL 20, 2023 MEETING

By Zoom Video Conference

#### Voting Member Entities Present:

*Towns:* Bolton: Rebecca Bucciaglia; Groton: Diane Carson; Harvard: Lucy Wallace and Michele Girard; Hollis: Bernadette McQuilkin; Pepperell: Paula Terrasi; Shirley: Heidi Ricci; Townsend: Joan Wotkowicz

*NRWA:* Jennifer Keegan

*NPS:* Emma Lord

*MF&W:* Pat Huckery

*Guest:* Leslie Gabriliska, MF&W; Ralph Baker, NRWA Board member; Hannah Volk, NPS Fellow

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 March 16, 2023 meeting were approved as presented.

#### NPS Update

Emma Lord reported that the FY24 Budget-Work Plan has been submitted to the Finance Team for review. She will keep us apprised of its status and approval. She then introduced Hannah Volk, the new River Conservation Fellow who will be based in Concord and working with Emma for the next 12 months. Council members introduced themselves to Hannah, after which she was given an opportunity to introduce herself. Lucy noted that we are looking forward to having her working with us for the next year.

#### Finances

Jennifer Keegan provided an update on the Council's finances.

- In March the Council spent a total of \$11,406.96 as follows: \$4,994 Community Grant disbursements; \$5,375.96 NRWA Staff Support; and \$1,037 for Fiscal Agent services.
- The combined FY21 - FY23 NPS funds less obligated and funds spent through March (\$85,813.34) leaves a balance of NPS \$152,380.41. With the additional planned projects (Dragonfly Mercury, Land Protection Grants, and the Regional Conservation Planning Workshop) Jen estimates the balance to be carried forward into FY24 to be less than \$100,000.

#### Land Protection Grants Program

Given the funding available for FY23, it seemed appropriate to offer a second year of our Land Protection Grants Program. Lucy suggested, and Emma concurred, raising the total amount set aside for this program to \$50,000 and offering grants up to \$20,000. Joan Wotkowicz had modified last year's program announcement, RFP and application accordingly, which were presented for approval. Given the lateness of the program, Lucy explained that applications would be due by May 31<sup>st</sup>, announcement of awards would be June 16<sup>th</sup> (the day after our June meeting), and projects should be completed by March 15, 2024. Joan raised the question of valuing in-kind services offered by professionals and if they

should be credited at the \$30/hour rate of volunteers or at their usual billing rates. It was agreed that in-kind services offered by professionals should be credited at their billing rates. On motion made and seconded, the Council unanimously approved the Land Protection Grants program as presented.

### Community Grants Program Update

*Groton; Invasives Removal - 2022:* Lucy reported that grantee has requested an extension of the Grant term to either the fall of 2023 or spring of 2024. Diane Carson explained that they would like to reassess the success of last year's invasives' removal – and perhaps do additional work this spring. Therefore, they would like to postpone reseeding until next fall, preferably the spring of 2024. The Council agreed to extend the Grant term to June 30, 2024.

*Townsend Cooperage – 2021:* Lucy noted that while this grant has been extended to June 30, 2023, she had asked Joan to confirm that work was going forward given the past delays. Joan has spoken with the grantee and they intend to have the work completed by the end of June. She has encouraged them to submit a final report as soon as possible.

*Ayer Signage – 2021:* Lucy reported that the Conservation Commission had submitted its final report on this project (signage along Ayer waterways to raise awareness of the connection to the Wild & Scenic Nashua River). While the grantee expected to pay for installation of the signs, due to various factors, volunteers did the installations. In addition, the cost of the signs was less than estimated. Therefore, the grantee did not even spend 50% of the \$4,800 grant award. She has asked the grantee if there is additional work they would like to do that would be within the scope of this project, but has not received an answer. Therefore, we may be looking at approximately \$3,400 in 2021 funds being returned to our total NPS funds.

### Regional Conservation Planning Workshop

Lucy reported that following last month's meeting, the proposed budget for this project had been reviewed and revised. As now proposed, costs will be:

NRWA staff support	\$15,188
Facilitator	\$ 3,000
Materials	\$ 40
Food/Drink & Facility	<u>Donated by NRWA</u>
Total	\$18,228

Pat Huckery asked if the area to be considered was the entire Squannacook River sub-watershed, extending up to the river's headwaters, or would it be limited to the lands abutting the river? Pat noted that an \$18,000 budget would probably not cover the entire sub-watershed. Lucy responded that she did think it would cover the entire area, as the focus would be primarily on the lands along the Squannacook River. However, the study area might include larger streams such as Mulpus Brook and extend up to Ash Swamp. Leslie Gabrielska asked about the purpose of the workshop and what follow-up was expected. Heidi Ricci responded that the intent is to bring the landowners of the protected lands along the river together to share habitat management, issues (such as invasives), and public use of these lands. This could be the beginning of an on-going dialogue with the stewards of this expansive greenway corridor, perhaps including landowners of unprotected lands along the river.

Lucy then asked for and received Council approval of the revised budget. She reported that she would like to form a small group to work with NRWA staff and the facilitator in planning the event and has

reached out to a few members. Heidi, Joan, and Bernadette McQuilken have offered to help; others interested in helping should contact Lucy.

The last matter to address was the date of the workshop. Lucy noted that as it was too late to organize and hold it before the end of June, we should look at late summer or early fall. Given no clear preference for a weekday or Saturday session, it was agreed to offer weekdays, the week of September 18<sup>th</sup>, or Saturday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>. NRWA will reach out to the facilitator, Robb Johnson, to see his availability.

### Additional Projects

*Interpretive Signage:* Joan had prepared draft language and proposed graphics for signage, focusing on making the information uniform with a brief description of the particular river at each location. Emma screen-shared signage developed by the SuAsCo Wild & Scenic River Stewardship Council. She noted the importance of uniformity of appearance and information as a method of “branding” the rivers’ Wild & Scenic designation. Pat did not endorse including photographs of threatened or endangered species, such as the Blanding’s turtle, as it might encourage searching for and harm to a given species. Heidi agreed we did not want to harm these species, but that it would be good to let the public know that these rivers provide critical habitat. She also suggested adding photographs of people to the signage, illustrating a diversity of population enjoying these areas.

Jen reported that the group working on this project intends to bring a mock-up of the signs to the May meeting.

Lucy noted there has been outreach for approval of the initial locations. Joan has spoken with officials in Townsend who agreed to the Adams Dam location and Al Futterman was working with Drew Kellner for installation of a sign at the fishing pier on the Nissitissit in Brookline. Diane met with a subcommittee of the Groton Conservation Commission regarding a sign at Petapawag. She has followed up with the Conservation Agent, explaining the need to limit the information to the Wild & Scenic designation, and hopes the Commission will approve installation a sign at its meeting this evening. All three towns will have final approval of their respective signs before they are produced and installed.

*Nissitissit Canoe Launch:* Lucy reported that Al had raised the possibility of partnering with Beaver Brook Association to improve this over-used canoe launch on its property by restoring and stabilizing the riverbank. Emma noted that this is one of the sites selected for the upcoming Canoe Access Planning Workshop. Any advancement of this as a possible project, therefore, was put on hold pending the outcome of the Workshop and Beaver Brook’s decision moving forward.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Next meeting: Thursday, May 18, 2023 at 7 PM by Zoom