

Nashua River Wild & Scenic River Study Committee
NRWA's River Resource Center, 592 Main Street, Groton, MA
February 21, 2019

INFORMAL NOTES

Members Present: Beth Sudemeyer (Ayer); Rebecca Longvall (Bolton); Jordan Bailey (Brookline); Nadia Madden and Stacey Chilcoat (Groton); Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace (Harvard); LeeAnn Wolff (Hollis); Heidi Ricci (Shirley)

NRWA Staff: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, Al Futterman, Martha Morgan

NPS: Liz Lacy

FWS: Linh Phu

MA F&W: Anne Gagnon

Guests: Mike Fleming and Joan Wotkowicz (NRWA Board member)

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM by the chair, Lucy Wallace.

Administrative

The minutes of the December 20, 2018 meeting were approved as presented.

Various Updates

Legislation: Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell reported on the status of the legislation. While there had been an effort prior to the end of last year to pass legislation for designation, which was included S. 47, the Natural Resources Management Act, unfortunately that did not come to fruition. However, as had been assured by the leadership, the legislation was reintroduced early in the new legislative session and was passed by the Senate on January 12, 2019 by a vote of 92 to 8. According to Ron Carleton, Representative Trahan's legislative aide, it is likely to come to the House for a vote by the end of February or early March. It was noted that designations of the Lower Farmington River and the Wood-Pawcatuck were also included in the legislation. We will be able to announce designation once the bill is signed by the President. It is expected that this bill will pass in the House, but in the event it is not, Representative Trahan has separately introduced legislation for our designation, co-sponsored by her New Hampshire counterpart; similarly an identical bill will be introduced by Senator Markey, and co-sponsored by Senators Warren (MA) and the two NH senators.

Study Report: Liz Lacy reported that the Study Report is going through one more final internal review by the upper echelon in Washington, DC. Once Liz has received the final sign off, the Report will be posted on-line and the 90-day review period for the Report can begin. She noted that the review period and legislative process are two separate tracks and one does not inform the other. Elizabeth added that Wynne Treanor-Kvenvold had worked with our graphic designer to get the Report into a format that was ready for posting on the internet and printing as soon as authorization is given.

Funding: Prior to the meeting, Lucy had asked Liz if we could use funds from the current Cooperative Agreement, which was funding for the Study Committee's work, once designation is granted. Liz responded that we could continue to use those funds. Liz added that the current (FY19) NPS funding request for Wild & Scenic Rivers is for ALL designated rivers, so once we receive designation we will be entitled to that funding as well. She cautioned, however, that funding requests often run a year ahead of receipt of funds. In other words, funds requested in the FY19 budget probably will not be available until

close to the end of FY19 or beginning of FY 20. (Federal fiscal years run October 1 – September 30.) Lucy asked if we could now start forming the Stewardship Council and develop its bylaws/operating policies. Liz responded that we needed to wait until we are formally designated, at which time we will need to go to the towns' boards of selectmen for members to be appointed, elect officers, designate a fiscal agent, and draft our operating policies and bylaws. Elizabeth offered that the NRWA would be happy to act as fiscal agent (as outlined in the *Stewardship Plan*) for the Stewardship Council, playing a similar role to the one it had been playing for the Study Committee, if the Council so desired. The Wild & Scenic Study Committee members agreed that the NRWA had done an excellent job as its fiscal agent and would like to have it continue as such. Liz explained that the Council would have to vote on the fiscal agent when it executes its Cooperative Agreement with NPS.

Various Grant Updates: As reported at the December meeting, the NRWA has applied for an \$8,000 grant from the Bruce J. Anderson Foundation for on-going activities in support of the Wild & Scenic River project. She also had sent a letter of intent to the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts' grant program for another year of funding in the amount of \$10,000. She asked the Committee if they would like her to submit a proposal if invited. The Committee approved and thanked her for her efforts to seek additional funding for its work. Elizabeth is not sure if they will fund a second year, but felt it appropriate to try. Finally, she reported that, should the Committee so desire, she could apply for a \$2,500 grant from Bristol-Meyers Squibb. The Committee endorsed her submitting an application and thanked her for her efforts to find supplemental funding during this interim period.

Liz reminded the Committee that there are small grants available through the NPS to help fund our work once we are formally designated, but before we receive funding through the NPS Wild & Scenic Rivers budget.

On a related topic, Heidi Ricci reported on a working group comprised of MEMA, DEP, DCR, Audubon and others that is looking at developing a methodology for culvert and small bridge replacement that takes into account larger storm events, and seeks to simplify design and permitting processes. It also was looking at ways to lessen the cost to towns. The Division of Ecological Resources has some funding available for culvert replacements.

Review of Potential Interim Projects

Networking Breakfasts for Conservation Agents: Michele Girard gave a report on the first networking breakfast held at the NRWA River Resource Center on February 12th. Judy Schmidz, Circuit Rider on Wetlands for the DEP's Central MA office, gave a presentation on siting of large solar arrays and related permitting issues. Michele said the talk was well received and that, overall, those present appreciated the opportunity to get together and share ideas. Al Futterman added that except for one every one of our 11 towns was represented by either their conservation agent or a member of their conservation commission. LeeAnn Wolff added that she found the presentation informative and the gathering helpful. Jordan Bailey said the early morning meetings would be difficult for her to attend and possibly for Drew Kellner as well. If neither of them could attend she would try to get another member of the Brookline Conservation Commission to attend. She also noted that Massachusetts and New Hampshire permit, manage and categorize wetlands differently. That said, Anne Gagnon felt it is helpful to learn about the differences, and perhaps seek to modify practices.

Michele asked what topics might be interesting for the next meetings. Among those suggested were water-based and land-based invasives and different control methods, including biological controls. LeeAnn said it would be helpful to know what and how other organizations are addressing invasives.

Canoe Access Assessment: Al reported that he has been in touch with Doug Cameron, Assistant Director/Deputy Chief Engineer Department of Fish and Game Fishing and Boating Access, for assistance in assessing boat launch/canoe access sites. They intend to start with the boat launch at Petapawag sometime in the next few weeks. Linh Phu, the new Refuge Manager for the Eastern MA Refuge Complex, noted that there is a push within the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to expand access to refuges for hunting, fishing and recreation. Al is looking at a possible access site at the end of Bishop Road in Ayer. She also is looking to improve the boat launch at the end of Still River Depot Road in Harvard and make access to the launch at the Bill Ashe Visitor Center ADA compliant. One option being considered is to install a pulley system to lower canoes or kayaks down to the river and to raise them back up. In addition, the walking path to the launch site will also need to be made accessible at some point. On another note, Linh announced that the FWS has recently formed a partnership with the City of Lowell to create an urban wildlife refuge.

Al asked about other sites to consider or improve. He reported that Karen Hill, Townsend Conservation Commissioner, had approached him about a site on the Sqannacook off Canal Street and near the town cemetery.

Lucy suggested that Al create a schedule of sites he would like to visit and distribute it to Committee members to see who could join him.

On a related note, Al reported that letters had been sent to the 11 towns' boards of selectmen, with copies to their conservation commissions, giving an update on our work to date and going forward in the near future.

Other Business

Meeting with Representative Lori Trahan: Elizabeth reported that she and Alison Field-Juma will be meeting with Representative Trahan on March 20th. In addition to introducing their respective work on behalf of their rivers to the Representative, they will use the meeting to raise the need for funding for Partnership Wild & Scenic Rivers in general. Elizabeth has been advised, and Liz concurred, that it would be reasonable to request \$175,000 in our first year. She added that the Representative has suggested that meeting in Lowell, as opposed to Washington, DC, would be best for her.

Included in the packet of materials for the meeting was a draft handout to give to the Representative. Elizabeth asked for comments; Liz suggested adding the Lower Farmington River and the Wood-Pawcatuck Rivers to the list, as well as the Nashua. It was decided to hold off on the York River until it is closer to seeking designation.

Empty Seats: Elizabeth reported that since our last meeting she had reached out to Bill Flynn and Susan Munyon to see if they would like to continue as Lancaster's representative and alternate, respectively. Bill has declined; Susan has said she would like to continue. In addition, Elizabeth had spoken with Bill Wilkinson about continuing as Townsend's representative and he has agreed to do so. Joan Wotkowitz is willing to serve as Townsend's alternative as well. However, it was agreed it would be best to fill the empty seats when we go to the towns' boards of selectmen for appointments to the Stewardship Council, as it seems that request could be made in the near future.

MacPherson Road: Al reported that he had just learned that MacPherson Road is owned by the FWS. Linh confirmed this, adding that they close the road at night during the spring amphibian migrations and reopen it during the day at the request of the Town of Ayer. Al reminded the Committee of Beth

Sudemeyer's idea to close MacPherson Road for a block party as a partnership event. Linh said she would be receptive to that idea. It was noted that funding might be available through Freedom's Way Heritage Association.

Designation Celebration: Elizabeth asked how the Committee might like to celebrate once we receive formal designation: just among ourselves very quickly? With all the stakeholders and supporters? After some discussion on timing and places, the Committee felt a spontaneous gathering of just the Committee within 48 hours (if possible) of designation at the Bull Run in Shirley or Billiards in Ayer. A larger celebration in late spring/early summer on the river could be held for all the stakeholders, supporters and partners. Linh suggested the Bill Ashe Visitor Center, perhaps in April; Liz agreed we should hold it on the river. Lucy pointed out that NRWA staff should not be asked to organize this event and nor does the NRWA have the funds for such an event. She suggested Committee members could donate light food and beverages; Linh suggested asking the Friends of Oxbow NWR to help and offered to contact them. LeeAnn offered to chair a committee to organize this event.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.

.Next Meeting: March 21, 2019 at 7 PM at the River Resource Center.