

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

By Zoom Video Conference

June 18, 2020

DRAFT INFORMAL NOTES

Members Present: Beth Suedmeyer (Ayer); Rona Balco and Rebecca Longvall (Bolton); Tara Alcorn (Dunstable); Stacey Chilcoat (Groton); Michele Girard and Lucy Wallace (Harvard); LeeAnn Wolff (Hollis); Alix Turner (Lancaster); Paula Terrasi (Pepperell); Heidi Ricci (Shirley); Joan Wotkowicz (Townsend)

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

NPS: Emma Lord

Guests: Neil Angus (DEC); Anne Gagnon (MA DFW); Mike Fleming (former MA DCR and current NRWA Director); Warren Kimball (former MA DEP and NRWA Director)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Interim Chair, Lucy Wallace. Due to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic the meeting was held virtually by Zoom. The meeting began with informal updates on how attendees were managing during the extended “shelter in place” advisory issued by the Governors. All reported being well and remaining busy, some noted the challenges of working at home, others are taking advantage of time for getting outdoors.

Administrative

The minutes of the April 16, 2020 meeting were approved as presented.

NPS Updates

Emma Lord reported on the following items:

1. The Nashua Rivers Wild & Scenic Rivers Study Report has been printed and copies delivered to NRWA.
2. The Cooperative Agreement is still undergoing review and processing by the NPS. Emma expects it to be approved by the end of June.
3. Emma reported on the National Rivers Project which maintains a database on recreational opportunities on rivers nationwide organized by state. The database has been updated to include information on the Nashua, Squannacook & Nissitissit Wild & Scenic Rivers, along with other New England recently designated Wild & Scenic Rivers. She shared a link to the National Rivers Project (www.nationalriversproject.com) which is managed by the Rivers Management Society.
4. Emma noted that SuAsCo will be holding its annual RiverFest virtually. She will send Council members a link to the site.

Current Projects' Updates

Al Futterman reported on the two on-going Council projects he has been coordinating:

1. *Canoe Access Assessment:* With input from the working group, the 30 sites have been prioritized with the intent of focusing on the top five priority sites. These include:
 - Marion Stoddart Conservation Land, Pepperell - expansion of the parking area is being considered; and, as noted by Paula Terrasi, a dock may be added as well;
 - Shattuck Oil site, Pepperell – Paula has contacted the owner and is looking to set up a time to meet with her;

- Petapawag, Groton – Al is looking into improving signage regarding use and parking;
 - Walker Road (across from the Ice House), Shirley – the replacement of the guard rail to allow access to the river will require engineering and, therefore, will be expensive. The town cannot provide funding for this project; and
 - Beaver Brook site, West Hollis, NH – This site has severe erosion problems, which Beaver Brook Association plans on addressing. However, the pandemic has put this project on hold.
2. *Networking Breakfasts for Conservation Agents:* Al is looking into speakers for upcoming breakfasts who would be willing to make Zoom presentations. He hopes to have Pat Swain speak in July on “Natural Communities of Conservation Interest in the Nashua River Watershed.” Other possibilities include Paul Somers to speak on invasives; Peter Hazelton to speak on fresh water mussels and dam removal; and Denise Burchsted, a professor at Keene State College, to speak on “Rivers Without Humans.” Alix Turner asked if these breakfasts were open to Council members. Al responded that the intent was to present to a smaller group initially and, if appropriate, offer to a larger gathering. Lucy added that the intent of the Networking Breakfasts was to give conservation agents an opportunity to meet and discuss issues of mutual interest or concern. Martha Morgan reported that she is seeking a grant to hold a symposium on science-based activities or investigations in the watershed.

Land Stewardship Committee Update

As Ken Hartlage was unavailable, Al reported on this Committee’s recent activities.

1. *Priority Natural Communities:* The Committee has identified six to seven priority natural communities along the Nashua River which it would like to further investigate, perhaps reaching out to Pat Swain for assistance. The purpose would be to identify and create a database of rare plant species, remove invasives, and note boundary infractions. Heidi Ricci applauded this effort, noting that information on location of rare species needs to be provided to the state on a regular basis in order to keep the Natural Heritage mapping up to date and, thereby, protect these sites.
2. *Proposed Shoreline Survey:* Al reported that he had participated in a webinar on river access guides. Of the six steps presented for developing a guide, the first one is to create a baseline by identifying and assessing the shoreline current conditions. The best way to accomplish this would be by water, which would avoid the necessity of getting landowners’ permission to walk on their riverfront properties. Al would train volunteers to do the survey and would hope the town representatives could identify volunteers for him to contact. Elizabeth noted two issues to be addressed: 1) that this project will require a substantial amount of Al’s time, which the NRWA would be willing to cover pro bono until the Cooperative Agreement funding comes through; and 2) the Council has not yet adopted a policy on selecting Council projects. Joan Wotkowitz suggested we select a few specific areas to do as pilot shoreline surveys. She did not think the training would be onerous or that there would be a problem in finding volunteers to do the survey (Rona Balco and Neil Angus volunteered and others expressed interest as well). Stacey Chilcoat also noted that river guides who had been working with Nashoba Paddler, the NRWA, and River Classroom® would be eager to do it. Mike Fleming noted the increased importance of shoreline surveys, especially as the state’s “stream teams” program had been discontinued.

The members agreed to initiate a pilot project. Al will get in touch with Ken when he returns and determine the best way to move forward. While doing the surveys would be best in the summer, it could extend into the fall as well.

Other Business

Elizabeth thanked Anne Gagnon and Heidi Ricci for writing letters of support for removal of the Sucker Brook dam and culvert replacement. She added that the NRWA had also submitted a letter of support. Paula noted this is a great project as the Brook has a significant population of rare mussels.

Next Meeting: July 16, 2020 at 7 PM - by Zoom