

Strafford Conservation Commission meeting

September 24, 2019

Minutes

In attendance: Dave Paganelli, Mike Hebb, Micki Colbeck, Chuck Sherman, and Steve Willbanks, Chair. J.T. Horn arrived after the meeting had started. Visitors included Tim Appleton, biologist with Vermont Fish and Wildlife; Andrew Davis, agriculture specialist, and Jennifer Byrne, director, both from the White River Conservation District.

Approval of the draft August minutes was postponed until later in the agenda, but the Chair forgot to resume it later. Micki Colbeck agreed to take meeting notes in the absence of Jared Jenisch.

Tim Appleton recently replaced John Buck as the ANR's Barre Region's Fish and Wildlife biologist. He has responsibility for both the Podunk and Clover Hill Wildlife Management areas in Strafford. While the state owns these WMAs, it does not own the mineral rights or, in the case of Clover Hill WMA, the timber rights. His duties include providing signage, parking access, managing woods roads, mowing, gating, and keeping motorized vehicles out. The purpose of a WMA is wildlife management, as well as hunting, fishing, trapping, and other activities accessible on foot. Access to the Kibling Hill WMA, also in Strafford, is limited only to the public's right to hunt.

There was discussion of the possibility of extending our town hiking trails through the Clover Hill area. Tim said that would need to be approved by the regional Stewardship Board, which is comprised of representatives from several state agencies. While low-impact hiking trails might be permissible, the potential damage from mountain biking would likely not be. In the Clover Hill WMA, he reported recently discovering a homeless person living out of his car surrounded by drug paraphernalia and garbage and is taking steps to prevent this in the future.

In the Podunk WMA, he said motor vehicle access is a continuing problem. They have gated off certain trails to limit intrusions and even placed boulders to prevent access to the pond, but these obstacles have been circumvented. Someone has even stashed canoes around the pond. Regarding the pond's dam, there was discussion in the 1990s about rebuilding the dam to its previous height. More recently, fisheries biologists have expressed an interest in breaching the dam to allow the free flow of the stream. There are currently no plans to do either. Podunk WMA is for public enjoyment and foot traffic only. A VAST snowmobile trail does traverse the WMA.

It was noted that the beavers who had maintained the dam had apparently disappeared. He was asked if they had been trapped out. Tim thought it more likely that they had gone in search of better forage somewhere else. He also mentioned that he would like to develop a parking area west of the pond's access on Pennock Road.

Jennifer Byrne and Andrew Davis represent the White River Conservation District, one of 14 Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDs). There are NRCDs in every state in the country, all formed after the dust bowl disaster. Although formed by the states, they are not funded by the individual states. They are focused primarily on water quality. They write grants and secure funding for

agricultural and water quality projects, such as septic education, storm water management, dam removal, riparian buffer plantings, and fencing to keep cattle out of waterways.

Asked if they might be able access funding, for example, to develop water crossings for a proposed community forest, she thought that might be a possibility. She noted that a project or problem already listed in a state database, would be more likely to be approved. She was also asked about funding for mowing invasives, releasing apple trees and similar project and said she would look into those possibilities.

She said that our watershed is in Basin 14, which includes the Wells, Ompomponoosuc, Stevens, and Waits Rivers. Every five years they make a tactical plan for the districts. She invited the SCC to a November 12th gathering for representatives of the various basin districts to present the new 5-year plans. Andrew discussed agricultural issues and clean water. They were given the name of a local farm that might benefit from their technical advice.

UPDATES: Dave and Mike reported pulling knotweed and buckthorn at Cobb Forest. Although Dave does not recommend a timber harvest at this time in the Cobb Town Forest, he is willing to develop a management plan for the forest. He has recently completed a forest management plan for the proposed Ashley Community Forest.

Discussion about the SCC's stance on frog jumping contests was postponed until additional members of the SCC are present. It was suggested that there may be other ways of publicizing concerns about this form of entertainment and the increasing scarcity of many amphibian species.

The proposed Sharon and Strafford votes to accept the gift of the Ashley Community Forest from the Alliance of Vermont Communities will not take place this fall, but could well be scheduled in the spring instead.

It was recommended that everyone view the SCC's webpage on the Town's website. It is looking very good.

Mike has cleared all the town trails of downed trees and debris with his chainsaw.

The Selectboard has to date not discussed the SCC's request that the two SCC Reserve funds currently in the General Fund be managed by the Trustees of Public Funds.

Finally, there were differing opinions offered as to whether game cameras should be used in the Town Forest. It is likely that this matter will come up again.

Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Micki Colbeck, Secretary *pro temp*