

Strafford Conservation Commission
June 25, 2019
Minutes

Present at the Morrill Education Bldg. at 7pm were commission members: Mike Hebb, JT Horn, Kate Root and Steve Willbanks, Chair. Also present were Paige Greenfield, from Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Planning Commission, and arriving late, John Escheverria, a community member and Strafford's representative to the regional planning commission.

Paige Greenfield inquired about our projects, present and future, and started to outline specific help and resources her commission can provide to local conservation commissions like ours. These include various mapping resources, including EAB and other invasive control support; grant work, including the ERP (Ecosystem Restoration Program); and water quality projects.

Ms. Greenfield paused in her presentation to allow **John Escheverria** the opportunity to discuss a tract of land currently for sale and owned by Michael Mancini, whose property abuts John's land in Tunbridge. John urged the SCC to consider acquiring this parcel as a wildlife corridor connector in Strafford and Tunbridge to allow movement of wildlife from the Taylor Valley area to areas south of the Morrill Highway. The commission members thanked him for his suggestion, but pointed out the SCC has very limited resources for projects such as this one.

Returning to Ms. Greenfield's presentation, the SCC heard about forest-based resource areas, with specific discussion of wildlife corridor designations in town plans and assistance in finding buyers for potential timber sales. JT discussed potential sources of grant funding and specifically seeking financial support for the Taylor Valley effort to control invasive plant species. She also mentioned that Eco-Americorp volunteers have in the past been available for invasive control work. She asked for further information on programs and projects that the SCC has been involved in and the Ashley Community Forest project was mentioned along with the effort to control invasives in the Cobb Town Forest and the need to replace a footbridge over the Ompompanoosuc River. JT asked her to send us a list of grant opportunities that might be available to us.

Ashley Forest update:

- Hikes and tours this summer have been successful and were well-attended and additional events this fall will be offered to raise awareness of the project. Community meetings in Strafford and Sharon are being planned.
- Holt Gilmore of Woodstock will be surveying the property boundaries.

- An 'Interlocal Contract' between Strafford and Sharon appears to be the most likely governance model and a draft is being prepared.
- Special town meetings in each town are likely to be scheduled this fall to vote on the project or the vote could also occur at Town Meeting in March.
- The Orange and Windsor County Foresters have been walking the property and working on the forest management plan.

Trail Report: Mike didn't have much to report except that we need more photos for the SCC webpage on the Town's website.

Other Business: There was a discussion about the SCC taking over management of the Coburn Trail and Picnic Area, which were created by the Upper Valley Land Trust on the Coburn property and have not been maintained for some years.

Draft management plans for Whitcomb Hill, Old City Falls Nature Area and Cobb Town Forest will be submitted to the Selectboard. Transferring the SCC reserve funds to the Trustees of Public Funds was discussed with the chair of the Selectboard and the matter still needs to be approved by the full Selectboard.

Submitted by Kate Root