
Conservation Commission Minutes 05/27/2015

Greenfield Conservation Commission

Minutes

Date: May 27, 2015

Attendees: Carol Irvin, Candi Fowler, Karen Day, Conrad Dumas, Neal Brown, Janet Renaud, Sue Knight, Ray Cilley, and Janet Lutkus

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 pm. The following was discussed by the Commission:

Debrief on the Roadside Roundup – Commission considers the roundup to have been successful with 1.2 tons of trash collected. The contest for children was considered particularly successful and members recommended it be repeated next year, perhaps with more prizes. The turnout at the dinner was also very good and members continue to believe the ice cream sundaes are key for the children.

Ray Cilley's proposed project – Ray first presented his project to the Commission on April 22. The Commission conducted a site walk of the proposed project on Sunday, May 3.

Ray presented:

- Two copies of a Forest Management Plan dated April 2013 and prepared by New England Forestry Consultants (Dennis McKenney/William Caveney) for the 87.4 acre property he owns on Old Bennington Road.
- Six copies of a cost estimate in the amount of \$23,800 from Frankestown Sand & Gravel dated May 25, 2015 to provide all labor, materials, and equipment necessary to complete work on the NRCS Access Road Forest Trail Improvement plan dated August 2014.
- Four copies of a listing on Spring Pond Farm letterhead entitled "Facts that Support Restoration Project" undated, which lists seven points.

Sue Knight accompanied Ray Cilley and presented at the meeting and remained until approximately 8:30pm to answer questions.

Sue has been with Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) for 10 years and is a soil scientist by training.

Background for the project was reviewed. Steve Robertson, with the help of Rich Cook from NH Fish and Game, applied for and achieved an award from the federal Wetlands Restoration Program (WRP) in 2010. The award allowed Mr. Robertson to sell the development rights on 59.6 acres on Old Bennington Road to the WRP. The WRP, as administered by the NRCS, now holds a conservation easement on these acres which spells out the rights and obligations of both the landowner and the easement holder. To be eligible for the WRP, the property must include wetlands that need restoration. The parcel under the easement had an old logging road that had negatively impacted some wetlands. As stated in Mr. Robertson's application to the WRP, the parcel exhibited four resource concerns affecting hydrology of the wetlands: (1) a failed bridge crossing that was blocking significant hydrologic flow near the center of the property; (2) invasion of buckthorn on the wetland borders, thus altering the species diversity and native plant community; and (3) and (4) near the failed bridge crossing were poled fords causing a hydrology blockage due to their poor placement and lack of removal. Funding from the WRP is awarded on a competitive basis and in April 2010 the Greenfield Conservation Commission wrote a letter of support for Mr. Robertson's application and in that letter pledged \$20,000 from the conservation fund for the restoration of wetlands under the easement. This pledge helped to increase Mr. Robertson's chances of winning the award. Ownership of the property passed to Mr. Cilley in 2012.

Sue Knight explained that the NRCS work on the parcel has consisted of two phases, a project design phase and now the implementation phase which has begun. Phase 2 consists of restoring and upgrading the old logging road and installation of crossings that protect the wetlands. A copy of the plans for this work was presented during the April meeting and were dated July 24, 2014. The intent of improving the old logging road is to restore the hydrology while facilitating (1) public access to the property under the easement and Powder Mill Pond and (2) the forest management plan developed for the larger 87.4 acre parcel held by Mr. Cilley. Ray would like the Conservation Commission's \$20,000 pledge to finance the restoration of the old logging road.

Design work is completed and the necessary wetlands permits are in hand and Ray has two bids for getting the work done.

While the old logging road was in existence and caused the damage to the wetlands, the road was impassable as recently as 2012 because of forest growth. By opening up the road, the NRCS, the landowner, and the public, including public safety personnel (fire and police), will be able to fully access the property from Old Bennington Road. The group discussed how

access has to be the right kind of access. The wetland crossings will be cabled log bridges supported by stone abutments that can accommodate vehicles as large as a pickup truck, but the bridges are a low impact, low-foot print approach.

- In 2012, Sue's predecessor's concerns were laid out in a one-page restoration plan, all of which related to the removal of invasive plants. The Conservation Commission had agreed to that plan in 2012.
- Currently, there is no single document which lays out the complete wetlands restoration plan, but individual components: Invasive species control, soil erosion, and access issues make up the wetlands restoration plan. A separate conservation plan contains a forest management plan written by a licensed forester and a compatible use authorization required by the NRCS.
- Restoring and upgrading the road and removing invasive species of plants currently make up the wetlands restoration plan. The intent is to allow reasonable access to Powder Mill Pond from Old Bennington Road, the cutting of cord wood, and passive recreation while addressing hydrology issues.
- The plan is to have a gate at the entrance to control vehicle access to the road. Only the landowner, NRCS, and public safety personnel will have keys to the gate.
- Many people park on the Hancock side of the rivers and walk in over the railroad trestle, others park along the railroad tracks on the Bennington side and walk in along the old tracks. This type of access is not possible to block.
- Sue worked with the NRCS wetlands scientist, who mapped the wetlands.
- Whoever does the construction work will have to use small equipment to accomplish the work without further damaging the wetlands.
- When asked whether other restoration approaches were considered, the answer was the current approach was the low impact, least cost alternative.

Carol explained how the Conservation Commission's concerns relate to what the pledged money will fund. A plan to restore and upgrade a logging road does not appear to be a restoration of wetlands. The Conservation Commission would like to present to the public a Wetlands Restoration Plan that specifies in plain language the following:

- The wetlands issues under the easement that need addressing (a statement of the problem)
- The goals and objectives of the wetlands restoration plan
- A description of all the corrective actions that make up the restoration plan, ideally a table would crosswalk how each wetlands issue links to the reason for the damage and to a specific corrective action that will be implemented under the plan

- How the implementation of the plan will be monitored, including roles and responsibilities of the landowner, NRCS, and the Conservation Commission
- Because much of the proposed work will deteriorate overtime and with use, how long-term monitoring will ensure the proper maintenance and prevention of additional damage to the wetlands, particularly as ownership of the property changes

Carol also explain why the Commission is engaging in a careful due diligence process. This expenditure represents 44% of the Conservation Commission's funds and it will take at least four years to recoup these funds. In addition, citizens were very concerned about providing the Fire Chief with a \$20,000 annual salary during the 2015 Town Meeting and it is extremely important that the Commission ensure that its \$20,000 pledge is for the restoration of wetlands.

In addition, when the Commission made the pledge in 2010, we were envisioning paying for work such as the removal of invasive species and the planting of native vegetation or the removal of silt or obstructions from wetlands.

Sue: NRCS's responsibility is to ensure the wetlands are maintained even if Ray doesn't own the property any longer.

- Sue agreed to draft a wetlands restoration plan which maps goals and objectives to individual components of plans. Sue will email a draft to Carol for review by the Commission.
- Carol requested that the wetlands restoration plan include a map that clearly shows the location of the resource concerns raised in Mr. Robertson's application to the WRP together with the plans for the logging road. This purpose is to have a visual that shows how the logging road plans link to those resource concerns in the WRP application.

Action Items:

1. Sue to email Carol a draft wetlands restoration plan which maps goals and objectives to all individual components of plans.
2. Carol to share with the Commission and respond with feedback.

The Commission deliberated and discussed.

- The damage to the wetlands was caused by the logging, but then the logging ended and the logging road fell into disuse and eventually became inaccessible as new tree growth took over. The tree growth that grew over the road has been removed by Mr. Cilley as he prepares the property for rebuilding the road. Why not restore the

wetlands to the time before the logging road was developed? Wetlands will eventually restore themselves if they are left alone and undisturbed, so why isn't the best approach to leave the area inaccessible to vehicles and allow nature to do its work?

- The Commission had initially agreed to the removal of the invasive species when the property was owned by Mr. Robertson, why isn't that aspect part of the current cost estimate? In addition, when the Commission was presented with the initial plan we were told that restoring the wetlands directly would cause more damage and the best approach was to focus on addressing the vegetation problem. Why has the perspective of the NRCS changed?

- Regardless of what happens, the shoreline area along Powder Mill Pond is an attractive nuisance and for a very long time that area has been used by young adults in the area as a place to party and have fires. Improving vehicle access would improve the ability of the police to control the parties and the ability of the fire department to fight any fires that may occur. How does this type of issue relate to the restoration of wetlands?

- The cost estimate from Francetown Sand and Gravel is not broken down into enough detail to describe the work and materials it will provide.

- Having a gate at the point of access from Old Bennington Road that bars vehicle access will be critical to the long-term health of the area.

- If our funds help improve the accessibility to the property and the Powder Mill Pond, there should be signage at the gate/entrance that indicates the area is open to all Greenfield residents.

The meeting officially adjourned at 9:13 PM. Next meeting of the Commission is June 24th.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Janet Lutkus to Carol Irvin for approval, corrections, and distribution.