

**Town of Amherst
Conservation Commission Meeting
Wednesday April 26, 2017**

Attendance: D. D'Angelo- Chair, L. Gilman, R. Hart, R. Clemens, P. Lyon- Selectman Representative, J. Hardner (Alt), B. Widmer (Alt) and Staff: Planner S. Corson

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:02pm and stated that Jared will vote for John and Bill will vote for Vick.

• Chair Comments

None

Topics / Invited Guests

• Forest / Habitat Management – Matt Tarr (UNH) and Steve Roberge (County Forester)

Steve Roberge was unable to attend the meeting.

Matt Tarr is a professional wildlife biologist and a NH state forester.

Jared said Matt went on a three-hour site walk with them over ACC land. This presentation will help inform the ACC on where they want to go with their forest management plan. After the ACC has a chance to reeducate themselves on a variety of information Matt will discuss, the process of updating the forest management plan with Charlie will begin. It has not been updated in 20 years.

Matt said he would provide information on improving habitats and an overview on how he would make wildlife and forest decisions.

Some highlights from his presentation include:

Habitats = where creatures live

These change daily/monthly as needed for the animals. Different species have different requirements for their habitats. How those habitats are organized around town determines how each particular creature will utilize and move through the town.

Layers:

-Herbaceous

-Shrub

-Mid-story

-Canopy

Patches that have all the layers will have the most active habitat. Though not all species like habitats with all of the layers present.

Some species require no layers- just fields. These habitats are uncommon in our landscape because they have to be maintained so they don't grow to shrubs and then trees.

The most common tool for managing forest habitats is commercial timber harvesting. You do this by managing the amount of sunlight that comes through the canopy.

-How large should those openings be?

-How should fields be managed?

48 You need a little bit of each habitat if you want to support the full suite of wildlife.
49 Mammals are pretty easy going and can adapt. Matt focused his presentation on what is needed for
50 various bird species.
51 (Two main types)
52 -nest in young forest/ shrub (about 36 species)
53 -nest in mature forest (about 26 species)
54
55 Mature forests should be 100-300 acres in size. They can be cut in specified areas to maintain.
56 Openings that are about five acres in size support brush- favoring birds the most.
57 One type of harvesting is to cut small openings .25 acre to 1 acre. This allows for some shrubs and if the
58 small trees that are not suitable for timber are cut away, it allows the good trees to ~~blossom and flourish~~
59 ~~and~~-mature. These won't attract the shrub birds, but will allow insects, bats, young birds to flourish.
60 If you want to create a shrub area in the forest, 5-10 acres of cutting is recommended.
61 Other options are rights of ways bigger than 250' wide and gravel pits. If you don't want to cut five
62 acres, you can cut a smaller area adjacent to a right of way to include the acres together to get 5-10
63 acres.
64 The Eversource arborists are open to working with land owners if they have an interest in protecting the
65 shrubby fields. The arborists task is to keep hardwood trees from growing under the power lines.
66
67 The edges of forests and fields is where the predators prey. That's why large acreage of fields and
68 forests are needed- to allow the animals to nest away from the edges. What also helps is making edges
69 more complex with various canopy levels.
70
71 When deciding whether to cut and when, take into consideration the area around your property. Are
72 there many acres of forest, or is this the only forest in the area? Talk to abutters to find out if they are
73 planning any cutting and when so you can adjust your cut schedule to not be simultaneous, but cut one
74 and don't cut the other until the first has taller trees coming in (5 years).
75
76 If you have a large forest, keep half mature with small openings scattered and have a shrub area nearby
77 and cut an adjacent area every 10-15 years so you have the full complement of layers in the area.
78 Take growing conditions into consideration. If there are no hardwoods in the area and you cut the pine
79 and hemlock, you could end up with a sparse area that won't ~~replenish-regenerate~~ well.
80
81 Also consider deer density and invasive plants when deciding how large an opening should be in a
82 mature forest. If you have these, you can't just take out a tree here and there. You have to make a larger
83 opening. Otherwise you won't have regeneration.
84
85 There was discussion about recreational land areas and that they are also prioritized and wouldn't be
86 sacrificed to cuts.
87
88 Grasslands/fields:
89 Nesting occurs in the center of the fields. Wildlife tends to stay away from long, skinny fields where the
90 edge of the forest is too close.
91 Rotate your mowing so it's not all at once, allow for larger growth at the edges. At least 30 feet wide and
92 messy with shrubs/ fallen trees in a scalloped pathway.
93 Cut once a year after August 1st. Mowing every 2-3 years encourages wildflowers to grow yet keeps
94 shrubs out.

Mow larger fields in blocks to maintain some cover- especially if it's less than five acres. Fields over five acres allow for the possibility of grassland birds. The more acreage you can add, the more you will have.

Lee asked about dollars per acre for management planning purposes.

Rob pointed out that to start the process, the ACC needs to itemize what they do have currently for land areas of forest, grasslands and shrubs.

Jared mentioned the wildlife habitats don't follow Town property lines, so how far do we look outward before making decisions. Many of the birds travel throughout New England, but focusing on the wildlife priority maps is a good start.

Matt suggested not to rush any decisions. If you have grassy areas you want to maintain, you have to manage that. But forests aren't going anywhere.

The first step is to do an overall assessment by looking at the landscape scale and the uses and uniqueness of certain areas.

Jared said after the assessment they will look at specific properties and figure out management plans.

At 9pm, the presentation/ Q&A concluded and the Commission took a brief break.

- Minutes

L. Gilman moved to approve the minutes of April 12th as submitted. R. Hart seconded. All in favor with R. Clemens abstaining

There was brief discussion about the presentation.

Next step is finding out what triggers the different priority codes in the wildlife map.

Rob mentioned we should have experts like him at more of our meetings.

- Alice Towne Lot – Daryl (and John, *in absentia*)

- Trash – sign?

Daryl said great meadow and at the end of the scout extension have seen increased trash. One suggestion is a sign and trash container. Other suggestions are encouraged.

- Vehicles / Wheeled access

Cars are driving onto the grass and kids on bikes have been there and have almost been hit by cars.

Discussion occurred about what the issues are and what to do about them.

They discussed putting a chain across the track so cars can't go through or putting in a vehicle pull off and posting where cars should stop.

Steps: take a site visit. Get a hold of Bruce Berry to ask about putting in a turn-off. He will talk with highway safety regarding site lines.

Regarding trash, R. Hart suggested a pack it in/ pack it out sign with the ACC logo on it.

Daryl introduced Gina Frey who has been picking up trash locally and is interested in working with the ACC. She has five people interested in helping her and wants to create an organized plan. She is also interested in organizing a day/ weekend Town-wide clean- up event. She has researched this and the trash for that event will be picked up by the state.

143 Daryl suggested to ask the stewards who emailed about that property to continue picking up that area
144 and to have Gina organize the street clean up and have the ACC work towards coordinating a yearly
145 event that includes the school students.
146
147 The ACC gave her their blessing to continue her efforts with trash management.
148 She confirmed DPW will supply the bags.
149
150 Rich said he will design a sign regarding trash.

151 • Project updates - Daryl
152 Daryl asked Rich to get in touch with Wendy from the Recreation Commission to organize a mid-May
153 paddle on the Souhegan River.
154
155 Rich said May 5th will be one of the last salmon releases on the Souhegan.
156
157 **R. Clemens moved to adjourn at 9:49pm. R. Hart seconded. All in favor**
158
159 Respectfully submitted,
160 Jessica Marchant