



Town of Amherst, NH

Conservation Commission

Draft Minutes

Barbara Landry Meeting Room

Wednesday, April 24, 2019

Conservation Commission members in attendance were: Chairman Rob Clemens, Jared Hardner, Vick Bennison, Bill Widmer, Rich Hart, Bill Stoughton, Michael Cohen. Also in attendance: Charlie Koch, Town Forester, and Ethan Belair, County Forester.

I. Call to Order

Chairman Clemens called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

II. Minutes (from 4/10)

A MOTION was made by Mr. Bennison and SECONDED by Mr. Hart to accept the meeting minutes from April 10, 2019 as presented.

Voting: all aye; motion carried unanimously.

III. Financial

The group reviewed the status of the Commission's financials.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Hardner and SECONDED by Mr. Clemens to allocate \$1,000 for SpeedPro Imaging for "You Are Here" signs.

Voting: all aye; motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Hardner presented the group with a proposal for the Milford Rotary Grant project. He suggested creating an important return route at the end of the Highland Trail that will take people back up to PMEC. The new reroute will be closer to the Commission's trail standards and will help a local abutter. One portion of this reroute will be quite technical and the grant money could be used to hire a professional trail builder out of Maine. The plan will be to do much of the work with volunteers, but have the professionals do the technical part. This same crew could then be used to do some reroutes on the Joe English side of the Bicentennial Trail. These secondary reroutes would also bring the trails closer to the trail standards and deal with some private land issues in the area. The project will also include a memorial bench along a scenic spot along one of these trails.

38 The group agreed to continue forward with this proposal for the grant money.

39
40 DPW Director, Eric Hahn, discussed mowing to be done by DPW and beaver deceivers in
41 town. He explained that 16 beaver have been trapped by a DPW contractor this year so far.
42 He only traps beaver if they are threatening the roads in town.

43 44 **IV. General Review and Discussion of Habitat Management Planning in Amherst**

45 Mr. Hardner explained that there are 10 areas in town, totaling 1,792 acres, where active
46 forest management is possible. He stated that Mr. Koch is currently collecting data from the
47 forests for the ACC and that the Commission needs to discuss their goals for management
48 planning. The steps are:

- 49 1. Update status of forest resources
- 50 2. Review ecological response to past silvicultural treatments
- 51 3. Prepare a forest management plan for the next 10 years
- 52 a. 1st step: what does the group what the goals to be?

53
54 The group discussed their opinions on if the ACC should actively manage the forest lands.
55 Mr. Clemens agreed that the ACC should manage some of the lands.

56 Mr. Belair stated that there is no reason to look at the time of European colonization as an
57 ideal, as managing forests to be similar to that time period might not work for the town or
58 ACC's goals.

59
60 The group agreed that they would need to actively communicate their goals to the public.

61
62 Mr. Koch stated that he believes managing forests by age classes is essential. It should be a
63 cornerstone of management.

64 In response to a question from Mr. Cohen, Mr. Koch stated that it does not work against the
65 management of the town's grass/wetlands to manage the forests by age classes.

66
67 The group discussed the economic value of timber in regards to the town possibly managing
68 its forests for revenue purposes.

69
70 Mr. Stoughton stated that managing the forests with a goal of having them similar to how
71 they were in the 1650's might be the worst model, because it isn't achievable and doesn't
72 represent the reality of the present and future. He believes that a goal of wildlife diversity is a
73 good one, if choosing to actively manage town forests.

74
75 Mr. Hart explained that these same questions were brought up about 25 years ago. The group
76 at that time decided that a majority of the town's forests were mature (approximately 80
77 years old) and not very good for species diversity. They chose to reduce some of those
78 mature forests and replace them with younger forests and open spaces.

79
80 In response to a question from Chairman Clemens, Mr. Koch stated that more diverse ages of
81 forests absolutely creates more sustainability and resilience.

The group agreed that diversity is important. Managing forest age classes is a way to get more diversity and diversity also promotes things that are helpful to the community.

Mr. Belair explained that there is nothing to be done on a local scale to halt climate change, but planning for carbon storage is a good goal. This can be done by keeping hands off of forests (letting them grow and fall apart on their own), or growing particular kinds of trees that go into high value products.

Mr. Belair explained that, in regards to managing forests for wildlife diversity, about 80% of the wildlife is ok on its own. There is an opportunity in some places to manage for threatened/endangered species or ones that are heading that way within the next 50 years.

The group discussed ways to actively manage the forests in town to help create habitat for these types of wildlife species.

Mr. Belair suggested that cutting a series of 2-5 acre forest patches would still leave those areas to be considered as forests because they will eventually grow back into forest lands. If these patch cuts were moved around the town, the Commission could use that as a way to make money from the timber to be used to pay for other acquisitions.

In response to a question from Mr. Cohen, Mr. Belair stated that the cuts could also be made in a way that thins out certain tree species, while leaving behind high quality species.

Mr. Hardner stated that there are different scenarios that can be simulated in GIS.

The group reviewed a chart from Mr. Belair showing percentages of land area by 2015 NH Wildlife Action Plan Habitat Types for various areas and ownerships.

The group agreed to consider which areas in town might lend themselves to making small patch cuts.

V. Round Table

Mr. Widmer stated that the group needs to bring their ideas on how best to spend the rest of this year's funds to the next meeting.

Mr. Stoughton stated that the first letters for the easement monitoring were sent out. They have heard from 1 owner who would like to participate in the monitoring process.

Mr. Bennison stated that the Trail Steward party is on Saturday.

The group discussed the Taylor/Bower easement. Mr. Hardner explained that he went back to Mr. Bower with the group's request for a sunset provision or other modifications, but he is not amenable to any other changes. Chairman Clemens agreed to draft the Commission's conclusions regarding the easement for the Board of Selectmen to review if/when Mr. Bower presents his case directly to them.

Chairman Clemens stated that he and Will Ludt, Chairman of the Heritage Commission, will be walking a potential new trail connecting Pond Parish, the corn crib, and the Josiah Bartlett trail on April 30th at 10am.

Chairman Clemens also stated that the Ponemah Bog, which is owned and managed by the Audubon Society, is looking for a new trail steward with the passing of Jack Gleason. They also could use some physical help with the infrastructure there.

Mr. Hart stated that the last Planning Board meeting was a public hearing regarding the IIHO. The next meeting will be on May 15th.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Bennison and SECONDED by Mr. Hardner to adjourn the meeting at 9:37 pm.

Voting: all aye; motion carried unanimously.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*