

## **LAND STEWARDSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE**

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Thursday, October 8, 2020

8:30 AM

### **DRAFT MEETING MINUTES**

Chair Ann Welsh called the meeting to order at 8:31 AM, then read the “Meeting Preamble During COVID-19 Emergency.”

**ROLL CALL ATTENDANCE:** All joined remotely via Zoom: Larry Brickner-Wood, Gale Carey (George Carey in the room), John Carroll, Vin Dell’Ova, Mike Everngam, Dennis Meadows, Rich Reine, Todd Selig, Ellen Snyder, Sally Tobias, Ann Welsh. Guests: Heidi Holman and Brett Ferry (NH Fish and Game), Todd Johnson (UNH)

**MEETING AGENDA** approved, with modifications, by roll call

### **NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL/HABITAT MANAGEMENT IN DURHAM**

Heidi Holman of NH Fish and Game (NHFG) began by saying that Durham has been a fantastic partner in the New England cottontail (NEC) restoration effort with habitat projects at Wagon Hill Farm (WHF) North, Oyster River Forest, and Thompson Forest. She summarized the statewide goals for the recovery effort, which began in 2008. As of 2020, 1,200 acres of dense, shrub thick/young forest habitat have been restored/created in the State, with a goal of 2,000 acres by 2030. The habitat acres have been managed in a variety of ways: brontosaurus mowing, invasive plant removal, native shrub plantings. The effort has occurred in large parcels within the landscape where NEC populations persist. NEC needs a minimum of a 20-acre habitat patch to persist. NHFG and partners have been doing captive-rearing of NEC at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge and releasing them at two locations in this region: Bellamy Wildlife Management Area in Dover and in Rollinsford. Some of the released rabbits are surviving and reproducing. In 2013, one radio-collared rabbit was tracked to WHF North where it crossed Route 4 several times, and eventually died.

Vin D. asked why some of the released rabbits are not surviving. Heidi H. said that lack of habitat is a primary reason, exposing them to predators as well as a lack of food sources. Dennis M. asked what if there are no rabbits. Heidi H. stated that it would be a loss of a species native to NH. Although it is not a keystone species, it requires habitat that many other species also depend on. Mike E. asked if there are any rabbits at WHF currently. Heidi H. said no and said that in 2013 only the brushy wetland was suitable habitat. A timber harvest in the winter of 2015-2016 created additional habitat at WHF North. In annual winter pellet surveys, no rabbits have been detected there, but they are present on the nearby Bunker Lane property and Heidi H. expects they might show up on WHF North in a few years. Todd S. asked about invasive plants on the property. Heidi H. described NHFG’s yearly effort to cut the glossy buckthorn repeatedly in the wetland; native alder seems to be becoming more dominant as a result. NHFG is committed to continuing this work. No invasive plant control has yet occurred in the upland. Given the proximity to Great Bay the use of herbicides has not been an option for the Town, only mechanical methods.

The current habitat management efforts and proposed next steps were discussed for the three town properties. Heidi H. recapped the work at Oyster River Forest, which was begun in 2014 with funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), which including invasive plant removal and native plantings over several years. There are fewer invasives now although the site has been slow to convert to native shrubs due to the thick sod. A timber harvest was conducted in 2017 on 25 acres to create additional habitat. The following next steps were recommended:

- Within 2 years retreat half of the 25-acre timber harvest area with a brontosaurus to encourage shift toward a shrub thicket/dense young forest.
- Continue invasive plant control with a focus on the 25-acre timber harvest area prior to the bronto work
- Funding may be available through NHFG and its partners

At Thompson Forest, habitat management began in 2017 with invasive plant removal by a contractor and a logging operation to create a 15-acre habitat patch. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provided funding this year, through the Wildlife Management Institute, for invasive plant control. Heidi H. said she was impressed with the regeneration of aspen and birch, after three growing seasons. Although there are no signs of NEC on the property yet, there have been observations in the area, including on NHFG's Beaudette property. The following next steps were recommended:

- Assess the growth of native shrubs and young forest in 3 to 4 years to determine if any management is warranted at that time
- Continue invasive plant control

At WHF North, Ann W. noted that the trail was supposed to be kept open. Heidi H. agreed and said they were not able to get out there this year but will schedule that work. The following next steps were recommended:

- NHFG will brush out the trail and continue cutting the buckthorn in the wetland
- Mechanically cut about 2 acres at a time in the upland, starting with the barberry and the larger invasive shrubs. A hand held weed trimmer with a blade works well on the barberry or a bobcat with a front mower
- The area may need to be cut back with a brontosaurus in 5-10 years

IN SUMMARY, Heidi H. will draft a summary of these recommendations and provide to the Town.

#### OTHER WAGON HILL FARM UPDATES

Ellen S. described the project by Scout Ryan Belanger who is working on a segment of trail for his Eagle Scout project: brushing back the trail, removing invasives, and spreading 8 yards of hardpack, provided by DPW. He still plans to install a section of boardwalk if he can find the pressure treated lumber, which was funded by the Conservation Commission. The Rotary has offered to repair some broken boards on to foot bridges. The Town applied for a Moose Plate grant for another bridge/trail re-route and will be notified in December.

#### APPROVAL of SEPTEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup> LSC MEETING MINUTES

Gale C. suggested that SRPC should be spelled out. Minutes were approved with this change. Sally T. made the motion, John Carroll seconded, all in favor by roll call.

#### OYSTER RIVER BRIDGE UPDATE

Dennis M. provided the following update on the Oyster River bridge project

- On Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> the Town Council passed a resolution to name the Oyster River bridge in honor of Kenny Rotner who passed away this year.
- The construction is underway with the path from Orchard Drive to be laid out this week. The construction of the south abutment will begin on October 13<sup>th</sup>. The bridge is being fabricated in Florida.
- Ellen S., John N., and other volunteers have been working on the trail network from Oyster River bridge to Doe Farm and it is wonderful

- Still need about \$50,000 to cover the cost of the bridge construction. A loan was made to the Town to guarantee the project could be paid for, while the fundraising continues. Dennis M. said that although the LSC preferred a wood-decked aluminum bridge, unless the additional \$6K is raised, it will be all aluminum. Rich R. commented that the process of contracting is going well and that we hope to complete the project this year.

Ann W. took a roll call poll of the voting members to see if they are okay with an all-aluminum bridge. All voted yes. Dennis M. acknowledged Todd Selig and Jenny Berry for their help in keeping people updated about the project through the Friday Update.

### **OUR TRAILS AND CELEBRATE DURHAM: CAPITALIZING ON WHAT WE HAVE**

John Carroll noted that some people, for various reasons, may not be able to visit the Durham trails, and thus, a series of videos of the trails throughout the seasons would be nice way to introduce these areas. Sally T. liked the idea but wondered about funding. John C. suggested that maybe some people in the community would enjoy creating these videos. Sally T. suggested that John C. put together a summary of the idea and she can post in on Celebrate Durham. Gale C. suggested UNH students/classes as a potential resource as well. Dennis M. advised that we don't want to be too successful at attracting people to ensure that we consider sustainable use. He gave Wagon Hill Farm as an example that may be over-used. Sally T. and Larry B-W agreed that we need to balance, but that the trails are a great town resource that we should be proud of. Todd S. offered that people can always send in photos. Sally T. liked that idea and suggested creating a montage of images. Gale C. asked if the visitor counter that is at Wagon Hill Farm will be used at other sites as that seems like a good way to judge use.

### **DOE FARM UPDATES**

- UNH post-doc Todd Johnson provided an update on the emerald ash borer study, which has gone well. He reminded folks of the periodic project reports that have been included in Friday Updates. Next week they will begin the final phase of the project, to be completed by the end of October. The study trees will be cut down, bark removed and take away, and the bare logs left in the woods.
- Mike E. provided an update on the planned winter 20-21 timber harvest which will focus on red pine and some other marketable timber. Consulting forester Charlie Moreno is researching options for loggers.
- Mike E. noted that Turfpro is at Doe Farm this week to do the invasive plant treatments, with a focus on the areas that will be harvested this winter.
- Ellen S. recapped the site visit with fire and safety; they are able to access Moat Island in case of an emergency. Ellen is working on new, better signage to inform visitors of allowed and prohibited uses.

### **REPORTS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

John C. noted the progress on the proposed changes to the zoning ordinance related to agriculture. The first reading was done by the Town Council. Sally T. noted the two issue before the Town Council: agriculture zoning changes and the Oyster River bridge dedication in Kenny's honor. Ann W. asked if Parks & Recreation had identified a new representative to the LSC. Todd S. said he had not heard, but that Rachel G. is very busy this fall with programs, including Durham Day and Halloween.

### **OTHER UPDATES**

None

Next Meeting: November 12, 2020 at 8:30 AM  
Meeting adjourned at 10:05 AM

Submitted by Ellen Snyder