

## Andrews Community Forest

Monday, September 29 2022 – 5:30 pm – minutes

**Present:** Jesse Crary (chair), Amy Powers, Cecelia Danks, Jim Monahan, Caitlin Littlefield, Nick Neverisky, Daniel Schmidt, Melissa Wolaver, Chase Rosenberg

**Public:** (all call-in) Brad Elliot, Kit Emery, Bob Low, Paul Hauf, Nancy Zimny, Betsy Hardy, Martha Nye, Jon Kart, Daniel Wolfson

### **A: Roll Call, Confirmation of Quorum and Appointment of minute taker (2 minutes)**

Appointed minute taker: CL

### **B: Additions or Deletions to the Agenda (1 minute)**

- AP: Urbanik Way maintenance?
- DS: Brief update on VYCC water quality work

### **C: Review and accept minutes of July 6 Meeting (1 minute)**

### **D: Presentation by Vaughn Noble re Proposed Eagle Scout Project on ACF (10 minutes)**

Rising senior at MMU. Eagle Scout proj oriented to community. Proposes 5-10 informational signs depict Abenaki translations for a few things around the forest (e.g., word for maple tree). Connect present-day community use to culture that was here long before us.

CD explains land acknowledgement and advised language, developed in part with culture keepers. Radiate Art willing to pass on digital images. This is helping to fulfill mgmt plan

Must finish project by 18th birthday (March 28th).

CL mentions Conservation Reserve Fund. Vaughn anticipates no more than \$6k for cost of materials and potential donation to Abenaki community.

JC brings up anticipated trail names that may use Abenaki words; asks if we want cohesiveness in style.

DS iterate w committee on design, esp as we won't yet have all loops/trails built.

CD points out that interpretive signage is often on easily accessible trails.

JS next steps could include bringing design to committee – size, type of wood, itemized budget; we could help him to work on CRF app.

JS moves to approve presented Eagle Scout project from Vaughn Noble (Y-9, N-0, A-0)

### **E: Subcommittee Report on Meetings with Potential Facilitators for Public Engagement Process**

### **and Consideration of Approval of Facilitator (20 minutes)**

JM: With MW, met with Jenna Kolaski, Jessica Savage who were impressed with extent of responsiveness to public comments to date. Advised on next piece of public engagement as more of a celebration given the extent of engagement to date.

MW: They're not available to actually facilitate. They would guide us in a process to do-it-ourselves. Free offer of 1.5 hours of time for us to plan that process over Zoom, but they would not be present for actual event. They tend to come in earlier in the process than where we're at

MW: Emailed back and forth w Rebecca Stone. Recommended by Jon Kart and Kate Forer (Comm Forest at UVM Extension). Only available later this year or early next year. Reiterated idea that we're quite late in the process to engage with facilitator, which would be most appropriate when all is on the table. Advised on more focused process, too. Emphasized need for meeting with stakeholder groups individually in advance of facilitated meeting. \$2700 for 1 day facilitation w prep.

JM: Met with Melissa Levy of Community Roots. In Hinesburg. Somewhat familiar w ACF. Asked essential Q of how do we structure feedback in the way that it moves us forward? No trails vs 30 more trails – that ship has sailed. She would help us structure feedback that is what's signage going to look like, how do we deal with parking, etc. Consider on-site component to meeting. See posted notes that have rough outline. 1-1.5 hours to complete meeting. 10 hours ttl at \$120. Would be present at mtg.

MW: Bulk of fee would be in helping us decide what are the topics. That said, trying to put up guardrails may not work bc there are some strong feelings in the community and some may

CD: works with Melissa Levy – upbeat, can-do, very pleasant. Available whenever.

NN: What does "late in process" mean – we've missed it? Or we've done a lot?

MW: It refers to points at which we've already passed. Facilitation in general form would be at start of "do we want trails" – that kind of visioning. Whereas we've already made the pretty foundational decisions.

CD: Just want to clarify that we voted to put the trail plan out for public review of the revised plan. It's not a closed book.

JM: Personally not willing to hear proposals to put new trails over here or there. We're not opening up whole proposal.

CD: That's not way to get people on board. Need to convey our rationale and ensure people feel heard.

JM: Just need to be fully focused on this engagement. Let's be clear on the extensive process we've followed so far.

CD: 1-1.5 sounds short.

JM: Public see posters laid out – Concept Map, proposal, nix Ridge Top, etc.

MW: Could be multi-pronged feedback gathering. Some may be break-out groups, some may be comment cards, some may be

CL: can we have them collate/synthesize notes? Us doing that ourselves would be disaster.

AP: beneficial for having more distant eye on it; more legitimacy

NN: Unless I misunderstand what you're staying, three separate professionals have said you've done a lot. And the next step now is the more celebratory piece. Is that right? None of them said we blew it with public engagement?

MW: No, nobody said we did a terrible job.

JM: They were impressed with the amount of process we've done to this point. See this as an opportunity to explain to the public and convey rationale.

CD: We still need to think about that this is the last step before we go to the Selectboard. We should be clear on what information we're welcoming and what changes we may make. Eg once we got Appendix approved by Richmond Racial Equity and two bands – feel very firmly in that. So need to articulate what we're willing to accept feedback on.

JC: Do you feel comfortable recommending one?

JM/MW: Melissa Levy

CD: knows community forestry very well. Has never seen her feathers ruffled.

AP: If she can't provide a written summary of the meeting and comments?

CD: Hire someone else.

CL: Quotes below needing to undergo sealed bid process (\$15k upon check of town's purchasing policy and bidding process)

CD moves that we pursue a contract with Melissa Levy to support facilitation, including asking her about synthesizing responses, and contingent upon town approval that we've followed proper bidding/solicitation process (Y-9, N-0, A-0)

CR would be great to set this up as format we may use moving forward to solicit feedback in ACF.

### **F: Report from Caitlin Littlefield on Meeting with Nick Fortin re Managing of Deer Yards at ACF (10 minutes)**

CL read from email in which phone call w Nick Fortin was recapped

1. The whole southern aspect rising from the Winooski River Valley between Richmond and Waterbury serves, to some degree, as deer wintering area. Especially as the winters get milder, simply being on a south-facing aspect may provide enough thermal protection. (This is in contrast to elsewhere in the state, especially the colder NEK, in which targeting and protecting dense softwood cover will likely capture the areas deer use the most.)
2. Based on Nick Fortin's observations on ACF (which are consistent with what Caitlin Littlefield and Nick Neverisky observed when doing pellet counts), there's more winter deer activity in the steeper, higher grounds near Sip of Sunshine than within the hemlock stand that the Hemlock Valley trail cuts through. During bad winters with >3' of snow, that hemlock stand may well be important, but when winters are mild, the sparser hemlock cover in the steeper terrain is worth the trade-off, as there's greater food availability up higher.

3. Seasonal closures can be an appropriate tool to protect deer wintering areas so long as they can be enforced. Closures from December 15 - April 1 are recommended and are consistent with state-level development reviews.
4. The high degree of variability and uncertainty in our winters means we need to give deer and all wildlife ample space to shift and adapt. Predicting how and where deer will use resources during the winter is increasingly challenging -- for example, they may use one yard one winter, then use another location the next winter. This underscores the fact that we can't simply delineate and protect one hemlock stand and say we've done enough.
5. Thus, it's likely preferable and better for wildlife to close a swath of the network (eg both Hemlock Valley and the East Climb) during the recommended time period rather than simply close one trail and route traffic elsewhere. This does not have to mean people can't use the forest -- they can wander off trail. But simply establishing an official trail closure will likely reduce traffic overall.

CD would closing swath limit connectivity for fat bikers?

CL yes but worth protecting wildlife/habitat

DS we're focusing on deer here, but there are plenty of other species and other mgmt/access modifications that we should consider (eg dogs with ground nesting birds). In general, good to have a process for evaluating energy we put into doing something and the benefits we get out of it (eg trail closure simple/straight forward)

CR wildlife population trends should influence if/how we manage

CL expresses concern about capacity for legitimate monitoring of wildlife

JC should at least include language that advises monitoring, resource limitations notwithstanding

### **G: Update on Town of Richmond and VLT interpretation of ACF Management Plan Language**

#### **Requiring Full Plan Revision for Departures from Concept Map (5 minutes)**

JC will be discussing with attorney. Plent yof grey in mgmt plan regarding what triggers a revision. Q at hand: how far can we potentially depart from Concept Map such that it triggers full plan revision.

### **H: Consideration of first draft of Revised Management Plan (50 minutes – Subcommittee)**

JC outlines anticipate documents: original, revised, additional doc describing substantive changes.

Tonight, work through a few particular changes

DS list of six items that the committee could decide how we want to revise

AP marked up draft is up on the website available for public review. What you see represents only a fraction of all the work/changes/commenting that has already occurred. [Committee realized that the form in which the draft was available to View Only assignees did not show any of the mark up or Comments. AP is looking into how to remedy this.]

CD we didn't change everything. Mindset was "what would we want to receive from the prior committee"? Tried to deal with inconsistencies/clarities. "SAVE" indicates that we may want to consider as larger edit, not at this round. But for future revisions, thoughts, discussions – in coming years.

DS mgmt objectives/actions repeated twice – once in document, once in table below. Ripe for inconsistencies.

CD so many decisions are embedded in prose that you have to read through lots of paragraphs. Feels important to have a single list/summary of rules/guidelines

CR does this mean there's a separate pdf that has rules that means they don't need to go to the mgmt plan?

CD Yes but should be tiered and referenced in the mgmt plan (eg page numbers), even as an appendix.

JC new approach that focuses on user.

NN rules doc super useful, but get rid of table; could reference certain page number

AP emblematic of tension in doc – working/living/breathing doc vs "this is the plan"

CD thinks we should convey status, but don't need to have a running log.

DS interim mgmt plan map? More digging needed

DS can we cull potential partnerships?

CD remember this document reflects and captures numerous ideas; casting big net

NN brainstorming aren't a list – there's no data there. Wouldn't retain

CL agree that ideas should go elsewhere and plan should be actionable items and status

AP that's the tension – we were originally going to clean this but then didn't want to lose what's most important to ppl

NN why not just "potential partners"

DS will do that and flag need to evaluate who's actually partners in future

DS will remove Valley View as parking option

AP/CL public can't see comments. It's b/c they're viewers, not commenters or editors.

JC will resolve in sub-committee

### **Public Comment (5 minutes)**

Brad Elliot notes the gate above parking lot is open. Concerned that facilitators did not get adequate information/explanation. Suspects that thirty minutes of meeting with the potential facilitators wasn't enough time to explain to them the concerns some people still have. Surely this couldn't warrant a celebration. When was it decided that this public meeting would be 90 minutes long as there is no time for any public engagement. We're not getting any answers, as usual. When was 90 minutes decided? What about 200 foot buffer?

Paul Hauf deems process we've gone through exhaustive, esp relative to other town committees. There was not nearly the concern related to logging. Like the idea of setting forward rationale, but you've taken plenty of comments to date. Supports idea of celebration. Continual chipping away at recreationists' ability to use community forest. Would like to see committee only recreate at places constrained by the rules that they set forth (eg never ski through a deer yard). How much more info do you need to gather? It's time to move things forward.

Nancy Zimny notes that just because things have been done one way in the past does not mean we should continue in the future. Climate change and other issues are very serious. People may see that as too big of an issue and that it maybe isn't relevant for ACF, but every single decision is important. There's good research to show that it's hard for humans to take into consideration long-term outcomes like climate change, so instead they focus on what's short term and important to them personally. They're egotistical. Process that's followed here, they wanted it to be vanguard for how it may be used elsewhere. People have talked about how process have been incredibly intense, exhaustive and good. I don't agree with all those. Surprised that this would be framed as a celebration. If that public process happens, it's super super important that the ACFC makes clear to the public, how did you work really hard to ensure that wildlife and nature in the ACF was protected. What science did you review? What cumulative effects and zones of influence did you evaluate? Can't just point back to "we hired experts". We have got to step up, as humans.

### **Adjourn**

JC adjourns mtg