**Andrews Community Forest**

Monday, April 28, 2022 – 5:30 pm – minutes

**Present**: Jesse Crary (chair), Amy Powers, Cecelia Danks, Jim Monahan, Tyler Merritt, Ellen Kraft (call in), Caitlin Littlefield (call in), Nick Neverisky (call in), Daniel Schmidt (call in)

**Public**: Brad Elliott, Bob Lajoie, Betsy Hardy (call-in), Marcy Harding (call in), Paul Hauf (call in), Chase Rosenberg (call in), Dan Wolfson (call in), Ed Wells (call in), Ian Stokes (call in), Jeanette Malone (call in), Nancy Zimny (call in).

**Appointed minute taker**: CL

**Minutes Approval**

* Update date. Minutes approved subject to date update (9 yes/0 no/0 abstained)

**Public comment**:

* BE: requests that that Meredith Naughton’s presentation be moved to beginning of the discussion
* PF: disturbed that during prior mtg some members of the committee seemingly dismissed public comments based on brevity; disturbed that commentary during mtg reflected judgement of individuals’ motivations for being in the woods – specifically judgement towards mountain bikers; disturbed that members of the committee suggested that mtb community was unduly leveraging robust social network; concerned about honesty of intention
* NN responds. when I spoke of representativeness he was referring to *not* using simple tallying of comments but rather responding to content
* CL responds. not dismissing comments that are shorter but simply needing to bring forth content and address that; CL and NN are mountain bikers;
* AP responds. ppl in the position of defending a position need to bring to bear more evidence hence likelihood of greater length of comments who are opposed to trail proposals
* MW: why is committee moving ahead with mgmt plan revisions when the actual trails haven’t received due ecological assessment esp when trail runs right thru broad-beech fern.
* CL responds: in our responses to public comments we’re laying out various options for addressing – for example, walking
* BH: none of us depend on that piece of land for survival, but other beings do
* BE: mgmt plan designed to achieve balance; mtb was not top of the list; you just can’t look at a trail map but must look at the plan which regulates how that unfolds; BE says hired ecologists didn’t leverage any science; this all hinges on the science, the mgmt plan, the easement; much deeper than simply lines on a map
* PF: agree that you need to work in conjunction with experts; wouldn’t trail plan have flexibility to avoid areas like where broad-beech fern? This is a first-of-its kind that trail designed in conjunction w ecologists; we have a unique opportunity to set a higher bar with what we’ve done; this is an opportunity to be leading and instead we’re falling apart; let’s not have this drag out another 2-3 years
* NN responds: you’re not the only person expressing concern about how long this has taken and the fact that this has perhaps been an exemplary process

**Meta-analysis re: trail impacts**

* Meredith Naughton Field Naturalist thesis at UVM examined dozens of studies to evaluate – recently presented via webinar
* AP recaps:
  + Half the studies found negative effects of trails on wildlife; none of the studies had positive effects on wildlife
  + Scale and placement: trail-free areas are very important to maintain
  + Volume: assumption that as use increases impact increases; in fact we don’t really know that – more studies must be done
  + Types of recreation: biking vs skiing vs hiking, etc.; very limited evidence to date b/c controlled studies haven’t been conducted; the one surprising finding was that motorized vehicles had lesser effects (counterpoint: flying thru faster but may be extending into other areas and affecting wildlife differentially)
  + Reminder that research evolves and particular findings may be refuted over time
  + Three phase approach:
    - Overarching landscape view – eg ACF adjacency to Chittenden Uplands. Don’t put trails in interior but instead in areas that are closer to human-impacted areas
    - Site-specific planning – consolidating trails on the landscape; seems consistent with how consultants have mapped ours
    - Mitigation and monitoring – how much do you need to focus on monitoring the wildlife impacts in this area and closing trails at appropriate times of year (eg during nesting)
  + Meredith advised engaging both ecologists and trail designers (specifically mentioning Arrowwood)
* CD: correction 82% of articles found negative impacts; 20% no effects; only 3 of the article reviewed looked at biking
* DS: did she offer any clarity on what “impact” means? Communities, populations, individuals?
* CD: impact defined in multiple ways – energetics, population decline, etc.
* AP: sustained effects would be something related to population; temporary effects would be related to, eg, heartrate increase
* JM: how does speed at which people move interact?
* AP: speed and not being erratic may be reason why motorized have been found to have lesser impacts but again more research is needed
* CD: she only looked at terrestrial species and didn’t look at other impacts (eg erosion)
* PH: interesting that this analysis has similar findings to the report from NH F&W – looked at over 200 studies and came to pretty much the same conclusions. It doesn’t matter what you do in the woods, there will be impact
* CL: these sorts of science-based tools like the NH report and this meta-analysis are great. And yet let’s remember that science is always evolving, and that there are uncertainties, and that there are gaps. None of this research is giving us the definitive go-ahead, green-light.
* DW: Meredith was still able to offer guidance around avoiding and buffering around sensitive areas; if we were to simply avoid there areas, there would likely be much more community support trails; 100 m
* BE: Meredith recommends consolidating trails as well as avoiding sensitive area; his convo w NH author called for 400 ft. Arrowood did a great job identifying ecological areas and then walked away from them
* PH: have to be realistic and design trails that ppl want to use
* CL: there are trade-offs with ecological sensitive areas. For example the deer yard that the central trail goes thru. Arrowood didn’t dismiss ecologically sensitive areas, like BE said. Rather they looked to route trails in areas that were already impacted – eg down existing skid trails
* CD: Meredith advised modulating the buffers; even if we want to be guided by science, there’s a lot of uncertainty; we use adaptive mgmt to decide on an action and decide to collect data to monitor and revisit that decision later; eg putting in one trail and then making decisions about subsequent trails
* TM: thinking about condensing trails; if you look at bigger picture of where ACF, it borders 2000 acres of Prelco among other undeveloped areas

**Committee member terms**

* JC: TM term ending; he had been trails committee representative; trails committee unanimously recommending Chase Rosenberg
* AP makes motion to approve Chase’s appt; CL seconds; all approve (8 yes/0 no/0 abstentions; EK had to depart early)
* JC: CD and EK terms also ending in June; EK will be letting term expire; CD would like to remain; no other members of the community have expressed interest in joining so CD may remain and there will be a vacancy for EK’s position. Will communicate w Josh Arneson, Duncan Wardell to check on recruitment/soliciting of others’ interest in filling that vacancy

**Coding and responding to public comments**

* NN: applied qualitative research approach for dealing with open-ended responses. Has taken ~130 and pulled out ~25 unique themes and associated each comment with a theme. Some comments have multiple themes that will receive multiple codes. Some people will likely find some of these themes useful; others would have done it differently. The most precise way to do this would have ~130 themes but that’s untenable.
* CL: taking first stab at responding to each of these 25 themes – how we have/will address these concerns; if/how we can’t; various mgmt options that may address concerns
* JC: will be circulated among committee to comment/amend/edit
* CD: have any maps been included?
* NN: none in the comments

**Tyler’s departure**

* CD: makes motion to thank Tyler for his time, expertise, good humor, etc. NN seconds. All in agreement. (7 yes/0 no/0 abstained [EK no longer present])

**Cultural history of ACF**

* Angus Cummings wrote a few year back; CD will circulate again

**Adjourn**

* JC adjourns mtg