

## RCC 6/23 Minutes

Present: Trevor Brooks, Kit Emery, Jeanette Malone, Sam Pratt, Melissa Wolaver (remote), Susannah Zeveloff (remote)

Public Present: None

Minutes/Timekeeper: Sam

The committee did not review or approve draft minutes from 6/9. The commission reviewed the ACF draft management plan. First by discussing the purpose of the meeting and what was expected of RCC. Then commissioners shared overall feedback. Finally, the commission discussed major topics identified during the comment period.

### **What's the purpose of this meeting?**

- To synthesize RCC feedback — high level, not line by line comments
- Come to a consensus on feedback from RCC as a whole
- Folks still can submit feedback as individual community members if they wish

Should RCC members attend the public feedback session on Monday? Ideally, yes. The RCC meeting is not a substitute for individual comment.

### **General remarks per individual:**

#### **Melissa:**

- Liked the FAQs page, would like to see it added to the MP2 proper
- Some of the language in the MP2 may be confusing to a lay person
- The tone and the language in the FAQs is better than the MP2
- The introduction could benefit from this language the most

#### **Kit:**

- Good job bringing the committee together to come to a consensus
- Plan is effective in balancing public access and ecological protections
- Buffer widths are too narrow, especially in wetlands. Would like to see buffers increased
- Forest is ranked as 3% highest for habitat and protection and deserves utmost care
- Overall plan promotes low-impact recreation and protecting ecological values
- RCC should be aligned with the CRF criteria and have higher standards than the average Richmond citizen

#### **Jeanette:**

- Agreed that RCC should have high standards
- CRF criteria: the CRF helped make the forest possible in the first place, it should be a source of objective criteria. MP2 is strong in meeting those

- Providing access: people should be able to connect with the natural world and fellow community members. Visitors may be inspired to participate in other conservation activities
- Zooming out: the 428 acre forest is a key link in a bigger forest block and serves as an important wildlife connector
- We should be ensuring that the forest remains resilient
- Two-zone approach is good:
  - Likes that the trails are concentrated in the southern section of the forest
  - Variety of uses / accessibility
  - People should feel safe sharing trails
  - Protecting forest from more disruptive human impacts
  - Keeping the northern forest pristine is important
  - Trail connectivity exists: MFW, VYCC, potential future western connection?

**Susannah:**

- Inclusion of Abenaki guidance - where does this stand?
  - Inclusion of a member of the Abenaki tribe/heritage?
  - Indigenous acknowledgement and language seems largely unchanged since 2022 (not necessarily good or bad)?

**Responses:**

**Sam:**

- Appendix and much of the language has been preserved since there is a lack of expertise on ACFC regarding this topic
- Plan to use Abenaki trail names if possible
- Unsure of process/legality regarding the land use acknowledgement, allowances for rituals, foraging etc (SB will need to weigh in)
- There is ongoing debate about legitimacy of local tribes (Canadian vs American Abenaki), not sure how to proceed at this time, defer to experts

**Melissa:**

- ACFC searched for a member of the Abenaki community but was unable to find a Richmond Resident

## **Feedback by Theme:**

### **Ecological Completeness and Scientific Rigor**

- There are better ways to summarize some of the species affected in the MP2 language
- Don't want to shove everything into the appendix
- Ex: note why Dry Oak is so important (mast producing, berry bushes, etc. Especially with diseases wiping out other mast-producing species like beech and butternut)
- Define terminology (like Duff — makes it easier for the average reader)
- Link out to fact sheets? Use link and footnote. Adds legitimacy to the document for the average reader, especially those that aren't reading appendices
- How to help people understand the depth of understanding it takes to be a good steward?
- Definition sheet/glossary (in appendix?) might be helpful. Could link to those terms in the main body of the doc

### **Forestry, Species Threats, and Climate Adaptation**

- Should we add a section about climate change and getting ahead of things
  - Invasive species removal
  - Beech (and Ash) disappearing from the landscape
- We should add a paragraph at the end of the ecology section regarding climate change and resiliency
- Monitoring! For invasive species (plants, insects, etc)
- Resiliency and health of the forest might need to be its own separate paragraph (EAB, etc) since it's not exactly climate related
- Plan should mention managing introduced species and preparing the forest for threats
- Should be more explicit about how we should be monitoring

### **Welcoming Tone and Public-Facing Accessibility**

- Make sure that the language is broad and welcoming so that folks skimming the plan see the same welcoming language
- Add a vision statement to the document
- Add a map earlier in the doc to help set the stage (perhaps trails and natural communities without buffers)

### **Governance Clarity and Process Integrity**

- Revisit relationship between ACFC and SB in MP, make sure it's clear
- What is the process for "authorized" trail work (like trail maintenance)

## Trail Development Standards and Ecological Protections

- Better explanation of buffers: why they exist and how we arrived at the buffer distances (perhaps a summary paragraph at end of eco section or beginning of rec?)
- Should also have quick answers to questions about the buffers (for the public feedback meeting)
- Vernal pools are not protected the same way that wetlands are (through the state)
- Why are the buffers 300ft?
- Why are other buffers smaller? Like wetlands. MP doesn't make that clear
- This dovetails with the "readability" comments above... How can we add more context without overloading the main body of the MP?
- Should we add a "proof of work" section to Eco and Rec in the main body? This applies to any section drawing on scientific evidence (likely just eco/rec sections)
- The FAQ document has a lot of these answers and we should do what we can to plug those in to each section
- Compromises have already been made — trails already on steep slopes and encroach on buffers

### Where does RCC stand? Do we feel like we're in agreement on things?

ACFC has taken the time and come up with a good plan. It's a compromise, but it works. Not going to get better than what we already have. We have to let go of certain things we want in the interest of reasonable compromise to benefit the community at large. Believes it will really be a welcoming community forest. Protecting the northern section of the forest while allowing low-impact public access is good.

### Next Steps:

While the commission was largely in agreement on the plan, commissioners agreed that they would prefer to review meeting minutes and think about the feedback for a few weeks before making a motion in support of the plan. Ideally a motion would be made with a few conditional suggestions (add welcoming language, climate section, etc)

Note: Susannah left ~5min early (after 9pm).

**Motion to adjourn:** Kit motioned, Trevor seconded. All remaining members voted in favor.