

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting
April 13, 2021
Via teleconference - 7:00 PM

Meeting Minutes

Present: Tom Brownrigg, Dwight DeMay, Debby Geltner, Warren Lyman, Rhonda Michaud, and Andrew Wilmot. Conservation Administrator Sylvia Willard was also present.

Guests: Kay Hurley and Nick Ognibene

This meeting was conducted by Zoom teleconference due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with all participants at home. The meeting was opened at 7:05 PM by Chair DeMay.

The March 16 meeting minutes were approved as amended.

New Business

1. Towle Land Observations by Kay Hurley

Prior to the meeting Hurley provided LSC with her report "Observations made in the Towle Land, June 2019 - August 2010". Hurley made these observations because a visit by Mass Wildlife personnel in July 2016 claimed that the Towle understory was "moderately to negatively impacted" by deer browse. Hurley decided to visit much more of Towle to assess the extent of damage. For study purposes Hurley divided Towle into seven zones, and noted that these zones align with soil type.

Her report provides an overview of forest health, and includes lists of plants found within seven different zones, excluding Towle Field. She concluded that forest health is good at Towle, and she saw little evidence of heavy understory damage by deer, except for stands of Jewelweed.

Lyman asked if she plans to continue her study at Towle in the future. She said that she is not planning to do so, although if people find "gaps" in her report she would try to fill these with more information. She originally planned a similar study of the Davis Corridor, but did not do so because Towle took longer than expected. Lyman raised the question of how her information could be used in the future, perhaps by selecting certain plants to monitor in specific locations.

2. Russell Land Rookery

Lyman visited the Great Blue Heron rookery and sent photos of heron nests taken using a telephoto lens. Ognibene and Brownrigg raised the question of whether people walking the trail near the rookery could create a disturbance. Willard said that the rookery, and part of the Russell Land trail, is located on private property on School St. Willard and Ken Harte visited the rookery and thought that there are 11 occupied nests.

There was discussion of whether a sign should be posted along the trail regarding the rookery. Michaud suggested a sign saying that a portion of the trail is on private property, and to stay on the trail. Wilmot thought it was better not to draw attention to the nests. It is not known how close the trail is to the nest trees. Brownrigg thought that some nests might be very close since he had seen heron nests near the trail last fall, but these nests might not have been in use this spring. Brownrigg asked Willard if she could determine how far from the trails the nests are, and she agreed to do so.

3. Proposal by Asarkof

There was no discussion of the proposal that Asarkof had submitted to ConsCom for a proposed project at Towle Field. DeMay said that Asarkof is planning to set up a table on a conservation land on April 25 in celebration of Earth Day. Her goal is to try to recruit people for conservation activities. DeMay asked whether LSC should provide Asarkof with a list of suggested conservation-related activities. Ognibene said that people might be interested in keeping an eye on conservation lands, but would not necessarily be interested in baseline assessments or management plans.

Geltner remembered that former LSC member Lynn Knight had made a list of activities for people who could assist LSC, and found the list. After discussion, it was decided that Geltner will revise the list and send it to Willard. Willard will make copies for Asarkof to distribute during the Earth Day event.

4. Greenough Dam Repair Update

Willard said that seven bids were received for the repair of Greenough Dam. The bids ranged in price from \$447,000-\$675,000, but additional funds would be needed for dam oversight during construction. Willard will attend the Community Preservation Committee meeting on April 14 in order to advocate for Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds.

Willard also submitted a grant application to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for dam repair, but was told that funding is not likely because a dam failure would not seriously impact people or structures. If the state grant were awarded, the Town would have to provide at least 25% of the total amount. If the grant is not awarded, the full amount would need to come from CPA funds. The funding decision will be voted at the June 6 Town Meeting.

4. Cranberry Bog Kiosk

Lyman said that he is updating materials on the kiosk, many of which refer to growing cranberries, which will not continue. He will send his material to Geltner for review. In addition, Lyman is removing brush from conservation signs mounted on posts; so far, he has done the signs at Bisbee, Towle and the Cranberry Bog. Brownrigg mentioned that the sign at the north Greenough parking lot needs brush removal.

5. Recap of April 12 Cranberry Bog Working Group (CBWG) meeting

Lyman attended the meeting and said that the group was "moving ahead in a good way" to develop a plan for the ecological restoration of the bogs. They have hired former DEP employee MaryAnn DiPinto as a consultant and she has drafted a list of goals and action items. She will return to the CBWG on May 10 with a more developed restoration plan, which will then be presented to ConsCom later in May. Lyman forwarded three documents produced by DiPinto prior to the LSC meeting (these were not discussed).

Lyman said that once a plan is determined, a Notice of Intent needs to be submitted and Order of Conditions issued, and that the work will be considered "ecological restoration", for which there are special regulations. In particular, woody vegetation will need to be removed regularly in order to preserve the current vistas popular with visitors.

According to Lyman, Ken Belitz, CBWG chair, has welcomed inputs from people outside the CBWG, and Lyman encouraged people to submit their questions and comments in writing to Willard, who will forward them to the CBWG.

Old Business

1. Fox Hill Nursery Plants

Willard will contact Gary Davis, DPW Superintendent, regarding removal of several American Hornbeam trees. Lyman requested that Willard also contact Davis regarding installation of a conservation land sign at Benfield Land.

2. Baseline Assessments

Regarding Benfield Land, Lyman said he will be working on the Baseline Assessment and asked for suggestions regarding things to be included, such as unusual features, wildlife, and plants. Willard noted that Benfield Land has a conservation restriction.

3. Benfield Septic System

Willard reported on the status of the septic system. The existing field will be replaced with another in the conservation land field. The work will require filing of a Notice of Intent and Order of Conditions since the cart path leading to the field is a wetland. Swamp mats will be installed along the cart path prior to construction. There is currently no flow of effluent from the Benfield Farm septic tank, which is pumped every two weeks. The new septic field will have a different design.

ConsCom is looking for a contractor to rake the field edges of woody debris left by last year's brush removal operation. After the debris is removed, raked areas will be seeded with grasses and wildflowers.

4. Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness meeting recap

Willard gave a brief summary of the meeting, and will bring up specific issues at a later date.

Next Meetings:

May 11, 2021 @ 7 PM

June 15, 2021 @ 7 PM

Document discussed at meeting:

- Observations made in the Towle Land, June 2019 - August 2010, K. Hurley

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM.

Submitted by Tom Brownrigg

Minutes approved: 5/11/21