

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting
June 15, 2021
Via teleconference - 7:00 PM

Meeting Minutes

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

Guests: Kay Hurley and Marc Wey

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 Lyman.

The May 11 meeting minutes were approved as amended.

New Business

Marc Wey joined the meeting at 8:30 PM to discuss a proposal to remove vines from a stone wall along Westford St. at the Towle Land. Other agenda items, including old business, were discussed until Wey joined the meeting.

1. Water Chestnuts at Cranberry Bog

Geltner noted that there are Water Chestnuts at the Cranberry bog, and that the seeds have sharp spines that can damage the feet of dogs. She wanted to alert members who have dogs to be careful to avoid the seeds. Willard said that she had seen Water Chestnuts at the mill pond at Great Brook Farm State Park, near the log cabin; the seeds probably originated upstream at the bog.

2. Appointment of chair and secretary

DeMay was out of town at the time of the meeting, and had indicated to Lyman that he did not wish to continue as co-chair due to business commitments, but will continue as a member. Wilmot said that they will be moving to Florida, and will soon resign as a member of LSC. Lyman and Geltner thanked Wilmot for his service to the committee, and in particular for his research into drone regulations as these might impact conservation lands.

After discussion it was decided that Lyman will continue as co-chair. Geltner said she is willing to serve as co-chair, but she will ask Michaud as to whether she would serve in this position. Brownrigg agreed to continue as secretary.

3. Wey proposal for Towle Field (8:30 PM)

Wey and ten other residents of Acton St. are interested in removing grape vines and other vegetation from the stone wall along Westford St. at the Towle Land. Wey said they removed vegetation, including brambles and invasive plants, from stone walls near the intersection of Acton and Westford Streets this spring. They like the appearance of the stone walls and hope to make them more visible to the public.

Lyman said that a proposal to do the same at the Towle stone wall would probably meet with differences of opinion. He asked if LSC members had opinions about this. Brownrigg said that in his opinion native grapes and Virginia creeper provide food for birds and other wildlife, and that he was not in favor of removing these plants. Lyman said that the grape vines supply a small quantity of grapes that people sometimes harvest, and also grape leaves. He thought that vines that were climbing up trees should be removed. Ognibene said that he was in favor of removing poison ivy and oriental bittersweet, but not other native plants. Willard asked Wey how their group would remove the cuttings from Towle. Wey said that, on Acton St., they put the cuttings into piles, which were later removed by the DPW after getting prior DPW approval.

Lyman suggested that LSC members visit Towle and look at the vines growing on the stone wall. He requested that Wey provide a list of proposed activities for review by LSC. Wey said he will try to send a draft proposal to Lyman before the next meeting. Wey said that if the work is approved, they would do it next March. Lyman thanked Wey for his interest in improving the appearance of historic stone walls.

Old Business

1. Woodward Land Management

Judy Asarkof wrote a memo titled "Monthly report on Woodward's Field Agriculture License", dated June 7, 2021. DeMay forwarded this report to LSC prior to the meeting. Lyman asked if anyone had comments on the report. Brownrigg said that in regard to Asarkof's meeting with Steve Tobin (Trails Committee) at the property, he found it difficult to understand the locations of existing trails and fence lines, and suggested that she provide a simple sketch map for clarification. Lyman agreed, and will make this suggestion to Asarkof. The last topic in Asarkof's report mentioned the boundaries between the town-owned field and part of the field near the new house under construction which will eventually be owned by the town. Brownrigg said the ownership of this part of the field was not clear, and Willard provided an explanation.

2. Summary of Towle Land Observations by Hurley

Hurley wrote a report titled "Observations made in the Towle Land, June 2019 - August 2020", which LSC received in April. At the last meeting Lyman asked Geltner to provide a summary of the report which LSC could approve and forward to ConsCom. Hurley joined the meeting to discuss the summary. Her only suggestion was that the first sentence regarding comments made at Town Meeting in 2019 be revised. Hurley will provide Geltner with a revised sentence; there were no other suggested revisions.

Lyman said LSC needs to evaluate Hurley's work and to think about future studies based on her work. Hurley mentioned that jewelweed was heavily browsed at Towle, more heavily than other plants. Geltner asked how much of the plant the deer eat. Hurley said it is browsed to a height of about 6 in., and deer will clear a path 3-4 ft. wide; jewelweed continues to grow afterward. Brownrigg mentioned that Hurley's report identifies a number of invasive plants. He thought that we should locate these and think about methods for their removal. He also thought that clusters of certain plants like pink lady's slipper orchids could be monitored on a yearly basis for signs of deer browse and pollination. Lyman and Geltner will work on a document that summarizes the value of Hurley's report, for review by LSC and submission to ConsCom.

Hurley mentioned that Asarkof has befriended a very knowledgeable botanist, Walter Kittredge, who has volunteered to help prepare a list of plant species for Towle Land. Kittredge has already prepared a plant list for Spencer Brook Reservation.

3. Russell Land Rookery

There has been concern expressed about whether people walking the trail near the wetland at Russell Land might disturb nesting great blue herons. Brownrigg said that he and his wife walked there recently, and he did not think this disturbed the birds. Large white pines obstruct the view of the nests from the trail, and might also make people less visible to the birds. Willard said that she used her laser range finder to measure one of the closer nest trees as about 260 ft. from the trail. Ognibene said that LSC should keep an eye on rookery disturbance, since it may attract more visitors in the future.

4. Baseline Assessments

Willard said that the Garrison Place property manager asked if he should mow the field closer to Spencer Brook "as a lawn". Willard said that it should be kept as a meadow, and mowed infrequently. Willard said that LSC should begin working on a baseline assessment and management plan for Russell Land, and suggested looking at the deed regarding a management plan.

Lyman has volunteered to work on the baseline assessment for Benfield Land, and Brownrigg for Woodward Land.

Documents discussed:

- "Monthly report on Woodward's Field Agricultural License", June 7, 2021, by J. Asarkof
- "Summary of Kay Hurley's Report on Observations made in the Towle Land June 2019 - August 2020, Land Stewardship Committee 6-15-21", by D. Geltner

Next Meetings:

July 13, 2021 @ 7 PM

August 10, 2021 @ 7 PM

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Submitted by Tom Brownrigg

Minutes approved: 7/13/21