

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

Meeting Minutes

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

Guests: Judy Asarkof, Kay Hurley, Roy Herald, 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 June 15 meeting minutes were approved as amended.

New Business

Mark Wey joined the meeting at 8 PM to discuss a proposal to remove vines from a stone wall along Westford St. at the Towle Land. Other agenda items were discussed until Wey joined the meeting.

1. Election of LSC Co-Chair

Lyman nominated Michaud as Co-Chair. DeMay moved that LSC appoint Michaud as Co-Chair, and to accept the resignation of Geltner. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Towle Field Mowing Protocol: Discussion and Proposal (for ConsCom July 15 meeting)

Prior to the meeting Lyman distributed a draft proposal for Towle Field based upon the document "Field Management - Mowing Strategies to Maintain Ecologically Valuable Fields, SVT, updated July 2020." The proposal followed management procedures for "Small Fields" in this document, meaning fields that are too small to support ground-nesting birds.

After writing this, Lyman spoke with Steve Spang, who has been mowing the fields at Spencer Brook Reservation (owned by CCF) for about five years. Spang said that he followed the protocols recommended by the Native Plant Trust (formerly New England Wildflower Society). He mows the fields once a year after the first hard (killing) frost and mows as close to the ground as possible. CCF volunteers cut brush and small trees along the stone wall. Spang has not seen a problem with build-up of thatch (see discussion below); he thought the mowing protocol has been successful.

Lyman asked for comments from LSC members. Geltner said that the proposal should state LSC's goals, so ConsCom is clear as to what we are hoping to achieve. Lyman noted that in the Towle Management plan, one of the goals was to encourage recreational activities as well as

conservation, although impacts on recreational uses was not discussed in the mowing proposal. Ognibene asked about the recreational uses of Towle Field. Lyman said that cross-country skiing was once popular, and Brownrigg said that kite-flying, model rocketry, and picnicking were popular years ago. Over the years poison ivy moved into the field and interfered with recreational uses. (A program to remove poison ivy and other invasives was started in 2015 and is continuing.) Hurley said that the mowing proposal should focus on habitat, rather than people.

Geltner asked why removing the buildup of thatch every 2-3 years was recommended. No one seemed to know why thatch buildup is considered a problem. DeMay visited the SVT website and found that thatch is detrimental to certain ground-nesting birds. Asarkof said that, according to the Xerces Society, some insects overwinter in dead plant material, and that this material should be left in place. She said that the proposal should say "mow after the first hard frost" since this frost kills many insects and plants.

After taking comments, Lyman said he will make revisions to the proposal and send it to LSC members before the next ConsCom meeting on July 15.

3. Wey proposal for Towle Field (8:00 PM)

Wey and a group of other Acton Street residents are interested in removing vegetation from the stone wall near Westford Street near Towle Field, and Wey was at the meeting to discuss their proposal. They would remove trees, shrubs, and vines along the wall in order to "...reveal the original beauty of this stone wall." They would use loppers, small saws, etc. but no chemicals. The Carlisle DPW would remove piles of brush.

Lyman asked LSC members if they had comments. Brownrigg said he was not clear on what was meant by "reveal"; he asked if the removal was, for example, 20% or 100% of the total mass, and what species of plants would be targeted. Wey said he was not good at plant identification, and simply wanted the wall to be exposed from the ground up. Brownrigg said that grapes and Virginia creeper berries are a food source for birds and other wildlife and that he was not in favor of their removal. Lyman said that vines growing on trees obstruct the view of the field from the road, and many people value this view. Ognibene thought that LSC members should look at the wall and get an idea of the relative amounts of different species, including invasive plants such as oriental bittersweet and poison ivy. He thought that there could be a compromise solution that would satisfy both parties by, for example, selectively pruning the vines.

Wey suggested that only the section of wall that begins near Munroe Hill Road and extends to the gap in the wall farther east be considered for clearing. Lyman asked if LSC members would be interested in visiting this section of wall in order to decide a course of action. Most members were interested, and Lyman will schedule a visit later in the year, and report their recommendations to Wey.

4. Property Visitation Survey: Results and Future Actions

Lyman had previously submitted a questionnaire with a list of all town owned conservation lands to LSC members. He asked them to note how often they visit the properties: often, sometimes, rarely, or never. After receiving the results from 6 members, he ranked the results in terms of property size and also the overall visitation score. The most frequently visited properties and their scores were Towle (15), Cranberry Bog (14), Greenough (14), Benfield (12), and Foss Farm (12).

At the bottom of the list, there were 14 properties that scored 3 or lower. Lyman thought that these "orphan" properties should be visited by an LSC member at least once or twice a year, and asked for volunteers. Two of the properties, Blanchette Land and Macone Property have no access, and Buttrick Woods has no trail, so these were not included. LSC members and Willard indicated which properties they will visit.

Michaud will prepare a list of properties and the people who volunteered to check them.

5. Initial Review of LSC Action Items from 2021 OS&RP

Lyman asked members to think about action items from the OS&RP list that LSC could begin working on. Michaud suggested making a list of properties that could have handicap parking. DeMay suggested including specific locations of parking places and signs. Currently only Foss Farm has a handicap parking place. Benfield Land has a parking place for conservation land visitors but no designated handicap place within this area. Other conservation lands mentioned as candidates were the Cranberry Bog, Towle Land, and Greenough Land (main lot only?).

Lyman will begin working on obtaining cost estimates for handicap parking signs, to be included for funding with other signs at next year's spring Town Meeting.

6. Greenough Dam repair update

Willard said that the lowest bidder has been hired for the dam repair and restoration. Bob Stevens of Stevens Associates has been hired to oversee the project. Lyman asked if there will be a report with photographs after the project is complete. Willard said that there will be a report and she has begun taking pre-construction photographs.

Old Business

Items listed under Old Business were not discussed due to time constraints.

Documents discussed:

- "Towle Field Management Recommendations: Quotes from Three Reports", W. Lyman, July 2021
- "Land Stewards' Proposal for Towle Field", W. Lyman, July 2021

- "Table 1. Survey of LSC Members' Visitation Frequency to Town-Owned Conservation Lands, June 2021
- "Table 2. Town-Owned Conservation Lands Ranked by LSC's Overall Visitation Score", W. Lyman, June 2021
- "Towle Field stone wall clean-up", Memorandum to LSC, Marc Wey, July 10, 2021

Next Meetings:

August 10, 2021 @ 7 PM

September 14, 2021 @ 7 PM

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Submitted by Tom Brownrigg

Minutes approved: 8/10/21