

Bolton Conservation Commission
February 1, 2016
Bolton Town Office

Members present: Lars Botzjorns (chair), Amy Ludwin, Steve McLeod
Jerry Mullen, Ali Kosiba, Virginia Haviland

Members absent: none

Guests: Rob Mullen

Public present: Bonnie Mullen

The meeting came to order at 8:05 p.m.

1. Review minutes of the January 18, 2016 meeting

Steve moved (Jerry 2nd) to accept minutes as written. All were in favor.

2. Public comment

None

3. Preston Pond Conservation Area

3a. Review overall plan draft

Overall notes:

Steve is interested in early successional habitat -- but Lars indicated that it is covered more specifically in the forest management plan. Ali is interested in how the Ecological Protection Zones were determined and what is and isn't allowed in an EPZ. Lars thinks that VLT might have information on that in their edits. Virginia is interested in clarifying what is and isn't allowed on specific trails. Right now it is unclear what is allowed on certain trails.

Section 5.2

Robert noted that mountain bikes do rip up trails, and the trails at PP aren't designed for mountain bikes. Jerry said we should at least restrict mountain biking during the mud season, and that we should check with VAST about their guidelines. Lars noted that the soils aren't suitable for mountain bikes. Robert

suggested that perhaps fat bikes could be allowed but only in winter, however Steve noted that VAST might have issues with winter mountain biking tearing up the groomed VAST trail. **Lars moved (Jerry 2nd) to have mountain bikes be listed under prohibited uses in section 5.6. Motion passed unanimously.** Section II (a) will also be revised to reflect the mountain biking restriction (p.4).

Section 5.4 - Trapping criteria:

Discussion focused on moving trapping to Section 5.3 and determining criteria by which the BCC will assist the Select Board in deciding whether to approve a request to trap and under what conditions. Amy provided ideas via email from Joss Besse as well as a list of her own thoughts. She had also posted the issue to the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions for feedback. Lars recommended that the Commission develop a list of criteria and vote on them in total.

[Consensus criteria are underlined.]

Criteria for approving requests to trap on the PPCA:

RE: requiring recommendations from other landowners about the history of the trapper. Steve thinks this is excessive. Lars thinks that we should require that trappers have submitted the most recent annual VTDF&W mail survey to show their commitment to scientific furbearer management.

RE: The number of trappers who can trap at one time. Steve thinks that this isn't needed because there are not enough trappers in the state to create crowding issues. It was noted the extensive recreational use of the PPCA will likely limit its desirability to trappers anyway. Ali suggested not to keep it vague. Lars and Jerry suggested that preference be given to Bolton residents. No specific limit was decided (see following).

RE: Permission form and notification. The VTDF&W courtesy card is a good starting point for a form to be developed by the BCC for the PPCA, which would include questions to help the Select Board use these criteria. A trapper would file such permission with the SB, which would warn the item on its agenda, and invite

the BCC to attend the meeting to provide input. The SB would not wait for the BCC to discuss the request at a regularly scheduled BCC meeting, out of consideration of the timeliness of the request. At the same time, trappers would be encouraged to give the SB as much lead time as possible to make an informed decision. The SB would have in hand the permission form, criteria, and information from the most-recent VTDF&W site review (provided to the SB prior to the trapping season by the BCC).

Criteria for setting conditions on approved requests:

RE: Set back from trails. Steve noted that a restriction is fine as long as it doesn't prohibit trapping of beavers underwater. Amy has heard a lot of concern about dogs and small children running off trail, especially as trapping season begins in October. Jerry and Steve suggested 30 paces from any trail (30 yards), unless the trap is [X] inches underwater, or under ice (underwater figure 'X' to be determined after consulting with VTDF&W).

RE: Would we consider EPZs out of bounds for trapping? Such a restriction would include both ponds. Steve noted that the conservation easement doesn't restrict trapping in the EPZs and that he doesn't think non-commercial trapping has any negative impacts. Robert noted that trapping may be construed as commercial in that trappers sell fur. Lars had asked Cara at VLT about trapping as a commercial activity, and she said VLT is not concerned with small-scale trapping. Virginia noted that the easement states that the primary objectives are to preserve the ecological status of the land. Amy added that because we are managing a 'conservation area' and we should limit impacts to EPZs, out of consideration for their unique qualities. Robert noted that it would be introducing a new predator into the EPZs and said that his friend who is a VTDF&W biologist was concerned that recolonization could be slow because Preston Pond is at the upper limit of the watershed. Steve noted that he trusts VTDF&W furbearer biologist Chris Bernier who has said recolonization by beaver should readily occur. Robert noted that VTDF&W bases recommendations on proxy data and doesn't know exactly what the carrying capacity of the PPCA is.

Lars suggested we include two check boxes: one asking whether trapping will have an ecological benefit, the other if it will do ecological harm. Discussion ensued on how this would be determined and consensus was reached on having an annual on-site assessment of the property by the VTDF&W furbearer biologist to inform decision-making for the ensuing trapping season. Amy asked for a vote on not allow trapping in EPZs and Jerry suggested that Lars draft two options for this criterion, one prohibiting trapping in the EPZ's, and the other deciding requests in EPZ's on a case-by-case basis, pending VTDF&W site review.

RE: Limits on the number and species of animals trapped. Ali asked that the BCC receives a copy of the annual VTDF&W survey filled out by trappers at the PPCA, that includes the number and sex of taken animals. Robert added that PPCA trappers report accidental take to the BCC. In terms of species limitations, Steve thinks that we should defer to VTDF&W and their site review to determine any restrictions. Robert wondered about how to keep dogs out of coyote traps. Amy wants public training about extricating pets from leg hold traps. Ali noted that fishers are the only effective predator of porcupines, which can have severe impacts on timber stands under reduced predation. All agreed that regular (annual or more frequent) visits by VTDF&W would address these and other questions.

RE: Access to traps. All agreed that snowmobiles could be used only on the VAST trail and direct access to traps would be by foot.

RE: VTDF&W regulations. All agreed these would be explicitly followed, including the trapper's name and address on each trap.

RE: Safety notice to the public. All agreed the BCC should be responsible for posting information about trapping at access points to the PPCA. Steve thought information at trailhead kiosks would be sufficient to make visitors generally aware that hunting, fishing and trapping are allowed on the property. Amy added that specific trapping activity would also be signed on the trails in the vicinity of the traps (separate from the kiosks, where the message may be missed). Lars noted that local trapper Matt Mead is helping the VTDF&W to develop signage and we

could piggyback on that effort. Amy asked about the Town's liability in the case of accidents during trapping season. Steve noted that Vermont has strong statutes to protect landowners, unless landowners are grossly negligent. Jerry recalls that when he was on SB, the town lawyer noted that a lack of insurance protects the town, however the Town does have insurance (there was a question about the towns' sovereign immunity). Amy agreed to ask the SB about this before the next meeting.

RE: Baiting of traps. All agreed we need more information about this from Chris Bernier at VTDF&W.

The discussion about criteria ended with the goal to vote at the next meeting on a refined list to be developed by Lars.

Section 5.9 - Trail management plan.

Lars recommended that to keep the PPCA Management Plan as simple as possible, that specific trail needs be addressed in the body of the main plan, and not as a separate addendum (like the Forest Management Plan). He noted the trail system is not complicated, and that most issues are in the category of general maintenance, which is already addressed in Section 5.8. Other specific trail issues (currently a half-dozen or so) can be listed as bullet items similar to how actions are listed in other sections of the plan. Consensus was reached that Section 5.9 be dropped from the plan. Ali noted that trail use is having the greatest impact on the land and should be stated as a top priority in the plan. Virginia noted that on p. 24 we should remove wording about any formal connection to the CRAG-VT trails at Upper West. She also asked that equestrian use be officially designated for the VAST trail only.

Plowing of PPCA parking lots - Amy reported on her meeting with the SB (during the BCC meeting). In brief, the Town crew is not willing to do the Notch Road access on a regular basis as it would require a special trip with the smaller truck. The Notch Road lot also needs improvements to facilitate plowing. The Stage

Road parking lot is too difficult to plow because it would impede the VAST trail. The SB suggested the BCC hire a private contractor to plow the Notch Road lot

4. Town Meeting

Lars will respond to questions about the PPCA by stating we are still in the drafting phase and a public hearing of some sort will be held once the plan is completed.

¼ cent tax for the Conservation Fund: Ali mentioned that Judy from RCC has had success for ¼ cent tax conservation fund promotion on FPF. Jerry agreed to draft an article promoting the tax for the Bolton Gazette and FPF, especially in light of potential preservation of Wheeler Field. Steve made his position known in opposition to the ¼ cent tax.

5. Old Business

Wheeler Field Update

- Public meeting on 2/9 at Smilie
- Need to clarify BCC role vis-a-vis SB, including how to communicate with them
- For now the BCC doesn't need to do much.

Fiddlehead Management

Jerry will pen a draft article for the Bolton Gazette in the spring promoting stewardship of floodplain habitat in general. Ali noted that there was a comment at the last meeting that camping and other high impacts are happening at the Sarah Holbrook property. Lars noted that the BCC should eventually address the need for a management plan for the property. Ali will continue to be the contact on this issue.

Potholes

Lars read a letter (dated Jan. 26) from Lydia Mendez (Vt River Conservancy) about the new ownership situation at the Potholes. Lars noted that the interested parties should meet to discuss use of the site after the sale is finalized.

6. Next meeting agenda

PPCA: Review revised draft forest and wildlife habitat management plan, section 7 of the main plan, public review process for the final draft, finalize trapping criteria. Floodplain forest inventory landowner contact letter (assuming grant comes through). BCC liaisons.
Election of officers.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Ali Kosiba and Lars Botzjorns

These minutes were read and approved by the Bolton Conservation Commission on:

March 28, 2016,



Lars Botzjorns, Chair, For the Commission

