

Bolton Conservation Commission
January 18, 2016
Smilie Memorial School

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

Members absent: none

Guests: Leslie Pelch, Chris Bernier (VTDF&W), Cara Montgomery (VLT), Rob Mullen, Kim Royar (VTDF&W), Sean Fowler (VTDF&W), Dana Joyal (VTDF&W)

Public present: Bruce Baroffio, Rebecca Marquis, Bonnie Mullen, Bobbie Summers, David Parot, Brian Miller, Randy Barrows, Diane Barrows, Kyle Miller, Jason Michever, Gene Armstrong, Ron Lafreniere, Luke Ingram, Mike Covey, Scott H., Joss Besse, Craig Newman, Mark ?, Josh Champney, Taylor Krammer, Matthew Mead, Alicia Norton.

The meeting came to order at 6:04 p.m.

1. Review minutes of the November 16, 2015 meeting

Move to accept as written: Steve, 2nd Ali, passed by all.

2. Public comment

A letter was submitted to the BCC by Protect our Wildlife, of Stowe, questioning VTDF&W trapping data and opposing any trapping in the Preston Pond Conservation Area (PPCA).

David Parot, Bolton: Will there be additional parking and signage for the PPCA? How is parking advertised; it's hard to find. Lars says parking will be addressed in the plan as the need has grown. Amy said 911 signage in place in parking areas. David also asked about a management plan for the town-owned Sarah Holbrook property. Lars stated that could happen after the Preston Pond plan is done.

Mike Covia, Williamstown: Applauds involvement of Fish & Wildlife, thinks Select Board made right decision to allow trapping at Preston Pond.

Bruce Baroffio, Northfield: Look towards trapping guidelines on state lands, they're successful.

Randy Barrows, Milton, VT Trappers Assoc.: Applauds Select Board's decision, Preston Pond open for traditional use.

Ron Lafreniere, Bolton: In favor of multiple use of PPCA, keep open to everyone, not just for walkers.

3. Preston Pond Conservation Area

3a. Review overall plan draft

Trapping, Sec. 5.4 of the draft plan: Currently as written follows state land regs, as private landowners require notification and can deny permission, but what about municipal lands? Game Warden Fowler read the statute, which indicates the need to notify of any landowner if not the state, state licence assumes permission for state lands. VTDF&W has a notification form we could use. If trapping is moved to section 5.3 it would require town permission. Steve asked to hear from Select Board members in attendance on three options, keep current language in line with VT statutes, require permission on a case-by-case basis, or write blanket permission into the plan.

Ron L (SB): His opinion have people ask to trap, notify at parking lot kiosks. Ron thinks permission case by case would come from SB, with CC input at the SB meeting, to avoid delays in waiting for the next CC meeting. Gene Armstrong (SB) stated the SB should give permission, and the CC advises.

Amy L asked that SB make decisions be informed by ecological conditions in place at the time. Lars noted that trapping is currently managed under recreation, not as a wildlife management practice for mammals.

Kim Royar (VTDF&W): they've considered the ecological context of trapping as a form of predation that used to be provided by wolves, whereas coyotes have just started preying on beavers more intensively. Jerry noted we need population data to make biologically-based recommendations. Chris B (VTDF&W) noted going back to 1984 there has been very little trapping pressure on beaver in Bolton. They may be causing problems elsewhere, so a few harvested now may preclude nuisance problems later. Amy recalled some folks at the recent SB meeting noting unwanted beaver ponds on their land near the PPCA. The Game Wardens noted that nuisance trapping occurs for a fee, which could be precluded by wild trapping.

Steve asked if there are differentiated ecological zones in Vermont for beaver management and Chris indicated that aquatic species are managed on the watershed level, however Preston Pond has too small a sample size good data inference. Steve asked if the PPCA beavers trapped, will more come? Chris responded that plenty of young disperse each spring, and he thinks the PPCA would soon be repopulated as long as adequate food exists. It was noted many of the historic ponds on the property currently have low quality foods near the shore, however an expert assessment would be helpful. Chris recommended patch cuts to optimize food and habitat for beavers.

Brian Miller, a trapper, stated no one goes in and wipes out a population, and there are other animals to trap than beaver, such as fisher, coyote, etc. Trappers typically take one male and one female beaver and then stop. He stated trappers are a close-knit and ethical group in regular contact with VTDF&W. Trapper Randy Barrows noted that he nuisance trapped 27 beavers and there are more in one area. Another trapper indicated a concern that with changing membership of the CC and SB over time, traditional uses may not get a favorable hearing.

Joss Besse suggested that each decision about trapping rely on criteria for allowing trapping in the first place and conditions on approved requests, for example, distance from trails. Lars stated that the existing trapping language could move to Section 5.3 (activities requiring town permission) with the need for additional language on criteria.

Steve moved (Jerry 2nd) that the CC, in line with the recommendation of the two SB members in attendance, allow trapping in the PPCA with permission for each request by the SB, subject to clear and direct criteria to be developed by the CC, the purpose being not to discourage trappers with excessive red tape. Steve received confirmation that the current approved request is grandfathered. All approved.

Chris welcomed the chance to walk the PPCA to assess furbearer habitat, and Chris and Kim offered to help the CC with developing criteria for trapping.

Before proceeding with the agenda, Jerry moved (Steve 2nd) to adopt modified Robert's Rules of Order (for small groups), which allows the chair to make motions. All approved. This motion is in effect indefinitely.

VLT edits to the overall plan: Cara confirmed that the exact acreage of the PPCA, as determined by GPS mapping, is 403.2 acres, which will be shown on the Conservation Easement Map. The new map, which shows the adjusted Ecological Protection Zones (EPZ's) is awaiting updated trail information before being finalized. The new map will need to be signed by VLT and the town, and attached to the approved management plan. Joss asked: if the Notch Road access is in an EPZ (for ease of access to manage the property). It is not, as the EPZ boundaries have been redrawn, such that none of the VAST trail is in any EPZ..

Lars addressed the VLT comment in *Section 2, Access/parking*, about how to restrict access by ATVs. The CC will request that VAST gate the Stage Road access and block off the detour by the Notch Road gate. Cara suggested removing the ATV language unless the CC has specific actions to address an ATV problem. ATV use is already prohibited in Section 5. All agreed. The CC will get more of VLT's no-ATV signs to post at problem sites.

Lars noted that the CC will need to address trail management somewhere in the plan and Cara stated she is available to help.

3b. Review revised draft forest and wildlife habitat management plan
Not addressed at this meeting.

3c. ROW issue - Stage Road access

Lars has sent the VAST Trails Director an email informing him of the ROW discrepancy with the current trail location and asking if VAST will contact the landowner about formalizing permission to have the VAST trail cross private land. If so, pedestrian access could piggyback on this request, but should be formalized by the town. The protected corridor offers a less than optimal route for a footpath but could serve as a contingency if the landowner balks at allowing access. Especially need to do this before any release of the map! Steve asked if the town could buy an easement from the landowner if needed? That would protect it forever. Perhaps the town and VAST could cooperate on such a move. Lars will report back to the CC once he hears from VAST.

3d. Trail maps and signage

Leslie Pelch handed out a revised draft of the new trail map in three formats (trailhead kiosk, portable, and online version). Some trail intersections will have maps posted as well ("You are here"). She will drop any reference to non-marked/informal routes and will gather data on the unnamed cutoff between the Loop Trail and Libby's Look/VAST junction. The crossing of the former Long Trail will be shown, but not as an access to the Notch Road (we want to avoid burdening that heavily used trailhead for hikers and climbers with more parking). She will add a 'P' for parking and the number of spaces at each trailhead, along with a note to park off the travelway if the lots are full (and don't block the VAST trail!).

A discussion about parking ensued as Ali noted that the Notch Road lot could be expanded fairly easily. Ali asked whether the town could plow the two parking areas in winter, which would help alleviate parking on the road. It was agreed that Section 2 of the plan state year-round parking is available (hence requiring the town to plow them). This may entail an annual cost.

Leslie and the CC discussed coordinating trail colors on the map with trail markers on the ground. She will confirm distances shown for trail segments and add the names of a couple of natural features. A brief stewardship statement will be included that reflects multiple use of the property as a whole but restricted uses of trails as they are managed by the town. CC members will assist in developing the message.

3e. Public comment process (SB review, public meetings, Town Meeting)

Not addressed at this meeting.

4. Old Business

4a. Update on UVM proposal for floodplain inventory

Ali reported that she is finalizing the request to the UVM Field Naturalist Program for a summer intern to conduct the Winooski River floodplain forest inventory and management recommendations, assuming the project is funded.

4b. Update on Wheeler Field

Ali and Amy will provide an update at the next meeting.

4c. Update on fiddlehead management

Not addressed at this meeting.

4d. Update on Potholes

Not addressed at this meeting.

5. New Business

None.

6. Next meeting agenda

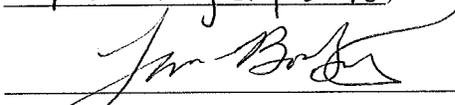
The next meeting is schedule for Monday, February 1, at 6 p.m. at the town office. The remainder of this meeting's agenda will be addressed at that meeting, as well as follow-up on trapping criteria, trail maps, and discussing the CC's role at Town Meeting (promoting the ¼ cent tax, etc.).

Steve moved to adjourn (Jerry 2nd). Meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Virginia Haviland, Amy Ludwin and Lars Botzjorns

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

February 1, 2016.


Lars Botzjorns, Chair, For the Commission

