

Bolton Conservation Commission
Monday, January 26, 2015
Bolton Town Office

Present: Larissa Urban, Lars Botzjorns (Chair), Ken Remsen, Ali Kosiba, Amy Ludwin,
Guest: Keith Thompson, Chittenden County Forester.

The meeting came to order at 6:10 p.m.

1. Minutes of the October 27, 2014 meeting - approved as written.

2. Preston Pond Conservation Area Wildlife and Forest Management Plan - The Commission asked Keith Thompson, Chittenden County Forester, to present the results of his forest stand inventory and provide ideas for forest management over the next ten years.

Keith's cruise of the PPCA involved finding productive and operable stands and those that are too sensitive for active management (e.g., too wet, shallow soils, unique natural community). He settled on six distinct stands with potential for management and summarized the character of each stand for the Commission. He noted that a considerable percentage of the overall forest in the PPCA is overstocked with a simple structure and minimal understory, to the detriment of many interior forest wildlife species.

The Area's Ecological Protection Zones were discussed, including possible alterations to their boundaries that would better reflect the ecological reality, and what conditions under the easement could any management be considered that would support the goals of the EPZ's. Access to managed stands is an issue that needs to be addressed, both with adjacent landowners and with the Vermont Land Trust. The Area is crisscrossed with forest roads, some in poor condition that would need restoration either to be used again or put to bed in the future.

The Commission will need to consider long-term goals for the Area, such as improving bird habitat, sawtimber quantity, and/or tree diversity (Keith noted that future disturbances such as the Emerald Ash Borer could significantly alter the composition of our forests), and how various types forest management (e.g., commercial cuts over a larger portion of the Area versus limited hand cutting with volunteers) could help us reach those goals more quickly than leaving the forest alone. The Area should also be put into context of land management in Bolton, including the significant portion of the town in public ownership. Keith recommended contacting the District 3 State Forester for more information on state land management.

Any commercial harvest would require greater infrastructure, which could have an impact on the aesthetic and recreational values of the land, but would allow us to achieve wildlife habitat goals more broadly. There is not much sawtimber value now, especially given the density of trees in many stands, but thinning would achieve better crown growth for the remaining trees and increased understory growth. Any active management would create openings on the order of one-quarter acre at most.

Commercial operators would need to access 30-50 acres of firewood to be economically viable. The Town would need any operation to at least break-even cost-

wise. Income from timber harvesting could go back into mitigating the environmental impacts of historic management.

Active management would entail a period of public outreach and education about the goals and potential impacts. Commission members expressed concern about significantly altering the experience of visitors, especially in proximity to the trail system.

Lars recommended that the Commission reread the draft of the main plan, especially the sections on wildlife habitat and forestry, to make sure our consideration of forest management goals is consistent with the main plan.

For our next meeting in March, Keith will develop a draft plan that will include the stand information and management prescriptions for a couple of stands. We would like to invite our current Preston Pond Stewards Group and members of the PPCA Management Plan Subcommittee to review the draft.

Invasive plants: Keith also discussed a quick inventory of occurrences of invasive plants in West Bolton through a class at UVM. He noted that occurrences that threaten sensitive natural communities, or are the the incipient stage, should be addressed first, such as Knotweed on Notch Rd. and Japanese Barberry on the shore of Preston Pond, before they spread. Keith recommended the INaturalist app for adding information to the database (called Mapping for Healthy Forests). Keith offered to have the UVM students create more detailed maps for our use for prevention or control.

3. Town Plan revision update

Lars reported that a draft of the natural resources section is still in process, and will be shared with the Commission when Lars and PC Chair Linda Baker finish the draft. Lars has attended two PC meetings when the NR section has been discussed.

4. Old Business

a. **Green Up Day-** Amy will post another notice in the Front Porch Forum seeking a volunteer to coordinate Green Up Day. Ali and Amy can do some other outreach: make sure to get bags for the town office, general store and Smile School.

b. **Keeping Track presentation** - February 3 in Richmond. Larissa is taking care of arranging the BCC's sponsorship and distributing posters.

c. **Joiner Brook Management Plan** - further action tabled for now. Lars will keep it on future agendas.

5. New Business:

a. **Terms:** Larissa's and Ken's terms end in 2015, however at what point is unclear. Lars will clarify with Amy Grover. Neither of them wants to continue on the Commission. Larissa will maintain her involvement with the Preston Ponds Stewards Group. Lars will put out the call for new members at Town Meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Ludwin and Lars Botzjorns


Approved as written 3/16/15