

Bolton Conservation Commission
Monday, March 31, 2014
Bolton Town Office

Present: Lars Botzjorns (chair), Amy Ludwin, Ken Remsen, Larissa Urban.

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

Lars noted Kath Costello's resignation which brings the Commission's membership to five.

1. Minutes of January 20, 2014 meeting. Approved with no changes.

2. Science to Action Project

The Commission reviewed a draft tiered ecological priorities map prepared by Jens Hilke of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. The map is to provide guidance to the Bolton Planning Commission and the Bolton public on future development in the town, including avoiding highly sensitive and significant natural features and habitats. The present draft includes all but around one percent of the town in some level of conservation priority. It was noted that much of Bolton consists of large blocks of unbroken habitat (Contiguous Habitat Units), which are considered as a tertiary level priority to maintain their contiguousness as much as possible. Secondary, and more so tertiary, levels allow for some development at the edges. A top priority will be to protect existing floodplain forest, as well as promote the reclamation of this habitat type, along the Winooski River. It was noted that conservation in Bolton happens in the context of the larger region, such that we shouldn't feel the need to try to conserve or promote every habitat type in Bolton if those needs are being met elsewhere. Bolton's 'specialty' is in providing extensive core habitat for the region at large.

The map does not substitute for site-level review, but can show where town boards can be more circumspect about potential development. The discussion focused on the extent of secondary level lands and their location vis-à-vis existing development. Much of the overlap of residential development and secondary tier conservation zones may be due to the coarseness of data on (i.e. potential) road crossings by wildlife. We will ask Jens more about this. The Commission discussed a town-wide survey to gather information on road crossings, to focus future roadside tracking efforts the Commission may coordinate. We will revisit this idea at our next meeting.

Next steps: Lars will discuss with Jens the Commission's questions about the criteria for secondary tier conservation priority. The Commission is invited to the Planning Commission meeting on April 14 to help update definitions in the Town Plan, as part of

the process to incorporate the STA inventory data and conservation planning into the revision of the Town Plan. The Commission will review the Tiered Ecological Priorities Map at our next meeting in May before presenting it to the PC.

3. Preston Pond Conservation Area Management Plan

The Commission discussed the parent plan draft with action on the Trail Management and Wildlife and Forest Management subplans to come at a future date. The draft plan will cover the next ten years, although portions are already being instituted, including the volunteer Forest Steward position. The new draft plan contains more background information on the Area's natural resources and maintains much of the on-the-ground management practice of the previous ten years. The exception will be in more active management of wildlife habitat, including small patch cuts to promote habitat for certain bird species. The Commission noted that beaver continue to be active in creating openings and our management of the Area should be informed by management of surrounding lands, i.e. how much open habitat is being created in the vicinity? Any timber cutting that occurs in the Conservation Area will need to be accompanied by education and outreach to the public, as well as sensitivity to the aesthetic appeal of the property to users year-round. Horse logging should be considered. We will also need to determine the best access for any logging operation, the options being limited. There was discussion of developing a loop trail on the west side of Preston Pond that would partially travel on private land (Mullen). This loop would need to cross the stream below the pond and the current bridge has been washed out. Lars and Quinn Keating will look into that option as part of developing the Trail Management plan. County Forester Keith Thompson is working on the Wildlife and Forest Management plan.

Next steps: The Commission will next review the plan in totality when the two subplans are complete.

4. Old Business

Green-Up Day – Kathy Costello will be Bolton's contact person

Keeping Track Program – on hold while KT looks for funding

Friends of the Winooski River stormwater grant – The Commission discussed having both a stormwater presentation and a rain barrel workshop at Bolton Valley, given the town's goal to protect the water quality of Joiner Brook. Amy Ludwin, the BCC's contact person for this four-town grant, will stay in touch with grant coordinator Ann Smith and will reach out to David Parot of the BV Condominium Association to ascertain their interest.

5. New Business

The Commission briefly discussed membership levels and agreed that the current level of five is sufficient, but we should get word out that additional members would be welcome, especially from the southern or eastern parts of Bolton. Lars will talk with Amy Grover about an announcement in the Gazette.

6. Next meeting agenda

Tiered Ecological Priorities Map, stormwater grant, Preston Pond plan review (?), wildlife crossings survey.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Ludwin and Lars Botzjorns

Approved on May 19, 2014.