

Town of Farmington
Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 14, 2016

Commission Members Present:

Dave Connolly, Chairman
Randy Orvis, Vice Chairman
Charlie King, Selectmen's Rep.
Resta Detwiler
Bill Fisher
Laura Bogardus
Richard Ballou

Commission Members Absent:

Rose Muise

Others Present:

Jim Oehler, NH DRED, Fish & Game
Resident Patience Taylor

1). Call to Order:

Chairman Connolly called the meeting to order at 6 p.m.

2). Pledge of Allegiance:

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3). Public Comment: None.

4). NH DRED/Jim Oehler:

Fish & Game State Wildlife Habitat Biologist Jim Oehler told the members his duties include management of wildlife areas on approx. 2,000 acres across the state on 114 parcels. He said he also manages a grants program that provides assistance to private land owners and municipalities to manage habitats on their lands of 25 acres or more. He urged interested landowners to go to the NH Fish & Game website, Small Grants Program for more information. Mr. Orvis noted that the commission got a grant from this program for management of the woodcock area of the French property.

Mr. Oehler said he is also involved in the land acquisition program which seeks to add more acres to the state wildlife management system. He added that he also works with NH DRED doing habitat work on DRED lands including the Blue Job State Forest.

He began the project presentation with a map of the Blue Job State Forest which is located in Farmington and Strafford.

The actual project is scheduled for 60 acres of the old blueberry barrens located between Meaderboro Road and First Crown Road. He said this part of Blue Job was acquired in 1991, has several stone walls and was used as a commercial blueberry farm prior to acquisition by the state. The state has done a number of prescribed burns to property from 1995-2000, in 2002 and in 2005 he said. He said the Brontosaurus, which is rotating drum type mower mounted on an excavator was last used to maintain the overgrowth in 1999.

The presentation included several photos of the 1995 burn and photos of the new growth in the area 16 months later in July 1996. He explained that burning the blueberry bushes is similar to pruning apple trees in that it encourages new growth and improves production of the fruit. It also sets back any encroaching brush and trees he said.

Current conditions at the site as of April 2016 include 29 acres of blueberries and small white

pine and birch saplings as nothing has been done to the area since 2005. There is also another 20 acres of a mix of birch, pine, red maple, huckleberry and blueberry he said.

Mr. Oehler said they plan to burn 29 acres of the blueberry barrens and the Brontosaurus mower will be brought in a rotating schedule as follows: prep for the burn in the fall, prune the blueberries and set back small pines and birch trees in March/April at 2-4 year intervals for each section of the parcel taking 6-12 years he said. He added the NH Prescribed Burn Council will assist in the planning and implementation of the burn.

He then described some of the species found in the area including snakes, turtles, grouses, several types of birds, Bobcat, bees, bats, bear and turkey all of which need the forest cover for nesting, foraging and protection.

Mr. Oehler said because this area is highly used by public they plan to notify Selectmen, Conservation Commissions and send out press releases to notify the public about the scheduled work. There will also be on-site signs and postings on the DRED website and Face Book page he said.

Mr. Connolly said there has been a serious problem with the removal of some of the stone wall in the cemetery area and ATV drivers driving through the openings. He asked what could be done to curtail access to these areas.

Mr. Oehler said the only thing they planned to do was to place cameras in the vicinity and ask Conservation Officers to carefully monitor the area and the cameras.

He said the riders are also breaching the wall near Scruton Road where the opening was blocked but they just ride right around the wall.

Mr. Connolly said the Commission first got involved with another DRED representative due to complaints about the ATV damage to trails and walls in that area. He added that the "beaten down" trails were also caused by the 4-wheeled vehicles.

He asked if there was anything different planned as part of the burn/mowing project to help deter the violators.

Mr. Oehler said he did not have anything planned to address this issue as he is focused on habitat issues. He said he would pass the information along to the DRED manager and see if they can assist with this problem.

Mr. Orvis said the best way to curtail this problem is to provide legitimate places for ATV riders to go. He added that he has surveyed in the area and first noticed ATV use there about 10 years ago.

Mr. Connolly asked if there would be a problem if spectators were present to watch the project work.

Mr. Oehler said it probably wouldn't be allowed during the prescribed fire as personnel must be trained and deemed physically fit to be on the fire line. He said he would need to check with the burn boss to see if it would be possible to observe the burn from a safe distance.

Mr. Oehler said that he could arrange for viewing during the Brontosaurus mowing work.

Mr. Connolly thanked Mr. Oehler for attending the meeting and keeping the members/residents "in the loop" as to what is going on there.

Recess- Chairman Connolly called for a 5 minute recess at 6:20 p.m. The meeting reconvened at 6:30 p.m.

5). Expedited App/Randy Orvis:

Mr. Orvis stepped down from the Commission to act as agent for applicants Paul and Laurie Levesque who are seeking a Dredge and Fill Permit for wetlands crossings for a 6 lot subdivision on Ridge and Aiken Roads. He said that earlier this year the applicants received Conditional Approval for a 6 lot subdivision of their property from the Planning Board. Two of the lots require wetlands crossings to get to the building site. The last 2 pages of the application is an actual copy of the subdivision plan he said.

The proposed crossings are on proposed Lot 14-3 and Lot 14-6. There are existing agricultural crossings there and the applicants propose to improve the crossings to allow for residential access to the sites. The impact to Lot 14-3 is approx. 1200 sq. ft. and the impact to Lot 14-6 is approx. 1600 sq. ft. for a total wetlands impact of 2800 sq. ft. The total impact is under the 3000 sq. ft. so it qualifies for an expedited application he said.

Mr. Orvis said the difference between a regular and expedited application is the time allowed for the state to conduct a review and approve the application. He said if the Commission members sign the expedited application the state can take up to 40 days to approve the request and if the members don't approve the expedited application the state may take up to 75 days for approval. He also provided the members with photos of the crossings locations.

Mr. King noted the bigger wetlands impact would be to Lot 14-6 and asked about the classification of the wetlands that would be impacted.

Mr. Orvis said the wetlands are classified as Class 2 wetlands and are included on the National Inventory of Wetlands. He said this was the site of the applicant's original welding shop before it was moved to its current location on Route 11. He added the photos show existing tote roads and the applicants plan to have a culvert installed but do not otherwise intend to change the drainage pattern of the site.

He said the Natural Heritage Bureau did not find any endangered species for this site; the abutters have been notified and then listed the information provided in the application packet.

Mr. Connolly asked about the terms for the Conditional Approval granted by the Planning Board.

Mr. Orvis said the conditions included getting a wetlands permit and receipt of driveway permits for Ridge and Aiken Roads. The proposed driveways are existing access points once used for agricultural uses and the applicants are asking for only one new point of access for the subdivision.

Mr. King asked if there will be any mitigation required for the wetlands impact.

Mr. Orvis said there is no mitigation required until there are at least 10,000 sq. ft. of wetlands impacted.

Mr. Connolly asked for further questions/comments and hearing none called for a motion.

Motion: (Detwiler, second Ballou) to have the Chairman sign the expedited application passed 6-0.

Chairman Connolly then signed the application.

6). Old Business:

A). 30 Hornetown Road Sign- Mr. Fisher said he went to the French Property Conservation area and installed a sign stating the name of the site and the new address number to provide a reference for emergency crews attempting to rescue someone. He encouraged the public to hike the easy trail and enjoy the all of sights to be seen there. He also stated he intends to add

a “Public Welcome” section to sign to help make it stand out to users attempting to find the entrance to the property.

Mr. Connolly thanked Mr. Fisher for volunteering his time, money and materials for the new sign. He said he suggested the Police and Fire Chiefs and some of their dept. members walk the trail and familiarize themselves with the site.

He then asked if the Commission should ask for an E911 designation for the Dubois property and the Town Forest.

Consensus of members was to request Chairman Connolly contact Fire Chief Reinert to begin the process to obtain an E911 designation for the River Road (Dubois) and Bay Road (Town Forest) properties.

Ms. Detwiler asked if there are GPS maps of the Dubois and Town Forest parcels and noted that UNH is conducting a program to map hiking trails in the area.

Mr. Connolly said there are GPS maps of the properties in the kiosks at each site.

B). School Board Recycling Presentation- At the previous meeting Mr. Connolly told the Commission he would like to make a presentation to the School Board to offer their assistance in updating/revising the recycling program at the Town’s 3 schools. He provided members with a list of key topics he planned to speak to the board about to try to get the program going in the schools. He said the topics should include the importance of recycling, the Town recycling program and the current recycling efforts at each of the schools. He asked the members for their thoughts on the matter.

Consensus of the members was to have Chairman Connolly contact the School Board Chairman and request to be placed on their agenda at a future School Board meeting to discuss a recycling program.

Mr. Connolly said he will inform the members when he is scheduled to attend a School Board meeting and asked other members to “back me up” at the meeting. He suggested that Ms. Detwiler has a lot of knowledge about what was done about recycling at the schools after attending a lot of meetings there and her involvement with the high school recycling program. He added she would have a lot to offer at the School Board meeting.

Ms. Detwiller said one of the courses she took at the NH Association of Cons. Com. was entitled “Conservation Commissions and School Partnership Program”.

C). Pound Road Update- Mr. Connolly said the Southeast Land Trust applied for a grant to fund the conservation easement for the Robert Hills property on behalf of the Conservation Commission and the grant has been awarded to the project. He said Jeremy Lougee of SELT was able to obtain an extension from the state for submitting the invoices involved in securing the easement as there is more grant money available. Mr. Lougee applied for the additional grant money on behalf of the Commission which is expected to double the \$1500 already awarded and will help offset the \$10,000 cost for the easement he said.

D). Moose Mountains Regional Greenways Mixer- Mr. Connolly apologized for missing the mixer due to problems with his vehicle. Mr. Ballou said he attended the event and said he found it to be very informative. He will forward an e-mail regarding their plan to get Selectmen, Planning Board and Conservation Commission members to envision recreational uses as well as conservation easements for land in their towns to Mr. Connolly. They are looking for input about what kinds of activities they would want to see allowed on conservation easements in the area he said.

E). UNH Extension Workshop- Mr. Ballou also reported that he attended a trail finder workshop in Concord and told the group about the trail on the French property. He said they asked if GPS coordinates for the trail location were available.

Mr. Connolly said Andrew Fast from the UNH Extension Service is scheduled to attend the next meeting to discuss GPS mapping with the Commission.

F). Any Other Old Business- Ms. Detwiler told the members that she attended the NH Association of Conservation Commissions Annual Dinner and that a lot of good courses were available to the attendees. In addition to the Conservation and School Partnership course mentioned earlier, she also took a courses on “Invasive Species” and “Up with Pollinators”.

Mr. Connolly said that bees have become a hot topic lately and suggested the members consider offering a forum to the public next year.

Mr. Orvis suggested contacting the Strafford County Beekeepers Association for leads to possible speakers for the forum.

Ms. Detwiler said there is a lot of information available on the school partnership program and she is waiting for the information to be posted on the NH ACC website. She noted that part of the program is to get all of the teachers involved in conservation programs and to include the programs in the curriculum so it becomes a school wide effort.

Mr. Connolly suggested the information could be part of the presentation to the School Board if it is received in time for the meeting and could also be used going forward if they are receptive to the Commission’s offer to assist in setting up a recycling program.

7). New Business:

A). Maynard Property- Mr. Connolly said SELT took over management of the easement on the Sheepboro Road property and updated the baseline documentation for the lot. He said he received a packet of the documents which he reviewed and found them to be in order except for misspelling of a Selectman’s name and to remove the name of a Selectman who is no longer on the board. The Commission will receive a copy of the final version for signatures and then to be forwarded to the Board of Selectmen for their approval.

B). 2017 Meeting Dates – Members received a copy of the proposed monthly meeting dates for next year. All meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. except for the March meeting which is scheduled for the third Wednesday in March due to Town Meeting scheduled for March 8.

C). 2016 Monitor Reports- Mr. Connolly said he received a copy of the Monitoring Reports for Conservation Easements held by SELT. The report included information on the Huppe, Maynard, Smith and Witham properties regarding conditions at the sites and any recommendations for improvements. He said all 4 properties were found in favorable condition with no issues at this time. No recommendations were made for any of the properties and the reports will be filed in their respective file folders he said.

8). Review Minutes:

Nov. 9, 2016- Page 1, #4, Interview with UNH Co-op, second line- add the word “of” between “development” and “wetlands”. Page 1, absent list- add “excused” after Ms. Bogardus’ name. Page 2, #6D, first line- strike “Police Chief Jay Drury” and replace with “Farmington Police Dept.” #6D, third line- strike “Chief” and replace with “officer”, #6D, line 5- strike “Chief/ “ and leave “officer”

Page 3, #8, School Recycling Program, line 12- amend “workshop” to “woodshop”.

Motion: (Orvis, second King) to approve the minutes as amended passed 5-0-2 (Ballou, Bogardus abstained).

9). FYI :

A). Intent to Cut- Jason and Carrie Scruton, (Map R7, Lot 4), 63 acre lot, cutting 40 acres;
Ryan Moriarty, Meetinghouse Hill Road, 29 acre lot, cutting 20 acres;
Jason and Carrie Scruton, (Map R6, Lot 4) Camelot Shore Drive, 75 acre lot, cutting 28 acres.

10). January Meeting: Wednesday, January 11, 2017 at 6 p.m.

11). Any Other Business:

A). Statewide Buffers for Wetlands- Ms. Detwiler said she received information from the NH Association of Conservation Commissions asking Commission members for their thoughts regarding an effort to establish a minimum setback buffer from the most important wetlands statewide. Currently NH is the only New England state with no statewide buffer regulations. A group of wetlands scientists reviewed scientific reports on wetlands and determined a minimum setback buffer of 100 feet is needed to protect surface and groundwater water quality and flood storage areas and 300 feet to protect wildlife habitats she said. The information sheet provided also listed several points to consider such if there is need for a minimum buffer, what size should the buffer be and if a statewide buffer should replace the various buffer sizes required throughout the state.

Discussion included if all wetlands are important, how the most important wetlands is defined, what happens if the state defines wetlands differently than local classifications, putting undue hardships on wetlands landowners, some wetlands ordinances contain buffer requirements more restrictive than the permitted uses in the actual wetlands and Farmington is the only town that has classifications for wetlands.

Consensus of the members was to ask Ms. Detwiler to inquire as to which wetlands will be included in the proposed buffer, what criteria will be used to classify the wetlands, and to contact Rep. Judith Spang or Antioch College wetlands scientist Richard Vandepol for more information. Ms. Detwiler said she also plans to provide the NH ACC with a copy of the Farmington Land Use Ordinance, Wetlands Section for their consideration.

12). Adjournment:

Motion: (Orvis, second Bogardus) to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously at 7:15 p.m.

Respectively submitted
Kathleen Magoon
Recording Secretary

Dave Connolly, Chairman

