

MINUTES
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts*
Executive Committee Meeting – March 23, 2023, 2-3:30

Committee members in attendance: Henry Art, Williamstown (Board Chair); Bob O’Connor, EOEEA; Rick Chandler, Ashfield; Kate Lindroos Conlin, Massachusetts Forest Alliance; Keith Ross, Society of American Foresters; Alain Peteroy (clerk) also joined.

Other Board members in attendance: Dicken Crane, Windsor; Marybeth Chichester, Colrain;

Guests/staff in attendance: Charlie Cary, guest speaker; Lisa Hayden, NEFF, Woodlands Partnership Admin. Agent; Jack Guerino, iBerkshires.

1. **Call to Order** at 2:03 pm by H. Art, with Land Acknowledgement. H. Art noted a *NYT* article about “getting beyond land acknowledgement,” and K. Conlin shared a similar topic in *The Atlantic*. H. Art noted there is interest in opening the Board to additional Indigenous perspectives and the hope is eventually to get beyond the repetition into more meaningful dialogue.
2. **Approval of January 17, 2023, minutes.**
B. O’Connor moved to approve the minutes and K. Ross & R. Chandler seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.
3. **An Act Supporting the “Woodlands Partnership of Northwest MA” update.** This proposal relates to the partnership’s desire and vote to change the name from the “Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership” to the name above that the Board voted unanimously to approve in Oct. 2022. Rep. Natalie Blais is facing some roadblocks to moving this forward over concern to not affect current grants or to dissolve the entity in the process. H. Art highlighted a draft bill that has been reviewed by attorneys at EOEEA to correct other minor issues as a model that could be supported by any local legislator if the new name was inserted throughout. K. Conlin made a motion to continue this effort, and Bob O’Connor seconded, unanimously supported.
4. **Proposal to increase membership of the WP of NWM board to include the Indigenous community.** There was suggestion and discussion to specify a representative of an organization rather than an individual to create a new seat on the Board for Indigenous Peoples representation. K. Conlin said she views this step as an absolute necessity and there was consensus to make this recommendation to the Board. Before this is discussed at the full board level, it was suggested to invite a representative from the Ashfield-based Ohketeau Cultural Center, such as Rhonda Anderson, co-founder and a director to speak with the Committee. Hank also suggested inviting someone from the Stockbridge-Munsee community, such as Bonnie Hartley. A. Peteroy supported the board change, but wanted to be sure the decision does not limit representation of other Indigenous groups. R. Chandler voiced concern to make sure the partnership has a clear vision of the future of the organization.
5. **CDS Funding:** L. Hayden reported that the USFS notified the Agent of partial funding awarded at \$540,000 out of a \$1.1 million Congressionally Directed Spending proposal, titled “Action on Forest Climate Resilience” submitted by New England Forestry Foundation for the Partnership, and that match will not be required. She will now need to redraft and resubmit an application to the USFS to operationalize a three-year project.

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6. **Position posting:** With the departure of Sophie Argetsinger as part-time Assistant, a full-time Coordinator position to replace the role is being posted with NEFF to provide additional needed capacity for a variety of functions. L. Hayden will remain the key Agent point person to the Board, supervising the Coordinator, but will slightly downsize her percentage of time to the Partnership due to increased work on other projects that will also provide opportunities for the region. The Agent contract with MA EOEEA runs through June 2025 with state funding.
7. **Status of Board Officers and Committee Chair.** H. Art reported that Art Schwenger of Heath has showed interest in the vice chair position, Dicken Crane of Windsor is considering the Chair and Jeffery Thomas, LEVER is considering the Treasurer position.
8. **Annual Board meeting:** It is expected that the option to hold remote meetings under the Open Meeting law will be extended, but there was some concern about continuing with a hybrid meeting, since it was hard for folks on Zoom to hear all conversations in the room at the last meeting, and a question if we should stick to Zoom only. No decision was made.

Regarding meeting topics, the Forest Conservation Committee needs to be meeting and folks are interested in what land trusts are accomplishing in the Partnership region. A. Peteroy offered to put together a summary of conservation projects completed in the last year or two, and a summary of the number of forest stewardship plans, for the annual meeting. It was also discussed that the Outreach, Education & Research Committee could hold a joint meeting with the Forest Conservation Committee in the near future to review potential Forest Legacy projects. Other potential Annual Meeting themes that have been discussed at Committees include: focus on Dept. of Agriculture and business development issues for forest infrastructure investment by the Natural Resource-based Econ. Dev. Com., and a focus on Indigenous Peoples involvement and representation.

9. **Bringing Value to Wood Residue:** Invited guest Charlie Cary, who previously submitted a proposal to the Executive Committee, presented a thorough review of the value of wood residue, or all the wood left behind in our efforts to live more sustainably. He stated that this wood that is already being cut but not utilized is a ubiquitous resource. The issue is the cost of getting this material to market, and how to make a market for this “low-grade” wood. He noted that the recent student report by Ben Kargère found a lot of the material is being blown on the ground, and once it is chipped, the carbon is released and it will biodegrade quickly. C. Cary encouraged the Exec. Committee to keep engaged on the issue and follow up to determine how much is being cut and being put on a truck, as there needs to be better data and only 3 towns responded to provide data to the student. The general sense is that there is not a steady supply of wood residue which would be needed to create a supply chain. H. Art noted that the enabling legislation prohibits the Partnership from working on biomass from “wood pellets.” There has been some interest in supporting local wood banks for home heating from salvaged wood, and the Partnership can check in on these issues on a regular basis.

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10. **Virtual Forest Center web site & updated Partnership website:** Partners involved in the Rowe MVP grant have been meeting monthly and Mass Audubon is leading work to plan Story Map content for the VFC. An initial Stakeholder focus group meeting regarding gaps in information and local interests was held on Feb. 27 via Zoom and WP Board members were invited. Participants offered a variety of perspectives and priorities for local forests.

11. **New business:** L. Hayden reported that a resident of Savoy contacted the Partnership and is interested in having the town join, and asked for a town warrant template from other towns that are already voted to join, though most joined by a vote of the Select Board. K. Conlin noted that Buckland’s town meeting is May 6 and may also consider joining.

12. There was no Public Comment and K. Conlin moved, and R. Chandler seconded a motion to adjourn, approved at 3:55 p.m.

***On Oct. 11, 2022, the Board of the public body created in 2018 voted unanimously to change its name from the “Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership” (MTWP) to operating as the “Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts” and requested the state legislature and USDA Forest Service to officially establish and recognize the new name.**