

## **Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) Board Meeting**

June 9, 2020

### **Meeting held virtually via Zoom**

Staff: Tom Matuszko, Bob O'Connor, Peggy Sloan, Alyssa Larose, Mark Buccowich (USFS Liaison)

Board Members Attending: Hank Art, Chair (Williamstown), Rick Chandler, Vice Chair (Ashfield), Larry Flaccus (Shelburne), Kyle Hanlon (BRPC), Zachary Feury (North Adams), Beth Girshman (Conway), Andrew Kawczak (Hoosic River Watershed Association), Joe Nowak (Adams), Mark Phelps (New Ashford), Keith Ross (Massachusetts Society of Foresters), Whit Sanford (GSFABA), Kevin Fox (FRCOG), Sheila Kelleher (DRWA), Alain Peteroy (FLT), Jeffrey Thomas (Lever, Inc), and Paul Catanzaro (UMass Amherst),

Others Attending: Keith Nislow (USFS), Mary Wigmore (Ashfield forester)

Meeting Materials:

- MTWP Board 1-28-2020 Draft Meeting Minutes
- K. Nislow Presentation Slides - FS Research in Support of the MTWP: Station, Unit and Location Perspectives

### **1. Introductions**

H. Art commenced the meeting at 6:04 p.m. with introductions of MTWP Board members, staff, and guests on the Zoom call.

### **2. Review and Approval of January 28, 2020 MTWP Board Minutes**

H. Art asked for a motion to approve the January 28, 2020 MTWP Board minutes. A change was requested on page 4, last sentence of the paragraph on the top of the page. Change "one" to "once."

M. Phelps MOVED to accept the January 28, 2020 MTWP Board minutes, as amended. K. Hanlon SECONDED. At 6:12 p.m. the motion PASSED unanimously, with A. Kawczak and R. Chandler abstaining.

### **3. Nomination and Vote for Officers of the MTWP Board –Treasurer and Clerk**

H. Art identified two self-nominations for officers – Mark Phelps for Treasurer, and Whit Sanford for Clerk. Art asked if there were any other nominations. There being none, K. Hanlon MOVED to approve both nominations. A. Kawczak SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously, with M. Phelps abstaining.

### **4. Nomination and Vote for Members of the MTWP Board Executive Committee – 1 Municipal & 1 Regional Organization Representative**

H. Art explained that the Executive Committee is made up of one State, one US Forest Service, two municipal, and one regional organization member. The State member of the Executive Committee has already been nominated. The Committee will meet more frequently than the full Board and will work with the Administrative Agent to keep progress going. At the last meeting there was discussion that the chair of MTWP Board should also chair Executive Committee, but this is not specified in the bylaws and

will need to be added at some point. The current list of self-nominees is H. Art (current Board Chair) from Williamstown, and J. Nowak from Adams, as the two municipal members, and A. Peteroy from the Franklin Land Trust for the regional organization member. Art asked if there are any other nominations.

P. Sloan noted that the Greater Shelburne Falls Area Business Association (GSFABA) expressed interest. W. Sanford said that she is willing to be the regional organization nominee for the GSFABA to serve on the Executive Committee. She asked whether the Board Clerk would also serve on the Executive Committee. The answer was no, a member of the Executive Committee would serve as clerk for the Committee.

H. Art asked for a motion on the municipal appointments to the Executive Committee. K. Hanlon MOTIONED to approve H. Art and J. Nowak as the municipal appointments to the Executive Committee. B. Girshman SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously with J. Nowak abstaining.

H. Art asked for a motion to vote on the regional organization appointment to the Executive Committee. K. Hanlon moved to nominate A. Peteroy, Franklin Land Trust and W. Sanford, GSFABA, with one to serve as the Regional Organization representative to the MTWP Executive Committee. J. Nowak seconded the motion. There was a question as to whether the MTWP Board clerk would serve as the Clerk to the Executive Committee. P. Sloan explained the membership of the Committee and H. Art explained that one of the Executive Committee members would serve as the Clerk but is not necessarily the same person as the Clerk of the full MTWP Board. A. Peteroy joined the meeting and confirmed she is interested in being the regional organization nominee for the Franklin Land Trust. The MTWP Board voted to appoint W. Sanford as the regional organization member on the Executive Committee, with 8 votes for W. Sanford, and 6 votes for A. Peteroy and two abstentions (W. Sanford & A. Peteroy).

##### **5. Presentation on Possible Research Projects for the MTWP Region in Partnership with the USFS**

B. O'Connor thanked K. Nislow and the USFS for their interest and help with the MTWP project. K. Nislow shared his screen with participants. The slides were sent to Board members ahead of time so those without video could follow along. Nislow explained that he would first present an introduction to the USFS Northern Research Station, provide examples of their research that may be relevant to the MTWP, and leave time for questions and comments.

Nislow is a field leader in the Northern Research Station (NRS), which is one of 5 regional stations across the U.S., Puerto Rico, and the islands. The NRS geography covers the northeastern quadrant of the U.S. from Maine to Minnesota and Missouri to Maryland. The headquarters are located in Madison, WI. Within the region, there are 22 field stations, the closest located at UMass Amherst. Often field stations are located within a University but may also be standalone facilities and labs.

The NRS region shares the same geography with the two other branches of the USFS – State and Private Forests and the National Forest system. As researchers in the USFS, Nislow and his colleagues have responsibilities to National Forest lands, but their mission is broader and includes research and support across all lands. This is really important in the Northeast where there are limited National Forest lands.

The NRS is organized into research work units (RWUs), which can encompass more than one location. All RWUs are led by scientists. They may be discipline focused units, sometimes with more than one discipline, that operate across the entire NRS geography. Examples include invasive species, carbon cycling, and climate issues. RWUs may also use forest ecology and management as a base to explore

multiple forest services and connections between them. This research recognizes the importance of place – different climates, economies, culture, etc. help to support context-relevant, locally applicable solutions. Geography-based units develop specific expertise that is essential to a certain place, but also has broader applications. The locations serve as centers of excellence. Examples include the central Appalachians, where scientists have become experts on the impact of deer herbivory and forest and timber markets; northern forests, where emphasis is on long term forest management experiments that have led to expertise in wetlands and watershed ecology and adaptive silviculture for climate change; and the northeast corridor and mid-Atlantic region, led by Nislow's field station, that has focused on urban ecology and management of small, fragmented forested parcels that are characteristic of the region. Nislow's field station also takes advantage of the high population density to emphasize citizen science.

The Research Work Units (RWUs) often work together on important issues. An example is looking at management strategies around the loss of keystone species in the forest, such as American Elm and various Ash species. Multiple RWUs, entomologists, fungal specialists, silvicultural and wildlife specialists have been brought together to address the issue.

In Amherst, three RWUs have expertise in the relationship between forests, fish and wildlife, with a long history of work on aquatic habitat restoration, early successional habitats, forest management and wildlife, including pollinators, and wildlife and habitat in urban landscapes. These cooperative efforts have resulted in the Foresters for the Birds and Greening the Gateway Cities initiatives, as well as climate adaptation efforts.

Amherst RWUs also have expertise on people and forests and how they interact, and have developed tools for the public, including the iTree suite of software tools, and the Neighborhood Nestwatch citizen science network. The Family Forest Research Center is a cooperative effort between the USFS and UMass that conducts the National Woodland Owner Survey to understand the motivations of woodland landowners. Nislow's unit seeks to understand interactions with groups of people to help steward and care for the environment.

Nislow discussed how the USFS Northern Research Station can use science to support the goals of the MTWP. Nislow explained that he is a co-principal investigator for the Northeast Climate Adaptation Science Center (NECASC), a UMass lead institution. USFS is a participating member. This center is oriented towards science-based solutions for climate adaptation for forests, fish and wildlife.

Nislow's research has been on streams and rivers that support fish. These cold-water dependent ecosystems and species are clearly vulnerable in a warming climate. Nislow's work has developed models to understand factors that affect different streams and rivers to support healthy native brook trout populations. Forest cover is a strong influence. He showed a series of maps that illustrate how important the MTWP region is, and will be, in supporting native brook trout habitat as the climate warms. Management actions can help maintain this high-quality habitat. Nislow showed a web-based tool that can identify places that currently lack riparian cover, which could be restored to become more resilient.

Nislow demonstrated another tool that provides information on vulnerability to an increase in extreme precipitation events on road / stream crossings. Nislow explained that it's well understood how the design of crossings can impact species movement, but "under-designed" crossings also pose real risks to

infrastructure. Nislow showed a screen shot of the SHEDS: Stream Crossing Explorer tool that identifies and filters road stream crossings in the Deerfield River Watershed by risk category.

Nislow then presented the work of the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science (NIACS). NIACS is a cooperative effort started by the USFS and universities, non-profit, and tribal conservation agencies. A staff of 20 offer a range of climate services related to forests and can help answer questions and provide support on climate change issues. Adaptive Silviculture for Climate Change is one of NIACS current projects. A robust set of experimental silviculture trials are being conducted in multiple regions, ranging from “resistance” strategies that maintain current conditions, to “transition” strategies that support change to enable an ecosystem to respond to the changing climate. Current efforts in Western MA include science translation, professional training, and technical assistance to natural resource professionals in addressing climate change; creating education materials and resources for woodland owners and managers; and supporting initiatives like the Family Forest Carbon Program to incentivize sustainable forestry practices on private land.

Nislow emphasized that the USFS approach is long-term and collaborative. He then answered questions from the Board members and public.

H. Art asked how the MTWP can coordinate with Nislow and his partners. Nislow explained that the USFS would like to foster a more systematic way of collaborating through designated points of contact. As the partnership continues to formulate goals, the Northern Research Station can be a sounding board, and can engage scientists to come talk about particular topics relevant to the MTWP.

B. O’Connor thanked Nislow for presenting. J. Nowak agreed the information presented was very interesting and helpful and he looks forward to working with the Northern Research Station.

W. Sanford suggested collaborating with USFS on educational opportunities at the Forest Center once it is created. The Board has an opportunity to teach residents and visitors about climate change, forest management, and resiliency. Nislow agreed that the Forest Center could be a great place where different aspects of citizen science can come together.

M. Wigmore, an Ashfield forester working with Conway and Rowe on one of the MTWP implementation grants, mentioned that a lot of private landowners are interested in what they can do to help with climate change and how forests can serve as a carbon sink, and that this would be a useful topic to focus research on. Nislow said the current work is to develop a carbon credit and evaluation system. This is a big focus in the MTWP region already, and Maria Janowiak from NIACS could be invited to a future Board meeting to present.

M. Wigmore commented that people attending her workshops want to become better informed and to find a source of information that they can trust. K. Nislow agreed that better communication to the public is needed. M. Wigmore asked if there is someone to contact at NIACS about soil carbon and harvesting impacts. Nislow encouraged her to reach out to M. Janowiak at NIACS; they are involved in research on how carbon moves through forest systems, particularly through soils.

H. Art thanked Nislow for his presentation, and suggested development of a working subcommittee focused on education and research to take advantage of the array of resources available.

## **6. Discussion of Request for Proposals to Hire an Administrative Agent for the MTWP, Updating the Plan & Future MTWP Board Agenda Items**

H. Art reminded the Board that one of their duties is to designate a legally established non-profit entity as Administrative Agent for the partnership. B. O'Connor has been working on a Request for Proposals.

B. O'Connor said that the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) would like to help the MTWP for the first 3 years to fund a non-profit to move the Partnership forward. Funds have been set aside in the budget and will be advertised soon. Because the money is coming directly from EEA, the RFP mirrors the language in the legislation on what the Administrative Agent would do, but decisions will be co-made by the MTWP Board and EEA. The preparation of the Regional Plan is probably the biggest project to get working on, but the Administrative Agent will also provide staff support to the Board, taking over for the Regional Planning Agency staff.

EEA plans to advertise for the Administrative Agent in a couple of weeks and would like help from the Board with getting the word out to possible organizations. Responses will be due in September 2020. H. Art asked what the Board's involvement will be in the selection process. O'Connor answered that the decision will be up to the Board, but EEA will participate in the selection process, as a member of the Board. Discussion followed on the composition of the Administrative Agent Selection Subcommittee that will review applicants and make a recommendation to the full MTWP Board.

K. Ross MOVED to include members of the MTWP Executive Committee members and any other interested Board members to form a Selection Subcommittee. W. Sanford SECONDED. The motion PASSED unanimously.

H. Art moved on to discuss agenda items for future Board meetings and noted that L. Flaccus asked for the Forest Legacy program to be on tonight's agenda, but there was not enough time so it will be on the agenda for the fall meeting. L. Flaccus noted that the MTWP region is currently not in the program, and he would like to understand what needs to be done to get the region approved so that it can be voted on at the Board meeting in the fall. Discussion followed on the process for joining the program. The region would need to be included in the areas designated by the State as a Forest Legacy region. A. Peteroy noted that much of the information needed to apply for the region was previously collected. B. O'Connor said some public outreach would be needed, but having the MTWP Board with representation from towns and regional organizations is a benefit. Some letters of support would be needed from towns, but it would not be necessary to get letters from all towns in the region. M. Buccowich noted that Massachusetts has been very successful in receiving Forest Legacy funds, but that the process for landowners is time consuming. It can take several years to complete the process. There was discussion of forming a working subcommittee over the summer to begin the process, in coordination with EEA and USFS.

M. Buccowich announced that the Landscape Scale Restoration application will be open on June 19, 2020 with a deadline of September 17. It is open to State agencies and partners. Successful applications are those that tie in with the State Forest Action Plan.

J. Nowak asked if the USFS Chief and the EEA Secretary have communicated with each other since the November event. B. O'Connor said since November, a USFS grant of \$60,000 has been secured for the MTWP, with several partners working on Municipal Vulnerability Planning (MVP) grants to leverage that

money. Also M. Buccowich connected O'Connor with the supervisor of the Green Mountain National Forest to discuss projects they are working on and how we might share resources.

### **7. Updates on the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Grant for the MTWP Region and the MTWP Implementation Grants for Towns**

T. Matuszko noted that B. O'Connor mentioned a USFS grant that is being leveraged by an MVP grant application. The application has two key components – forest resilience and best practices, as well as carbon sequestration and what type of best of practices property owners can use to achieve that goal. Maria Janowiak from NIACS, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and K. Nislow from UMass have helped with different aspects of the grant application, which will build upon what Paul Catanzaro at UMass and TNC have done. The project would also include an educational component. B. O'Connor noted that the New England Forestry Foundation and Mass Audubon are also involved.

T. Matuszko announced the next round of MTWP implementation grants is due June 18, 2020. Several Franklin County towns are working on applications. Lever Inc. is planning a regional application. J. Thomas said they are proposing a challenge program for entrepreneurs. A call will go out for startups to come pitch an idea. A panel of judges choose the best idea, based on potential for growth and job creation, and that team wins \$25,000 in seed money and support in moving forward. Lever Inc. has done this in other sectors, and Thomas has a lot of confidence that it will be interesting and fruitful for entrepreneurs in sustainable forest product manufacturing or outdoor recreation/ tourism, etc.

H. Art asked for public comments, if any. There were none. H. Art said the Executive Committee requires a chair, but the bylaws say nothing about the Board Chair serving on the Executive Committee. The Chair should also be a municipal member. The bylaws will need to be amended to include these details. There is also an issue of not having an official USFS representative. B. O'Connor explained that Congress first has to authorize the USFS to participate before a Board member can be appointed. H. Art raised the concern that because of this, the Executive Committee only has 4 members, making a quorum 2 members and requiring meetings to be posted if 2 members will be present. Also, the bylaws were passed prior to COVID19 and do not provide for participation via teleconference. These issues will need to be addressed at a future meeting. It was determined that the bylaws can be amended at any regular or special meeting of the Board.

The next Board meeting was tentatively set for Tuesday, October 20, 2020. The Executive Committee will meet in July and September. Board members are expected to attend at least one Board meeting a year. H. Art said that members do not have to serve on a Subcommittee, but that formation of these committees needs to happen soon. It was also clarified that all MTWP related meetings have been posted according to Open Meeting Law.

H. Art asked for any other items. Being none, M. Phelps MOVED to adjourn the meeting. W. Sanford SECONDED. The meeting was ADJOURNED at 8:07 p.m.