

MINUTES
**Forest Conservation Committee of the
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
February 20, 2024 – Zoom**

Committee Members in attendance: Alain Peteroy (Chair) – Franklin Land Trust; Deb Donaldson – Conway; Larry Flaccus – Shelburne; Doug Brown – Berkshire Natural Resources Council; Sheila Kelliher – Deerfield River Watershed Association; Elayne Murphy – Hoosic River Watershed Association (4:28pm join)

Board members: Dicken Crane (board chair) – Windsor

Staff/Partners in attendance: Lisa Hayden, NEFF/Admin Agent; Kate Conlin, NEFF/Coordinator

- 1. Call to order, welcome, and introductions** 4:02 p.m.
- 2. Review & approval of February 11, 2022 minutes** – L. Flaccus motion, S. Kelliher second, unanimously approved.
- 3. Discussion of Committee goals and priorities – focusing on Ten-Year Plan for guidance**
 - Discussion to have BNRC, FLT and MAS complete a geospatial analysis of priorities for conservation in the MTWP region. Modeling and landowner connections are important. Dicken wants to remember that community benefit of conservation and the local economy, recreation, forest products, climate conservation – all that align with the state goals. Also keep PILOT front and center. Suggested 5-year look back at land conserved in the MTWP region. FLT to complete.
 - Need to bridge between interested landowners and the appropriate conservation entity to help bring a project across the finish line, taking geospatial models, BNRC, Mass Audubon, Forest Legacy project, add geospatial models – maybe there's ability to portion some funds to Agent or partner organizations to look at those overlaps critically in the service area of the Board and to figure out priority conservation parcels, whether using relationships between those in the towns – ultimately providing money for land trusts or identifying land owners. A. Peteroy noted it was never the goal for the Partnership to hold conservation restrictions, but perhaps to support securing funding. Most of the lands that could benefit from Forest Legacy are in Chapter 61, so there would not be dramatic impact on the tax base.
- 4. Forest Legacy Program updates and discussion**
 - A. Peteroy updated the committee regarding the ongoing effort underway to prepare an application to the Forest Legacy Program for a large-scale land conservation funding request based on the CT River watershed and overlapping area of the Berkshire Linkages focus area. GIS exercises have been conducted to query land parcels containing at least 100 acres in size and minimum 50 acres of BioMap core habitat within this region between the Vermont and Connecticut borders. Outreach will be coordinated by Kestrel with support from other land trusts including primarily Franklin Land Trust, Hilltown Land Trust and Mass Audubon and to a lesser extent New England Forestry Foundation and BNRC. Application is due 7/2024. This program requires any conservation restrictions be held by public entity such as DFG, DCR or towns. The Board can provide a letter of support when the time comes.
- 5. Discussion of Deerfield River Watershed Wild & Scenic Designation pursual and possible intersection with the Woodlands Partnership's pursual of a Natural Heritage Area Designation**

- S. Kelliher – Chris Curtis leading effort for designation the last 3 years. Latest update is that they have study bills in the House and the Senate but progress has been slow; have asked Markey and McGovern to make a direct request to the National Park Service (NPS) for funds for a reconnaissance study, submitted in the fall with signatures, pursuing ways to find state funds to help with a management plan. Chris participated in a workshop on Congressional Action – the best approach would be attached as a rider to the appropriations bill, and he has been in touch with McGovern to seek joint passage. If there is no congressional action, the best route is to go around NPS and fund the study. Chris Curtis worked on the Westfield River and that took a decade.

6. Agent update: Expected state funds for land conservation through Forests as Climate Solutions and Resilient Lands Initiative, potential to support Woodlands Partnership related land conservation efforts

- L. Hayden attended a meeting in the fall with EEA regarding Resilient Lands, theme of supporting rural areas as conservation goals implemented.
- A. Peteroy will pull together a map of conserved parcels in the last 5 years and can bring to the next meeting.
- L. Hayden – is the idea of a circuit rider that could help make connections between towns and conservation areas appropriate? Is there a need for that or do land trusts have it covered?
- A. Peteroy – Berkshire County has small, volunteer land trusts that are single towns, Franklin County has less.
- D. Brown – not a lot of other local land trusts north of Lenox and Northern Berkshire County has been historically underserved for conservation opportunity. Geospatial data may show some overlapping locations for various conservation priorities. He said there may be interest in the circuit rider idea.

7. Items not anticipated within 48 hours

- Update of riparian restoration projects. Edge Hill golf course a possibility?
- A. Peteroy. Edge Hill is 157 acres, headwaters of the Bear River, lower bottom half of it is all drainage, used to be pasture and hay field years ago. FLT is putting together a committee focused restoration. They are just starting, meeting with Dept of Ecological Restorations about restoring wetlands, to plant trees would be premature.
- L. Flaccus asked about the license plate funding idea. Need to revisit the license plate design and fundraising effort. Between 400 and 800 people need to pre-buy license plate for the effort to be successful and there are requirements for logo design. Perhaps this is better suited for Education and Outreach committee and using logo design as a local art class competition. Agent will investigate parameters for license plate design and the idea for a contest for designing a logo..

8. Schedule next meeting

- May 21, 4-5 p.m.

9. Public Comment

- None

10. Adjourn

- Motion to adjourn L. Flaccus, seconded by D. Brown, all in favor. 5:10 p.m.