

MINUTES
Executive Committee of the Woodlands Partnership
September 24, 2024

Present: Dicken Crane – Windsor (Board Chair); Art Schwenger – Heath (Board Vice Chair); Alain Peteroy – Franklin Land Trust (Clerk); Rhonda Anderson – Ohketeau Cultural Center; Russ Richardson – Massachusetts Forest Alliance (joined at 4:09);

Absent: vacant (Treasurer); Robert O’Connor – MA EOEEA; Constance Carpenter (USFS ex-officio)

Staff/Partners: Lisa Hayden – Administrative Agent; Kate Conlin – Coordinator; Vanessa Farny – EOEEA

Public: Elise Cormier; Glen Ayers; Lori Bradley; Tami Daniels– iBerkshires; Janet Sinclair

1. Call to order and welcome – 4:03 p.m.

2. Approval of December 11, 2023 minutes (August 1, 2024 meeting postponed due to quorum) - April joint Committee Chair and Executive Committee Summit meeting minutes will be approved next time after Committee Chairs have the chance to review – A. Schwenger motion, R. Anderson second, all in favor

3. Establishment of a public comment protocol (see DCR Stewardship Council for an example) and consideration of hosting listening sessions – D. Crane explained Stewardship has monthly council meetings & all full meetings have public comment period and rules; committee meetings generally are business meetings and don’t typically have public comment, but there are listening sessions and specific meetings focused completely on public comment. If questions, they are answered at the next meeting by the Chair, to avoid back and forth. Where does WP want public comment to appear on the agenda (beginning or end)?

A. Schwenger: in respect to public that may join the meeting, an abbreviated system might be easier and more respectful. Comments at the beginning of the meeting, those topics taken under discussion and addressed next meeting if a specific question. A. Peteroy: it’s more logical to have public comment at the end of the meeting after the agenda items have been discussed. Separate listening sessions add to an already busy schedule. Agrees with not necessarily responding to the public in an immediate way. Next meeting, if specific questions are posed, that would go up front.

Motion – A. Schwenger, motioned to move Agenda item #11 to right now, second by R. Anderson. All in favor.

4. Public Comment

- Glen Ayers: In the future, public comment should occur after the agenda item(s) likely to prompt public response. Interested in how the Partnership perceives what they consider misinformation. Wildlands in New England study has a goal to increase lands conserved as “forever wild.” 2% of land in MA is permanently protected in this way. He stated this approach is pro-forest, not anti-logging. Seems this group is only interested in logging and denigrating wild nature.

- Janet Sinclair: She served on the Partnership Advisory Committee and has been to a lot of meetings related to the Partnership a while ago. Recommends that public comment be less formal and involve answering questions. Surprised that she had to ask for a link to the zoom meeting – why isn’t it posted on the agenda? Agrees with a lot of what Glen is saying. She thinks different points of view are not misinformation. (K. Conlin responded later in the meeting to the zoom link question, sharing that zoom-bombing has been a concern).

- Lori Bradley: Stated the forum at City Hall was one-sided, as were the forest walks. One point of view. There are a lot of people who hold varying points of view. A forum where opposing points of view are presented is needed and people in town should be able to discuss and decide what they want. This project will affect a historic nature trail and impacts the tourism economy. Opponents to the Notch Reservoir proposed climate-smart practices are hosting a different point of view at a forum on Sept. 27.

5. How do we address misconceptions and inaccuracies in anti-forestry petitions as they pertain to the Partnership?

K. Conlin: Sought to clarify that this agenda item isn’t about differing of opinion, but rather about actual factual inaccuracies that have swirled around this proposed project. For instance, there is misunderstanding that ten-year management plans, rather than indicating a cycle of stewardship planning, means the forest will be continuously logged for the next ten years. Another is that demonstration forests are always experiments. In this case, the project related to the Notch Reservoir Forest Stewardship Climate Plan would demonstrate practices defined in scientific literature for specific identified results. Another suggestion is that the woods there are old growth or “pristine”, which, as articulated in the op-ed written by Dicken Crane and Hank Art published in the Berkshire Eagle, is problematic in that that description erases human land use history including Indigenous presence on and management of the land for millennia. Another is that the management proposed (for 70 of 1000+ acres) is dishonest and extractive rather than intending to be supportive of the forest’s function and ecology. So, while we may

differ on the best path to achieve forest health and resilience, there is public rhetoric that this is not the intent of the stewardship proposed, which undermines the trust and respect that is ironically being asked for. Some social media posts and other commentary has included falsehoods, which we want to correct – for instance, the Woodlands Partnership is not comprised of commercial logging companies, nor is New England Forestry Foundation.

L. Hayden: She has seen the suggestion that this project is intended to turn Notch Reservoir into suburbia. This isn't a part of the project nor is it an aim of trying to address climate change vulnerabilities in the forest.

Some Committee members responded:

- Partnership Board Members have different perspectives and ideas about forest management. A full discussion by the Board and public needed. Consensus is rare with this topic, as evidenced by the recent Forests as Climate Solutions Committee
- D. Crane: The process, in this particular case, could have been better in reaching the public, even though public meetings and woods walks were announced, there wasn't as much engagement as there is now.
- The Woodlands Partnership has been accused of things that are blatantly incorrect. A. Schwenger: One of the strengths of this Partnership is the access to research and researchers. A public forum with varying research topics presented, with a diverse group of professionals, is important for ongoing Board education.
- R. Anderson: Misconceptions about why Andre StrongBearHeart Gaines, Jr. was speaking at the North Adams City Forum. He has done some work with the WP, but he is not a mouthpiece. He is very vociferous about his opinions, and they don't always line up. His main point is that Indigenous People have been curating this land for tens of thousands of years, that doesn't mean leaving it alone; it means curating for the best possible outcomes and the next generations. He also asked why Indigenous People weren't invited to the curation of a demonstration forest. The Mohican Stockbridge-Munsee have an incredible forestry program. It was disappointing that Andre was categorized as taking a side. We need more clarity in conversations.
- R. Richardson: No credit is given to the advances in forestry science and ecology and the constant changes. The clear distinction between past land use abuses and present-day restorative work is often ignored. Importance of recognizing that degraded forests can benefit from human intervention to restore ecological function. Some former pasture lands have grown into forests and some plantations, now in poor health, were planted with the intention of being cut for wood production.
- A suggestion was made that it may be useful to open a dialogue with opponents of the North Adams project – people can offer ideas if they have them.

6. Executive Committee Treasurer vacancy; vacant UMass Board seat (faculty member specializing in ecosystem functions, carbon cycling in terrestrial systems and climate change as it relates to forests)

Agent staff met with Brett Butler and others from the Family Forest Research Center at UMass Amherst. The idea of grad students attending in a UMass faculty member's stead (in non-voting capacity) was floated. They seemed interested. They will also assist in figuring which faculty member might be the best fit for the described position. Suggestion to approach those with leadership roles within the institution.

National Heritage Area designation—FRCOG and BRPC proposal

FRCOG and BRPC provided a proposal for services (mapping, cultural assessment, inventory). Built into this budget is for us to contract with other consultants for Indigenous perspective of the Region.

Committee-proposed work: Farmers' market pilot program with Woodcraft Collaborative (NRBED); videography and content creation (EOR)

Locally produced wood products at Farmers' Markets, open to multiple people. Agent staff has reached out to various markets and is awaiting response. Another suggestion to reach out to Berkshire Grown.

Ethan Tapper event on Oct. 11 will likely be recorded professionally. The Board will also invest in low-budget recording equipment. *Root Hog or Die* as inspiration. This will be a great way to showcase the diversity of the region and define its identity. The plan is to create a formal way to collect suggestions from the Board. Editing will then occur of the footage. R. Anderson recommends Issak Larkin Harmon, who has great skills, and works for Montague Community Television. Graduates from Four Rivers High School learn a lot about documentaries.

Agent update: Sen. Markey meeting regarding federal designation; IRA USFS underserved landowner/emerging markets grant application; Catalyst Fund awarded; Collins Center municipal services study (EEA grant); Notch Reservoir; upcoming and recent events; venue search for November Board meeting; how to address update to Ten-Year Plan

Meeting with Markey staff to share the Heritage Area designation intentions and to ask for federal designation absent a feasibility study, considering that our recent Ten-Year Plan is very close to what a feasibility study provides.

Grant submitted for Inflation Reduction Act funding for underserved landowners and emerging markets related to climate resilience. \$25,000 awarded via the Catalyst Fund for a fundraising/development consultant to identify strategies and opportunities. K. Conlin will

attend peer learning cohort. The importance of Executive Committee involvement in hiring process for a consultant. Agent will send out grant proposal for reference.

EPA grant for emergency services study with the Collins Center – Scope of Services has been drafted, working through the Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee, October 8 meeting with Collins Center.

Notch Reservoir: City Hall public forum was held on September 12; recording is recommended to watch. The meeting was an opportunity for neighbors and residents to ask questions and express concerns.

September 21, a woods walk was hosted in Savoy with DCR at the state forest. A lot of local residents came out. A positive example of involving public very early on. Two sites were shown. One where management is still conceptual in the design stage and another site where similar management goals were conducted 6 years ago. Upcoming, October 11, Ethan Tapper will be reading from his book *How to Love a Forest*. Book club reading *Becoming Kin* hosted by R. Anderson about to be announced, beginning late October.

November 18 is being considered for a full Board meeting with Heath Community Hall as a possible venue.

Updating the Ten-Year Plan as our priorities expand and focus. Idea for annual appendix/action-item addendum to be created in conjunction with an annual report that references the Plan, so as not to distract from getting work done. Agent staff will work on addendum draft of recent initiatives and share at next meeting.

Scheduling next Committee meeting(s)

Monday, October 21, 4-5 p.m.

Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours

How are we moving ahead with the panel on Aboriginal Rights? L. Hayden will be contacting Pam Ellis. Also, considering the idea that the upcoming Canopy event could be a venue for this event as well. Importance of extending invitation to organizations and tribal members doing work in the region. R. Anderson also recommends Keisha De Freece Lawrence, Kim Toney, and speaks highly of Pam Ellis.

D. Crane discussion with DCR forester Kevin Podkowka who led the Savoy woods walk: subject of more events came up focused on food forests. Perhaps we could collaborate to get this program started. D. Crane will connect R. Richardson and K. Podkowka. R. Anderson shares that Ohketeau Cultural Center has been involved in putting together a food and medicinal demonstration forest using silviculture and that will likely shift to the Nipmuc farm school,

Pequoig farm or in Millis on Nipmuc-held land, or both. Dr. Jess Dolan has designed much of this work and if there are opportunities to involve her and this work in partnering that would be great.

Adjourn

A. Schwenger motion, seconded by R. Anderson, all in favor, 5:40pm.