

**MINUTES for approval**  
**Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts**  
**Full Board Meeting – June 26, 2024**  
**Hybrid Meeting, Rowe Center & Zoom**

**Board members in attendance:** Joe Nowak, Jay Healy, Deb Donaldson, Art Schwenger, Alain Peteroy, Liz Kidder, Sam Haupt, Hannah Poplawski, Larry Flaccus, Sheila Kelliher, John Waite, Marybeth Chichester, Elayne Murphy, Andrew Fitch, Bob O’Connor, Chris Cozzaglio, Rhonda Anderson, Mark Phelps, Keith Ross, Dicken Crane

**Board members absent:** Chris Skelly, Ron Bosley, Greg Cox, Alice Houghtaling, Hank Art

**Staff/partners in attendance:** Lisa Hayden – Administrative Agent/NEFF; Kate Conlin – Coord./NEFF;

**Guest Speaker(s):** Andrew Randazzo (MA Audubon Forest Ecologist); Josh Rapp (MA Audubon Senior Forest Ecologist); Rick Whitney (MA Audubon Forest Ecologist)

**Public in Attendance:** Laurie Pike, Vanessa Farney (EEA), Hillary King (EEA MVP), Stacy Kontrabecki, Ada Denenfeld Kelly (GF Recorder), Malanie Smith (Savoy), Susan Flaccus, Jonathan Lagreze, Judith Roberts (Colrain), John Sears, Bill Dornbush, Alex Barrett, Emma Sass (EEA MVP)

**1. Call to order, Welcome:**

Dicken – Board Chair welcomes all in attendance and call to order. Kate explained that the Partnership is currently engaged in reviewing and editing its Land Acknowledgment in conjunction with formation of a working group on Indigenous rights and the role the WP might play in furthering justice and equity.

**2. Roll Call Attendance of Board Members and introduction of guest speakers:**

Kate completes roll call and reminder to board members to complete annual Open Meeting Law and semiannual (Ethics) trainings.

**3. Introduction of Mass Audubon guest speakers Josh and Andrew.**

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- Slideshow presentation by Mass Audubon Josh and Andrew on Climate Smart Forestry Practices in the Region funded by the Partnership. Partnership Administrative Agent Lisa Hayden gives introduction of climate-smart forestry practices to address ecological benefits in the face of climate change including the work with Mass Audubon to develop forestry plans to address a changing climate. The Forest Climate Resilience Program partnered with MVP funding and regional planning agencies to assist towns of Rowe, North Adams and Williamstown to develop their 10-year climate smart forest management plans. A resilient forest is diverse, connected, multi-age, self-renewing and capable of adapting to disturbance, cuts, climate extremes, while also storing carbon. Funding also includes support for planning and mitigation. The MVP grant for Adams in 2020 helped with feasibility study to apply latest research on forest climate vulnerability with match from The Nature Conservancy. Six municipalities received grants for engaging community members and Indigenous people and professionals.
  
- In 2023, Rowe and North Adams focused on implementation plans. In addition, US Forest Service and Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) funding supported private landowner recruitment and engagement, technical assistance, woods walks, surveys, public meetings and newsletter outreach. Rhonda Anderson, board member of the Ohketeau

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Cultural Center in Ashfield expressed her deep appreciation for what the land has to offer and for the opportunity for the Rowe Municipal Vulnerability Program (MVP) grant that increased understanding and education of the community at large regarding Indigenous people's local culture and needs. To actively create relationships of reciprocity with the original land stewards of this area. The workshops included woods walks, Indigenous ecology and untangling the story of colonization. Rhonda thanked Bob O'Connor, Josh, Kate, Lisa, Emily Boss, and others for their participation and support.

- TheForestCenter.org website debut, Andrew and Josh announced the launch of the virtual Forest Center website with the goal of connecting landowners with professionals in the forestry and conservation fields. Born out of vision to help connect forest landowners with diverse sites on the ground from virtual visits to out in the woods. Audience to include municipalities, volunteers, private landowners, and public. Focus on invasive species, forest health, native lands and promoting equity.

**4. Review and approval of 2/29/24 minutes.** Motion made by Art S. and seconded by Andrew F. and unanimously approved.

**5. Recognition of Larry and Susan Flaccus on conservation of their farm off of Route 2 in Shelburne.**

Larry and Susan conveyed through a generous bargain sale a conservation restriction on their 145-acre "Kenburn Orchards Farm" to the Franklin Land Trust. The restriction will forever keep the farm available for active forestry and agricultural purposes and limit the development to the multifamily house that currently exists. The community is grateful for landowners such as the Flaccus's that include conservation as part of their estate planning.

**6. Board discussion and vote for support of the National Heritage Area (NHA) feasibility study.**

Meetings with NHA program staff to review examples of process and designations and Kate continued conversations with FRCOG and BRPC staff to review next steps in process. The Partnership has \$50,000 left to start feasibility study. Vote to support using these remaining contract funds to initiate the process of completing a feasibility study for NHA designation of the Partnership region. Motion made by Mark P. and seconded by Art S. and unanimously approved.

**7. Agent Update:** Updated Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts website:

[www.woodlandpartnership.org](http://www.woodlandpartnership.org) is active and being viewed. The US Forest Service has officially recognized the new name and efforts are ongoing at MA state house to update name change. Representative Paul Mark is continuing efforts to keep this moving forward.

- EOEEA Ecosystems and Municipal Services grant of \$75,000 was awarded with assistance in preparation from Liz Kidder, Leyden board member, to complete a study in the 21-town partnership region by The Collins Center for Public Management at UMASS Boston to focus on the issues relating to the increase in tourism, real estate tax support, conservation and public safety concerns.

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- The partnership’s application to Network for Landscape Conservation’s Catalyst Fund is pending for ongoing support with staffing, specifically to hire a fundraising consultant.
- Planning for application to the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to help support outreach to underserved communities.
- Announcement from Kate that Town of Colrain has voted to join partnership, with 2 vote margin. Town of Savoy vote was a loss (by one vote) with no discussion at the town meeting. Efforts will continue.
- Board vacancies: full board must approve slate of members to continue serving (Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Clerk) Motion made by Sam H. and seconded by Art S. and unanimously approved. Vacancies include FRCOG, UMASS Amherst Forestry/Climate Dept., North Adams, Clarksburg, Savoy, and Cheshire.

John Waite of FCCDC spoke regarding the Equity in Conservation grant his agency is administering on behalf of multiple partners and Eagle Eye Institute in Peru opportunities.

**8. Board Chair report.** Dicken reviewed the May committee chair summit topics of discussion which included:

- PILOT reform updates from the State Auditor’s pending release of report.
- Support of communities with low tax base
- How to support the partnership for the long term.
- How to support filling the vacant town seats.
- New working group to review and study aboriginal rights in our region.
- Identifying obstacles to more conservation.
- Use of new website to celebrate land conservation in our region.
- Desire to continue and encourage partnership with Greylock Glen.
- Thoughts on updating Land Acknowledgement to include more local recognition of landscape and history.

Dicken’s thoughts on Forests as Climate Solutions Report: putting moratorium on state-led forestry cutting, chapter 61 forest cut plans are stalled and emphasis on forest reserves. The MA Forest Alliance opinion that report assumes passive management is better than active for storing carbon, despite differing opinions from many experts on the panel on the nuances of these issues. Mark P. clarifying that EOEEA wants to codify idea of all public lands to have 10% as reserve (not cut) is put into law which makes it hard to ever change.

**9. Committee Chair Updates**

Finance Committee update, Sam H. - Committee wants to focus on long-term financial stability of partnership. Also on how to revitalize the larger communities experiencing low volunteerism at the fire, rescue and EMT services. He feels there is a real lack of sense of community lately. PILOT tax issues, Municipal Aid Chapter 90, and education funding are big concerns in most of our towns. Need greater communication with legislators. Attended “Beacon Hill in the Berkshires” workshop with Ann Gobi. Towns also need grant management staff support such as from a circuit rider.

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Budget/Finance Joe N. - reports that our efforts must speak for the environment and work with the towns.

Education/Outreach Marybeth C. - Plans include a woods walk in September with DCR, Ethan Tapper book signing in Shelburne Falls to be held in the fall. Proposed newsletter to reach out to towns with committee chairs to participate and proof.

***Any Items not anticipated within 48 hours.*** Rhonda brought several books on Indigenous perspectives to review and share. Lisa and Kate will send out the list of these resources.

***Public Comment***

***Adjournment*** motion made by Art and seconded by Sam and unanimously approved. 8:11 pm