

**MINUTES**  
**The Executive Committee**  
**of the Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts**  
May 9, 2025 – Virtual via Zoom

**Committee Members Present:** Dicken Crane – Windsor (Board Chair); Art Schwenger – Heath (Board Vice Chair); Alain Peteroy – Franklin Land Trust (Clerk); Russ Richardson – Massachusetts Forest Alliance; Robert O’Connor – MA EOEEA; Chris Cozzaglio – Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (Treasurer);

**Absent:** Rhonda Anderson, Ohketeau Cultural Center; Connie Carpenter, acting USFS representative

Board Members Present: Jonathan Legreze - Colrain; Deb Donaldson – Conway; Liz Kidder - Leyden

**Staff:** Lisa Hayden – Admin. Agent;

**Public:** Ryan Owens, New England Forestry Foundation Executive Director

**Call to order and welcome:** 3:05 p.m.

**Approval of April 8, 2025 minutes:** A. Schwenger moves, C. Cozzaglio seconds, all in favor.

**Agent Staffing Update:** Ryan Owens, Executive Director of NEFF joined meeting to discuss the recent lay-off of Kate Lindroos Conlin, Woodlands Partnership Coordinator, who held the position until May 6, 2025, due to budget constraints. The hiring of Kate in a F/T position was put in place when NEFF received USDA federal grants to support their Climate Smart Commodities program and Lisa’s position/responsibility at NEFF shifted to ½ her time being part of the CSC program and ½ for the partnership. With the termination of the CSC federal funding Lisa’s position was shifted back to f/t under the EOEEA contract for the administrative agent for the partnership, leaving a shortfall to continue supporting Kate’s work as F/T coordinator. Ryan apologized to the Woodlands Partnership board members present for making a staffing decision without any direct consultation or notification of WP Board.

The request for proposals (RFP) for the upcoming continuing agent contract is something the board is waiting to see. Ryan did go on to express continued interest by NEFF to be the admin and financial agent for the partnership, saying that NEFF’s priorities are highly complementary to the partnership’s focus and mission but on a New England wide scale.

Chris expressed his confusion and concern regarding the math of letting Kate go but funding Lisa fully and wanted to confirm that the work of the agent will continue to be responsive and timely. Lisa explained that the structure of the multi-year contract is not a line-item budget, but a general lump sum associated with a list of tasks which allowed for the hiring of Sophie A. in a part-time position as the Assistant two years back to help with the 10-year plan, then Kate for 2 years and there is now 6 months left to the current contract with EOEEA, through Dec. 2025.

Lisa explained the two MVP grants recently submitted, one with FRCOG and BRPC focused on watershed resilience, and a second with Rowe continuing forest stewardship with Mass Audubon, may have opportunity for funding contract work with Kate. Chris requests better transparency with communications in the future. The Partnership does not want to lose momentum.

**PILOT Reform:** Lisa updated the committee on the April 7<sup>th</sup> PILOT study presentation hosted by the Woodlands Partnership at the Town of Windsor, with the Office of State Auditor Diana DiZoglio (OSA) who attended as guest speaker. She “conducts audits, investigations, and studies to promote accountability and transparency, improve performance, and make government work better,” and her office’s Division of Local Mandates issued a report and data dashboard in January outlining inequities in the state Payment in Lieu of Taxes formula resulting in much lower average payments per acre for rural municipalities. Over 70 people attended including partnership board members, several of whom spoke to share local examples, as well as members of the public, local town board members and the press. The presentation reviewed the study showing the imbalance of PILOT payments across the state. The Municipal Finance Committee is discussing next steps for advocacy in support of reform for better equity for western MA, and meeting next week with Rep. Blais to discuss her bill related to PILOT. There was consensus that the Ex. Com. would like the Muni. Finance Committee to review proposed bills and the Auditor report, and recommend specific proposals that the Partnership Board wants to support. Alain also noted that FLT has an intern with GIS experience who could incorporate town PILOT data if needed.

**EEA Woodlands Partnership Implementation Grants due May 15<sup>th</sup>:** Suggestion to refocus on land conservation, forest management, outreach events such as Ethan Tapper video series and profiles in conservation. Russ R. would like to host his workshop at Dicken Crane’s land in Dalton. Lisa is prepping application now. There was discussion that the most compelling programs to be applied for include a speakers’ bureau, local outreach to schools, environmental education. Question came up wanting to understand if we could rehire Kate as a consultant to do this programming.

**Agent Update:** The partnership is leaving the online survey on emergency services up and active for a few more days to get more input as part of the Collins Center study. Applications are in for the Heritage Area feasibility study contracts including the Indigenous-led study portion and the Executive Committee will review applications. A zoom webinar account has also been set up for Hank Art’s “How does a forest grow?” webinar on May 27<sup>th</sup> (which may be rescheduled). Monday, the Muni-Finance committee is hosting Natalie Blais via zoom at 4 pm. Lisa will send invite out again for folks interested in attending. Lisa also reminded folks of the Canopy event at UMASS on May 29<sup>th</sup> and our upcoming full board meeting at Greylock Glen on June 24<sup>th</sup>. Consultant Stephanie Schilling will be presenting the summary of her fundraising work.

In addition, LEVER has an interested representative to join the board and the town of Florida has an interested resident (Ron Bosley is current town rep.)

Items not anticipated: none

Public Comment: none

Motion to adjourn: made by Art and seconded by Alain, 4:35 p.m.