

MINUTES
The **Executive Committee**
of the **Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts**
via Zoom
September 23, 2025

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

Other Board Members Present: Deb Donaldson, Shelia Comstock, Liz Kidder

Staff: Lisa Hayden – Administrative Agent; Consultant Jessica Dolan, PhD

1. **Call to order and welcome:** 4:03 p.m. Dicken Crane
2. **Approval of July 30th, 2025 minutes:** Motion made by Art and seconded by Russ. Roll call vote: Alain and Chris abstain, motion passes 4-0.
3. **Focus on Heritage Area Study:** Lisa reported that Dicken and Rhonda visited with representatives Bonney Hartley and Sherry White of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans to discuss the launched study that is part of the National Heritage Area project. Dicken and Dr. Dolan reported on a good conversation following sharing of slides explaining the WP’s mission and funding for an NHA study. There was concern voiced by the representatives that it would have been better if the WP reached out to them sooner, rather than after the decision to pursue the Heritage Area in their homelands. Any decision about partnering would be up to the Tribal Council (based in Wisconsin where the federally recognized tribe is now based) and Sherry White indicated she would raise the Heritage Area proposal with the Council. All parties agreed to keep the conversations going in good faith even given time constraints, the tribal review process and the need for Free, Prior & Informed Consent. The Stockbridge Munsee have consulted with the Upper Housatonic Valley NHA project (completed around 2006) and wondered if the Northwest MA effort would be similar (being a partner in a WP NHA would be a more in-depth level of participation than consulting on programs such as speaker series). There was also a question about whether funding for Stockbridge Munsee Band staff to care for land under their stewardship might be a part of the new Heritage Area. As the Woodlands Partnership is early in the process of drafting the feasibility report, many details are yet to be determined – and the WP Board will need to further define anticipated outcomes.

Jessica Dolan, Ph.D., recently hired consultant who will be assisting the WP in the Indigenous-focused inventory for the Heritage Area feasibility study, reported on her research to date and background of Indigenous cultures in the western MA regions with discussion about attempting to correct inaccuracies in local public history and along the Route 2 corridor.

Bob reaffirmed that the NHA should include primary focus of forest stewardship of all lands and its history since it is the WP that is leading this effort. Jessica highlighted the approach with environmental and cultural stewardship of the region.

Lisa showed slide show summary from the planning agencies with draft selection for each focus area. It was mentioned that the agricultural history of this region was directly related to its cultural history and community structure. The impact of “sheep fever,” an intense period of forest clearing for sheep farming for merino wool from around 1810-1840 and related building of stone walls for pasture clearing must be highlighted, along with rise of apple orchards and later agricultural abandonment. Bob suggested the reading of *North Woods* book, Jessica mentioned Andre Strongbearheart Jr.’s research of the extensive Indigenous cultural history of the area and Deb reminded us that the geology of the area (dinosaur footprints and “Jurassic armored mud balls or JAMBs” sedimentary rocks studied by Greenfield Com. College Prof. Emeritus Richard Little) affected the settlement, use and stewardship. Evidence of Indigenous occupation is still being discovered, including a recent fire pit under farmland in Bernardston. Other ideas to research included local tool makers, white pine as masts for shipbuilding, and railroad ties including transport down rivers.

Art noted the theme needs to do with the uniqueness of the region – putting it all together, he feels we can qualify by tracking land use change and the history of the land and forest types. Inclusion of local Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives could set the story and approach apart if they decide to participate.

- 4. Agent Report:** Lisa updated the committee on the upcoming Insurance renewal for D&O liability. It was decided that Lisa would renew the existing Travelers policy for another 3-year term at cost of \$4318. Lisa also reported on recent grant announcement for \$75,000 Voices for the Forest supporting outreach and education efforts by the WP, including school programs and video communications. Also continuing two USFS grants supporting tree planting and forestry resilience practices. Lisa wants to revisit the fundraising report completed by consultant Schilling at a future committee meeting.

5. Scheduling: Lisa will send out scheduling poll for upcoming Ex. Com. and full board meeting dates.

6. Any Items not Anticipated: none

Adjourn at 5:35, motion made by Russ and seconded by Art, unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted Alain Peteroy, Clerk, 9/23/25