

MINUTES

The Executive Committee of the
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts
April 8, 2025

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

Absent: Rhonda Anderson – Ohketeau Cultural Center; Constance Carpenter (USFS ex-officio)

Staff: Lisa Hayden, Admin. Agent; K. Conlin, Coord.

Guests: Chris Curtis, Deerfield River Watershed Association (DRWA)

Call to order and welcome – 3:31 p.m.

Approval of March 18, 2025 minutes of joint meeting with the Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee – Draft minutes sent out include a track change to clarify a discussion point: “ecosystem services don’t fit neatly into structures of monetary value.” A. Schwenger moves the minutes are accepted with the edit, seconded R. Richardson. Roll call vote, 4-0. A. Peteroy and B. O’Connor abstain.

Deerfield Wild & Scenic Initiative - C. Curtis thanks the WP for support of the EEA grant to study the Deerfield River for Wild & Scenic potential. DRWA has been working on this designation for five years with a regional campaign including the main stem of the Deerfield and 14 tributaries. Assessing eligibility and classification of the river and “outstandingly remarkable values.” Letters of support received from 21 communities, 7 in Vermont and 14 in Massachusetts and 12 organizations. Congressional delegation has provided support – 7 members of Congress. An Act of Congress needs to authorize the study and then Congress needs to pass the recommended designation from the study. Rep. McGovern, Rep. Neil, Sen. Warren, and Sen. Markey support in Massachusetts, as well as Sen. Sanders and Sen. Welch in Vermont. The study bill was filed in 2022, re-filed in 2023, and in that session was heard in the Senate Natural Resources Com., but did not make it to a vote in the House. In the current session, Sen. Markey has re-filed the bill and is working to perhaps put it in a public lands package. However, with the change in federal administration, the focus has shifted to providing the necessary study through local and state funding means and then submit to Congress for final approval. Alternatives to achieve the desired outcome of federal designation are also being considered, such as state-initiated designation through a state Wild & Scenic, where the Sec. of the Interior can designate absent Congressional approval. National Park Service may help and provide a “reconnaissance study” in Vermont. A cooperative agreement with NPS is in the works. Looking for other funding sources to complete. A. Peteroy: would cooperation between a Wild & Scenic and National Heritage Area be attractive to private foundations? How can we work together to advance both priorities? Next steps: letter of support or cooperation, seek private foundation funding source collaboration, notifying our Fundraising Consultant of this potential synergy. Also, what’s the overlap on the outlines for these studies? K. Conlin will look at overlap and let DRWA know. Land and Water Conservation Fund was reauthorized in 2019 with several Heritage areas

tacked onto it. Could Farm Bill or other bill be a vehicle? A. Schwenger: Chris & DRWA deserve a lot of credit for this process.

PILOT reform, recap of [4/7 event in Windsor](#) – any next steps for legislative action – Public & media forum went very well, great turnout of about 70 people, many towns, local leaders, and elected officials. The State Auditor highlighted the key disparity points very effectively. Commonwealth Beacon coverage advertised the event. iBerkshires coverage of the event. Idea to have the Woodlands Partnership lead a campaign for PILOT reform via an official letter and ability to sign on, as well as a template for public to send. Do we want to weigh in on specific legislative attempts? Do we want to specify that a conversation, as the State Auditor pointed out, is necessary and should include multiple voices? Next step: Agent staff will work on a draft statement and share for edits and ideas. We need to get a lot of people involved, residents contacting representatives or making phone calls. K. Conlin will send out Blais/Comerford legislation. Suggestion the WP should agree on what is needed, as a group, simply and straightforward. The Executive Committee asks that the Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee provide analysis of different PILOT reform proposals for the Ex. Com. and Board to compare, as well as recommend which points from the Auditor's report to highlight. Reminder that current legislative efforts don't reflect the State Auditor's report. K. Conlin to create google form, and perhaps posters, asking for public comments on the PILOT reform proposal on website and & share. Town perspectives shouldn't be lost; B. O'Connor noted all towns with less than 1000 population. Would it be valuable to listen to people in Eastern MA to see what problems they have with PILOT in order to get substantial legislative support? Pine Barrens and MassConn Partnerships mentioned as examples of other regions that may be concerned about PILOT.

[EEA Woodlands Partnership Implementation Grant Planning](#) - due May 15 at 3 p.m.

Highest priority need for the Partnership should be identified. Pairing priorities the Board has set around public communication and education, video series. USFS grants should fund some of these activities, however unsure if contracts will be honored and fully reimbursed. A package that provides additional support for Agent staff paired with programming and perhaps a transition period to continue work with active grants should there be an Agent transition.

D. Crane – the proposal could be to fund these activities in coordination with increased capacity, so as not to increase the workload of current Agent staff. For example, the Heritage Area study could be included, with funding for additional staff capacity. B. O'Connor - it's difficult to get programming funded through other grants. Good idea to include a budget for this. R. Richardson – interest from other parts of the country to manage for Non-Timber Forest Products. This topic could be included in the proposal. A. Schwenger – make sure we don't lose sight of why this area is important to people living on the eastern side of the state and elsewhere, to gather support for Heritage Area Designation and PILOT reform. D. Crane – could something go out to the full board to provide input, like "thinking about supporting all kinds of educational programming and want to source ideas for inclusion." K. Conlin: reach out to Agent staff for items to include in the proposal.

Agent update: MVP applications; Collins Center study on emergency services; Heritage Area feasibility study contracts; upcoming events including Annual Meeting June 24 at Greylock Glen

- Two MVP applications have been submitted. One in partnership with FRCOG, BRPC, DRWA, HooRWA, FLT, BNRC, Trout Unlimited, GZA to map and prioritize the river corridors in the Woodlands Partnership region and identify areas for conservation and stewardship. One in partnership with Rowe to continue work at Pelham Lake Park with Mass Audubon, and modest funding to update content for TheForestCenter.org website.

-R. Richardson will be hosting a workshop on April 17 at Heath Community Hall - "Opportunities to Sustainably Manage the Forest Below Our Knees for Nontimber Forest Products," 6-8 pm.

Any item(s) not anticipated within 48 hours - none

Scheduling next Committee meeting(s) - May 9, 3-4:30

Public comment - none

Adjourn – Motion A. Schwenger, seconded by D. Crane. 5:09 p.m.