

Atkinson Conservation Commission Minutes
Wednesday, November 29, 2023
Atkinson Town Hall

Approved January 31, 2024

Members Present:

Paul Wainwright, Chair
Bill Steele, Vice Chair
John Fournier, Secretary
Scott Kukshel
Suzie Newman
Jeff Nenart
Monique Chrétien
Charlie Pitts, Alternate
Sandy Cannon, Alternate

Others Present:

Bob Worden, Selectman Liaison
Pete McVay, Emeritus Advisor

1. Call to Order, and Attendance:

Chair Paul Wainwright called the meeting to order in person at Atkinson Town Hall at 7:00PM on Wednesday, November 29th, 2023. Chair Wainwright took attendance and noted that all members are present as well as two alternate members.

2. Review & Approval of Minutes

a. September 27th, 2023

Discussion: Chair Wainwright produced the minutes of September 27th as well as an addendum written by Member Fournier to clarify certain points.

Vice Chair Steele made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of 09/27/2023, as amended. Member Nenart seconded the motion. Member Chrétien abstained from the motion. Vote: 6/0/1, the motion carried.

b. October 25th, 2023

Discussion: Chair Wainwright produced the minutes of October 25th and asked if there were any comments or corrections; Member Newman noted one spelling correction.

Vice Chair Steele made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of 10/25/2023, as amended. Member Newman seconded the motion. Member Chrétien abstained from the motion. Vote: 6/0/1, the motion carried.

3. 2023 Expenditures Report and Projected Expenditures Discussion

Chair Wainwright produced the latest 2023 expenditures report and discussed a few recent expenditures. Chair Wainwright stated that if his math is correct, the Commission still has \$368.38 remaining in the budget for 2023. The Commission discussed how to utilize the remaining funds before year end, including reimbursing Member Cannon \$36.19 for turtle sign cover material and allocating \$327.96 for more turtle signs to be installed next spring. Chair Wainwright asked the Commission for consensus to pay Peter Steckler \$2,000.00 for his Maple Avenue turtle culvert study, and paying an invoice for \$169.65 for crushed stone to fill the washout on Sawyer; they agreed.

4. Accessible Trail on the Slade Town Forest – Progress Report – John

Member Fournier produced a map of the Slade Town Forest which showed the new Accessible trails. Member Fournier also displayed photographs of the work that has been done thus far. Member Fournier gave a special thanks to Ted Stewart for his exemplary efforts towards this project. Member Fournier stated that volunteerism is still needed, as there is plenty of work still to be done but things are moving along nicely.

Chair Wainwright stated that he met with the Rotary Club of Greater Salem, New Hampshire, and gave them a pitch for which he will submit a request for the required funding to complete Phase 1. The Commission had a discussion about how to go about fundraising for Phase 2 of the project and how to recognize the donors. Chair Wainwright stated that although there is still a lot of work to be done, Member Fournier has done a great job on this project and his efforts have been commendable.

5. 50th Celebration, Logo, Letterhead, Name Tags, and T-shirts – Suzie, et. al.

Member Newman discussed the events planned for 2024 including:

- a wildlife tracker event,
- a wildlife rehab discussion,
- a bear presentation,
- the annual pollinator event,
- walking in the Memorial Day Parade,
- a seed and tree giveaway,

- a semi-aquatic mammal presentation,
- a benefits of community forest presentation,
- co-opting Atkinson Days for conservation education,
- a mushroom walk,
- a take-a-hike day,
- a turkey talk, and
- a conversation on wildlife and culverts.

Chair Wainwright stated that he received an invitation from New Hampshire Fish & Game Commission to attend the awards ceremony at their December meeting to receive the Habitat Stewardship Award of Excellence; the Commission congratulated Chair Wainwright on the prestigious award.

The Commission discussed how to go about executing a successful tree giveaway. Member Kukshtel agreed to look into the program hosted by the State nursery.

Chair Wainwright produced a copy of the new letterhead and asked if there were any comments or suggested edits; there were none.

Chair Wainwright stated that he would personally like to buy name tags for the Commission so they can be easily identified at public events; the Commission agreed that this would be a good idea, particularly since there will be so many events happening in 2024.

Member Chrétien asked the Commission how they would like the t-shirts to look so she can work with the printer to get a cost estimate; the Commission agreed that just a logo over the heart would be fine with no writing on the back.

Selectman Liaison Bob Worden pledged to purchase these shirts for the Commission and asked that they order a few extras for certain people who help the Commission.

6. Trail Updates and Issues: Plans for 2024 – All

Chair Wainwright stated that he will be working early in January to print the large maps for Marshall and Stickney Town Forests.

Chair Wainwright continued that there needs to be a Kiosk at the end of Knightland Road once that map is complete, and stated that there has been some interest to also have a kiosk installed on Juniper, at the back end of the Sawyer Town Forest trails. Chair Wainwright continued that he has one kiosk, in pieces, in his shop, which he originally intended for the end of Knightland Road. This should be installed in the spring after consulting with the Homeowners' Association.

The Commission had a brief discussion about the Knightland Road trail entrance. Chair Wainwright stated that the Knightland kiosk should likely be placed closer to the trailhead rather than the parking lot.

Chair Wainwright stated that he asked Charlie Pitts to consider the Caroline Orr Town Forest in terms of which trails he recommends be closed. Member Pitts stated that he walked through each of the Conservation parcels and he looked into the wildlife corridors but he is unsure if the data is robust enough to draw any real conclusions. Member Fournier mentioned that some of his land has been designated as a “wildlife corridor” but his trail cameras catch nothing. Chair Wainwright stated that while this data is useful it may not always be accurate. Member Pitts stated that there are too many trails in this area that do not make sense; primarily, the trails down by the water. Member Pitts continued that the land was logged years ago and the trails were never changed so they are very outdated.

The Commission had a brief discussion around which apps and other technologies to use when walking or researching maps of Town lands.

Member Cannon brought up a trail on Crown Hill, near the houses as well as another trail that just goes out and back which was made by the mountain bikers. Member Cannon continued that if these trails could be removed it would totally clear up the area. Member Newman mentioned a large downed tree in this area that needs to be addressed. Chair Wainwright stated that the Commission can work on these items throughout the coming year.

Chair Wainwright stated that he received an email from Sandy Fuchs regarding a downed tree on a trail on the Marshall Town Forest; he let her know that if it is on a marked trail, it can be cut. Member Pitts stated that he is familiar with this tree and it does pass right across a marked trail. Chair Wainwright stated that Sandy is a great volunteer and he is confident that she will handle this appropriately.

Chair Wainwright stated that he received an email from a resident named Michelle who said there are American Chestnut saplings along the Stickney trails. Member Nenart stated that he has seen this in his line of work and sometimes, what appear to be saplings are just offshoots from existing root systems and they do not yield full size, healthy trees.

Member Nenart stated that someone has been opening the main, large gate at Sawyer and leaving it open. Member Nenart continued that he will keep an eye on it and close it if this situation occurs again. Chair Wainwright stated that he has some chains and a padlock that they can place on the gate, if this becomes a larger issue. The Commission had a brief discussion about past issues when locks were needed to prevent certain unsavory behavior.

7. Short Reports & Discussions

a. Abutter Complaint Form – Suzie

Chair Wainwright stated that Member Newman has been working on an abutter complaint form. Member Newman stated that the abutter complaint form can be used when a resident has an issue with conservation lands that abut their lands. Member Newman read the form and discussed some changes she made after conversations with Assistant Town Administrator Angela Wesson. The Commission discussed the challenges with this form and agreed that hard copies would need to be kept at the Town Administrator's office since some residents may not have computers. Chair Wainwright asked who the communications would go to once someone submits this form; it will be emailed to the Conservation email address. Member Fournier stated that he could write a rule to have the email forwarded to other recipients as identified to ensure visibility.

b. Volunteer Application Form - Suzie

Chair Wainwright stated that Member Newman has also been working on a volunteer application form. Member Newman stated that when she was working on the complaint form, she realized that the Commission should also utilize these online forms for volunteers. Member Newman continued that this method would be more official and it would also create a list of past volunteers in case the Commission wanted to reach out to them again. The Commission discussed the merits of an online volunteer application form and how they could utilize all of its benefits.

c. Maple Avenue Culvert Status Report – Paul

Chair Wainwright stated that there was a field walk with wildlife consultant Pete Steckler, the Town Engineer Steve Keach, and Director of Public Works Matt Sullivan. Chair Wainwright continued that he received a draft memorandum but he'd like to work on the language a bit. Chair Wainwright stated that he will complete this over the next week and pass it around for comment. Chair Wainwright continued that construction of the turtle-friendly culvert won't be in the Town budget until at least 2025.

d. Stewardship Reports (Orr and Williams #4) – Bill

Vice Chair Steele stated that he and Monique walked the Caroline Orr Town Forest and didn't find any surprises with the exception of some invasive plant species [why is that a surprise?]. Vice Chair Steele continued that he just needs to go online and fill out the proper forms. Vice Chair Steele stated that he also walked the Williams #4 land and did not find anything out of the ordinary. Vice Chair Steele continued that

both properties are in good shape and there does not appear to be any dumping activity occurring.

e. NHACC Board of Director's Report – Paul

Chair Wainwright stated that there will be another photography contest next year, and the NHACC Board is discussing some changes to the program.

f. Turtle Sign Report – Additional Signs? – Monique

Member Chrétien passed around her suggestions for locations of the new signs for next year. Member Chrétien continued that she is identifying these locations by asking the public where they are seeing the most turtle activity. Member Newman suggested asking the Bryant Woods homeowner association if they would pay for the sign going on their land. Member Newman continued that Oak Ridge may have a homeowner's association as well that can be approached for the same purpose.

g. Troop 9 News? – Bill

Vice Chair Steele stated that there is no Troop 9 news at this time.

h. Trail Map Status Report from Hannah

Chair Wainwright stated that he has not heard from Hannah regarding trail map status although this time of year tends to be a slower for trail map use.

i. SELT Acquisition Public Hearing Expected in Early 2024

Chair Wainwright stated that there will be a public hearing early in 2024 regarding the SELT acquisition. Chair Wainwright continued that Jerry Monkman came and took photographs which came out spectacularly.

j. Other Business

Chair Wainwright stated that Barry Conservation Camp is coming up. Member Nenart stated that she was aware of some girl scouts who will be applying to go to the camp this year. Chair Wainwright continued that since sponsoring an attendee costs about \$350.00 each, how many attendees should the Commission sponsor? The Commission agreed that

they would need to see how much interest there is. Member Nenart stated that although it is expensive, it is a tremendous opportunity and he thinks the Commission should sponsor two attendees. Vice Chair Steele stated that the decision would need to be made by January 15th. The Commission discussed that by sponsoring one attendee, they can afford to send them for the longer week if they so choose.

Member Chrétien stated that the Commission should give a gift to the Staley family since they gave the Commission the gift of two separate wildlife walks; perhaps a \$100.00 gift card. The Commission agreed that a gift was in order and determined by consensus that a \$100.00 gift card to the Home Depot would be appropriate.

Chair Wainwright asked if the Commission wants to spend funds from the Forest Maintenance Fund for invasive plant mitigation, there needs to be a warrant article written to allocate the funds. Chair Wainwright continued that he'd like to propose submitting a warrant article to appropriate \$15,000.00 for this purpose, which is about how much went into the fund after the latest selective timber harvests. Chair Wainwright continued that this money will be used for invasive plant management and will need to be spent within five years. The Commission agreed that this warrant article was a good idea.

Member Nenart asked what the regulations were for tree stands and hunting blinds. Member Nenart continued that he has seen a hunting blind within 100 feet of a marked trail. The Commission had a discussion around the topic of hunting, and whether or not the Commission had legal ground to prevent hunting blinds in close proximity to trails.

8. Next Meetings: December 27 (only if necessary) and January 24th, 2024

9. Hold the Date: NH ACC Annual Conference will be Saturday, November 2, 2024

10. Adjournment

Member Nenart made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Fournier seconded the motion. Vote: 7/0/0

The meeting adjourned at 8:43PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Zachary Gilberti, Recording Clerk

Attachments: none