

The meeting convened at 6:37 pm on July 8, 2009 in the Brown Public Library Community Room with Commissioners Russ Barrett, Patricia Coppolino (Chair), Lawrence Garland, Leslie Matthews and Don Wallace present. Also present were Andrea Chandler and Tom Willard from the Berlin Conservation Commission, resident Sandy Hyde, David Packie (Northfield Trail Association)(NTA), Danny Hale (Vermont All Terrain Vehicle Sportsman's Association)(VASA).

The Minutes from the June 10, 2009 meeting were unanimously approved.

TRAILS ON PAINE MOUNTAIN-Russ Barrett provide a brief orientation for the group showing a map depicting the existing trails on the property and noting that these have been GPS'ed. He said that a planning process was underway for recreational trails on the parcel and that input from user groups was being sought as part of that effort. He noted that in addition to trails on the Paine Mountain lot there were a number of ad hoc trails on adjacent private lands and with a mix of old town roads it was possible to travel from the Mill Hill Road in Northfield to the boundary with Berlin Municipal Lands and the Boyer State Forest which had trails that continued northerly to the Cross Town Road in Berlin.

Danny Hale (VASA) told the group that his organization, which is similar in structure and mission to the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, is a consortium of local ATV rider clubs and that the state level organization responds to local club needs. He said that there is no local club in this area but that he would check the membership list and contact any with Northfield addresses and ask that they contact the Conservation Commission if they wished to participate in the planning effort. He stressed that if no local riders came forward VASA would not continue involvement. If VASA does become involved, the organization has funds it can use for trail development, repairs and contract law enforcement. VASA encourages its members to use managed trails and applies "peer pressure" to lessen user misuse. He added that VASA has a goal of establishing an interconnected state trail network and that a short trail along Paine Mountain would be unlikely to address that goal but would provide a short ride for locals. David Packie (VTA) said that he has seen evidence of a lot of local ATV use on Municipal land as well as adjacent private lands and that there presently was a noticeable amount of damage to old roads.

Tom Willard and Andrea Chandler (Berlin Conservation Commission) said that their experience showed public concern about vehicle usage at steep and wet sites. They said that Berlin allows some ATV and Mountain Bike usage of selected trails on Town property. Mr. Willard said that the privately formed Irish Hill Preservation Group originally acquired lands later transferred to Berlin. Originally ATV use was not allowed but in response to residents and local officials the current regulated use was permitted with the intent that this be for local riders and that there were concerns for a higher level of use. He added that there is a fairly intense level of ATV use on private trails on the "Poor Farm" and a similar level of activity on Town lands was not wanted. He urged caution on a ridge trail for vehicle use. He said that on Berlin lands the Vermont Land Trust (a major funder) and Town officials needed to agree to any trail changes on the property.

Commissioner Lawrence Garland raised concerns about continuing to gather user group input to the process via separate meetings with individual user groups with conflicting interests suggesting that getting groups together and letting them interact and reach consensus would be more useful. Following debate the Commission voted to continue meeting separately with user groups 3 in favor, 1 opposed and 1 abstaining.

David Packie (NTA) said that the mountain bikers principal interest was to have a trail running west to east across the Paine Mountain lot to the ridge line where access to other trails on adjacent private lands were possible. He said they were very interested in accessing Norwich University lands as these were drier sites. In his experience there is a safety perception with trail users that travel at different speeds on the same trail. A solution might be to have mountain bikers travel one way up the main trail which he said would keep bikers at about 4 mph speed and offer a fairly easy ride to connecting trails off site. He said he thought bikers would be willing to follow such a format based upon his personal observations elsewhere.

DOG RIVER RESTORATION PRIORITIES. Berlin hasn't had an opportunity to address this as a Commission but intended to do so. They agreed that there likely were joint projects such as riparian planting and invasive plant species control where joint materials purchase could be expected. NOTE: Following the meeting the Roxbury Planning Commission was invited to consider joining in joint processes.

Northfield Conservation Commission priorities are:

1).Plantings to improve riparian buffers along the Dog River and control of invasive Japanese Knot Weed on Northfield owned Well Field lands and as needed and possible in highway rights of way north of the Golf Course with the intent of these locations also serving as demonstration sites for private property owners of river side lands.

2).Encouraging the Vermont Housing Authority to create a riparean buffer on it's Dogwood Glen holdings possibly as part of #1 above.

3).Encouraging Norwich University to establish /improve riparean buffers on it's lands as needed and possible likely as part of #1 above.

4).Explore possible projects to improve the effectiveness of Northfield's storm water drainage system in lessening sedimentation / contaminants from entering the river. A beginning step is to get Northfield on the DEC storm water system mapping list. Conversations between Bill Lyon and Patricia Coppolino suggest that Mr. Lyon supports the need for mapping project. The request to DEC needs to come from Town officials.

5).Explore removal of no longer needed in-stream structures on the Dog River and tributaries to improve fish passage. NOTE: Post meeting contract with Rich Kirn, Fisheries Biologist, Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife found that Mr. Kirn does not believe removing existing on used in-stream structures in the Dog River would enhance upstream fish passage because natural barriers to passage created by falls would

still be in place and he doesn't believe downstream fish movement requires assistance. He has no opinion about the need for fish passage in Union Brook currently blocked by a dam but would look into this and advise the Commission at a later date.

The remaining agenda was set aside due to the lateness of the hour.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Respectfully Submitted
Lawrence Garland, Secretary
July 16, 2009

NEXT MEETING AUGUST 12 BROWN LIBRARY COMMUNITY ROOM AT 6:30 PM.

NOTE: An early August field trip on Paine Mountain with Vermont Audubon Society member(s) is being planned but is not yet firm.