

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Minutes of September 27, 2023**

- I. **ROLL CALL** David called the meeting to order at 6:05, all Ruth, Jeremy, Russ, David and Mo attending, and Debbie and Nigel unavailable.
- II. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None
- III. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** August 23, 2023, Jeremy moved, 2nd by Russ, unanimously approved
- IV. **DISCUSSION**
 - a. **Dog River Park Committee:** Bonnie Donahue returned to receive feedback on the committee's park maintenance report. The NCC members present expressed appreciation for the great work of the Dog River Park Committee on this report and voted unanimously to "endorse the report and to recommend to Town Manager Jeff Schultz that the town staff use the report to inform groundskeeping and maintenance activities at the park." In addition, the committee reiterated a recommendation that the Dog River Park Committee create a shorter version of the recommendations in the report that could be used by town staff and volunteers. For next steps,
 1. NCC will communicate its endorsement to Jeff
 2. Dog River Park Committee members will meet with town staff to share the report and discuss ongoing communications regarding park groundskeeping and maintenance
 3. Dog River Park Committee members will ask the town to post the report on its website.
 - b. **Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC)**
 1. **Town Forest Trails – Closures/Repairs:** TFSC committee members have been meeting with Norwich University staff to coordinate. Norwich U is meeting with FEMA about funding for the repair of the Slate Avenue trail. TFSC members have observed limited damage to town forest trails.
 2. **Ski Trail Proposal:** The NCC voted unanimously to conditionally approve the proposal for a backcountry ski trail as discussed in the August 23, 2023 minutes. The condition is that the TFSC has a request into the ANR State Botanist to confirm that the trail work will not impact any state listed threatened or endangered species. If no threat is found, the TFSC will let the Town Selectboard know that the TFSC/NCC recommend approval of the application. If there are any questions, the TFSC will bring the matter back before the NCC.
 3. **Other Business:**
 - i. TFSC proposed to invite Norwich U. Shaw Center Director to join TFSC -- preliminary discussions indicate that Andrew is receptive -- and the NCC members agree that would be a good approach for further strengthening the great level of coordination between the town and university over trail and forest management.
 - ii. A Paine Mountain cross-country trails race has been re-initiated and may serve as a fundraising vehicle for trail maintenance.

- iii. **Cheney Field mowing:** The TFSC has initiated conversations with the Town Manager and staff to ensure that the field is mowed in accordance with a conservation plan next season. The committee will discuss management goals for the field with experts at the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and then work with the town to mow and maintain accordingly.
- c. **Collective Purchasing of Bare Root Tree Stock:** Though included on the agenda, the committee agreed that we had already resolved this issue (we decided to consider it in a future year).

V. UPDATES

- a. **VOREC Grant:** Tabled discussion and agreed to pick up at the October meeting.
- b. **Report on Working Groups on Forest Uses and Town Forest Stewardship Plan:** Work is ongoing.
- c. **New Tree Planting Grant:** Tabled discussion until October since an uncertainty over status of tree order.
- d. **High School Trails System:** Mo indicated that the trails are still closed. A reason may be that the teacher who used to organize trail maintenance is no longer doing so. She will talk to the H.S. administrators to find out who the NCC can contact to discuss.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED) None

VII. OTHER BUSINESS:

- a. The committee agreed that we would like to discuss the potential for a conservation easement for the town forest at the October meeting.
- b. David reported that Audubon Vermont biologist Tim Duclos should be contacting Russ and Jeremy to explore an update to the bird habitat management plan for the town forest.

VIII. TOPICS FOR NEXT MEETING (September 27, 2023)

- a. **Town Forest Conservation Easement**
- b. **High School Trails System**
- c. **New Tree Planting grant**
- d. **VOREC grant update**

IX. ADJOURNMENT: 6:44 pm, Ruth moved, Jeremy 2nd, meeting adjourned.

David Mears

Vice-chair, NCC