

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN FOREST STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE
Minutes of April 20, 2021

- I. **ROLL CALL:** Committee members in attendance were Russ Barrett, Lydia Perry, Colin Bright, John Sears, Nelson Hoffman, and Brad Johnson. Sitting in were Debbie Zuaro, Timothy Swartz, Susan Barnard, Dylan Simms, Lauren Griswold, Evan Martell, Matt Katz, Ben Gauthier, Andy Virnig, Colin O'Neil, Greg Hewitt and friends Anna, Joe, and Allie (no last names given), and Alex (no last name given). Russ alerted us that Mike Donneville, who is a committee member, will be joining the group at the end of the school year. He will be working on education issues.
- II. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None scheduled, but several sitting in.
- III. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Notes from March 16, 2021 were offered for approval. Lydia so moved and Colin B. seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- IV. **UPDATES AND NEWS FROM COMMITTEE MEMBERS:** Lydia reported on several fires set and trash left behind last weekend in the area around the Cheney Field. Several public posts have been put out to remind all of use allowances and restrictions.
- V. **WORKING GROUP REPORTS AND DISCUSSION**
 1. **Mapping/Long Range Planning**
 - a) **Landowner Letter Responses:** Russ summarized responses to the letters sent to adjacent private landowners. Colin B. suggested that individual landowners be kept anonymous. Six total landowners have been contacted by mail to tell them there are existing recreational trails on their land that also run through the TF. The committee has heard back from four of the six. Only one had objections to trails on their land, and that landowner was firm in his/her objections. The WG has put out public notices about the fact that the Postal Trail is on land that landowner's property and users should stop using the trail. Brad asked if any of the property lines of these owners are posted/marked, and Russ said no. He pointed out that the public is legally able to walk, hunt, fish, etc. on these lands but trail building is not permissible.
 - b) **Mapping Project:** Lydia and Nelson spoke on the mapping efforts with Central Vermont Regional Planning. Russ reported that the committee has used free hours of mapping time offered to the town to produce a layered digital map. As Nelson stated, the map is intended to be used as a planning tool for the TFSC/NCC/NSB as they plan to the future of the TF. Lydia shared her screen with all so the map could be reviewed. Nelson and Lydia talked about how the various layers were generated, including information from the TFSP and VT Natural Resources Atlas.

c) Trail Reviews for Approval: Brad asked if the Summit Trail had been approved at last meeting, and it was. Lydia presented review of Trail #6, or the Connector Trail. Colin O. said he liked the trail as it connects the TF with NU trails. Several others echoed that sentiment. Nelson reminded the committee that it does travel next to a known vernal pool, and urged consideration of a reroute to move it further away. Colin O., who does the maintenance on that section, said that was possible to do. John asked whether or not we should hold off on voting until such a reroute is completed, but as that section is on NU land the vote moved ahead. Brad moved that the trail be approved, and Lydia seconded. The motion passed unanimously. There was some discussion of how to name the trail in future planning, and all thought that keeping traditional names in place is best. John suggested calling this trail the Ridgeline Connector. Next up was discussion of Trail #5, which is actually a series of short trails around the Cheney Field. Lydia, Colin O. and others offered that these trails are important as a way for the public to access the TF in all seasons. Russ added that the soils there are good for trail use – dry, not erosion prone. Several on the committee pointed out that NU has been using this area for shelters and fires, and this issue needs to be addressed in the long term. Lydia moved that these trails be approved and Colin B. seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Lydia then asked for some time to discuss the Postal Trail closure/reroute. After some consideration of whether to return to this matter, the committee asked if anyone had comments (especially those sitting in). There were lots of comments here. Two options were considered – go back to the land owner who has said he/she does not want a trail on their property or find a reroute. There was some disagreement as to which is the better option. The section that is in question involves the only easy crossing of the stream below the beaver pond. As Colin O. and others stated, another crossing on the town land will be tough to find and build. Nelson stated that the landowner in question has wildlife management plans for the land and recreation can impact wildlife. Colin O. favors working further with the landowner to see if we could get permission to use his/her land. Nelson pointed out that the TFSP does not encourage further stream crossings, and Postal should be a lesson as to the negative impacts of building unsanctioned trails on TF and adjacent private land. In the end Colin O., along with Nelson, Lydia, and others on the WG agreed to see if a feasible alternate route can be found that would avoid the private land. Also, there was discussion of whether or not the digital map could be shared with the public, and Debbie is going to ask the town manager that question.

d) Spring Closure of Trails: Several committee members urged consideration of seasonal closures. Nelson added that we should complete the plan for recreational use first and then think about spring trail closures. Russ reminded us that at the present the TFSC has no legal power to stop users during any closure periods; public pressure is the only enforcement tool. The committee will return to this matter later.

2. Norwich University Relations/Special Events: Colin B. reported that several requests have come in from NU, too late and with ground too wet for approval. These have been denied. All agreed that Colin O. has been a great help in dealing with NU requests and use during training exercises. Colin O. noted that despite the denial of special use requests to military planners at NU, there has been no negative feedback on his end. He reported that planning at the university seems to be going better, though it will take time for cadets and other students to get over the old habits of considering the TF land around the Cheney Field to be NU land. Colin O. urged us to be patient here. There was discussion of ATV usage up and beyond the Cheney Field. Lydia asked about closing the gate leading up, but others thought it was important to leave it open to allow and encourage public access to the TF. Colin B. suggested that some signs be placed near the gate that say motorized use is prohibited.

3. Education Events: Russ reported again the Mike Donneville will join us after school ends.

4. Forest Management Access: None

5. Other Business: None

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED): Greg Hewitt spoke to his hopes that key parts of the existing and historical trail network in the TF can be maintained for recreational use. He stated that the trails network is one key reason that he and other Northfield residents choose to live here. Lauren Griswold added that she wants us to work with the landowner who owns the portion of the Postal Trail in question to seek an arrangement that allows continued use by the public. Alex (no last name given) asked about the closure of the unsanctioned trail above the beaver pond. Russ and Nelson reported that the trail was built without TFSC approval and goes through the Low Disturbance Area defined by the consultant that worked on the TFSP. Lydia added that the town adopted the TFSP in 2019 and the plan addresses trail building specifically; all new trails must go through the TFSC approval process. Nelson commented that the committee is required by the TFSP to consider recreational usage along with other ecological factors. The committee will take up this matter at our next meeting.

VII. ADJOURNMENT: Nelson moved that the meeting be adjourned, and Lydia seconded. The motion passed unanimously.