

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT TOWN FOREST STEWARDSHIP
COMMITTEE MINUTES August 17, 2021**

Meeting called to order: 6:06 pm

Place: Brown Public Library - Tree House.

I. Roll call: Committee members in attendance were Russ Barrett, Lydia Petty, Colin Bright, Brad Johnson, and Nelson Hoffman

II. Public participation(scheduled): None scheduled. Mathew Katz, Northfield resident, attended this portion of the meeting. Mat expressed concern about trail closures, specifically Postal and the Ridgeline trails. Colin stated that the rerouting of Postal would be challenging given the steepness of the terrain and likely need for a stream crossing due to property boundaries. Lydia shared that the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) hosted a public hike earlier in the summer to identify possible rerouting options. The TFSC is continuing to explore options for rerouting or alternatives that use portions of the original trail. More hikes to the area may be scheduled to continue to consider options. Russ explained the trail was closed when a private property landowner learned of the trail and did not want recreation trails on their property. The trail crosses the Town Forest and Norwich University (NU) and other private properties. Mat offered to be involved in future discussions of the Postal trail and potential trail building. Mat asked about the other trail that was closed. Colin and Lydia explained its location from Forest Road to the Paine Mountain Trail, that it also crosses Town Forest and private property, that it had been built within the last two years, and that the portion of the trail in the Town Forest had been closed. Nelson added that this decision to close the trail was voted on by the TFSC, the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC), and ultimately the Select Board. The TFSC had earlier recommended the Summit Trail be recommended as an official trail as it was all within the Town Forest. Other trails also recommended to be recognized as official trails leave Town Forest property on to private property and are pending signed landowner permissions before they will be official trails. Mat asked about potential closure of the Ridgeline trail that leaves the Town Forest and crosses into NU property. Nelson responded that the TFSC voted to recognize that trail, but also recommended working with NU to reroute the trail away from vernal pools that provide essential habitat for wildlife. There are no plans to close that trail. Lydia stated there appears to be a new unofficial trail behind the Hawk Watch lean-to. Mat said that the apparent lack of clear policy for trail building may be leading to trails being built without permission. He suggested improved trail markers on official trails and improved communication. Brad said that addressing trail names has been a priority for some time. Colin stated that the TFSC has established a trail request policy and form. Lydia mentioned to Mat the need for a mountain bike or trails group in Northfield to help with trail work, maintenance, and community involvement. Brad suggested the value of a multi-sport group and that we should think about the coming winter and back-country skiing. Mat was thanked for attending the meeting and was encouraged to continue to be involved.

III. Approval of minutes: Minutes from July 20, 2021 were offered for approval. Colin moved to approve, Lydia seconded, vote: 4 yeas, 0 nays, 1 abstain.

VI. Updates and news from committee: Russ reported that he and Nelson took a hike around Dustin Pasture, Town Forest property on Saturday. The visit included walking along an approximately 1400' long dirt road on a slope without water bars or other drainage management features. The road ends at a building that is part of a maple sugaring operation. Nelson added that at the maple sugaring operation building there was a strong smell of petroleum product, perhaps kerosene or diesel. Russ noted that the two fuels tanks that are visible at the site appear new and in good condition.

V. Working groups and discussion

a. Master plan and mapping

1. Landowner permissions: Lydia said that TFSC need to reach out to the landowners to seek their approval and signature on the landowner permission form that had previously been discussed with the Select Board. She also suggested putting the landowner permissions form – blank and trail request form – blank on the TFSC website with explanation of what they are and their use. Russ and Brad volunteered to connect with the landowners to answer questions, address concerns, and seek signatures of the permission forms for the existing trails on their properties. Once completed, the TFSC will go to the Select Board for final trails approval. Lydia stated that a landowner is always in charge of how the trails on their property are used and whether the trails are on public maps, how they are signed, and other specifics about use. She also suggested that the TFSC should consider a presentation to the Selected Board about the Northfield recreational resources and the overall management of the Town Forest trail system and use, including a discussion of landowner permission for trails leading to private property. She concluded by suggesting that the TFSC could seek advice from more experienced organizations in Vermont that manage public and private trail systems.

b. Norwich relations/special events Colin reported that he and Russ will be meeting with NU to discuss use of Town Forest property. Goal is to better understand how NU wants to use the Town Forest and ensuring that these are compatible with the Town Forest Stewardship Plan. The Town Manager approves the use of the Town Forest. Colin said that re-marking the southern and other boundaries of the Cheney Field would help better designate property lines. Brad said that consideration should be given to the interaction with recreational users of the Town Forest during NU's activities and large events. Lydia added that this is an important relationship and we need to understand NU's needs, that the TFSC is looking to foster partnership with NU.

c. Education events: No report.

d. Forest management access

1. Butternut junction and County Forester involvement: Russ reported that there is a new Washington Co. Forester, Robert Nelson. Robert has offered to provide assistance in assessing forest access for timber harvest in the Town Forest. Brad stated that the TFSC should seek guidance from the Select Board on what is intended from a timber harvest in the Town Forest as an earlier step. Colin said the discussion with the Selected Board should include the broader uses of the Town Forest and the balance between timber harvest, recreation, and conservation. Brad said the TFSC should also get input from Northfield residents. Colin said a public meeting may be needed to understand the desires of the community for the Town Forest. Lydia said the TFSC should focus on discussion of the timber harvest with the Select Board to

get started. Brad stated there is no ticking clock and the town has time to get this right. Russ said that even with all best public out-reach, there is always the negative reaction once the skidders show up. Brad said the Town Forest Stewardship Plan does include timber harvest, so there is some guidance in the plan. Russ said that the Northfield has been down this path before. Lydia suggested that we start with Town Manager to talk timber harvest. Brad said access is a foundational issue for a timber harvest and that should be addressed first; he will set up a meeting with the Town Manager.

e. Other business

1. Election of officers: Colin nominated Brad as Chair, Nelson seconded, vote: 4 yeas, 0 nays, 0 abstain. Colin volunteered to be Secretary, Nelson seconded, vote: 4 yeas, 0 nays, 0 abstain. Lydia thanked Russ for his serving as Chair.

2. Hawk Watch: Russ report there has been no action on this project, however the roof should be the priority. Possible assistance is available. Russ will discuss with TFSC member Mike Gonneville. During the planned hike on Sunday, August 22, the group will visit the Hawk Watch.

3. Replacement for John Sears: Russ will contact NCC.

4. Planned hikes: Paine Mountain hike August 22 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Meet at the Green Mountain Medical Center 9:45 AM. Other hikes this Fall are being planned and will be advertised.

VI. Public participation(unscheduled): See item II above

VII. Other Business:

Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) Transportation Study Grant

Update: Lydia reported that Dubois and King is the contractor, the project is on a tight schedule, however, there will be three site walks open to the public, a community forum that will be hybrid to allow in-person and remote participation, and a survey to seek input. The project will consider alternatives and provide a preferred alternative with estimated cost for construction. The project and public involvement will be widely advertised soon.

Vermont Outdoor Recreation Communities (VOREC) Grant Update:

Brad told the TFSC of this grant application process. Interested parties are working on a letter of intent due August 27th. The proposed project will tie to the five pillars of VOREC and will include outreach and access through a way-finding kiosk, mapping and additional wayfinding resources that are the centerpiece of the project, rehabilitation of the Slate Avenue trail, public access to snowshoes and bicycle through the town library, and Hawk Watch invasive plant species removal. Lydia added the project includes a proposal for hiring a consultant to help with the planning to implement the project and that the focus of the project is on Northfielders having access to the Town Forest and use of recreational equipment. The results of the CVRPC Transportation Study Grant will be part of the VOREC grant. The group involved in the VOREC grant process reached out to Berlin, but that community chose to not be VOREC co-grantees at this time.

However, a CVRCP member offered to help the towns collaborate on overall land management. Lydia suggested that the TFSC vote in support of the VOREC grant. Collin made the motion to support the VOREC letter of intent, Lydia seconded, vote: 4 yeas, 0 nays, 1 abstain. For additional information on the VOREC grant email ncc@northfield.vt.us

Cheney Field Mowing: Nelson said that per the conservation recommendation in the Town Forest Stewardship Plan, TFSC should plan for an annual mowing of a third of Cheney Field. He will reach out to Town Manager.

Trail maintenance: The TFSC will invite Collin O'Neill, Shaw Outdoor Center manager, NU to the September 17 TFSC meeting to discuss coordinating trail maintenance.

VII. Adjournment: Colin moved to adjourn, Russ seconded, vote 5 yeas, 0 nays, 0 abstain.
Meeting ended 8:05 PM