

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN FOREST STEWARDSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE
Minutes of October 20, 2020

- I. **ROLL CALL:** In attendance were John Sears, Colin Bright, Lydia Petty, Russ Barrett, Brad Johnson.
- II. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** Devin Krevetski expressed interest in doing some routine trail maintenance in TF, on Paine Mountain Trail and Hawk Watch Trail above the Rock Garden. He wanted to schedule it for Halloween Day, but will inform TFSC as to scheduling. Colin moved that the committee allow this volunteer work to proceed as planned by Devin and Casey, and Nelson seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Dave Packie followed Devin with a report on his unsanctioned trail building activities. He began by requesting that the TFSC delay the dismantling of the trail in question, as mapped and discussed in the previous committee meeting. His reasoning was based on the fact that certain reasons given were “not accurate.” There followed a great deal of discussion concerning the trail section that appears to run through the Low Disturbance Area (LDA) as designated by the consultant that worked on the Town Forest Management Plan. It was unclear as to whether or not the boundaries of the area were meant to be hard lines or a general recommendation to protect natural resources contained within the area. Dave argued that the trail is located on natural benches and in general is a low impact use of the area for mountain bikers and other uses. Lydia commented that Dave’s perspective is needed, and Dave followed by noting that he built that trail in a good faith effort to eliminate potential hazards from bikers traveling downhill on the Paine Mountain Trail while walkers and other users are traveling uphill. He commented that since his work with the NCC which began in 2008, he thinks that there is a bias amongst the NCC against mountain biking in the TF. He reviewed a contentious period of discussion amongst the NCC and members of the community over this specific use, and Russ agreed that this had been the case as far back 2008. Dave maintained that at some unspecified point in time he got the OK from an unnamed member of the SB to ignore the NCC and move ahead with mountain bike trail building. Brad and others noted that they had not encountered issues with bikers and hikers traveling opposite directions in the trail section in question. Nelson thanked Dave for bringing this issue to the TFSC. He reminded the group that there are ecological interests beyond recreational use that must be considered in the LDA. He commented that we need to have further discussion of this matter before proceeding with action beyond the closed signs currently in place. Lydia agreed, proposing that the TFCS hold off on dismantling the unsanctioned trail, but urging the group to have a decision made before the biking seasons begins next spring/summer. Brad noted that the committee needs better numbers on trail use here, and Lydia stated that the data we do have clearly shows that the closure of the university’s Shaw Center trails have created more traffic on the TF trails, with more users of all kinds there. Colin O’Neil, manager of the NU Shaw Center commented that the town needs a more comprehensive plan for all the trails on NU and TF property. He argued that we should refrain from closing any other trails until there is such a plan in place. Colin Bright asked if that would leave the TFSC time to close trails if needed before biking season. Nelson pointed out that at some point this covid crisis and the associated challenges in use of trails will pass. He stated that we need to get a better plan in place first and then consider trails afterwards, so that the conservation goals of the Town Forest Plan can be adhered to. It was clear at this point that there is little agreement amongst the

committee and others on the bigger question of how this town land should be managed with all the multiple uses and users. Dave, while still arguing that his unsanctioned trail should stay, commented that he would comply with what the TFSC decides to do with trail in question. And, he commented that the TFSC needs to have a clearer vision of what the end goal is for management of this public land. There are many considerations here, including multiple uses, parking, safety issues, and more. Lydia moved that the dismantling of the trail in question be delayed to allow time for the committee to do further work on these matters, including much better mapping. Brad seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

- III. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES: September 29, 2020:** This matter was not given any time at the meeting and the minutes were not approved.
- IV. **NORWICH UNIVERSITY ACTIVITIES IN TF:** Colin O'Neil provided an update on the recent ROTC drill activities in the TF. He called a meeting with leaders of the Corps and notified them of the activities that took place, including those which were not permitted by the town. University officials were troubled by what they heard. Going forward, Colin has been placed in charge of all future ROTC drill activities that involve the TF. Russ thanked Colin for working with us on this matter. Colin will reach out to Lydia and Russ to update them and start a dialogue about what the college may and may not do in the TF. Lydia commented that these drills have huge impacts on other users and the TF itself. Corps activities clearly fall into the category of "special events" and need to be monitored as such. Live fire drills and other specific activities need further discussion. Colin Bright contended that live fire drills should never be allowed on TF property. Russ noted the long history of the university utilizing the TF for such drills, but Colin Bright maintained that this use of public land should not be permitted. Nelson supported Russ' comments about the historical relationship between the town and NU and urged the committee to think more about this matter. He also noted that the poor behavior and decision making this time around might provide a good opportunity for further discussion. All committed members were in agreement that NU must ask for permission for this "special event" uses.
- V. **SPECIAL EVENTS POLICY IN TF:** Lydia noted that other events in the TF have obtained permission from the town, such as the Paine Mountain Trail Race. It was agreed that the SB is ultimately in charge of making decisions on such requests, and TFSC needs to give Jeff and the SB some further guidelines on how to make such decisions. John suggested that we table this discussion until a later meeting, and Colin Bright asked committee members to come to that meeting with ideas about how to proceed with the SB.
- VI. **OTHER BUSINESS:** Russ proposed a budget of \$350 for the TFSC to replace some signs and perhaps purchase a game camera. Dave noted his opposition to cameras in the TF. Colin suggested we budget for some printed maps. John commented that he has produced a PDF version of the Colin Bright's trail proposal form, and this issue will be put on the agenda for a later meeting.
- VII. **ADJOURNMENT:** Colin Bright moved that the meeting be adjourned and Lydia seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.