



December 11, 2020

Select Board
Town of Littleton

Dear Select Board Members:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present the details of the Smith Conservation Land invasive species management plan at your meeting of December 7, 2020. As you know, SVT's management plan is designed to restore the ecological health of this beautiful and important natural area.

SVT appreciates that the Select Board is responding to the concerns of some of the property's neighbors and other residents regarding our planned, limited use of herbicides to control the extensive non-native plant invasion on this property. It is important to note that other neighbors and town residents, including the Board of the Littleton Conservation Trust, have expressed support of SVT's management proposal. Additionally, the Smith family, who made the protection of this land possible, has expressed their support of SVT's proposed plan. In response to concerns raised, SVT has already reduced the proposed area for herbicide treatment in half, from 22 to 11 acres. Furthermore, the herbicide will be applied at well below maximum allowable rates and will be targeted carefully to the invasive plants only. Mechanical treatment alone on the remaining eleven acres has a questionable chance at success, but we are willing to try that approach in those areas.

At its meeting on Monday, December 7th, the Select Board asked if SVT would pause any herbicide application at the Smith Conservation Land until the new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations are issued. This request was made based upon information suggesting the new regulations would be issued in early 2021. SVT has since learned that the time frame for that issuance is uncertain and could be up to a year away.

SVT reviewed the proposed regulatory changes and consulted with a Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' (MDAR) Environmental Chemist, Hotze Wijnja, regarding those proposed changes. According to the EPA's proposed changes, the new label has been drafted to read as follows:

*"Groundwater Advisory
This chemical has properties and characteristics associated with chemicals
detected in groundwater. This chemical may leach into groundwater if used in*

areas where soils are permeable, particularly where the water table is shallow.”

SVT evaluated our project proposal in light of the expected labeling change due to the potential of triclopyr to leach into groundwater under certain conditions. Neighbors made comments about groundwater level and well depth. We understand that that the surface of the groundwater table at this site is greater than 6.5 feet but the well intake for a residential well is typically much deeper. Impact to well water would only occur if leaching occurs on a scale that allows continued input and leaching of herbicide from the top soil layer into deeper soil layers, eventually in upper groundwater layers and, if continued inputs occur, to deeper groundwater. The proposed project will not lead to herbicide inputs that would result in such an input scenario. Herbicides are applied on top of the vegetation or soil surface; upper soil has binding capacity and mitigates leaching. This project also does not anticipate long-term applications of herbicides.

In our re-assessment, SVT has concluded that the 125-ft residential well buffers and the 100-foot wetland buffers provide the additional precautionary protection to prevent groundwater or water supply contamination. Two studies completed in Massachusetts further indicate that this approach is sound. In our previous letter to the Select Board, we referenced the simulation study conducted for Eastham, MA that concluded, *“At the rate and with the method of application, the herbicides used in the rights-of-way area in Eastham will not result in herbicide concentrations in ground and surface water that would cause harm to humans and aquatic wildlife.”* In a second study that we just learned about, MDAR has been monitoring five public water supply wells on Cape Cod that are located in potential influence areas of Rights-Of-Way vegetation management with herbicides that has been in practice for many years. The monitoring has occurred monthly for the past two years and NO traces of any of the six herbicides – including triclopyr – have been detected in the wells. The monitoring did detect trace amounts of pesticides commonly used in lawn care (below levels of concern). Finally, in addition to triclopyr being on the list of herbicides permitted in sensitive areas, it is NOT on the list of chemicals of [concern for groundwater contamination](#) in Massachusetts.

Neighbors to the Smith Conservation Land had provided a consensus opinion to SVT at the October 20th meeting that they would support the cut and dab application, but requested that SVT not use the foliar spray. This same sentiment was expressed in an email from Jesse Walsh to the neighbor/stakeholder group on December 4, 2020. We note that at the Select Board meeting, the neighbors made a request that SVT add water testing.

In spite of all evidence pointing towards SVT's sound approach and the support of some key stakeholders, SVT will honor the Select Board's request to postpone the implementation of treatment of invasive plants with herbicides at the Smith Conservation Land until next year. In the interim, we will proceed with mechanical control.

At this time, the town of Littleton has a variety of landowners located within Zone II Wellhead Protection Zones that are implementing similar activities as those proposed by SVT. These

include Rights-of-Way vegetation management and standard residential and commercial landscaping practices. In that SVT's planned invasive plant management program will be conducted in compliance with all regulatory guidance and by licensed professionals, I would ask the Select Board to accord SVT the same consideration given to all landowners within the community as we move forward.

Thank you again for your thoughtful consideration of this issue. I, and the entire SVT team look forward to continuing to work with you and the Town in the acquisition, protection, and management of the Town's natural areas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vernegaard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Vernegaard
Executive Director

cc: US Representative Lori Trahan
Mass. Senator Jamie Eldridge
Littleton Conservation Commission
Smith Neighbors and Stakeholders