

## WSCC Meeting Minutes

11/05/2014 4:00-6:00 PM

**In attendance:** Laura Mattei, Christa Collins, Lisa Vernegaard, Dan Stimson, Jesse Koyen, Alicia Coleman, Amanda Weise, Gary Dufresne, John Keyes, Karin Paquin, Kathy Sferra, Laurie Bent, Michele Grzenda, Priscilla Ryder, Rita Gibes Grossman, William Constable, Joan Furguson, Jacquie Goring, Hanle Rauch, Marcella Stasa, Betina Abe, Bill Taylor, George Fiske

### Announcements:

- **Laura Mattei, SVT:** announced new deer management policy at SVT, to which hunting will be permitted where there are significant impacts and SVT has cooperation of abutters.
- **Christa Collins, SVT:** described [SVT's Tri-Town landscape partnership project](#)
  - Funded by state landscapepartnership grant
  - Builds on idea of aggregated collaboration
  - Now, there is more funding for landscape-scale conservation, as opposed to individual parcels
- **Laura Mattei, SVT:** In May 2014, SVT and the City of Marlborough implemented a prescribed burn in the Desert Natural Area/Memorial Forest (Pitch Pine, Scrub Oak habitat). 14 acres. Continuing field management at Greenways in Wayland
- **George Fiske:** A current project in Sherborn: large, priority parcel has seen little success in conservation until recently. Property is under Ch. 61B and abuts other conservation land. Question if the town will exercise right of first refusal is pending, but his solution is transfer the development potential to another municipal property closer to town center. This has been an ongoing conversation, about 1.5 years.
- **Bill Taylor:** Hopkinton, with the Whitehall Woods Alliance, is conserving a 40 acre parcel. The town has the right of first refusal but may not exercise
- **Boxborough: Now has CPA funding**
  - Groton, MA has good examples of limited development projects
- **Acton:** Partnership between Stow, Action, and SVT
  - Parcel identified as a connector with high biodiversity value. Have given numerous offers to conserve over the last decade, all of which were rejected. Finally accepted and it's protected!
  - 24 acres in Stow, 6 in Acton. Only costs \$28k (Christa comments that this is a good lesson in patience)

- MassWoods has published a new issue of *Your Land, Your Legacy*

[http://masswoods.net/sites/masswoods.net/files/pdf-doc-ppt/YLYL-2-web\\_0.pdf](http://masswoods.net/sites/masswoods.net/files/pdf-doc-ppt/YLYL-2-web_0.pdf)

- Stow has issued a new 1-page guideline for posting boundaries
- **Laura Mattei** introduces the Request for Proposals (RFP) for SVT's MassLIFT AmeriCorps members

Jesse Koyen is the Americorps Land Steward and Alicia Coleman is the Regional Conservation Coordinator. Will send a new RFP e-mail thread Thursday 11/6/2014

- Discussion of new forms of communication- Facebook as a candidate
  - Agreed that a ListServ would be more appropriate to share opportunities
  - Will only be used as needed, promise to not be overwhelming
  - SVT will create this and figure out the details. More to come

## Featured Presentation: Priority Planning in the SuAsCo Watershed

Christa Collins introduces

- Based on SuAsCo biodiversity plan
- With the new quantity and quality of GIS data, SVT is refining areas that are “worthy of conservation” in the SuAsCo.. asking what is left to protect as valuable conservation land

Dan Stimson:

- All data from MassGIS – please remember to submit updates to them!
- Conservation land was adjusted on the L3 assessor's data
- Development layer includes roads, residential, industrial ,and all other impervious surfaces
- Data sources: MassGIS/Natural Heritage
  - NHESP Priority Habitats of Rare Species
  - BioMap2 Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape
  - Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
  - Priority Natural Vegetation Communities
  - NHESP Living Waters Core Habitats and Critical Supporting Watersheds
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\*(can view all data online on [MassGIS Oliver](#))

- Combination of all these layers create the “worthy of conservation” layer that relates to L3 parcels
- Remaining Acres = **71,262**
- Parcels >9 acres = 3,326

Alicia Coleman: Method to find landscape-scale contiguous blocks

- Find spatial patterns of contiguous parcels
- For each group of parcels (0-9.99, 10-19.99, 20+), attempt to find arrangements that would create dense blocks of conservation land
- Create a Tiered- Ranking System - Goal: Find areas with the least amount of parcels AND the most acreage
- Determine the feasibility of conserving the tracts of land that were just prioritized on a town-by-town basis

#### **Presentation Questions:**

- How credible is the TNC methodology? - general consensus is that it is “top-notch”
- Agriculture land- how is it included and should it be included separate from wildlife habitat?
- Make data transparent to open space and planning boards – local towns can provide feedback on important landowner relationships

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## Group Sessions: Summaries

### Land Protection

- General Conversation: About [Map Geo](#) (seems to only be available if the town chooses to invest in it, then it's open source software)
- Chapter 61: 70% has to be protected after the right of first refusal (ROFR), if assigned to a non profit
- Stow: Flagg Hill town exercised its ROFR, only 50% for conservation, but people got used to having it on open space and went berserk when selectman tried to sell/develop it
- Town forests not considered Article 97 unless it's been proactively made such
- George - precedent for disposing of town forest in town
- Can you sell town forest for developments rights and put CPA funds into general municipal?
- Land as collateral for bank loan RLF has always done so
- Conservation Fun- Rich Husband has used it quite a bit
- OSI or Norcross for funding?
- When does year kick in from date of withdrawal or non-renewal?
- Coolidge conundrum- remains squirrely
- Sherborne- “Handshake tenant” farmer wants LT to invest in farmland to improve soil. Do they do it? Land is still viable, so until it's not, why make the investment?
- Other LTs typically use rolling 5-year leases on farmland
- Stow- farmer said he needed water if he could continue farming (Stow does not have a public water supply.. town fire dept. also wanted water in that section). Town split the cost of a pond, farmer included labor. Land no longer used for farming but the pond is still there.

## Field/Forestry

Attending: Jonathan Keyes (Concord), Joan Fergeson (Concord), Rick Findlay (Littleton), Hank Rausch (Westborough), Michele Grzenda (Weston), Bettina Abe (Littleton), Marcella Stasa (Upton) and Laura Mattei, SVT.

### Are very small fields worth maintaining?

In Upton they have 5 small fields that total 8 acres in the middle of a large forested tract. The fields used to be larger and more numerous in the early 1900s. Upton Conservation is finding it challenging to find the time and resources to maintain these fields and wonder if it is worth it. They don't want to lose viable agricultural land. By the context, it would seem to make sense to let these fields grow back to forest, but would also have to control invasive plants at least somewhat during the natural succession.

### Mowing and turtles

Marcella said that one of their complications with mowing the small fields is that they have observed box turtles at the fields. She said that MNHESP recommends not mowing April through November if turtles are present. That makes it almost impossible to mow since the other months are either too wet or snowy.

The recommendations on line (last updated in 2009) suggest a shorter time period for not mowing, mid-May through mid-September. That should give managers more options to mow and not cause turtle mortality.

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/nhosp/species-and-conservation/mowing-guidelines.pdf>

### Field Management and Invasives

It is very expensive to clear field edges (push back shrub encroachment) and manage for invasives in fields that have not had a "good" maintenance history. The initial clearing work may be costly, but the continued treatment and control of invasive plants is even more costly.

Rick shared information about a 4-acre field they have been clearing in Littleton, primarily as an agricultural viewshed. They will be using CPA funds (~\$25,000) to hire contractor to clear and treat invasive plants.

Michele emphasized that you need to create a level rock free surface so that maintenance mowing up to the edge is possible. This is especially problematic near historic stone walls.

Animal Grazing: Concord example found that sheep are not effective because they don't eat invasive plants. Goats may be more effective but expensive to maintain a herd of animals. Also – can not put animals on land that has had previous herbicide use and/or contains milkweed which is toxic to the animals.

Laura will share SVT's field management plans for their Greenways Conservation Area. Michele will share the proposed study that they have contracted Polatin to do on the cost/benefits of field improvements and management.

Even if fields are left to succeed, problem of invasive plant impacts remain.

CONCLUSION: Early successional habitat management (even if deciding to revert to forest) is expensive!! (at least to do it "right")

## **Deer Management**

After introductions, I explained that we hoped to look over the position paper to be sure that we had captured all the important components and to assign tasks critical to next steps in the process.

Jesse then gave a quick summary of the recent webinar given by Tom Rawinski at Harvard Forest. We will make the webinar link available to the group:

[https://harvardforest.adobeconnect.com/\\_a1106599018/p9p7cbuws12/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal](https://harvardforest.adobeconnect.com/_a1106599018/p9p7cbuws12/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal)

Jacque shared with the group that Stow is forming a task force to study hunting on town lands - a very big concern is outreach and Laurie Bent suggested contacting Tom Rawinski to lead a guided public walk in Stow to show on the ground consequences of deer over abundance in their forests.

Laurie then asked what the purpose of the position statement was - what do we intend to do with it? I said that we were asking members to review the statement to see if all the critical components were captured and then hopefully define a list of tasks which folks would sign up to tackle.

Laurie's advice was to focus on people and the negative consequences for the public in areas overpopulated with deer. She emphasized that the outreach component is huge and that we need to step back and educate folks in every aspect of this issue including forest ecology and the fact that we are part of nature. Fundamental to this process is to change public attitude toward active management of our conservation lands - as opposed to nature taking care of itself. We also need to educate people about our (humans as a whole that is) relationship to nature.

The question was asked whether and how deer impacts were being measured on our lands and the answer was that there was little formal monitoring being done. Laurie also mentioned that although there is guidance from the state on deer density by WMZ this doesn't address localized much higher deer densities as evidenced by deer/car collisions and other indicators. She mentioned that Dave Stainbrook was able to provide her group with town deer density data - which we were unable to get?

Advocacy: Hunting regulations need to be relaxed/expanded - we need a concerted effort by towns in the watershed to lobby the state on this issue. In addition setbacks are a huge issue and Gary reminded the group that setbacks are not just from occupied residences but also even from remote tool sheds etc. Having a conversation with DCR officials as to the rationale of not allowing hunting on DCRW (DCR Water Supply Division) lands was discussed.

Outreach: It's a long term process we need to foster hunting in our towns and our membership. Laurie brought up the point that there is a lot of hunting on private lands that the public may be unaware of and that the safety record here is excellent. In Weston, deer harvested on private

vs public land is about 50/50 - last year about 18 public, 20 private and 20 by cars. Are statistics available for how many deer are taken on private lands on a town by town basis? Jacquie said that all the orchards in Stow are hunted.

Gary mentioned that the DCRW land surrounding Crane swamp had been hunted in previous years since it wasn't posted and state law allows hunting on unposted public land but that the land was posted last year so in theory it is no longer hunted.

Since time was too short we agreed to continue the discussion via email with participants agreeing to look over the position statement, comment and then take on tasks once there is a consensus on what those tasks would be.