

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 19, 2023, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

Regular (voting) members: **Bettina Abe, Jon Campbell** (Vice-Chair), **Dale Chayes, Aaron Moore** (Chair), Bruce Rachman, John Watlington, **Joe Will** (Minutes), **Tom Wolf**

Associate (nonvoting) members: **Ken Appel**, Josh Haines, **Rebecca Harvey**, Everett Kenerson, Gary Kilpatrick, Mel Lima, **Bob Mackin, Adam Nolde**, Jim Salem, **Bill Smith**, Jason Temple, Steve Trimble, Todd Tsakiris

Others: **Ian Bergemann** (Acton Land Stewardship Coordinator), **Mike Gendron** (Acton Conservation Agent), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Bob Walton** (Acton resident)

Aaron opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Review and acceptance of August 15 minutes

Postponed to the October meeting due to the lateness of availability.

Concerns from the public

None

Open Meeting Law and Public Records Request training

This is happening (in Town Hall Room 204) concurrent with this meeting. See the Acton TV video:
<https://actontv.org/on-demand/post-video/open-meeting-law-public-records-request-training-september-19th-2023>

Invasive plants 2023, Part 7

Postponed until October meeting.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) sub-goals

Mike expressed appreciation for input received to date. There were no new suggestions.

LSC Wiki

Bob Walton shared his views on dealing with invasives using slides with the following information:

Clearing Invasives from Acton Conservation Areas

- Land Stewards do not have the time to do very much invasive clearing.
- Land Stewards do have the time to describe invasive work areas.
- The person-power requirements to clear invasives faster than they grow is currently very large and needs to be reduced by hiring people to clear the work areas.
- If the existing invasives were cleared, a system of volunteers could probably keep them cleared.

The Work Area Concept

- A work area is small enough to be cleared by a 4-person 2-hour workday.
- Work areas have somewhat discrete status: needs-clearing, cleared, needs-re-clearing, re-cleared.
- Work area descriptions are maintained by the Land Stewards, but are updated with status by volunteers.
- As work areas are cleared and re-cleared, they can be merged.
- Large thickets can be divided by making paths through them and flagging the paths.
- Some work areas will be very large in area with low density of invasives (e.g., buckthorn).

Bob illustrated “The Work Area Concept” using two detailed examples of Work Areas in Nashoba Brook.

Nashoba Area A

Nashoba Areas B1, B2, B3, B4

(At the time of this writing, the above were two operational links to websites.)

He suggests that there probably are 20 to 50 such areas in Nashoba Brook’s southeast quadrant.

The Workday Concept

- Volunteers are standardly organized into groups of 4. Workdays are 2 hours.
- A group needs an experienced leader.
- Large areas with low density of invasives require experienced volunteers: each volunteer needs to be good at identifying buckthorn, for example.
- Larger groups require experienced volunteers.
- Invasive work is about removing roots or killing them by cutting or girding and continually removing regrowth.

Total Person-Power Requirements

- Cost-of-clearing can be measured in person-hours.
- John Watlington and Bob Walton together spend ≥ 300 hours per year clearing invasives.
- Invasive growth each year adds a larger amount than this. We keep falling further behind.
- Invasive growth per year probably adds at least 500 person-hours to the cost-of-clearing.
- Total Acton Conservation Land cost-of-clearing is more than 5,000 person-hours.
- 20 volunteers each working 10 hours per year (5 workdays) will contribute 200 person-hours per year.
- 1 paid employee working 6 hours per workday for 8 weeks will contribute 240 person-hours.

What Can Land Stewards Do

- Produce Work Area Descriptions.
- Monitor Work Areas.
- Remove invasives from places where there are few invasives (containment):
 - invasives beside relatively invasive-free trails.
 - small invasive patches in forest.
- For a thicket of invasives in a sunny place, remove those next to forest trees (containment).
- For a thicket of invasives, cut paths in the thicket to divide it up into work areas.

Possible Plan Not Involving Hiring

- Divide problem into 3 parts:
 - Next to trails: stewards
 - Under canopy: volunteer workdays
 - Open areas with few invasives: volunteer workdays
 - Open areas with a lot of invasives: mowers (people who mow)
 - 'mow' once a year.
 - Otherwise abandon to invasives if there is a lot of bittersweet.
 - If little bittersweet, place on lowest priority for clearing, and accept that it may never be cleared.
 - One can try to induce canopy formation in open areas.
- Mowyer: user of circular saw weed whacker.

Ensuing discussion:

- The last bulleted item prompted a discussion on weed whackers, notably the two that are currently in the LSC shed at Morrison Farm.
- Plaudits for what Bob suggests, but it might be a losing battle. Three thoughts: 1) Rather than Bob's prioritization, it might be more feasible to find some areas that we "can win" and cede some other places. 2) Before hiring a paid employee, consideration should be given to where such funds could be used elsewhere. 3) Do we have the authority to clear invasives from vegetative wetlands?
- By the "letter of the law", one cannot remove any vegetation from wetlands (200 ft from the riverfront is "in the wetlands"). In reality, there should be no fuss over pulling invasives on a small scale. Although larger scale removals would be looked on favorably, we should be careful. There is merit to the idea that the LSC could investigate some sort of permit for invasives removal on conservation land.
- Wetlands Act protection enforcement is left up to a Town's Conservation Commission (Cons Comm). There is a permitting process. For any permit, we would need a plan. The plan would be presented to Mike as the Town's Conservation Agent, and Mike would take it to the Cons Comm at his discretion.
- Another concern would the cost and maintenance of an area cleared of invasives. As it is right now, we can barely keep our meadows mowed. Perhaps there should be a small-scale experiment, say a couple plots over a couple of years. Determine what it takes to get them cleared and then what it takes to keep them from being recolonized by invasives.
- Bob has been working with Google Docs. He will investigate and report to the LSC on making invasive descriptions on a wiki — a website that would be much more amenable to public use.

Ian's Items

- Letter of Support for Sustainability Office resiliency grant
The Town's Sustainability Office (Andrea Becerra Sustainability Director) has applied for a grant, some parts of which overlap with concerns of the LSC. Ian described some of the actions proposed in the grant such as restoring the meadow behind the Red House (next to Town Hall) to its native (non-invasive) state — an education piece that could suggest to the public a DIY restoration of neighborhood backyards. A Letter of Support from the LSC could be very helpful.

It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously (by roll call): The LSC write a letter of support.

Ian has a letter prepared. He will send it to Aaron for Aaron to submit.

– Water Chestnut Removal Day, Ice House Pond

It's this coming Saturday, 9 am – noon. To be involved, send Ian an email. There are 32 volunteers already. Paddle Boston is donating 10 canoes that will accommodate 20 people. Ian would like the sawyers to help

remove trees that are blocking the water access at Ice House Pond. Dale confirms sawyering at 10 am tomorrow. Others are welcome to help.

– Kiosk roofing

Bruce Rachman gave Ian new kiosk blueprints and Ian updated the “Kiosk Design” link on the Acton Trails website.

– “I Hiked Acton Trails”, “Diwalifest” flyers, and “Promoting Safe Trails”

Ian laminated 20 copies of the “I Hiked Acton Trails” challenge and has been posting them on kiosks. Copies are also available in Town Hall. Ian showed a Photo Contest poster soliciting photos that could be used in the OSRP. He has posted it on the Town website and is wondering if the LSC would be okay with it being posted on kiosks. There was no objection. Ian showed a Diwalifest (a cultural festival presented by Acton, Boxborough and Littleton scheduled for October 8) poster. Festival organizers had asked if it could be posted on LSC kiosks. No, as it is unrelated to LSC interests. (In general, “maybe” to posting information on specific outdoor conservation activities.)

– Ian’s Trails tales, Part 2 (Wright Hill)

Ian shared his thoughts and pictures re the Wright Conservation Land (CL).

– First impressions:

First Impressions

- Multiple entrances: Wright Terrace, Meade Terrace, Central St (only labeled), connecting trail via Guggins
- Currently no “official” parking lot
- No kiosks, approaching from Wright/Mead Terrace unsure where trail begins
- Beautiful meadows, vast forest, & historic features (Corn shed? Old Summer Camp?)



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Trail observations:

Trails

- Easy to follow, arrows marked at various spots, blazed appropriately
- Old structures found throughout trails, tell a story
- Meadows leading to forest show diverse ecosystems (and differences)
- Red trail to Guggins a bit overgrown and could be labeled



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Jim Snyder-Grant's Invasive Species Control Project:

If successful, this is something that stewards might want to try on their parcels. John Watlington has done this, fighting Japanese knotweed.



Invasive Species Control Project

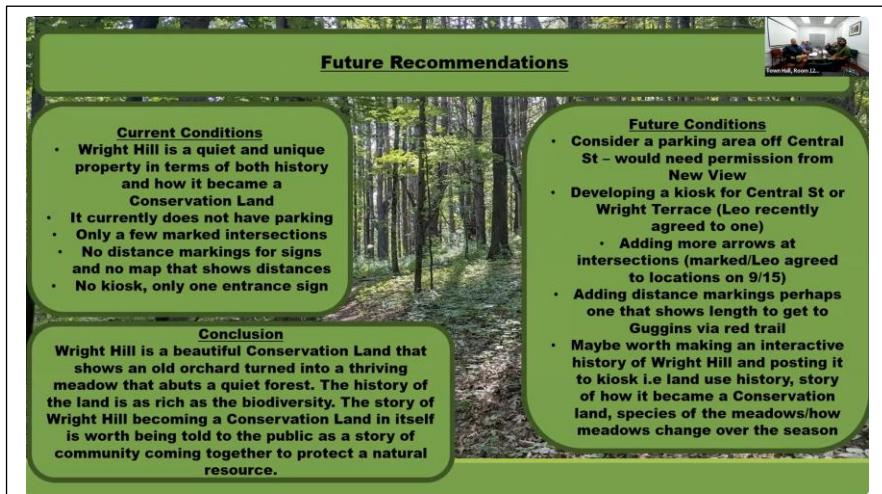
• Roughly 2 years ago Jim covered a historic rock wall with black plastic after removing as much bittersweet as possible

• In Oct 2023 he will remove the plastic to see if it successfully eradicated the invasive from the historic wall

• May prove to be a viable method for other historic features consumed by invasive species

Future recommendation:

Ian shared some plans for the future: red trail markings for Wright Terrace and Mead Terrace, new signage, a new entrance kiosk, and a space for parking on New View (NV) property that NV could likely agree to as it would provide NV with occasional overflow parking. Also, there could be small “You are here”-type kiosks with historic information.



Future Recommendations

Current Conditions

- Wright Hill is a quiet and unique property in terms of both history and how it became a Conservation Land
- It currently does not have parking
- Only a few marked intersections
- No distance markings for signs and no map that shows distances
- No kiosk, only one entrance sign

Conclusion

Wright Hill is a beautiful Conservation Land that shows an old orchard turned into a thriving meadow that abuts a quiet forest. The history of the land is as rich as the biodiversity. The story of Wright Hill becoming a Conservation Land in itself is worth being told to the public as a story of community coming together to protect a natural resource.

Future Conditions

- Consider a parking area off Central St – would need permission from New View
- Developing a kiosk for Central St or Wright Terrace (Leo recently agreed to one)
 - Adding more arrows at intersections (marked/Leo agreed to locations on 9/15)
- Adding distance markings perhaps one that shows length to get to Guggins via red trail
- Maybe worth making an interactive history of Wright Hill and posting it to kiosk i.e. land use history, story of how it became a Conservation land, species of the meadows/how meadows change over the season

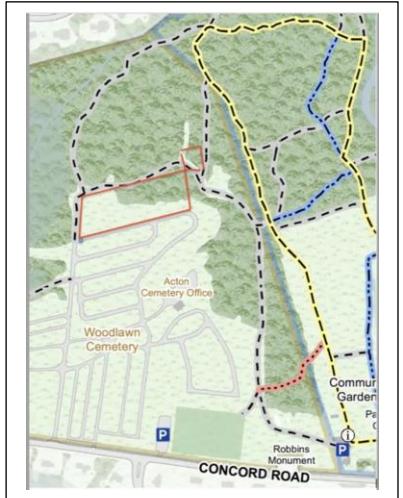
Guggins Brook inner meadow Tabled until a future meeting.

Bulette description and other info

Bettina sent an updated description to stewards on 07/25. Bob Mackin, Bulette/Town Forest steward, does not get any emails sent to the LSC, so he needs to be put on the LSC shell. Bulette concerns will be on next month's agenda. Question: How has the Anderson parcel and the adjacent PCRC land become part of Bulette? In 2017, LSC Chair Joe Holmes developed the “Acton Conservation Land Naming Guidelines”, a prioritized listing of naming considerations. These Guidelines were approved by both the LSC and the Conservation Commission. Bettina pointed out that there will be a Conservation Restriction (CR) on the new parts of the new Bulette, but not the original Bulette. Susan then cited Guideline 1, “Is there a legally-mandated name, (check deeds, town meeting votes, and conservation restrictions)?”, the fact that the ACT will be holding the CR on the new parcels, and that she has put its naming on the agenda for ACT’s meeting next week. Susan will update the LSC on this at its next meeting. (Clerk’s note: Guideline 4 states “If it is adjacent or proximal to an existing conservation land, should it assume the same name (e.g., extending Bulette to include the land obtained from Anderson)?”)

Cemetery land abutting Morrison Farm

The Cemetery Department sees a need for identifying the next parcel to be used for burials. The Cemetery Superintendent is proposing that it be the parcel outlined in red as shown on the Morrison Farm/Woodlawn Cemetery map at the right, with a provision for vehicle parking at its upper right (all yet to be approved by Corey York). Such a change would seem to require some adjustment to the service road trail that runs along the top of the red outline on the map, and is heavily used by visitors to the nearby Morrison Farm woods.



Other parcel issues

– General

There remain lots and lots of trees to deal with on LSC parcels.

<Clerk's note: A severe storm knocked down hundreds of trees in Acton on September 9, 10 days ago.>

– Great Hill

Dale will be clearing a 20-in. tree at Great Hill tomorrow after he finishes at Ice House Pond

– Arboretum

Joe showed a video of the large tree that fell along the trail into the Arboretum from Wood Lane. Dale told of the work to date re the massive treefall in that area and with this tree itself, and suggested what needs to be done to take care of it and its giant root ball. The gate on the trail needs to be fixed as well.

Updates

– 549 Main Street: Per Mike, the CR has been sent to the State. He has seen an updated draft of the Land Management Plan, but there's still much that must be "fleshed out". It's worth putting on the next agenda to talk about the LSC taking responsibility for that parcel . . . or not.

– Morrison Farm Conservation Restriction: The Agricultural Commission meets next Tuesday, and it is spearheading this CR effort. The Historical Commission and Historic District Commission are looking into making the north side of Concord Road an historic district. Doing so would take care of the concerns about the farm buildings so the CR could focus on the land. On the possibility of a sewage facility on the farm, the Water Resources Advisory Committee apparently is not a proponent of that at all and it doesn't see that anything would necessarily come to pass.

– Bridges, Board/Bogwalks, Maps, Mowing, Chain sawing, Website:

- Bettina pointed out that Kristin Alexander, the Town's GIS Officer, has a draft map that shows Wright Hill, Guggins Brook, and Jenks CLs, and the Wright/Guggins connection over private land.
- Jon suggests that we need to make progress on improving the means of communication that the sawyers use. The current email system is not ideal. There is a text-chat group but Jon suspects that there is an even better solution possible.
- Per Adam, if we put together a sawyers clinic and need a place to practice sawyer skills, he knows of 3 trees that need to come down because of the recent storm.
- Ian has access to the website now, so if anyone wants something updated, let Ian know.
- Bill sees a need to improve access to equipment inside the LSC shed at Morrison Farm. One way would be to install shelving. Bettina, Bruce Rachman, and John Watlington, all major users of the shed, are supportive. Bill can do the work himself and has listed the materials he would need for two shelves — one on each side wall — and some storage hooks at a cost of \$152. Bill should set up a time with Ian for the two of them to see what items on Bill's list might already be in the shed. Then, per Bettina, the Town has a

purchase order at Concord Lumber with a balance on it, so Ian could get what is still needed there and have it delivered to the Farm. Once two shelves are installed and in use, it can be decided whether more are needed. “Super nice” idea.

- Dale’s wife has an article “Land Stewards Clear Trail Blockages Following Recent Storms” published in the Action Unlimited newspaper. <Clerk’s note: It can be found by searching for “Stewards” at <https://www.actionunlimited.com/acton-maynard>>
- Per Joe, with Bettina leaving Town employ, there is a process that needs definition, to wit: If the LSC gets an email from the public, then Ian should be the only person to respond to the sender. If there were to be any input to the message from a steward, then the steward should send that information to Ian for him to consider for inclusion in his response. Ian agrees that he will handle all future emails.

– LSC membership: The LSC has a new regular (voting) member, Bettina! <unintelligible uproar>

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Next month’s (10/17/23) agenda

A few things above were tabled for future consideration. No additional suggestions.

Evaluate meeting

It was “super-duper”!

Adjournment

At 8:15 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, October 17, at 7 p.m.