

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 17, 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, Mel Lima, Bob Mackin, **Adam Nolde**, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, Steve Trimble, Todd Tsakiris

Others:

Stuart Amir-Lin (Acton resident), **Ian Bergemann** (Acton Land Stewardship Coordinator), **Mike Gendron** (Acton Conservation Agent), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Alissa Nichol** (Select Board LSC liaison), **Bob Walton** (Acton resident)

In Aaron Moore's absence, Jon opened the meeting at 7 p.m.

Review and acceptance of August 15 and September 19 minutes

Accepted as written.

Concerns from the public

Going forward, Ian will respond to emails to the LSC from the public. He may not "Reply all" but he will Cc LSC folks for whom his emails would be relevant.

Ian received an email that the original kiosk above the large meadow at Great Hill is damaged. John pointed out that when the kiosk near the fire station parking lot was installed 4 or 5 years ago the original kiosk was left in place as it was still functioning. Now, however, the original kiosk needs a new roof and repair of its ground supports. It's not worth repairing nor its parts worth saving, save for its Eagle Scout recognition bar. Going forward, Ian and Mike (letting Great Hill steward Steve Trimble know) will see that it's removed and a "You are Here" map and QR code put in its place, as such locators could be needed by trail users, particularly those from the Discovery Museum. The removal work should wait until the field has dried out a bit to avoid vehicle tracks on the field.

Another email to Ian: A Nagog Hill neighbor asked if there could be some clearing of the vegetation surrounding the meadow trails. Mike will check it out and discuss with Dale. John cautions that getting the field mower back to the meadow is "a nightmare".

Susan pointed out that the ACT has lost a couple Board members and wants to make these positions known to folks beyond the ACT membership. If the LSC can point anyone in the ACT direction, it would be much appreciated. Have them contact either Susan, ACT President, or Joe Cooney, ACT Vice-President.

Joe pointed out that Susan will be receiving the Sudbury Valley Trustees Lifetime Achievement Award at its Annual Meeting tomorrow.

A boy scout reached out to the LSC about blueprint plans for building kiosks. His Eagle Scout project, however, is for the Recreation Department, not for any LSC parcel. Ian has referred the scout to Bruce Rachman, who has provided some guidance, Melissa Settipani, Acton Recreation Director, and other scouts who have already done such projects. Ian will also discuss this with Melissa.

LSC membership

Ian introduced Stuart Amir-Lin who is interested in becoming the steward for Wills Hole/Town Forest. Stuart lives in Nagog Woods and often passes through Wills Hole to get to NARA. Ian invited Stuart to this meeting to provide an idea of what the LSC is about, and will follow up with Stuart, letting him know what the next steps would be for joining.

Aaron Moore has switched his stewardship from Wills Hole to Heath Hen Meadow, thus opening this opportunity for Stuart.

Gary Kilpatrick has resigned as Grassy Pond steward. Ian is in contact with a couple who are interested in this position.

Bob is awaiting his appointment by the Select Board as steward of Robbins Mill.

Re a recent email from the Acton Town Clerk on LSC membership: Ian is in contact with the Clerk for more clarity on this. He will reach out to individual stewards as necessary.

Invasive plants 2023, Part 7 (sic)

• Winged Euonymus

Also known as Burning Bush, if winged euonymus gets enough sunlight, it turns a very bright, pretty red (with bright red seeds) this time of year and can be seen in many yards. Unfortunately, it spreads, kills everything else underneath it, and allows nothing to grow.

We identify winged euonymus by the wings you see on the plant. They're at right angles to one another, in all four cardinal directions.

Winged Euonymus (*Euonymus alatus*)

A slow growing bush (although it may grow up to a small tree)

Spreads mostly by seed, but also by buried stems. A dead tree falling on a bush will make a thicket!

Regrows from root fragments or buried stems.

Repeated cuttings and/or pulling of roots required to kill.



Check: "wings" on small branch stems

There is a native euonymus called Eastern spindle bush. It looks just like the invasive except it doesn't have wings. It may not exist around here as it apparently hybridizes well with the invasive.

You want to pull out smaller winged euonymus. You can cut or gird bigger plants as they tend to have a large, thick root node. Cutting or girding . . . you will have to go back and do it again at least 3 or 4 times to kill it. It's taken six years for some places on Great Hill to start getting a nice regrowth of natives. A pair of Mill Corner folks are presently working on the main thicket of winged euonymus inside the yellow path on the southern slope of greater Great Hill.

• Japanese Knotweed

This is a very common invasive plant along Massachusetts and New Hampshire highways. The Departments of Transportation find it very difficult to control. Thankfully, we don't see much on our conservation lands. One problem: The roots go down much deeper than one can dig. It will spread sideways.

With little success at digging, John is trying a method recommended by the New Hampshire DOT on a large patch beside

Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)

Regrows from root to five - seven foot tall every year. Has a thick hollow stem.

The roots go very deep (6+ feet). Spreads by root and seed.

Repeated cutting multiple times a year to contain.

Seek help. Please notify the Land Stewards if found.



the small playing field at Great Hill. He covered it with 4 to 6 inches of wood chips, then a thick black plastic, then another 4 to 6 inches of wood chips to secure the plastic. Next, he must wait 5 years. Now in year 2, John has seen the plant aggressively trying to escape the plastic covering. Periodically, John must find any holes in the plastic, pull out any knotweed growth, and mend the hole with plastic and duct tape.

This method has proved to be effective at Canoe Launch.

John stresses that if you see this plant, please let the LSC know. We should try to act on any patch as soon as possible, as it's not going to die naturally. Cutting it repeatedly will keep it from seeding, so we can at least slow down its spread. That's been happening near the parking area at Pratts Brook.

Also right now, there is a small infestation at Wills Hole, some at Guggins Brook and the Arboretum, and a patch that's growing in Bulette on the trail that goes to the new boardwalk (twice as much now as last year).

There is a "really good" Facebook group "Worldwide Japanese Knotweed Support Group" offering up-to-date information and advice:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1617207091648331/>

Knotweed can also be eaten, per The New York Times:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/06/nyregion/japanese-knotweed-is-here-to-stay.html>

LSC Wiki

John suspects that familiarity with wikis "is a bimodal distribution" where one is either very familiar or very unfamiliar with wikis. (Clerk's note: Clerk is in the latter mode. A dictionary definition of "wiki": a website that allows collaborative editing of its content and structure by its users.)

John showed this "Main Page" of the proposed "Acton Invasives Wiki" that Bob has set up:

<http://ec2-44-218-8-154.compute-1.amazonaws.com/aiw>

and then took the LSC on a tour of the bulleted list shown on this page:

- [Work Areas](#) (includes guide on how to create/edit work areas)
- [Invasive Plants Around Acton](#)
- [Visual Editor User's Guide](#) for information on editing wiki pages.
- [Mediawiki User's Guide](#) for information on editing the wiki markup source and for other mediawiki features.
- Wiki Administrative [Maintenance](#)

This mediawiki allows the LSC to build up a history of what's happened, where, on the LSC parcels — a history that would be useful for future LSC members.

Ditto for capturing and/or editing other types of information, such as lists of, and ways to work with, plants, both native and invasive.

Ditto for using a Discussion page for each page of content.

Users of this wiki need to be in touch with Bob to create an account.

There followed a discussion on how this system works with Bob's technology, and the task of making it a part of the Town's technology, controlled by the Town and accessible by townsfolk. Possibly there should be a small committee that would include Bob, John, and Jon to talk to the Town (many detailed discussions with Town Information Technology (IT) folks) about the town taking over this wiki. To start a Town takeover process Bob, John, and Jon will go "offline" (from this meeting) to develop an initial discussion with Town IT.

Ian's Items

– Ian's Trails tales, Part 3 (Grassy Pond)

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

– First Impressions:

First Impressions

• Love the boardwalk!

- Hard to find Newtown Rd entrance, Nagog Hill Rd entrance easily found
 - 2 parking areas (Nagog Hill offers much more capacity)
- Perfect example of a woodland abutting a freshwater resource creating a wetland/marsh
 - meadow off Nagog Hill is a plus!
- Accidentally found Nagog Hill Rd entrance when running at Nagog Hill CL, I appreciate the connectivity (including to new Bulette/Anderson CL)



Need to fix the
Grassy Pond sign!

Trail Observations:

Trails

- Well marked, a bit muddy at Newtown Rd, some intersections confusing
 - Boardwalk is serene – albeit some portions flooded
- Surrounding woodland/forest contains creeks & streams – shows extent of watershed on a microscale
- Observation area is peaceful – but slightly inaccessible due to flooding/ missing railing



Wildlife:

Wildlife

- Abundant & diverse ranging from birds, bugs, frogs, & deer! (Beavers too!)
- Plants ranging from terrestrial to aquatic, flowers to shrubs to trees!
 - Birds sing among Phragmites & high above in the trees
 - Frogs and snails roaming the boardwalk, even bees!



Future Recommendations:

Also, John pointed out that the land between the Grassy Pond meadow on Nagog Hill Road and the road itself is Town land, so the LSC is responsible for invasives on it. A while back the stewards cleared invasives on three sides but the side farthest from the parking lot still requires a lot of work.

Future Recommendations

Current Conditions

- Grassy Pond contains a critically important ecosystems and offers an unusual view from inside a wetland
- 2 parking lots (1 with large capacity)
 - No "You are Here" signs
 - 1 distance sign at Nagog Hill Rd
- Repetitive flooding of boardwalk and observation deck access
- Ongoing Scout project for bridge at Grassy Creek

Future Conditions

- Consider installing bog bridges/boardwalks at Red trail from Newtown Rd
- Potential need for future plan for boardwalk – currently needs boards replaced (Ian is on it)
- New railing needed for Observation Deck – potentially a good area for an interpretive sign about wetland ecology
- New sign needed on Newtown Rd (Ian is on it)

Conclusion

Grassy Pond truly is a parcel that demonstrates the natural dynamic nature of water. It highlights how water defines a landscape and provides heavily for plants and animals. The boardwalk gives users an inside look of a marsh (often inaccessible due to Phragmites). Maintenance remains the biggest issue for Grassy Pond, but it may be an important land for education about wetlands. It is a good example of alternative connectivity (meaning not directly connected but adjacent to other Conservation Lands).

Question: If beavers are on Conservation Land and people complain about the flooding they may be causing, can the beavers be eliminated (which has happened near the entrance to Grassy Pond Brook)? Yes, such permits are applicable on both private and public land. Related to this, Ian has submitted a grant proposal for funding for four pond levelers (beaver deceivers — alternatives to killing beavers), one of which would be for Grassy Pond.

– Kiosk signage

Ian asks that stewards send him a picture of their kiosks, so he knows what on each kiosk needs updating.

– Water Chestnut Removal Day, Ice House Pond, 09/23

This was super successful! Ian and 43 volunteers removed roughly 16,000 plants. It was a great community event, and a lot of those volunteers are now part of the LSC list of volunteers.

– Scouts

The Assabet River Blue and Green Trail scout project is finished. Ian has yet to do a walkthrough. The Anderson parcel kiosk at Genevieve Lane is almost done. A Bulette/Town Forest boardwalk is being designed. At Grassy Pond, a bridge and bog bridges are being installed. For Guggins Brook, two scout projects are in the approval process.

Bulette/Anderson/Town Forest/PCRC discussion

Per Jody: Last Saturday's workday put in a very short trail from Genevieve (Anderson) Lane to what will be the "new" yellow trail. There were 17 volunteers including 6 scouts and 2 accompanying adults. A bit of sawyer work remains. Jody also detailed some blazing work done on the parcels.

Per Susan: There is nothing new to report on the CR as there is some delay in the CR review process. Mike has given the Town's go-ahead for completion of the surveys of the Anderson and PCRC parcels.

What's the name for the Bulette/Anderson/Town Forest/PCRC parcel? The ensuing discussion considered the entire parcel be named the Bulette-Anderson Conservation Land, including the Anderson name because Ernie Anderson was instrumental in Acton acquiring the Anderson/PCRC land as well as the nearby 11-acre "Grassy Pond West" land. Another possibility: Bulette/Town Forest-Anderson Conservation Land. A third possibility. Name the 32-acre Anderson/PCRC land as Anderson Conservation Land (that will have a Conservation Restriction (CR)) and retain the Bulette/Town Forest as is with its current name (and no CR).

Such was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call.

Discussion points preceding the vote:

- The Anderson CL will have a yellow loop.
- Should its connector with Bulette/Town Forest be blazed red, as occurs in other abutting parcels? Jody will work to match trail colors shown on the parcel's map maintained by Ian.
- Retaining the Anderson name might suggest that donated land won't necessarily be merged into a parcel with a name that differs from the donor's.

Other parcel issues

– Arboretum

Tomorrow night, the Friends of the Acton Arboretum are asking the Conservation Commission if there can be a stronger leash rule in the Arboretum's upper grounds (Cons Comm agenda at 7:30 pm, in person or virtual). This is in response to a citizen's letter asking that dogs be required to be on leash and not simply "under effective voice control" when in the upper grounds or on the handicap-accessible trails (off-leash being okay on the dirt trails in the woods). Reasons include the presence of senior folks, folks with disabilities, babies, and more responsible control of dog waste. Ensuing discussion points:

- The need for a stronger rule is not because of seniors, etc., it's because of bad dog owners and poorly-trained dogs. A stronger rule won't make any difference.
- If you ask someone to leash their dog or pick up after their dog, it helps to have an authority (the new rule) behind you.
- It's unenforceable.
- It gives you something to point to.
- Those rules already exist. So, enforce the existing rules. There are signs at the Arboretum kiosk now that people can point to.
- Signs in the kiosk are not very helpful.
- No more signs are needed at the Arboretum.
- A different approach. Put up signs that are different from signs one usually sees, like the following, more conspicuous, signs — on posts:

Dogs are welcome if they

- don't bite,
- don't knock people over, and
- don't run off and not come back.

Dog owners are welcome if they

- pick up every poop that they see.

- Land stewards can take a stand on this with the Cons Comm if they wish. Any land steward who does, however, may want to not represent yourself as a land steward as the Commissioners will "hear" that you are speaking for the LSC.

- Anybody wanting to debate this issue can bring it up at the Cons Comm meeting. Let's move on.

– Great Hill

Jody showed a sign being prepared for the red trail in the southeast corner.

– Morrison Farm

The Agricultural Commission is looking to rewrite or edit their CR for the farm's land and present it to the Select Board again.

– Wetherbee (land next to Wetherbee CL)

The Town has hired an appraiser.

– Robbins Mill

Bob reported a wooden teepee, constructed with a lot of wood and therefore quite heavy, not far from the Carlisle Road parking lot. As this is a first for Ian and Mike, they are seeking LSC advice on what to do with it,



if anything. Bob said that he pushed on some of the support sticks, and they are “in there solid”. Ensuing discussion points:

- There had been a similar situation at Pratts Brook. The LSC determined that structure to be structurally stable and said to let it be, but post a sign on the site informing visitors that anything brought to the site had to be removed within 24 hours. Nothing happened with the litter on the site, so it was removed by the town.
- The Robbins Mill structure appears to be structurally stable. There is no trash, no evidence of an accompanying fire, nor that anyone is sleeping in it.
- The consensus is to leave it for the time being. Bob will monitor it.

– Grassy Pond

CR monitoring will begin for West Grassy Pond.

– Nashoba Brook

Ian and Bob will be working together on the meadow next to the Davis Road parking.

Downstream from the dam above Wheeler Lane, pink ribbons are visible on both sides of the brook.

Possible reason: The DPW may be exploring removal of the dam. The State does not like the dam. It thinks the dam is vulnerable.

– Wright Hill

Wood has arrived so this parcel will be getting signage and arrows.

– Arboretum (continued)

Nothing has been done with the remaining treefall at the Wood Lane entrance as the Town presently is seriously understaffed for field workers. Dale is willing to use his tractor and remove most of the tree, leaving the stump where it is. Mike will check with the town on this.

– Somewhere

Shout out to Rebecca and Bob for repairing two planks on a boardwalk.

Updates

– 549 Main Street: The CR is still being reviewed by the State. A Land Management Plan is in the works, and there is a Memorandum of Understanding being reviewed by the Town, the Acton Water District (AWD), and the SVT. Of interest to the LSC is the determination of who will be responsible for the land management. If it's the Town's responsibility, then management could be assigned to Ian or offered to the LSC. If the latter, then what would be the duties of the steward? The Land Management Plan should detail who should be responsible and their related duties. It makes sense then that the LSC should be informed about the details related to this acquisition. It would also be interesting to know what land-management precedent there may be re Guggins Brook as the LSC is responsible for this parcel which includes some AWD land.

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

- Mowing: What's already done has been by Town staff. Because of the staffing shortage, the remaining mowings are scheduled to be contracted out — more than normally would be. Mike will try to have contractors give the LSC 24-hour notice on each mowing so that someone from the LSC could be at the site to share thoughts with the contractor about the parcel, e.g., mowing out to the edges. Dale is willing to do the mowing in the Arboretum meadow that has not been mowed for a while. Mike will hold off contracting for that and see what develops.

– Open Space and Recreation Plan: No update

– Heath Hen Meadow Bridge: There are only two more sections to do — possibly on this Thursday. Then possibly two more workdays to do handrails and cleanup.

- Morrison Farm Shed: Shelving supplies have arrived. Ian will work with Bill Smith to install new shelving.
- Grazer Saw: Bob would like to buy a Grazer saw that he would give to the LSC but also use himself. He is willing to buy it and have John test it to see whether Bob could run it safely. John agrees to this.
- Community Service: Friends of Pine Hawk have scheduled its Community Service Day for Sunday, November 12, 1 to 3 pm, at the Nashoba Brook Stone Chamber.

Evaluate meeting

“Comprehensive”. Jon was “really good” filling in as Vice-Chair.

Adjournment

At 8:40 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, November 21, at 7 p.m.