

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 16, 2024, 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, Bob Walton**

Others: **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)

Aaron opened the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

Review and acceptance of November 21 and December 19 minutes

Jody suggested the transposition of a date in an item; minutes accepted with that change.

Concerns from the public

The Rainbow Trail (RT) is a citizens-built trail (by staff and children from the Infant Toddler Children's Center (ITC) on Central Street). It is in the Conservation Land (CL) abutting Mt. Hope Cemetery on the cemetery's west side and includes a "story walk". Per Jody, the ACT is okay with making the Rainbow Trail an "official" trail and showing it as such on Acton Trails' Heath Hen Meadow map should the LSC approve. Discussion points:

The RT area got hit really hard by a microburst. Dozens of large trees are down in that area. It would take 20 to 30 hours of work to clear the RT.

This could be a place where sawyers could practice, experiment, and learn . . . and clear the place over time.

Ian will be walking the RT with someone from the ITC to get an idea of what a story walk is and see how children could use the story-walk trail. He can report on what he learns at the February LSC meeting.

Helping with the RT would make more sense if more people knew about it.

Ian is building a seasonal education program for Acton Conservation. One suggestion is that the program showcase trails that are toddler friendly. The flat, dry RT with a story walk could be such a trail.

Children's groups are visiting other CLs too. Perhaps Ian could formally schedule school visits to CLs for kids' educational experience; also, to get some idea of how such groups are using conservation lands.

If the RT is restored, something probably should be done with the graffiti (pictured at right) that's on the backside of the cemetery shed near the trail. It could be embarrassing — also a bad example — when children are taken to the trail. Mike will touch base with Susan on this.

Should we make the RT an "official" LSC trail? Tabled for the time being.



Acton 2023 Annual Town Report

Ian will write a draft and share it with the LSC.

Invasive plants, January 2024

Find the “Invasive Species Wiki” under “Resources” on the Acton Trails website. Its url:
http://ec2-44-218-8-154.compute-1.amazonaws.com/aiw/index.php?title=Main_Page

Excerpt from the Wiki “Main Page”:

Main Page

Acton Invasives Wiki (Provisional) [edit | edit source]

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

John is currently adding information to the site. The second bullet “Invasive Plants Around Acton” (IPAA) now holds the information that John has shared with the LSC via slides. He’s expanding the IPAA section to include more species that he’s finding to be prevalent around Acton. An example is the *privet hedge*:

http://ec2-44-218-8-154.compute-1.amazonaws.com/aiw/index.php?title=European_Privet_Hedge

The privet hedge keeps its leaves rather late in the fall, still visible when just about everything else has lost its leaves. It is an invasive that John was not aware of, but now frightens him a bit.

However, the privet hedge is nothing compared to Asian bittersweet, a plant that one can continue working on into the winter as it is quite recognizable, and frozen ground allows one to get into places where one normally might not really want to visit. Right now, there's plenty of opportunity to find Asian bittersweet in every one of our conservation lands. John reviewed information on this invasives using:

http://ec2-44-218-8-154.compute-1.amazonaws.com/aiw/index.php?title=Asian_Bittersweet

Everyone is encouraged to poke around the Acton Invasives Wiki. If there are any issues with it, or something is wrong or needs to be added, let Bob or John know. Also, they really need help in filling out information on work areas where there's been some invasive removal.

Stewards’ supplies — use and replacement

If a steward, particularly a sawyer, needs something purchased, contact Ian so that he can fill out a purchase order — the earlier the better as purchases can take about 3 weeks. An alternative: The LSC have an inventory of certain items, such as chainsaw bar oil. Suggestion: Provide a chain to every sawyer once a year. A discussion about chainsaw chains ensued.

The discussion on a supply inventory can be continued in warmer months when supplies are in greater demand. It would be helpful to have an inventory of each steward’s equipment.

Electric vehicles on Town Conservation Land

John witnessed some youths riding electric bicycles (e-bikes) — vehicles that are relatively all-of-a-sudden popular and common — at Wills Hole/Town Forest. John wonders about any rules that apply to e-bikes on CL. If not, the people who make the rules should be prodded to deal with this.

Initially the applicable rule was thought to be “No motor vehicles are allowed on CL.” However, Massachusetts General Laws define Class 1 (pedal-assisted, 20 mph max) and Class 2 (throttle-assisted, 20 mph max) e-bikes as motor vehicles as being not restricted by the “No motor vehicles” rule. Furthermore, there are bikes with Class 3 (28 mph max) capabilities that can be made to pass as Class 1 or Class 2 bikes. There is also the problem of electronic motorbikes (much faster) passing themselves off as e-bikes.

Should there be a speed limit on CLs?

Discussion points:

Some people even dislike mountain bikes on the trails.

If mountain bikes are allowed, e-bikes allow more accessibility.

A speed limit would be almost unenforceable. It's very difficult to tell the difference among bike classes. A lot of the trails are so rough that speed is restricted anyway.

This probably isn't about “enforcement” as much as making sure there's a rule on the books so that, after someone gets hurt, it can be said, “No excuse! You weren't supposed to be doing that in the first place!” as opposed to the hurt being a tragic accident.

Ordinary bikes can go very fast on the downhill trails. So, a rule should be of the form: Bicycles must slow down to near walking speed when near people and animals.

We have a lot of rules that seem unenforceable, but they are enforceable. It just takes a lot of effort.

We should watch this for a while and at the same time, we could

- ask the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation what it knows, what it's been hearing, if there is any consensus among towns,
- listen for this at different conservation or inter-town meetings,
- ask SVT, Mass Audubon, Trustees of Reservations, and other large land trusts,
- check with the rail trails.

We could ask these groups what their rules are, and why? Why do they have them? Is it for safety? Is it for wildlife? Is it to protect rare plants that could be at the side of the trail?

Mike is willing to take something (preferably a stance voted by the LSC) to the Conservation Commission for its guidance.

We could also do education. We could do outreach. We could talk about not just safety but reasons why one should be a good person on a trail, share a trail with people, even help prevent trail erosion. There could be an awareness campaign to accompany a new rule. We could also suggest that the biking community embrace the trails . . . i.e., help build and maintain them, help keep them clean and accessible, and help create rules that help everyone use the trails safely.

Each of the International Mountain Biking Association and the New England Mountain Biking Association has its members adhere to etiquettes that are pretty common, including giving the right of way to hikers, letting hikers know that you are approaching, and to just be courteous. Members sign up to do all these things. Both organizations try to educate, e.g., bullets on how to conduct yourself on the trail, and e-bikers should be able to practice the same etiquette as the mountain bikers.

Any LSC motorized-vehicle guidelines should reference all electric vehicles (e.g., one-wheelers), not just bicycles.

Ian will do some research on electric vehicles rules and regulations.

Ian's Trails Tales, January 2024 (Heath Hen Meadow)

First impressions:

First Impressions

- 6 Access Points and 3 parking areas!
- 2 kiosks, a handful of wooden signs
 - Over 2 miles of trails!
- Boardwalk Bridge provides scenic view of Heath Hen Meadow Brook!
 - Packed with wildlife ranging from Dragonflies to Mallards!
 - Highlights nature's engineer: Beaver!

Trails:

Trails

- Connects two major roadways!
- Spread apart enough making it unlikely to encounter others!
- Great spot for snowshoeing or cross country skiing!
- Boardwalk Bridge is critical connection and highlight of HHM!
- Good mix of upland and lowland environments!

Wildlife:

Wildlife

- Wetland and Heath Hen Meadow Brook support abundant freshwater species!
- Beaver(s) den visible from boardwalk as well as dam!
 - Large Pine forest by Robbins St
 - Brook is usually full of Mallards
- Most recently observed an Owl over the Brook!

Future Recommendations:

Future Recommendations

Current Conditions

- Multiple access points from two major roads spanning over 1 mile of Conservation Land
- Multiple parking areas and large capacity!
- 2 kiosks, 3 wooden signs
- Brand new Boardwalk bridge!
- A need to replace (move) boardwalks to Prescott Rd

Conclusion

Heath Hen Meadow is a largely popular CL due to it's long stretching trail system and accessibility (via walking and parking). It is also a prime example of a wetland habitat and showcases critical waterways in Acton. Along with Stow's Captain Sargent, Acton's Dunn Land, and ACT/Acton's Central St parcel, this location is a protected wildlife corridor for wetland dependent species. The community build Rainbow trail typically hosted storywalks which is an excellent way to encourage different audiences to get out into nature. Heath Hen Meadow should have more signage created at it's trailheads to increase access as well as possible signage in West Acton Village due to proximity.

Future Conditions

- Need for more signage at various trailheads:
 - Mt Hope parking (2 trailheads)
 - Prescott Rd (2 trailheads)
 - Billings St (1 trailhead)
- A kiosk at Prescott Rd or Central St?
- Move/build boardwalk at Prescott Rd?
- Observation platform viewing wetland
- Environmental education about beavers, local waterways, wetlands
- Rerouting Rainbow trail and adding seasonal storywalks

Ian shared possible locations for Heath Hen Meadow signs in Mt. Hope and the meadow side of the brook; also two possible locations for observation decks, one overlooking the wetland east of the cemetery and another on the trail to Winter Island where it dead-ends east of the island in the summer. An observation deck could be an Eagle Scout project and Ian has talked with a scout who may be interested. Observation

decks could also draw more visitors to the parcel. Ian also described the desire for a boardwalk fix on the red trail to Prescott Road and also possibly using surplus Trex for benches.

Joe observed that anything that stewards would do in Mt. Hope would need to be approved by the Cemetery Commission. Referring to Tom Tidman's map, he also asked about the "Overlook Trail" that encircles part of the Prescott Road/Overlook Drive neighborhood. That trail crosses private property and is not part of Heath Hen Meadow CL.

Parcel issues

– Spring Hill

Rebecca made a case for a boardwalk extension at Spring Hill. Location: The yellow trail at the south end of the N/S blue trail near the center of the picture at the right. She plans to put together a proposal for an Eagle Scout project to extend the boardwalk at both ends, particularly at the southern end where an extension could be about 30 ft long. Ian has a scout looking for a project so Ian will put the scout in touch with Rebecca.

– Camp Acton

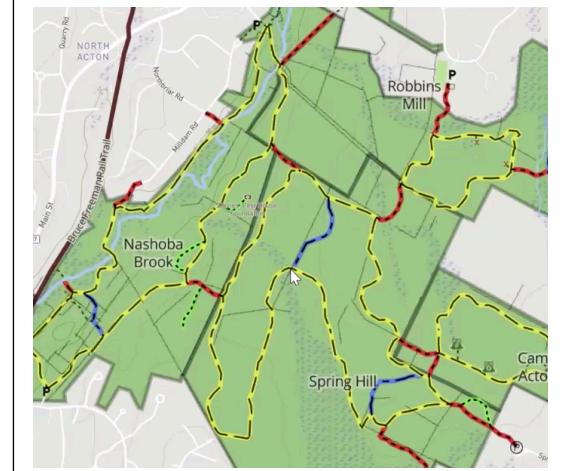
Currently, its access road is shut down because the gravel surrounding the culvert has washed away making it unsafe (Town's call) for vehicles. (Clerk's note: The 2023 Acton Town Meeting in May approved \$15K of Community Preservation Act funds for this work.)

All the permitting for the culvert repair has been done and the Town has a contractor ready to work on it. However, bad weather has interfered the couple times that the work has been scheduled with the biggest setback being getting the materials/equipment to the site. Having the Highway Department put a road plate at the site has been explored but the Department's concern has been the possibility of getting the road plate trapped under snow when it might be needed elsewhere. Having private contractors do this was also discussed. The approach should be to put in a road plate asap until the contractor is able to do the proper work. Once the culvert is repaired, the access road should be regraded periodically, say every five years. Mike will be in touch again soon with the Highway Department about this.

Also, Camp Acton is being seriously considered as a possible site for a disc golf course by the disc golf folks. They were told that Bruce would be the best LSC contact regarding Camp Acton. A discussion ensued about public use of conservation parcels. Mike is researching this with the State. It is fact that Camp Acton was established for permanent use by the Boy Scouts and public camping is allowed. It was deeded to the Conservation Commission, and it does have State Article 97 protection.

– Nagog Hill

The stone wall along what used to be the field used by Hybird Farm is totally overgrown (out of control) with brush, treefall, vines, and other debris. In other places, the debris is boosted into the abutting woods, but there is no place to do that here. Here, however, the debris is close to the road so stewards could run a burn pile. For a burn, it would be necessary to 1) get permission from the appropriate Town authority, and 2) get work parties to the site to do the huge amount of work necessary. Per Mike, Conservation can work on getting permission. The LSC would need to follow up with specific information.

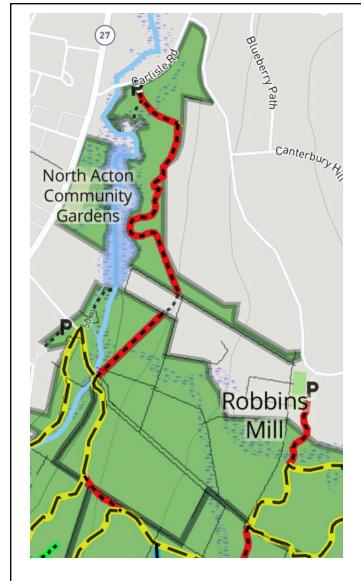


– Robbins Mill

Per Bob, there's a trail that connects the two parts of Robbins Mill. Starting at the northwest corner of Robbins Mill East (RME), it goes into Scoutland where it connects to the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT). Can that be made a permanent trail? (Clerk's note: From the 04/18/17 LSC minutes, "Scoutland is owned by the Trustees of Scoutland, not by the Boy Scouts". Bill Klauer of Acton is the lone surviving Trustee.) Scoutland has not granted any easements, but it has allowed public access.

It would be nice if Scoutland would allow the LSC to mark the trail on the map and maintain it the same way as the BCT. If not, would it be possible to make a new trail, a connector trail that goes along the south edge of Scoutland to the Nashoba Brook red trail? One problem with that is that it would have to go through a double wall.

Per Bettina, Bill Klauer has not budged on easement requests, and she suggests that Kaila Sauer in Planning, or Town Counsel, should research the deed.



Ian will schedule a time with Bob to walk the old trail and map it.

Per Rebecca, if someone parks at the RME parking (see the "P"), would it be possible to have a trail from there to Robbins Mill North (RMN) along that long strip of RMN land that abuts the north side of Scoutland? Ian would have to check it out, possibly map such a trail, and follow up with Rebecca. He suggests that it might also be worthwhile to see how the nearby residents would feel about such a trail.

– Grassy Pond

When the weather is nicer, Ian will schedule a workday for raising the boardwalk.

Pending Publications (OSRP, 549 Main Street CR, Morrison Farm CR)

– OSRP is "chugging along."

– Re 549 Main Street, there is a Conservation Commission special meeting next week to discuss the Memorandum of Understanding with Sudbury Valley Trustees and how the two parties are going to share the CR.

– A Morrison Farm CR draft should be on a February agenda of the Select Board. Mike can circulate an updated draft and if anyone from the LSC has specific comments they can respond directly to either Mike or Ian.

Bridges, Board/Bogwalks, Maps, Mowing, Chain sawing, Shed, Website

– Website:

Stewards' reports have been "super awesome". Ian was able to update the trail conditions, and will keep doing that as long as the reports come in.

– Chain sawing

Training is being scheduled, hopefully for Spring. Presently, there are "resources enough for just one volunteer". Ian suspects that "one volunteer" is in terms of participating in the actual hands-on training versus being able to observe if you are already a seasoned sawyer. He will continue working on this and is hoping that there will be room for three or more volunteers. He is also exploring other options, e.g., paying for a private training service. The ensuing discussion suggested that there could possibly be "grades" of

stewards, with basic work being done by those least trained. The challenge would be where to “draw the line.” Ian himself is aiming to participate in both levels of training.

Next month's (02/20/24) agenda

The Rainbow Trail

Evaluate meeting

Little bit long! And Bruce's brownies were great!!

Adjournment

At 8:36 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, February 20, at 7 p.m.