

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 21, 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, **Bob Walton**

Others:

Ian Bergemann (Acton Land Stewardship Coordinator), **Mike Gendron** (Acton Conservation Agent), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Alissa Nichol** (Select Board LSC liaison), **Jimmy Welch** (Zoo New England (ZNE) Field Biologist), **Bryan Windmiller** (ZNE Director of Field Conservation)

Aaron opened the meeting at 7 p.m.

Review and acceptance of October 17 minutes

Bob had one correction, namely, that there was no fire site at the structure found at Robbins Mill North. With that correction the minutes are accepted.

Concerns from the public

Per Jody, the ACT website received a letter regarding the plastic wrapped stone wall at Wright Hill. The ACT newsletter had an item on the site showing 1) clearing out the stone wall, 2) the cleared stone wall, and 3) the stone wall wrapped in plastic. The letter was a rant, expressing upset that this had destroyed rabbit habitat. She will forward the letter to Ian who will work on an appropriate response.

Wood Turtle Habitat Project

Bryan and Jimmy (see Attendees, Other) shared a project that ZNE would like to carry out and would like to learn of any concerns that the LSC might have.

Nashoba Brook is home to what is probably Acton's last remaining reasonable population (~20) of wood turtles. They tend to concentrate their activities in and around Acton's Veterans' Field (VF) (NE corner of the Main Street/2A intersection, lower left in map at right). In the warmer months the turtles spend much of their time on land where they use the combination of the reed canary grass meadows alongside Nashoba Brook (about a kilometer upstream from VF) and the land behind the VF ball fields, the only decent area of upland available to them.



Bryan described the work that, with the cooperation of Acton Conservation, has been going on there for a few years now. A current problem for wood turtles is the high level of predation they suffer from mammals. The work that ZNE is proposing is threefold:

- The planting of native shrubs to give the turtles better brush cover from the predators in sections of the brook where such cover is sparse, especially in the reed canary grass meadows.
- The planting of a state-endangered plant, wild senna, which currently occurs in only two sites in Massachusetts. It's a wildflower that can grow to 6 ft with "very pretty" yellow flowers. It is known to grow well in riverbank habitats.
- In Nashoba Brook, the creation (with LSC/Conservation Commission permission) of several small log jams — very helpful to turtles underwater — primarily near the VF area, either by
 - cutting up trees that are already dead and placing them in the stream so they are likely to be stable even during Spring high water, or by
 - cutting down, close to the bank, a few hardwood trees, dropping them into the brook, cutting them up, and placing them as with the dead wood. If there is particular concern about this, it could be considered on a tree-by-tree discretionary basis.

Ensuing discussion:

What's your timing for this project? A grant from Mass Wildlife should be available by early Spring that should cover work in 2024 and 2025.

This project is "winter focused". It's not about invasives. ZNE would be happy to help with invasives if circumstances allow, e.g., removing larger buckthorn that would be big enough to use in a log jam. However, its staff is limited to work beyond the defined project.

ZNE has already removed invasives from the upland area, and from where it will do planting in the reed canary grass meadows where there is very little woody growth. The meadows are ordinary vegetated wetlands, too wet for invasive species like multiflora rose, honeysuckle, or bittersweet. Reed canary grass itself is regarded by many as an invasive. For the shrubs that would be planted, the intention is to use string trimmers for the first year to keep the reed canary grass down and allow the shrubs to establish themselves above the grass.

The dam a short way upstream from the upper yellow section on the map will someday be removed. Should that happen, it's hard to know exactly what the impact would be. It could very likely be positive based on the history of turtles evolving with beavers . . . small dams being built, then falling apart, and stream flows changing in response. When hard structure dams are removed, it's generally beneficial to the wood turtle.

What if the wild sienna would be so wildly successful that it would cause a negative result, such as the closing off of some of the land? It would be planted and not regulated, thereby being regarded as an experimental introduced population. So there would be no new control restrictions. Also, it's an endangered plant so the odds of it going really wild and taking over are quite low.

There was a discussion on how this project would affect the kayakability of Nashoba Brook. Not likely, as the brook already has a low kayakability rating.

Getting approval from the Conservation Commission will be the last task for ZNE before it can proceed with the project.

Nashoba Regional Greenway Project

This was on the Select Board (SB) agenda, and it relates to regional linkage of trails. Per Alissa, the SB/LSC liaison, this is mainly about signage. The SB authorized pursuit of a grant, to be coordinated by Maynard, with the aim of connecting the rail trails and other trails in the area to make more bikeable

pathways, e.g., a pathway from South Acton Village to West Concord Village. There is no construction involved, or even striping of roads. It's just to establish signage that would direct cyclists along a certain route from one point to another. Mike's understanding is that it would just be on roads and bike trails, and not enter Conservation trails.

LSC Wiki

Before the LSC looks at this, Ian wants to meet with Bob and John to help Ian frame this for Acton's IT (Information Technology) group. Ian will email Bob and John his availability.

Ian's Trails tales, Part 4 (Nagog Hill)

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

– First Impressions:

First Impressions

- Large off-street parking lot (Nagog Hill Rd), 4 points of access
 - Connections to Grassy Pond (goes to Anderson/Bulette)
 - 1 Kiosk, 0 "You Are Here" Signs, 1 Distance sign for Skyline Dr
- **HUGE** land, spanning multiple meadows, rocky outcroppings, streams, wetlands, and upper forest! Very diverse ecosystem



Town Hall, Room 12...

Trail Observations:

Trails

- Somewhat easy to follow, could use some arrows at 3-way intersections
 - Multiple stream crossing (bridges in good condition!)
 - Some muddy sections and lots of hills
 - Wide trails, great for trail running!

Wildlife:

Wildlife

- Massive meadows that grow alongside trail & support abundant
 - Common pollinator species
- Wetlands and streams provide habitat for amphibians
- Hear song birds and birds of prey throughout forest

Future Recommendations:

The “stone wall (that has) succumbed to invasives” might be a place where we can replicate the Wright Hill effort at invasives control if we learn in the Spring that it has been successful.

A request for an Acton Water District (AWD) agreement might be of the form “Can we mark your trails?” to help keep hikers who go on AWD land from getting lost.

Future Recommendations



Current Conditions

- Nagog Hill is a large protected open space with a nearly 3 mile loop
- Has 1 large parking lot and shares potential parking up the street at Grassy Pond
- Only one distance marker for Skyline Dr
- No "You Are Here" map
 - Only 1 kiosk
- Stone wall succumbed to invasives

Future Conditions

- Unofficial trails exist to the adjacent AWD land, technically Nagog Hill is not located on property – agreement or partnership with AWD could change that
- A kiosk or "You are Here" map may be helpful at various junctions
- A distance marker at junction to Grassy Pond may display CL connectivity
- It may be worth trying Jim Salem's method for bittersweet control at the stone wall in Nagog Hill CL
- Prime environment for meadow education i.e sign for "Seasons in the Meadow" or "Why do we mow meadows?"

Conclusion (not shown above):

Nagog Hill is beautiful conservation land. Suggest we

- Add signage to help make it easier to navigate.
- Show how it connects to Grassy Pond.

- Restore that stone wall to its prime glory, where you can actually see the wall rather than the invasives that shroud it.

Alissa pointed out that Concord owns land bordering Nagog Pond but does not own the pond itself. It's partly in Acton and partly in Littleton, and a fairly recent court ruling maintained that all three towns have rights to draw water from it. (Clerk's note: The following was found via google, "Under the Massachusetts Public Waterfront Act, because Nagog Pond's surface area is more than 10 acres, it is accorded special status, as a 'great pond.' Importantly, like all of our state's 'great ponds,' including Walden Pond, Nagog Pond is owned and held in public trust by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.")

CISMA Invasive Species Management Grant

Ian presented a "Request for Proposals" by SuAsCo CISMA. (SuAsCo CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) is a partnership of organizations that try to manage and control invasive species in the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord (SuAsCo) watershed.)

CISMA has \$6K to fund invasive species control projects. Ian plans to propose a project: restoration of the mini-meadow behind the red house that sits on the south side of Town Hall. The LSC could also pursue a CISMA grant. Bettina sought two last year and was awarded one for half the amount sought. This year the focus is on funding projects that have to do with restoration after invasives removal.

Ian also was elected to the CISMA group.

Eagle Scout projects

- At Grassy Pond, the bridge and bog bridges have been finished — "a fantastic job".
- At Guggins Brook, two projects are underway. Construction has started on one and starts next week on the other.
- The Bulette boardwalk is awaiting Council approval.
- At Pratts Brook, a scout is working with Adam to rebuild or replace the utility pole bridge. To that end, Ian will be presenting to the Conservation Commission re the use of untreated (no chemicals) utility poles in trail maintenance.
- For Wright Hill, Ian has a scout who wants to build a kiosk at the Wright Terrace entrance, something Ian urged at the September LSC meeting and that has already been endorsed by the property owners. Hopefully, there will be one at the Central Street entrance also.

Parcel issues

General:

- A while back, Concord resident Matt Solar reported trees down using the "ridewithgps" app, an app with which you can take a picture of your site (e.g., at a tree fall) and tag the picture location on a map. Bruce has it, says it is easy to use but fairly pricey. Ian asked Matt if he could demonstrate the app at an LSC meeting but no success yet.
- Stewards should send a picture of any kiosk on your parcel to Ian so he knows how to update it.
- Anderson Land: The kiosk is complete and Ian will be updating it. Ian has a partnership with Alltrails and has created an Alltrails trail for this parcel.
- Morrison Farm: Ian walked the Farm with the Agricultural Commission to help mark where boundaries would be for the proposed Conservation Restriction (CR). Tomorrow, he expects to help Bill Smith build shelves in the LSC shed. He may also bring a bookcase to add more shelves. There was brief discussion on

what to do with the box (in the shed) that previously belonged to Bob Guba. There was a longer discussion on the need to clean in and around the shed. Ian plans to be there tomorrow around 11:30 for 2-3 hours and others are welcome to join him.

– Wright Hill: Ian has almost finished all the trail signage he had proposed; three 4 by 4's with “mash-style” signs (arrows pointing in different directions). There will also be a distance sign that shows how long to get to Guggins Brook.

– Nashoba Brook: On two recent Sundays Ian and Bettina joined the Friends of Pine Hawk for a cleanup of the top of the stone chamber and a little bit on the inside. The two led a third-grade class there on Monday.

Invasive plants 2023, Part 8 — John

• Mile-A-Minute

Although we haven't seen mile-a-minute yet in Acton, SuAsCo has identified it as a an invasive of concern in our area. It apparently grows like crazy. So if we do find it, we should jump on it right away.

One plant that is common around Acton and looks like mile-a-minute (but we do not worry about) is hedge false bindweed. It has a square notch where the stem meets the leaf.

If you do see mile-a-minute's triangular leaf anywhere, let the LSC know.

• Autumn Olive

Autumn olive looks rather similar to a cherry tree, but its leaves are very white on the bottom (glossy on the top). Its late-Fall red berries, flecked with little gold flakes on the surface, are a distinctive characteristic. The berries are very tasty — about 10 times the citrus of a tomato.

There was an aggressive effort in Acton to remove Autumn olive 20 to 30 years ago. Now it's regrowing. There is some significant growth around the Pratts Brook parking lot off Brewster Lane. John is watching one plant that is growing in the upper part of the large playing field at Great Hill.

Birds eat the berries and spread the seeds. If you need confirmation that you've found Autumn olive, let John know and he'll check to confirm.

• Bugs

Not about plants . . . but what about current concerns about invasive insects?

The lantern fly has been spotted in towns bordering Acton, but not yet in Acton. One resident has called Ian about it. There are a few signs about it posted at the Arboretum. New York advises that you stomp the bug on sight and report it to the State. A reported host for the lantern fly is the Tree of Heaven, an invasive that we try to remove. Remove the Tree of Heaven and you will no longer know where the lantern fly is.

Massachusetts has a really good website on this — a map that's interactive re invasive bugs that have been spotted in the state. Ian can email it to everyone.

Mile-A-Minute (*Persicaria perfoliata*)

Be On the Lookout: Mile-a-minute is an annual scrambling vine, with small, curved barbs covering the stem, petioles, and leaf undersides.

The leaf looks like a slightly forked equilateral triangle.

Removed by pulling seedlings

Not seen yet in Acton. If seen, please notify the Land Stewards.

Not to be confused with Hedge False Bindweed, which has a square notch in the triangle, where the petiole meets the leaf



The Asian longhorn beetle is coming into our area. It has been spotted in Concord and there is a quarantine area around Worcester.

Updates

– 549 Main Street (CR)

The CR was submitted to the State. It's come back with some comments that are being looked at by the Town, the AWD, and the Sudbury Valley Trustees. Once everything is final, including clarity on all parties' responsibilities, particularly the Town's, the hope is that the LSC will not get stuck with things that it doesn't want, but will have opportunity to do "the fun stuff".

– Morrison Farm (Ag Comm Conservation Restriction)

The Ag Comm is still working on the CR. It redrew the boundaries to exclude the farm buildings but include the LSC shed. There would be specific allowances for the shed, e.g., the woodpile could stay and specified related activities allowed. The plan is to bring the CR draft back to the Select Board. As that meeting gets closer, the Ag Comm may be reaching out to the LSC for more support.

– Bridges, Board/Bogwalks, Chain sawing (training), Maps, Mowing, Website, Etc.

Bridges, Board/Bogwalks: John expressed concern over the large amount of debris at the Heath Hen Meadow bridge site. However, per Bettina, high water has slowed work at and near the bridge, and demolition is not yet complete. Ian is in touch with a scout who may use the boards for a nearby project, and there may be other ways to repurpose the wood from the old bridge. When it comes time to remove the debris, one can truck to the site from the Mt. Hope parking area.

John also observed that the bog boardwalk in the Arboretum is settling. Per Bettina, "That's on my radar."

John's third concern was about the practicality of using utility poles for bog structures. The ensuing discussion dealt with local history re the use of poles, pole replacement, transportation, durability, maintenance, longevity, composition, the use of pressure treated wood, etc.

Chain sawing: Ian has contacted MIAA (Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association). We are in line for chainsaw training (both basic and storm management) next year, possibly a three-day course, and possibly as early as March — specifics yet to be worked out. Stuart Amir-Lin, who is aiming to join the LSC, has indicated interest. Needed: About 8 trees to fell. John knows of a bunch at Great Hill that could be dropped and taken apart.

Mowing: Per Mike, meadow mowing should be complete except for the Arboretum and two smaller wet meadows at Morrison. It might be difficult to get the DPW to finish Morrison so the Town will try to have contractual mower Sam Bell do those. The small Arboretum meadow east of the end of Wood Lane still needs to be mowed as well.

Website: It was down all weekend but is now fixed. Ian has added a "CONSERVATION LAND & TRAIL STATUS" section to Acton Trails. Click on that name and you are taken to its page:

<https://trails.actonma.gov/conservation-land-trail-status/>

Scroll down for an explanation of a chart even further down. Each line of the chart includes the name of a parcel, the status of its trail system in a color that signals the severity of the trail condition. Ian updates the chart using information from stewards, particularly from their reports that several submit monthly.

– Also found on the Acton Trails home page is "WILDLIFE OF ACTON", Rebecca's photography. Click on that name and you are taken to its page:

<https://www.actonwildlife.com/video-library/>

Ian has updated this page to link to Rebecca's YouTube Video Library. Question: Could anyone contribute photos to that site? Per John, it's not very wise to allow people to just submit photos to a website. It quickly gets vandalized.

– Also found on the Acton Trails home page is “RESOURCES”. Click on that name and you are taken to its page where you can click on “Invasive Species Wiki” and be taken to its page:

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

(Clerk's note: Previously these Minutes suggested Bob and John were just starting to work on this wiki. Viewing the wiki now will show that the wiki has had considerable input since this meeting.)

– Also found on the Acton Trails home page in the left-hand column is the list of LSC-stewarded parcels. There will be a new parcel, ANDERSON LAND, added to the list. Still to be determined is who will be its steward.

– Not found on the Acton Trails website is any link that would allow a steward to request blazing from Jody. Ian will ask that it be on a future LSC agenda to give Jody an opportunity to talk about it.

– Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP, 2024-2031)

There will be a public meeting Wednesday, December 6 at 6 pm to discuss the current version of the OSRP which addresses information gathered from a multitude of sources. Target would be a final draft sometime in the Spring. Notice of this meeting has been sent out to all committees.

– LSC membership

Bob has been officially sworn in. He is steward of Robbins Mill. Welcome to the LSC.

Next month's (12/19/23) agenda

Invasives Wiki, Anderson parcel, blazing link for Jody

Adjournment

At 8:31 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, December 19, at 7 p.m.