

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 20, 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: Stuart Amir-Lin, **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), **David Pinsky** (Acton resident, soon-to-be LSC member),

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

Review and acceptance of November 21, December 19, and January 16 Minutes

The December minutes, accepted at the January meeting, are here again as the correction that was accepted at the January meeting was incorrect. The original was correct. The three Minutes were accepted as presented.

Concerns from the public

ACT Annual Meeting reminder: John will be receiving ACT's 2024 Carol Holley Conservation Volunteer award at the ACT's Annual Meeting March 17, 1 pm, at Acton Town Hall. The meeting will also feature a presentation re New England (and other) snakes.

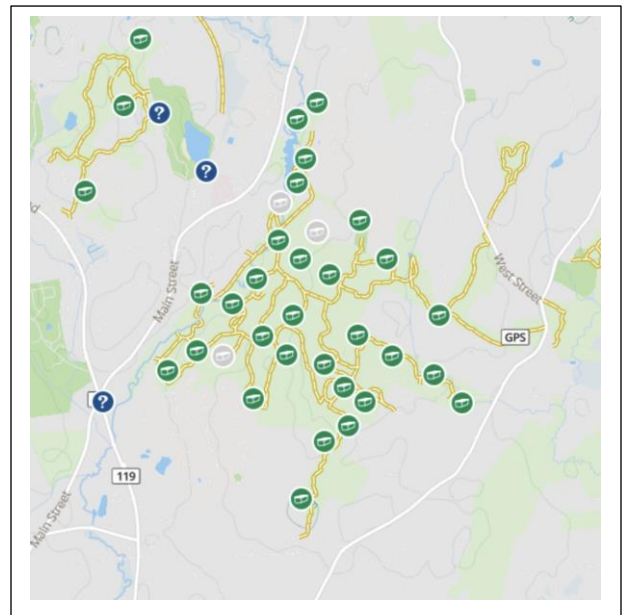
On geocaching: Rebecca expressed concern, even alarm, about large numbers of people "tromping all over the place in fairly sensitive environments" due to the increased popularity (aided significantly by COVID) of geocaching. She shared a visual like the one at the right showing (some of the) geocaches at Spring Hill.

(<https://www.geocaching.com/map/#?ll=42.50441,-71.41371&z=14>)

Rebecca is concerned that back when people were just gaining interest in geocaching, they had no idea of what it would grow into, and she wonders if there is a general policy related to this activity. Are geocaches "approved"? Is there a limit to the practice? Are geocachers given any off-trail guidance?

Discussion points:

– The land stewards talked about this last Spring (May 16, 2023) when someone inquired about needing permission for geocaching. The LSC basically said "okay" at that time as it was a general policy to allow geocaching. There was no major problem identified at that time, so maybe geocaching policy is something to address now.



- We were okay with geocaching at that time. We were aware of a few caches, all generally within 100 ft of a trail. Over the last couple years there seems to have been a huge explosion with the activity, so there shouldn't be a problem with trying to do something — except for what, indeed, can we do?
- It sounds like there needs to be some pushback, e.g., limit the number of geocaches, or require that they not be far from trails.
- We don't make the rules. Per our previous meeting, if something is to be done about this, it would be the Conservation Commission's doing.
- The LSC could produce a set of rules for geocaching — and possibly for consideration by the Cons Comm.
- The greater concern should be about the “continuous herd of people (staring at their GPS and) tromping the environment” rather than for what might be in a geocache. All it takes is about 10 people following the same path to damage it enough that it would take a year to recover.
- Some possible rules:
 - Limit the number of geocaches to “x” per conservation parcel.
 - Avoid any sensitive wetland areas (needing someone yet to provide a good definition of such areas).
 - A geocache should be within a given number of feet from an existing trail — this last rule to avoid opening areas of any Conservation Land (CL) where the LSC explicitly didn't make trails for that reason.
- If there are to be rules, a possibility would be for the geocaching organization to announce them and possibly semi-enforce them.

Rebecca, with the help of an avid geocacher and possible inquiry of such activity in nearby towns, will try to produce a rough draft of what we feel needs to be said to geocachers. She will aim to have something that would apply to all parcels to be discussed at the LSC March meeting, before anything would go from the LSC to the Cons Comm, should there be need for some “official” regulation.

There was an ensuing discussion about enforceability of any directives re geocaching. One possibly easy-to-enforce rule could deal with any “commercial” geocaches suggested by “Geocaching Premium” geocaches cited on the geocaching website.

Chainsaw Training in March — Ian

Training is scheduled for March 13. Training is at capacity with all those who reached out signed up. A new chain sawyer will be LSC Associate Bill Smith.

ABRHS Senior Community Service Day

This will be Friday, April 26. Last day for submission of a project proposal is February 27. Bettina will have a project at the Arboretum. Conservation will be collaborating with the Sustainability Office on a project to rebuild the meadow behind the Red House next to Town Hall. Tom has done such service projects for the last two years — clean ups at the end of Wheeler Lane — and is thinking of something similar this year.

Invasive plants (John), February 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

Click on “Invasive Plants Around Acton”, then “Multiflora Rose”.

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

John referenced the above page while presenting information on multiflora rose which is present on all conservation land.

Now (winter) is a good time to clear out some thickets of multiflora rose. Its thorns are so nasty that it's hard to work in the summer when you don't want to wear thick protective clothing. But if you're wearing a sweatshirt and a parka over that, the thorns don't make it all the way through to you. You are not going to kill it at this time of year, but you can certainly cut it down to the ground. Next year there will be a few sprouts. Keep cutting it and you will actually kill it.

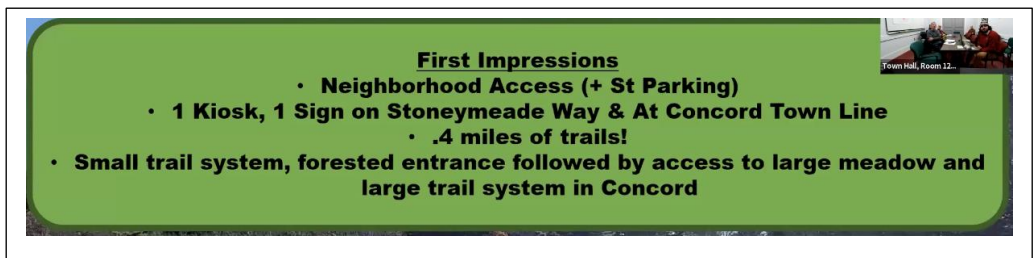
How to identify multiflora rose in the middle of winter when the leaves aren't there? Its curved thorns are very distinctive (although they can be straight at a particular growth stage) while native roses in this area all tend to have straight thorns. Be careful with the curved thorns. If they get into your skin, they tend to rip and cause bruising as well. Also, protective eye gear is strongly recommended.

Two approaches to dealing with multiflora rose: 1) Cut into the very base and do one good cut across all the stems. 2) Chop the plant into one-foot pieces (nice, because then you don't get tangled up with it).

Ian's Trails Tales, February 2024: Stoneymeade

To be removed from the Stoneymeade map: The trail that goes onto private property at the north boundary. There will be new signage, possibly including one that marks the property line.

First impressions:

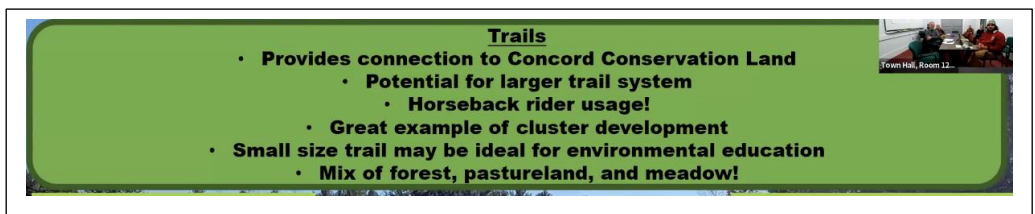


First Impressions

- Neighborhood Access (+ St Parking)
- 1 Kiosk, 1 Sign on Stoneymeade Way & At Concord Town Line
 - .4 miles of trails!
- Small trail system, forested entrance followed by access to large meadow and large trail system in Concord

Trails:

The Stoneymeade trail is that part of the Bay Circuit Trail that links the North Acton CLs to Concord CLs.

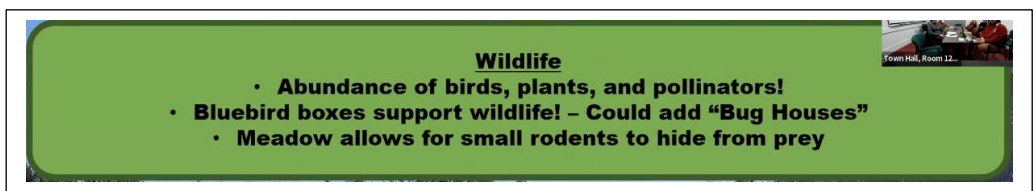


Trails

- Provides connection to Concord Conservation Land
 - Potential for larger trail system
 - Horseback rider usage!
 - Great example of cluster development
- Small size trail may be ideal for environmental education
 - Mix of forest, pastureland, and meadow!

Wildlife:

Ian also pointed out instances of wild cucumber that could be a relic from past farming activity.



Wildlife

- Abundance of birds, plants, and pollinators!
- Bluebird boxes support wildlife! – Could add “Bug Houses”
- Meadow allows for small rodents to hide from prey

Future Recommendations:

Future Recommendations

Current Conditions


- Small half-mile trail connects to larger trail system in Concord
- Street parking allows large capacity of visitors
- 1 kiosks, 3 wooden signs
- Popular for dog walking, running, and horseback riding
- Quiet trail

Future Conditions

- A full loop could be developed in adjacent woodland
- Volunteer days to remove invasive species thickets and save trees
- Artificial habitat for pollinators – similar to bird boxes
- Small trail – close to road would be good for temporary environmental education panels

Conclusion

Stonemyeade is a quiet short trail that provides access to a large trail system within Concord. Additionally, it is a part of the larger Bay Circuit Trail. Stonemyeade has obvious signs of anthropogenic impact such as the old cart path, culvert, and even structures abutting it in Concord. It's short trail could be expanded into a full loop through the woodland. Invasive species are partially managed through mowing but often thickets form and suffocate any trees. Stonemyeade has a lot of potential value in terms of recreation and ecological benefit.



Also, it might be nice to have a map that's close to the Acton/Concord line to let people know 1) that they are coming into a neighborhood if heading into Acton, and 2) what kind of a hike they may be facing if heading into Concord.

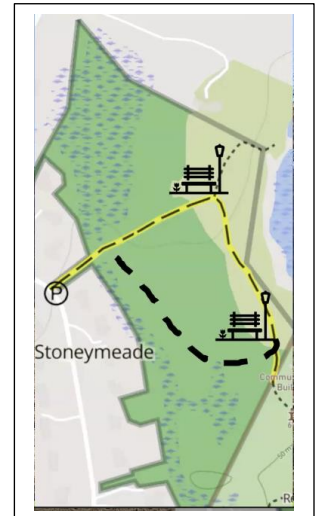
Ian suggested that Stonemyeade's yellow trail could be extended into a loop through the adjacent woods as pictured at the right. A bench or two might also be nice; the one shown at the top to help deter folks from going off the parcel to the north while also providing a nice view of the whole meadow. If possible, any bench should be located where mowers don't go.

The parcel would seem to be a good site for a "volunteer day" that could result in significant invasives removal.

Status of MCI farming parcels

These parcels are protected by Article 97 of the Amendments to the Massachusetts Constitution. Land so protected cannot be used for other purposes without a two-thirds roll call vote of the Massachusetts Legislature. Also, the five-year lease by Acton of MCI land for what Acton calls the School Street playing field was renewed just this past September.

Per Joe: There is a map that shows the MCI lands that are protected by Article 97. One parcel that's not shown as being protected is the field west of the State Police horse farm and east of Wetherbee Street (between Wetherbee Street and the barn with the large U.S. flag shown on its side).



LSC parcel issues.

– Heath Hen Meadow Rainbow Trail (in Conservation Land abutting the west side of Mt. Hope Cemetery): Work is underway to clear the trail, but requiring much less effort than previously thought. Jody has provided markers and a sign for the trail. A Volunteer Day to clean up the trail is likely to happen.

– Jenks culvert (CPA): We're still in limbo with the federal grant. Mike was in touch with the feds two months ago and is expecting to hear back from them but hasn't yet.

– Camp Acton access road (CPA): The Highway Department is hesitant to put in a road plate because it feels a road plate will be insufficient as the road is in such bad shape. Instead, it feels the road should be

restored. On restoring the road, Mike detailed his frustration with trying to work with a contractor and has consequently reached out to another who said they would be ready to go asap. Now the original contractor says that they may be able to do the job by the end of the month. Mike will decide which one to use once he gets a quote from the second contractor. It has become a top priority for him.

- Camp Acton memorial bench: Still in the hands of the Scouts.
- Reminder to stewards: If your parcel has a foot bridge over a stream, make sure the stream isn't dammed up causing water to cover any part of the footbridge. John has observed such coverage at both the Arboretum and Great Hill in the last week and is confident that it is occurring in other places as well.
- Nashoba Brook: At Wheeler Lane, we need demarcation of the edge of the parking lot. Someone drove onto the soft soil the other day and made a mess. Tom is aware of the problem and may solve it with the help of ABRHS seniors on the school's Senior Service Day.
- Pratts Brook: Per Adam, the dead tree that's in the center of the picnic area meadow has come down. Adam will coordinate its removal with a sawyer sometime in the spring when the weather is nicer. John has added the tree to the sawyer's spreadsheet.
- Great Hill: Joe commented on the huge cleanup of extraordinary treefall along the blue trail behind the Discovery Museum. John, Bruce, Dale, and Ian reopened the trail.

LSC membership; who's on the shell

Jody wonders whether she should be on the LSC shell because she is the LSC blazer, she interfaces with a lot of LSC members, and believes that she is missing many LSC e-notices. Jody has been a "friend" of the LSC and not a Regular (voting) member nor an Associate (non-voting) member. At present the LSC has the maximum number allowed of Associate members but has an opening for a Regular member. An Associate could consider becoming a Regular to open an Associate spot. Also, Ian, supported by Mike, could talk to the Town's IT Department to see if Jody could be allowed on the LSC shell. It was noted that one could volunteer for LSC tasks via the LSC page on the Town website. But to volunteer to be a sworn-in LSC member one must go through the much more complicated Committee/Commission volunteer procedure.

Pending publications

- 2023 Town Report: Edits submitted to date have been incorporated. A few more edits are expected tomorrow. That draft will go to the LSC for final review and the final report will be submitted to the Town by February 26.
- OSRP: A draft will go to the state in March and will be presented to the Select Board (SB) on April 8.
- Morrison Farm CR: The CR proposal was sent to the SB and it did not get voted on so it will not go to Town Meeting this year. The SB said that it still needs some work (addressing possible future uses of the land, whether the space carved out for the buildings was adequate, and a need for more public input to get a clearer direction of what the Town wants) so the Agricultural Commission will be "returning to the drawing board" potentially with a larger group working on it.

Fran Arsenault is the SB member directed to oversee this. Alissa noted that Fran has reached out to four Committees/Commissions to get together and start a larger conversation, and wonders whether there is any Land Steward who would like to be involved with the process. Joe is the steward for Morrison Farm and John spends a lot of time there, so they should be interested. John agrees, and while Joe has concerns about the process, he will be in touch with John about what they might want to do with this. In the meantime, anyone else who may be interested in this should reach out to Fran (franarsenault@actonma.gov).

- 549 Main Street CR: There is a Memorandum of Understanding between the Sudbury Valley Trustees and Acton's Cons Comm on how the CR will be administered. It is on tomorrow's Cons Comm agenda.

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

– Per Bob, what’s the procedure for putting in a bog bridge or boardwalk? There is no need for a formal proposal. Such a project is left to the steward to work with whomever wants to be involved. If a project would involve more people, the steward and LSC can work together on scheduling a workday. Bob should keep Ian informed as to the steps he takes as it will be a learning process for Ian too.

Other business

– Mike has found a “greener pasture” and will be leaving the Town’s employ. During his time here, he has been a great resource for the LSC, we appreciate all he’s done, and we wish him well. (He will be here to meet next week with ACT to talk about the pre-existing encroachment on the Anderson Land that needs to be resolved.)

– Adam’s Town email stopped working back in December. He has been unable to restore it, so he has not been seeing any of the emails sent to that address.

Next month’s (03/19/24) agenda

Geocaching, of course.

Evaluate meeting



Adjournment

At 8:06 pm.

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