

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 19, 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**, **David Pinsky**, **Jim Salem**, **Bill Smith**, **Jason Temple**, **Steve Trimble**, **Todd Tsakiris**, **Bob Walton**

Others: **Ian Bergemann** (Acton Land Stewardship Coordinator), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Alissa Nichol** (Select Board (SB) LSC liaison),

Aaron opened the meeting at 7:01 p.m.

Review and acceptance of February 20 Minutes

February minutes not ready yet.

Concerns from the public

None.

Invasive plants, March 2024

John had computer difficulties so will skip this month. He plans to take on garlic mustard in April.


Ian's Trails Tales, March 2024: Camp Acton

Ian first showed the map of Camp Acton with campsites 0 (handicapped, although not labeled as such) through 7 identified when one zooms in. Zooming in also shows the site of the port-a-potty. In his visit, Ian noted an upside-down "12" marker at campsite 7. No one knows its origin. A copy of the North Acton Trails map is posted at Camp Acton.

First impressions:

First Impressions


- Short drive/walk through tree lined dirt road
 - New culvert! (Thanks Mike!)
- 1 Kiosk, 2 Signs on Pope Rd & Spring Hill red access trail
 - 1.5 miles of trails!
- Acton's only camp ground! Great for beginner campers and backpackers!
 - Gives a real "backcountry" feeling to each camp site



Trails:

Trails

- 1.1 mile yellow loop with 1 blue trail
- Trail system fully utilizes the entire parcel AND allows campers pri
 - LOTS OF PARKING (when road is not closed)
- 8 campsites with varying conditions and unique firepits plus firewood containers
 - 1 unique ADA accessible campsite
- Mix of wetland/brook to the east/SE, large forests of Eastern White Pine, Birch, and Ash



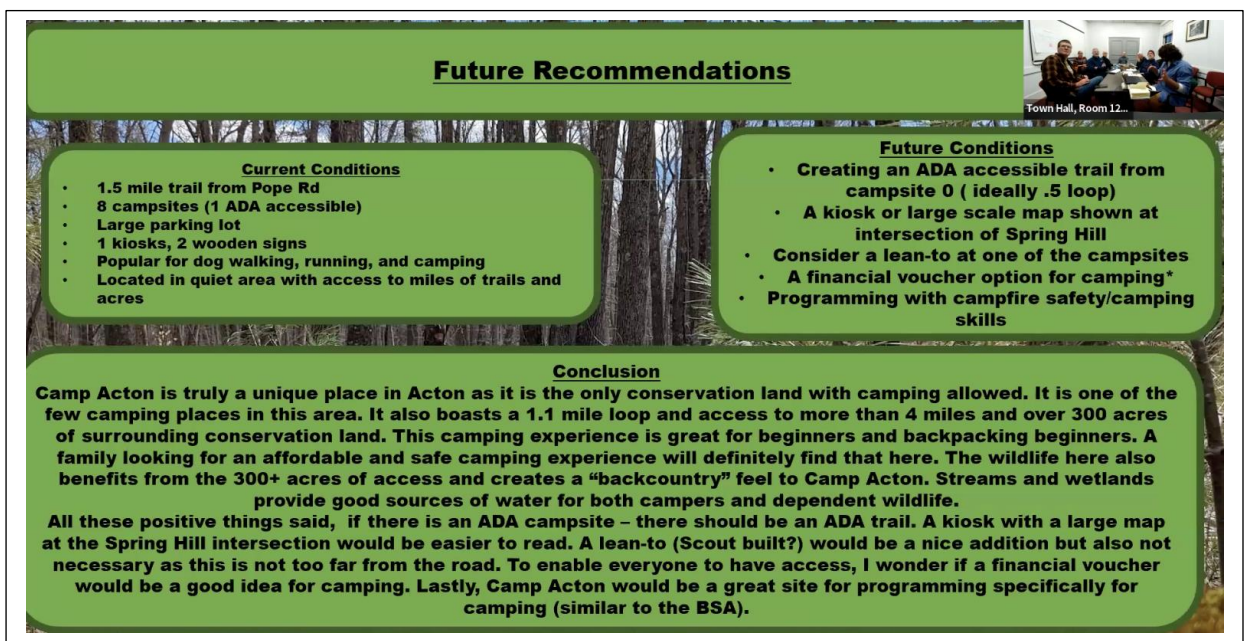
Wildlife:

Camping:

Ian is working on getting another, matching, picnic table for the site. Such tables are no longer commercially available,

so any new ones must be built from scratch. Per Bruce, a Lexington Scout Troop wants to do just that, so Bruce has put it in touch with Acton's Recreation Department which manages Camp Acton. Also, we could ask places in town that if they want to upgrade their picnic tables to let Camp Acton consider whether it could use their old ones.

Future Recommendations:



Wildlife

Camp Time!

- At least 1 picnic table at every campsite
- 1 fire pit at every campsite
- Port-a-potty (seasonal)
- Firewood storage
- 8 campsites
- 25\$ rental fee per night

Future Recommendations

Current Conditions

- 1.5 mile trail from Pope Rd
- 8 campsites (1 ADA accessible)
- Large parking lot
- 1 kiosks, 2 wooden signs
- Popular for dog walking, running, and camping
- Located in quiet area with access to miles of trails and acres

Future Conditions

- Creating an ADA accessible trail from campsite 0 (ideally .5 loop)
- A kiosk or large scale map shown at intersection of Spring Hill
- Consider a lean-to at one of the campsites
- A financial voucher option for camping*
- Programming with campfire safety/camping skills

Conclusion

Camp Acton is truly a unique place in Acton as it is the only conservation land with camping allowed. It is one of the few camping places in this area. It also boasts a 1.1 mile loop and access to more than 4 miles and over 300 acres of surrounding conservation land. This camping experience is great for beginners and backpacking beginners. A family looking for an affordable and safe camping experience will definitely find that here. The wildlife here also benefits from the 300+ acres of access and creates a "backcountry" feel to Camp Acton. Streams and wetlands provide good sources of water for both campers and dependent wildlife.

All these positive things said, if there is an ADA campsite - there should be an ADA trail. A kiosk with a large map at the Spring Hill intersection would be easier to read. A lean-to (Scout built?) would be a nice addition but also not necessary as this is not too far from the road. To enable everyone to have access, I wonder if a financial voucher would be a good idea for camping. Lastly, Camp Acton would be a great site for programming specifically for camping (similar to the BSA).

Re a lean-to: A lean-to could attract nuisance activity. To discourage that, put the lean-to on a trail, or someplace where public oversight would discourage inappropriate behavior. There is a trail that connects Camp Acton with privately-owned Scoutland where there actually are lean-tos (and platforms that need to be rebuilt). Scoutland would be a good destination for backpacking training and remote camping. Ian will talk with Scoutland Trustee Bill Klauer about allowing public access to Scoutland.

To go along with the financial voucher idea, consider creating a "library" of things needed for camping, such as tents, sleeping bags, etc. Bruce, after 2 Eagle Scouts and 20 years with the Boy Scouts, has a vast amount of equipment that he would donate. It would be "really cool" if we could put voucher/equipment information on the Rec Dept website or with the library. Ian will try to pursue this.

"Future Conditions" and "Conclusion" relate to public use of Camp Acton, in addition to Scout use. Ian wants to "drive home" the idea that Camp Acton is definitely the place for a family looking for an affordable and safe camping experience.

Ian's Updates

- At today's CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area; Ian is a member) of the SuAsCo (Sudbury-Assabet-Concord River Watershed) there was discussion on how to recruit volunteers.
- The volunteer Amphibian Brigade helped about 800 amphibians, ranging from salamanders to frogs, cross Fort Pond Road last week; previously helping a large number on Jefferson Drive with a “ton” of volunteers. You can read about the brigade in Alissa's Acton Exchange article:

<https://www.actonexchange.org/big-night-for-amphibian-helpers/>

Per Bruce, the brigade needs to visit Pope Road just north of Strawberry Hill Road.

- At the end of the day tomorrow, the Camp Acton road, and hence Camp Acton, will be open. Today Onyx is finishing the last portion . . . right after the culvert to the parking lot. Their bobcat will move the cones out of the way and Ian will be taking down all the alerts. The website and Recreation have already been informed.

–Mushroom gathering has also occurred at Camp Acton, probably promoted by the Boston Mycological Club (BMC). The BMC visits Acton parcels occasionally, including one planned for Wills Hole/Town Forest near the end of September this year, and it always asks permission from Conservation in advance. The BMC does not gather mushrooms for food (very little is edible anyway), but rather to study them (e.g., learn to identify the varieties).

- With the departure of Conservation Agent Mike Gendron, Ian is the only person in the Acton Conservation Department, but Kristen Guichard and some of her Planning staff are assisting Ian. Ian will let the LSC know what is happening with Conservation when he gets more information from the Town.

Chainsaw Training

There was chainsaw training last week and it went “really well”. Ian, Jon, John, Dale, and Bill were there. Because of safety concerns and a trail closing, it was moved from Great Hill to the Rainbow Trail area (outside the edge of Mt. Hope Cemetery). The training involved a single tree, and it seems that everyone found the training to be beneficial. Afterwards, Dale and Ian visited with the instructor, looking possibly to create some “custom training” in the future that would encompass almost all the land stewards and the DPW.

Wheeler Lane tree

This is not about the Wheeler Lane mulberry tree explicitly but about a process. It could apply to a decorative tree or to any special tree. Bruce, Ian, and Dale have had 3 work efforts on this tree at Wheeler Lane, perhaps totaling close to 10 person-hours of work. The tree has core rot in both of its large trunks, and it's shattered on both of its tops. Dale believes that the tree is not going to survive. He feels that the tree is a huge “time sink” for cleaning up. For such a tree, the LSC should establish some protocol for determining when it should be salvaged vs. when it should be removed. It could involve getting input from an arborist or the Acton Tree Warden (or Dean Charter, former Acton Tree Warden). If the tree is to be removed, there should be something put back in its place . . . and cared for. Dale does not see this being solved at this meeting, but it is something we need to think about and figure out how to move forward on.

Ian will reach out to Ryan Hunt, the Acton Tree Warden, for some professional advice on this Wheeler Lane tree.

Per John, there is a similar tree in the Brewster Lane clearing at Pratts Brook.

Dale's other concern with the Wheeler Lane tree is that the LSC is not equipped to deal with salvaging it. If the LSC were to try to prune it back to save it, a bucket truck or a crawler bucket would be needed to get high enough. Pruning it is not possible with any plausible pole saw.

Another Dale concern: How the LSC deals with cleaning up the blowdowns that it clears from a trail. The AMC's Trail Maintenance Guide talks about a two-step process: First step is to reopen the trail, something the LSC does well. Second step is to make the area no longer look like a giant tree "smashed the crap" out of the forest. We tend to cut up the big logs and roll them barely off the edge of the trail. It can look like someone dropped a 500-pound bomb on the trail, then scraped some dirt back down the middle, and one is walking through a disaster area. The upside of the second step is a pleasant forest experience (see the AMC Guide). Per Dale, the second step is a lot of work! We barely have the resources to get the trails reopened. We should think about having volunteer work parties that would visit these sites, drag the brush further into the woods, and at least turn the big logs so you're not looking at the sides of all of them (not proposing that volunteers wrestle 500-pound logs out of sight into the woods).

Discussion points:

- We can take your suggestion and maybe do a little better. But it is easy to lean towards the philosophy of let's leave the tree where it was in the woods as much as we can.
- The volunteers would have to avoid making piles on top of invasives so that the invasives can't be pulled out or attacked for the next 10 years.
- When you're out there alone, doing it all by yourself, and you've got limited strength, time and energy, and all the other things, it's difficult. It would be awesome if there were more people to assist.
- The AMC Guide calls this a two-step process. Maybe after we've completed the first step we should mark the sites that need a work party to go back some afternoon and do some cleanup.
- High school kids could volunteer to do this. We also have a volunteer list.
- Per Rebecca: There have been several times when I've reported a Spring Hill trail problem that was pretty bad, and I volunteered to coordinate with volunteers. But I'm not contacted. Maybe we have a communication problem. Right now, I have a 3-tree major blockage that I've reported. I could meet with a sawyer, and a follow-up volunteer crew.
- Let's identify some phrase to put into the sawyer spreadsheet that says the sawyer work is done but cleanup work remains — so the cleanup step can be addressed. Or how about we just add a column that says the site needs additional cleanup?
- Near the Nashoba Brook Davis Road meadow a large pine fell, was cut up, and the debris is now hosting bittersweet. This will be so noted on the sawyers' spreadsheet.

Geocaching on Conservation Land

Ian sent around a draft of a geocaching policy for Acton conservation lands. He received a few edits from some people. Others haven't seen it, so he shared it on the zoom screen and reviewed its contents for the LSC. Ian's presentation and related discussion took 24 minutes. Ian will "reshare" his document with the LSC and members should email comments directly to Ian. A decision on a policy statement will have to occur at a future meeting.

Other parcel issues.

– Camp Acton memorial bench: Nothing new

– Disc golf: At a recent Conservation Commission meeting, a commissioner wondered if this could be done at Wills Hole. Per Joe, Wills Hole might be a great place because it a) could probably provide for an 18-hole course, something preferable to a 9-hole course, b) abuts NARA, giving NARA another attractive recreational activity, c) could link to Sachem Way, providing a nearby recreational activity for low-income housing residents. This possibility is being shared with the disc golf proponents for them to study.

On the other hand, it is thought that the Conservation Commission has decided that disc golf is active recreation, thereby prohibiting it from any conservation land. There had been potential for a cluster development north of Wills Hole/Town Forest that would provide possible open space for disc golf, but that has since been re-evaluated.

– Jenks culvert: Nothing new. We're still waiting to hear back from the Federal Government

– Anderson Conservation Land steward: The LSC roster of Associate members is full. There is one opening for a Full (voting) member. The Anderson CL, abutting Bulette but voted as a unique parcel two meetings ago, still needs a steward who could be either an Associate or Full member.

LSC membership

David was approved as an Associate member by the SB at its most recent meeting and was sworn in last Monday.

ABRHS Senior Community Service Day April 26

The deadline for submitting projects has passed. Tom (Nashoba Brook), Jon (Guggins Brook), Bettina (Arboretum), and Ian (Sustainability Office) will each be supervising groups of seniors.

Town things

2023 Town Report: Done

OSRP: Should be done by next month.

549 Main St CR: In process, currently with the State.

Morrison Farm CR: Did not get voted on at the SB meeting as two SB members believe there should be more public comment on it to address the original reason for purchasing it, which was for active recreation. Other SB members believe that in some way the Town should say exactly what it wants to happen. Per Joe, the active recreation need died quickly after the land was acquired because it was acquired for soccer purposes. After the Farm's acquisition, the high school Lower Fields were developed, and Town soccer no longer needed a soccer field at Morrison Farm. Also, for an entire year the Agricultural Commission, co-sponsors of the CR, had the CR on the agendas of all other relevant committees (including the LSC) for their input. Also, if Morrison Farm is for active recreation, why can't it be used for disc golf?

2025 CPA funding: Approved projects can be found on appropriate websites.

Wetherbee Woods:

Per Jody, there are two planned workdays, April 21 and April 26, to work on the approximately one-mile trail. April 21 could involve the High School National Honor Society and possibly the Boy Scouts. April 26 is the High School Senior Service Day. Walks of the property are scheduled for May 2 and May 4, ahead of the May 6 Town Meeting.

Per Susan: ACT had a kickoff meeting for publicity a couple of weeks ago. There were 20 guests, and the objective was to encourage people to come forward to host gatherings at their home, to spread the word that Wetherbee Woods is a potential project, and to let them know what it's all about. There are four house parties scheduled and four more to be scheduled.

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

– Per Bob: By the end of the long boardwalk on Spring Hill the stream has taken over the trail. The project of extending the boardwalk probably should be prioritized. There's also a very large rock in the way. Possibly a Scout project?

– Ian is meeting with Corey York, head of Acton’s DPW, on Thursday morning to discuss where the DPW and Land Stewards responsibilities overlap to hopefully become the liaison between the LSC and the DPW.

– Ian has also talked with Scott Smyers who did some invasives work for the LSC at Jenks some time ago. Ian could possibly work with Scott looking at how the LSC can integrate his services in dealing with invasive species. Scott could possibly look at John’s and Bob’s “spread out areas” of invasives and learn what basic species we should prioritize and potentially hire somebody to deal with. We wouldn’t expect to cross such species off our list, but instead learn how to attack with our best resources. John cites two places in Acton that he’s written off as being completely out of amateur’s hands. One is west of the inner meadow at the Arboretum where the bittersweet site has brought down the trees, and is now conveniently taking over everything. The other at Great Hill between Mill Corner and the path between the pond and the little playing field is a patch that really needs to get hit with poison.

One thing Scott said is that a lot of times we can get a cheaper service if volunteers can cut things before any professional treatment. So Ian’s first thought was the Japanese knotweed at Wills Hole. If we were to cut it for Scott, he could then reduce his price, having to just spray.

A concern is that knotweed is hard to poison. Jim Snyder-Grant tried poisoning knotweed at Wetherbee 18 years ago, and it grew back within 8 years pretty much to where it had started. But if Scott wants to give it a try this year, we can see how well it works. Another concern is that some of the knotweed is on wetlands.

The town of Lincoln has an Adopt a Japanese Knotweed Patch program where volunteers sign up to care for different patches within town. We should consider tracking Lincoln’s effort over a couple of years as knotweed is so difficult to control with volunteer work.

On Facebook there’s a Japanese knotweed (non)support group that has “got it down.” There’s a special time of year right after it flowers that you hit it with an herbicide. But if it’s in a wetland you need a permit.

– Per Bob: What’s the relationship between our online maps and MassGIS? Ian led an ensuing discussion about MassGIS, the Acton GIS team, MapGeo, MassMapper, and Esri.

Other business

– There was discussion about the Bellows Farm Mill Dam, aka the Robbins Mill Dam, on Nashoba Brook. Alissa had informed the LSC about the SB meeting (last night) at which there would be discussion/action on what to do with the dam. (Clerk’s note: The SB voted “to ask the Town Manager to move forward with a grant application for a partial breach for the Bellows Farm Dam and authorize the Chair to sign a letter of support for dam and seawall grant application.) Jim Snyder-Grant had reached out to Bettina as to whether this would cause any problems with the Nashoba Brook parcel, particularly the Trail Through Time. Bettina and Linda McElroy responded that there would be no issue.

Next month’s (04/16/24) agenda

February minutes, more on invasive plants, geocaching.

Evaluate meeting

Thumbs up!

Adjournment

At 8:22 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, April 16, at 7 p.m.