

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, July 16, 2024, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

Full (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, Jody Harris, **Rebecca Harvey**, Everett Kenerson, Mel Lima, Bob Mackin, **Adam Nolde**, **David Pinsky**, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris, **Bob Walton**

Others: **Ian Bergemann** (Acton Land Stewardship Coordinator), **Jim Snyder-Grant** (Select Board (SB) LSC liaison)

Aaron opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Review and acceptance of June 25 Minutes

Bob had pointed out to Joe that Bob's work on invasives occurred on Acton Water District (AWD) land next to Guggins Brook and not at the AWD 549 Main Street parcel. The June minutes were accepted with that change. Jim noted that the Town website was short of some approved minutes from past meetings. Joe named himself as the "hangup" but has the March, April, and May minutes ready to go.

Election of officers for the coming year

Aaron has been Chair for two years now and is ready to pass the office on to someone else. No one expressed interest in the position. Discussion points:

- Jon, current Vice-Chair, is willing to continue in that position but is hesitant about being Chair as he just became President and Chair of the New England Orienteering Club.
- Since Bettina (a regular member) is not present, we should table this for another month in case she may be interested.
- Would it be helpful to distribute a job description? Not really, the job is just showing up for and running the meetings. One could choose to put more effort into it if s/he so desired. When Jim was Chair, for example, he would meet with the Town Manager about once a month.
- We will hold the election of Chair until next month. Aaron suggests that we also hold the election of Vice-Chair as he would be willing to take that role if, for example, Bettina would be willing to be Chair. However, . . .

. . . Joe indicated that he is willing to continue as Clerk, and the Committee agreed by a unanimous vote.

Concerns from the public

None

Invasive plants, July 2024 — John

Tonight, Glossy Buckthorn — John presented from the Acton Invasives Wiki:

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

selecting the Glossy Buckthorn page:

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

To eliminate glossy buckthorn, John used to pull it, particularly the young ones when they were about a quarter-inch to a half-inch in diameter. He found that that made the problem worse. A year or two after such a pull, he would find 5 or 6 plants growing in a circle from the remainder of the root tips that he had left at the site. These were harder to pull compared to pulling the trunk of the plant. What he does now is to gird the plant once it is at least an inch in diameter. When one gets good at this, it takes only about 30 seconds to remove 6 to 8 inches of bark. You will have to go back in 2 or 3 years as there will be some growth that will need to be cut. Another way John has been removing glossy buckthorn is to cut the plant about four feet up. (A lower cut leaves a stub that could injure if fallen upon.) When he comes back, he finds that any new growth will be concentrated at the top of the 4-ft stub. If, instead, he was to cut the buckthorn low, close to the ground, the plant would put up 6 to 8 shoots, termed a “hydra”. Cut those and each one produces another 4 shoots. Cutting high causes the plant to concentrate its new-growth energy near the top of the stub, not close to the ground.

Another approach is to nail a large can over the stump to deprive any new growth of light, but it doesn't look very pretty . . . and one has to retrieve the can. Also, one could try using a thick black plastic bag around the stump.

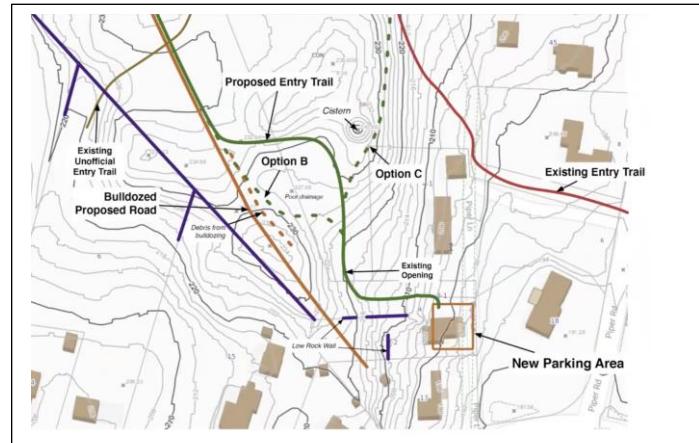
Glossy buckthorn leaf edges are smooth. Leaves on most native plants that resemble glossy buckthorn have rough edges. Leave those plants alone.

Ian's Trails Tales

None for this meeting.

Ian's updates

- Scoutland: Ian hopes to have a phone conversation with Bill Klauer, Scoutland Trustee, tomorrow. Bill has yet to confirm it.
- Nagog Hill volunteer workdays: Ian is still recruiting volunteers. Ian is wondering if any land steward did weed whacking or mowing at Nagog Hill recently (silence from the stewards) as whoever did it completed about half the job. Dale observed that such work there is “not unusual” and none of it has been bad, so he has not mentioned it.
- Wills Hole mosquito research: Ian has not yet been contacted on whether it has begun, but it really doesn't concern the LSC too much. It will come off the agenda.
- Pratts Brook pitch pine: John and Ian will meet with Select Board Member Dean Charter to have a look at the Pratts Brook pitch pine population. A potential goal will be a habitat enhancement plan. Such a plan would likely involve removing a lot of competing competitive species. Mass Audubon is working with the State on such a project (on a much, much larger scale than would occur here) in Fitchburg
- Great Hill trail relocation request: John shared his map of the problem location. The concerned household is just north of the New Parking Area. The proposed entry trail (in green) begins at the parking area and has to “S” up to deal with the elevation. Just to the west of the parking area, the elevation is the same, but passage would be much steeper. Also, in the middle of the space between the two houses on the north and south sides of the parking it really is impossible to have a trail because of the present tree line and a rock wall. A trail to the south of the parking would come within 15 ft of the porch of that house.



As the person who put in the new trail, John's recommendation is that we do not change it.

A possible consideration: A sign beside the trail that would ask trail users to be respectful of the concerned party's property.

Ian will be in touch with the concerned resident on this. Ian feels that for something like this in the future, although we rarely get reroute requests, it would be good if we could give some idea of how we arrived at a decision. Have the reason(s) written down so that the LSC can back up its decision. John pointed out that the LSC at least once did honor a Great Hill reroute request. Residents on Francine Road on the northwest edge of Great Hill asked that the yellow trail be moved further away from their houses. In that part of Great Hill, it is easy to reroute so there were no issues, and steward Bob Guba handled the task.

– LSC membership: Jody Harris has been approved as an Associate Member by the SB. We still have one Full Member opening. If any current Associate member would like to become a full member, let Ian know. Ian will check with Jody on whether she would like to become a Full Member.

– New Conservation Restrictions (CRs): 549 Main Street (trail map shown at right, Main Street is the diagonal at upper left, Brook Street is across the top) — This will have a CR created by the Town and SVT. Ian and others compiled some comments/suggestions/questions re this map, e.g.,

- Some trails to the north were drawn by Brewster Conant Jr. specifically for the meadow. Some of the straight-line trails are for AWD construction purposes.
- Consider consolidating all the trails shown in the top left corner into a “singular junction”.
- Why are the two trails near the right side of the map not connected?
- The long straight trail at the lower left doesn't go anywhere, ending at a private AWD road.
- The parcel's portion of the Isaac Davis Trail is the nearly horizontal path pictured across the middle of the map, ending at the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail at the right.
- Ian is seeking more clarity on the map from the Town.



Other information related to possible LSC stewardship of this parcel:

- The AWD is installing a well on this parcel. The LSC will need some direction about it.
- The LSC is willing to help the AWD work out the trail map.
- It will be the Town's responsibility to maintain the trails but not build kiosks nor install signs. However, current understanding is that the LSC will be asked to mow the meadow trails and not the meadow itself.

Ian has yet to be contacted by the AWD on how the LSC relationship with this parcel will play out. In the meantime, the LSC must decide whether it wants a steward for the parcel or whether it would be comfortable stewarding the parcel as a group. Jim is in favor of one steward because the CR is unlike any of the other CRs in town. It has very specific language about what the AWD does and what the Town does. It would be good to have one steward who's reasonably familiar with the CR so that all CR conditions are respected.

Does the LSC want to have a steward for this parcel? Should we enlarge the Regular membership of the LSC to accommodate another steward for this parcel? John, Jon, and Dale voiced their support for this.

John made a motion that the LSC add a Regular Member for the purpose of providing a steward for the AWD's 549 Main Street parcel. Discussion points:

- It is intended that the Conservation Commission maintain the parcel, which then gives the Land Stewards the potential for providing this service, chain-of-command-wise.
- The initial conversations with the AWD had the land stewards maintaining the trails.
- Voting for a steward from the LSC now seems a good step as we would be set up for this to happen. If we find from the AWD that it doesn't want LSC help, then . . .
- We should make it clear that the parcel's land steward is not going to do much work, if any, with invasives.
- As Jim has suggested, there will be very specific things that are allowed and not allowed on this land. For example, no dogs allowed.
- The AWD will have its own signs, its own kiosks, its own list of rules. They can ask that the land stewards help cut up a tree should one fall on a trail.
- Right now, the CR says that the Town of Acton will be maintaining the trails.

Roll call vote on the motion by the six Regular members still in attendance (Dale had to leave): Yes 5, No 1 (Bruce). The motion carries.

– Geocaching: Ian distributed a rough draft of the 2005 policy. He thinks it is nice in general and does what we'd like it to do. If inadequate, he can revise it for the next meeting. Discussion points:

- The current draft seems like a good set of rules. It's broad where it needs to be and specific in other spots.
- We had discussed a geocache policy previously. Was that policy ever adopted? No.
- Is there anything in the policy previously discussed that's missing from the one currently being shared? Ian: Only information that is more specific, e.g., what a geocache container should be made of. What's missing are things that can be addressed case by case.
- The proposed policy has the nice consequence that if a geocache activity becomes too (harmfully) popular we can remove the geocache, e.g., If a new trail is being created because of a geocache, we can remove the geocache. Near the end of the policy is a disclaimer that would allow for removal of any geocache.
- Are you (Ian) going to adjudicate any disputes with input from the land stewards? Ian: When there's an issue with a Conservation parcel, I'll involve only its steward.
- It would be good if geocache information would give latitude and longitude in degrees and fraction of a degree rather than in degrees and minutes. Ian: We should be able to do that. If the LSC adopts this policy, there will be a need to discuss specific information that exists in it. Having the latitude and longitude in the application, with whatever metric, is important because, for example, no geocache should get placed without the land steward, the staff member, and the geocacher at the location together.
- Will the policy state how approval of a geocache happen? Tom Tidman thought geocaches would bring too much work into his Town department. Also, is there a new Conservation staff member who can help? Ian: There is a new Conservation Agent, Olivia Barksdale, on Town staff. However, job descriptions have changed. There is a bit more of a divide between my work and her work, so she may not be too involved with us. I will take on the responsibility of dealing with geocache requests. There have been 70 geocache requests over 10+ years, so I don't expect to be overloaded by this. But it would be nice to have a policy in my back pocket that I can reference. Also, this gives us the power to remove geocaches, e.g., ones that have been in place a long time and the original sponsor having moved out of town.
- The 2005 regulations are for geocaches that have nothing in them but a logbook. Ian: We can leave it that way or we can be broad and say, "things like a logbook."

- Will there be a position on what we're going to do with existing geocaches relative to this policy? Ian: No, that's not something we've discussed. I could contact geocache sponsors and ask them to fill out this application. If I don't hear from them in, say, 6 months we can assume that they're no longer responsible for their geocaches.
- If we remove a geocache, do we need to report to somebody that it was removed, like geocaching.com, so people aren't looking for it? Ian: That's exactly who I would contact, and I think geocaching.com would be very amenable to it because we are the Acton authority.
- Ian: Do we want to vote in this policy tonight with the condition that I make changes agreed on tonight, or do we want to see the final draft at the next meeting?

At least three stewards favored waiting until the policy is finalized to vote on it. Jon suggests that we empower Ian to work with the existing draft using what he's learned from the LSC today, but that we divorce the policy on new geocaches from a policy on what to do with existing ones. We don't need to solve the "grandfathered" issue for Ian to come up with a workable policy for new geocaches. So, Jon moved that we:

Let Ian revise the draft policy he recently shared per information shared at this meeting and present it to the LSC for its vote of approval.

John seconded and the LSC approved with a 6-0 vote.

– Mowing: Ian would like to know what land stewards are mowing trails. He knows that Joshua Haynes mows Jenks, John mows trails occasionally, and the DPW mows them once a year. Some trails are really overgrown. (Ian has a complaint about this for Heath Hen Meadow.) John described some mowing he's done, and Ian asked that John (and others) email him about what exactly they have done. Ian wants to keep track, so he knows what mowing he needs to do himself.

Also, John raised a concern about being prevented from doing certain things requiring the LSC trailer, but the trailer needs to be emptied. Ian will talk with John about this.

Also, Bob asks if he could have permission to do some cleaning some items that are no longer useful from the LSC shed. Ian suggests that he and Bob do this together so Ian can have an inventory of what we would be disposing. He would talk to other Town departments to see if the unwanted items can be used somewhere else instead of going straight to recycling, and he himself is aware of other uses for some items that could be heading to the transfer station.

Also, Tom says that more help is needed in cleaning up the downed mulberry tree at Wheeler Lane. There are some big chunks that could require sawyers. Dale and Ian have plans to go back there when Dale's other obligations will allow. In the meantime, if any sawyer chooses to help, don't bother picking up the cut wood. Make it firewood size so that Ian, DPW, and perhaps some private citizens can easily remove it.

Next month's (08/20/24) agenda

Third try at electing a Chair

Evaluate meeting

Thumbs up.

Adjournment

At 8:00 pm.

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