

Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council

Minutes

Meeting Held on March 24, 2021

In Attendance: Charlestown: Neil Wardley; Exeter: Nan Quinlan, Kevin McGovern; Hopkinton: Elaine Caldarone, Chip Heil; Richmond: Antonia Bryson, Pete August; North Kingstown, Jim LeBlanc; South Kingstown: Dennis Migneault, Bill McCusker; Stonington: Fred Wagner; North Stonington: Madeline Jeffery, Dick Seager; West Greenwich: Pat Lardner; Westerly: Jon Ericson; CT DEEP: Eric Thomas; Save the Bay: Dave Prescott; National Park Service: Jamie Fosburgh, Lauren Bonatakis; Kassi Donnelly, Coordinator.

A quorum having been met, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm

Secretary's Report: A. Bryson presented the draft minutes of the February 24, 2021 meeting. F. Wagner suggested changes to items under New Business. There being no discussion on the proposed changes, F. Wagner moved the approval with suggested changes and P. August seconded, and approval was obtained.

Financial Report: P. August presented the financial report and noted the addition of two columns to the right which are new to this report. F. Wagner moved the approval of the Monthly Financial Report. D. Prescott seconded. There being no discussion, the motion passed.

Committee Reports

1. Bylaws:

J. Ericson reported that the Board of Directors at the Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) has reviewed the proposed MOU with the Council, and he is expecting to receive their comments soon.

2. Executive:

Insurance Update: J. Ericson reported on a meeting between the Executive Committee, representatives of WPWA, and their insurance agent to discuss coverage of Council activities. In order to advance matters, the Council needs to characterize and categorize types of risks that activities which it plans to undertake possess, and develop mitigation measures to address those risks. The Committee will be meeting to take its next steps. J. Fosburgh reported on a new possibility for coverage. The National Park Service is investigating whether Council members may qualify as "volunteers in the park", which would cover them under NPS's liability insurance.

Budget Process Review: P. August is preparing a draft of the Council's project selection and budgetary process. He will send the draft out to the Council for questions and comments, revise it accordingly, and send the revised version to all for discussion at the next Council meeting.

Solar Energy Workshop: K. Donnelly reported that the Advisory Committee is preparing a draft policy regarding solar energy system proposals and regulations. The Committee will finalize its draft and provide it to full Council for review and discussion. A workshop for that purpose will be scheduled after April council meeting.

3. Advisory Committee

A. Bryson reported that the Committee had prepared a letter of support for proposed legislation under consideration by the State legislature entitled the Forest Conservation Act, which would establish a commission and fund dedicated to forest preservation. WPWA signed on to the letter as well. The letter was approved by the Council and submitted to the appropriate legislators.

C. Heil and L. Bonatakis explained that The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has a funding opportunity under its Acres of America land acquisition program. They are looking to partner with organizations which can provide the 100% match (including federal) to qualify for funding, and W&S Councils are appropriate partners. The program is interested in large parcels of 500+ acres. P. August noted that the Alton Jones campus meets this criterion and is an important target for preservation in our watershed. J. Fosburgh says NFWF has history of liking Councils which check their boxes. See <https://www.nfwf.org/programs/acres-america>

4. Projects Committee

N. Quinlan reported that the Briggs Park project is at the Hopkinton Recreation Commission for input, and then will be sent to the town's engineers for concept design. The Committee is working on a template for providing new ideas and information to it, which would enable it better to process them. The Committee is exploring partnerships with other organizations, such as DEM and RICKA. Partnerships are welcomed both on existing planned activities and potential new ones.

P. Lardner requested that individual Council members who will be participating in the Big River cleanup day reach out to her so she can assign put-ins for each based on their circumstances.

4. Information & Education

D. Migneault reported that there had been a slight logjam in producing the town road signs which has now been cleared up and he expects the signs will be coming soon.

B. McCusker attended the 30th anniversary of the RI Rivers Council and reported that DOT is thinking of putting river signs on all rivers throughout the State, an initiative prompted by the Stewardship Council's work in the watershed.

P. August reported that the Committee is recommending the Council adopt Google calendar for its public facing calendar on the website. Google calendar is free, members could post events on it, and the Council would maintain a second calendar just for itself with meetings and zoom credentials. F. Wagner moved approval of the use of Google calendar, N. Wardley seconded, and the motion was approved.

P. August then discussed the adoption of a system for communicating with different groups and constituencies in place of group emails. He demonstrated the capabilities of Constant Contact as the recommended system. C. Heil had some issues using an alternative system, Mailchimp, and inquired whether Constant Contact would have similar ones. It was noted that there would need to be a policy on usage. A twelve-month license costs \$180. F. Wagner moved approval of purchasing a twelve-month license on Constant Contact, P. Lardner seconded, and the motion was approved.

B. McCusker and D. Seager reported that they had put up signs on the Shunock River. Photographic evidence of their work is at the end of these minutes.

New Business

J. Ericson reported that the Council will develop and use a Google form to track volunteer hours for Council members on monthly basis. P. August is working on constructing the form and will be sending out a prototype. Individuals, committee heads, and project leads will be filling out forms. K. Donnelly will be monitoring the committee heads and project leads for issues and general compliance.

1. Town Updates

J. Ericson reported that Westerly will be developing a river overlay corridor proposal for adoption. The effort is in its early stage. The Council brought the town's attention to the idea, which originated in its Comprehensive Plan, and offered to help. There followed a discussion of river overlay districts and whether it would be appropriate to advocate throughout the watershed. E. Thomas provided some relevant resources which are listed at the end of these minutes.

The Hopkinton Conservation Commission has requested a presentation on the origins and role of the Council. L. Bonatakis and K. Donnelly have prepared slides for the presentation, which is scheduled for April 8. There are a set of slides available for general use.

The Exeter Land Trust has asked the Council to partner on a land trust days event in August or September. This will be a good opportunity for collaboration and could possibly dovetail with a Council event.

2. Election of Council Officers

Nominations of candidates to fill the positions of Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary are to be made at the April Council meeting. J. Ericson will not be running for another term as Chair. D. Prescott, P. August and A. Bryson will be running to continue as Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary, respectively.

4. Timing of Council Meetings

K. Donnelly asked the Council to consider changing the time of the monthly full Council meeting to 5-7 pm. F. Wagner so moved, P. August seconded, and the motion passed. B. McCusker noted that the website should be updated to reflect the change.

Good of the Order

J. Ericson brought attention to the recently erected Hope Valley Handicap Trail and Viewing Platform, completed this summer.

There was discussion of the presentation on March 18 regarding the potential dismantling of the Potter Hill Dam and the impacts that might occur. It was felt the Council should become involved and help look for an outcome that best assuages community and environmental concerns, and to that end, should schedule its own workshop to become better informed on the consultant's analyses and the future process. Nils Wilberg, the

consultant who made the March 18 presentation, used to be on W&S study committee, and could be asked to do abbreviated presentation to the Council. Further discussion identified that a workshop would be a better venue for the discussion and we could look into bringing in other experts as well. From that workshop the Council should be in a better position for drafting an advisory. F. Wagner moved to schedule such a workshop or presentation and B. McCusker seconded, and the motion passed.

E. Thomas noted there is a good example of dam removal on Eightmile River at Ed Bill's dam in Lyme, coordinated by The Nature Conservancy and American Rivers. Also, since 1992 Pawcatuck River continuity has been a recognized restoration priority that supports migratory fish passage, and is supported in the Stewardship Plan.

K. Donnelly stated “free flowing condition” is an important attribute to Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by F. Wagner and seconded by B. McCusker, and adjournment was approved at 8:11 PM.

Next Meeting: Fourth Wednesday of each month at 5pm. Date is April 28, 2021.

Resource on river overlay districts:

Town of Salem CT within the Eightmile River WSR Watershed just held a public hearing and passed an updated overlay zone; this is a needed update of a 10+ year riparian corridor local planning and zoning regulation - the first big ORV protection action promoted by the Eightmile WSR Committee over 10 year ago. Here is draft Salem regulation, which the Eightmile Committee supported and provided technical assistance

on: https://www.salemct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf4966/f/pages/eightmile_river_overlay_draft_for_ph_3.16.2021.pdf

Posting signs on Shunock River:

