

**Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed
Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council**

**Minutes
Meeting held on August 24, 2022**

In Attendance: Charlestown: Bob Maietta; Exeter: Nan Quinlan; Hopkinton, Chip Heil; Richmond: Antonia Bryson, Pete August; North Stonington: Elaine Caldarone, Madeline Jeffery; Stonington: Fred Wagner; West Greenwich: Chris Grube; Westerly: Jon Ericson, Richard Smith; WPWA: Andrew McNulty; CT DEEP: Eric Thomas; National Park Service: Lauren Bonatakis; Kassi Donnelly, Coordinator.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 5:08 pm.

J. Ericson introduced the new representative for Westerly, Richard Smith, who provided his background and interest in serving on the Council. J. Ericson is retiring from the Council.

Secretary's Report:

A. Bryson presented the draft minutes of the June 22, 2022 meeting. P. August moved to approve the minutes as presented, and C. Heil seconded. There being no discussion, the motion passed and the minutes were approved.

Financial Report:

P. August presented the bi-monthly financial report. C. Heil moved to approve the report as presented, and B. Maietta seconded the motion. There being no discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

P. August and K. Donnelly are working to close the books on 2020-21 funding. They are collecting end of year reports on projects and will provide information on amounts actually spent when complete.

NPS executed an agreement with WPWA which provides funding for the 2022-23 Council budget. The NPS funding for the 2022-23 fiscal year is \$41,000 higher than the previous year, for a total annual amount of \$210,000. K. Donnelly pointed out significant expenditures in the 2022-23 budget, including funding Outreach and Communications, the Coordinator position at 1.0 FTE, Expert Consultant, Enhancement Projects, and Events. Annual funding is dependent on Congressional action, and thus the upcoming budget of \$210,000 is not a new baseline amount.

Project Update and Request

K. Donnelly reported on the Water Trails project to improve water access at two sites on the Wood River. Previously the Council had approved \$15,387 for the design and permitting of the two sites, and had approved hiring Cherenzia to perform the work without going out to bid. K. Donnelly explained that costs came in higher than anticipated and requested an additional \$16,613 for the project. Several factors for the increase are that the original estimates were based on design, and now permitting is included, the presence of wetlands near the proposed parking area at the Stepstone Falls site, and another factor is the widespread increase in costs since the original estimate six months ago. She presented photos documenting the erosion at the sites and explained that both sites need a wetlands permit under the newly implemented RIDEM Freshwater Wetlands Regulations. RIDEM is a partner and K. Donnelly has been coordinating with them.

There was general agreement that improving access on the river dovetails exactly with the mission of the Council, as it will improve recreation, enhance public safety, and restore the environment, and that the project is worthy and deserves to be funded. There was concern regarding subsequent costs for construction. It was pointed out that there are alternative sources for funding construction, such as RI DEM, the towns in which the sites sit, grant programs such as one available from NPS: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1837/index.htm> and possibly funds from the recently adopted federal infrastructure legislation.

The size of the project prompted a discussion about the process that the Council has used so far in allocating its funds. Members felt there needed to be a better articulation of the processes that produced a community grants program with a cap of \$4000 per project and a member-initiated process for adoption of projects whose maximum expenditures are determined individually by Council votes. It was suggested that this topic be reviewed by the Projects Committee for discussion at the Council at a later time.

P. August moved to approve the additional \$16,613 in funding, due to the importance of the project and its centrality to Council concerns, and to the opportunity to produce a shovel ready project should infrastructure funds become available. A. Bryson seconded the motion. Nine members voted in favor, one was opposed, and the motion passed.

Projects Committee - Grant Proposal Recommendations:

K. Donnelly reported that the Projects Committee had again reviewed the of the application of the South Kingstown Land Trust for mapping, in preparation for its application to RI DEM for a freshwater wetlands permit, which is necessary to the construction of a boardwalk at its Yawgoo Pond preserve. The review was conducted as a result of the vote taken at the last Council meeting. The Committee reaffirmed its recommendation against funding the project. N. Quinlan reiterated the reasons for the recommendation, which echoed their original reasons for rejection. P. August moved to accept the recommendation of the Committee, and F. Wagner seconded. Ten members voted in favor of the motion and none were opposed, and the motion passed.

Committee and Project Updates:

- C. Grube reported that the West Greenwich Planning Board favorably received a presentation on the results of the LID municipal assessment. It plans to discuss the subject further for potential action.
- A. Bryson reported that RI DEM has issued a draft Freshwater Wetlands General Permit and is seeking comments. The Advisory Committee will draft a comment letter for Council review and adoption.
- K. Donnelly reported that the Projects Committee is revising the community grants application process and will present its revisions to the Council in September. There are a few grant applications still being reviewed in the current process, including a request for reimbursement for an appraisal by the Charlestown Land Trust.
- B. Maietta reported that RI DEM has entered a consent decree with the Kenyon Mill which will obligate the mill to meet permit limits on a fixed timeline.
- M. Jeffery recounted what has been happening on the Green Falls Rift Valley project. She has been gathering material which will be available to share at a later date, and will highlight the beauty and significance of the watershed through art.
- P. August reported that the I&E committee has acquired a computer for outreach and tabling events which is well equipped, including office software and a slide show for display.

Town/Community Updates:

- A. Bryson informed the members that the town of Richmond has received the invasives management plan for its Beaver River Park, which was paid for with the Council's grant.
- L. Bonatakis informed the members of a speaker series on 8/31 on tribal engagement. She will resend an email explaining the event and how to participate. She also reported that there are plans for a meeting of all Partnership Councils at the end of January in Florida. Members would need to commit to attend by October.
- B. Maietta reported that N. Wardley did tabling at the Charlestown farmers' market.
- N. Quinlan requested information on the youth adventure program. K. Donnelly reported that the program took place in July & August, that the project is nearly complete, and that she expects a report in late fall. The program served 333 youth during 11 outings. There was discussion of outreach efforts and the composition of youth served.

New Business

Bob Maietta raised the issue of water use in the watershed. Particularly in light of the severe dryness of this summer, he felt it would behoove the Council to address the issue. He suggested holding a workshop, and noted that RI does not have a water withdrawal policy, unlike some of the other New England states.

Next Meeting or Workshop: The next meeting will be a workshop on September 28, 2022 at the Hewitt Farm, North Stonington. It will be in-person only.

Adjournment

There being no other business, F. Wagner moved to adjourn the meeting and N. Quinlan seconded. The motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 pm.