



**Town of Stowe
Conservation Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 8, 2024**

A regular meeting of the Conservation Commission was held on Monday January 8, 2024, at 5:30 pm in the Memorial Room of the Stowe Town Office.

Members in Attendance: Jacquie Mauer, Kay Barrett, Catherine Gott, Seb Sweatman, Colleen McGovern, Evan Freund, Phillip Branton, and Zach Lewis.

Staff in Attendance: Sarah McShane

Others in Attendance: Grady Vigneau and Carolyn Lawrence

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order by Chair J.Mauer at approximately 5:30 PM.

Public Comments & Adjustments to the Agenda – No public comments.

Review of Meeting Minutes - On a motion by E.Freund, seconded by C.Gott, the meeting minutes were approved as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

Stowe Trails Partnership (STP)- Annual Update & Trail Proposal

Grady Vigneau and Carolyn Lawrence from Stowe Trails Partnership were both present. G.Vigneau provided an overview of this past year’s maintenance activities in Cady Hill and Sterling Forest. He spoke of the challenges associated with trail maintenance and the extreme wet weather over the summer. He noted that many of the trails were closed for a number of days due to wet trail conditions.

C. Lawrence provided an overview of three trail proposals in/or connecting to Cady Hill Forest. She explained that two of the trails would serve beginner riders and one is designed to serve more advanced riders. She provided an overview of the Stowe Village Connector trail proposal. She explained that it is designed as a beginner trail connecting the Stowe Village Inn, traveling over the municipally owned Pallasades parcel, and connecting into Cady Hill Forest. She described the proposed trail as a true beginner and accessible trail into Cady Hill; she also described the challenges with the existing trails entering Cady Hill from the Mountain Road parking area. The trail would be bi-directional and is STP’s highest priority.

G.Vigneau and C.Lawrence provided an overview of the Macutchan Refurbishment proposal. The Macutchan trail proposal is a double track trail currently used as access for vehicles (emergency or maintenance) and an alternate entrance/exit to Cady Hill – Mountain Road parking area. As proposed, the existing trail will remain open with the newly constructed trail traversing on both sides of the existing main trail in a “\$” bi-directional design.

G.Vigneau and C.Lawrence provided an overview of the Trail #9- Refurbishment proposal. They reported that it is intended to be a more advanced trail, similar to Florence and would contain features. They mentioned that they may also work with Cady Hill Lodge to see if eventually the trail could connect to the resort. They explained that the trail is designed to be one way and would be relocated further away from the stream. As currently designed it would cross the stream where the ravine is most narrow.

Phillip Branton noted a few observations about when the Cady Hill Mountain Road parking lot is full. He noted that he has observed many trail visitors using the parking lot across the street. C.Lawrence spoke of a prior agreement with the property owner and that she is aware of the parking challenges. She added that the addition of more trails will help disperse trail traffic and spread-out users. They noted that, in general, people respect trail closures. C.Lawrence mentioned Carolyn Naughten's report and findings regarding clustering trails, maintaining trail-free areas, and associated reduced impacts on wildlife.

Members discussed next steps. STP will return with a more detailed proposal; the Commission agreed they did not have any major concerns with the trail proposals as discussed. Seb Sweatman inquired about other areas where STP might want to develop additional trails. STP mentioned that they had recently dedicated significant time towards developing a master plan for the larger trail network. Members discussed Sterling Forest Management Plan and asked STP to provide their input into incorporating revisions to identify future proposed trails.

Members discussed developing a trail inventory and condition assessment to help the Commission evaluate trail needs. STP has data that may be helpful. The Commission will discuss further at a later meeting. P.Branton suggested adding a sign at trailheads with information on who to call for trail maintenance needs.

C.Lawrence inquired about the Cady Hill Management Plan and the discussion of allowing mechanical grooming for winter fat biking. Members discussed different forms of grooming equipment, some of which are electric. Members discussed the timing of other projects. Staff mentioned that reviewing the Mayo Farm Conservation Easement will consume much of the Commission's work program for 2026 & 2027. Members will continue to evaluate potential options for allowing winter mechanical grooming but noted that currently the management plan does not allow for it.

C.Lawrence noted that SLT will have an intern to inventory trails on conserved lands next year.

Mayo Farm Agricultural Lease

The Commission reviewed the current Agricultural Lease for Mayo Farm. The lease expires at the end of the year. Members discussed adjusting the location of crops in relation to the riparian area. Members discussed how the Quiet Path was recently re-routed due to bank erosion and the corn crop will have to be adjusted to meet twenty-five (25) feet buffer requirement. Members discussed soil testing and were interested in better understanding soil health and quality. Members discussed the erosion of the riverbank and noted that the Quiet Path naturally shifts when the bank erodes. Members discussed Nutrient Management Plans and wondered whether there were added requirements being so close to the river. Members were interested in learning more about soil quality/fertility and cover cropping practices. The Commission will meet with the current lease holder at the next meeting.

Beaver Management

J.Mauer noted that she now better understands the procedures for holding a special meeting. Members discussed main channels for the Commission to participate in policy discussions and decisions. C.Gott mentioned the Commission's work could go beyond town-owned lands and include elements related to natural resource planning and policy. She noted that she attended the Selectboard meeting virtually and provided an update on the beaver issue. She noted that the Selectboard agreed with a recommendation from a person from Monkton regarding meeting with beaver specialist Skip Lyle. Members discussed the beaver management plan.

Reports/Updates/Other Business

Staff provided an update on the Mayo Farm storage barn and noted that DPW is working with the consultant to determine next steps.

Vermont Association of Conservation Commission (VACC) Tiny Grants- S.McShane will research whether the Commission is still a member of VACC and follow-up with the Commission.

Zak Lewis provided an update from the Environmental Club at the high school. He noted that when the snow melts, they anticipate cleaning up the pond area behind the school by removing trash and planting trees. Members mentioned Green Up Day, beaver wrapping, and developing a map of all town-owned trails and condition assessment as possible projects the club could assist with for community service.

Next Meeting-

The next meeting will be held on January 22nd.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:15 PM

Submitted by,

Sarah McShane