

Franconia Conservation Commission (FCC)

Meeting: December 15, 2022, 4 pm, at Town Hall

Members present: Chris Nicodemus (Chair), Ginny Jeffryes, Mary Grote, Red McCarthy, Jill Brewer, Dan Zajic, Art Daily

Guests: Charlie Wolcott (Sugar Hill Conservation Commission and ACT Board), Linda Hansen (Chair of Easton Conservation Commission, Amy Villamagna (Environmental Science and Policy professor at Plymouth State University), Kim Cartwright (Exec Director of ACT)

Presentation by Dr. Amy Villamagna, Plymouth State University Environmental Science and Policy Department Associate Professor, whose subspecialty is Conservation Ecology:

Amy is looking for collaboration for her senior students with community partners like conservation commissions and land trusts. She coaches students through a 15 week project-based senior seminar beginning every January which is intended to pull together what they've learned and give them experience in doing environmental consulting. She is offering their services to assist conservation commissions who have projects they would like help with. Example: last year two groups of seminar students took on doing for Plymouth Conservation Commission (PCC) (including surrounding towns) a) an updated Taking Action for Wildlife portion of the Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) (which was primarily GIS mapping and data-based); and b) a project to evaluate the expanding Plymouth bike trail network which had been engendering some sustainability conflict with residents.

She is offering the option of her students helping us (Franconia, Easton, Sugar Hill CC) if we have projects we would like done. Conservation Commissions can choose to simply name a project with a specific end goal, and have she and her students do it independently with minimal CC input and time, or we can choose to mentor and build relationships with the students. They are not graduate students, but they have some educational experience in land conservation, biological conservation, geology, geographic information systems, climate change, and some students have hydrology experience. Plymouth State has access to good mapping software and expertise with on-line mapping tools, GIS, statistics. Week 2 of the class she gives them a list of community partner projects to choose from, in the form of an abstract of each option. They choose the project that interests them most. Examples: Some projects are 100% GIS projects; some are policy advising projects, some are community education-related, and many other options.

The students work in 6 groups of about 4 on the project they choose. This course starts every January, so if we don't have something this year, we can do it another year. Or, if we have something that would be a smaller role for just one person – say, setting up a social media outreach – she can offer a 1 credit internship to students at any point in the school year.

She wants to know what we might want. Chris already sent her some suggestions. She says she agrees that collaboration among the three towns CCs makes sense in terms of natural resource inventories and other conservation goals, since conservation involves the total landscape. The students are good at providing helpful information to the towns. If we want an NRI, she would break it into doable NRI sections so that one group might do the Wildlife portion, and another might do the hydrology and water protection portion. Ginny is interested in doing an NRI since ours is decades old. Linda says Easton has a in-depth detailed NRI created by the Grafton Co Forester years back who was doing it as his graduate school project. Amy says that a full detailed NRI is typically a Masters level project. Or, most commonly, conservation commissions typically pay consultants a lot of money to do it. These days, preparing the basic NRI is done using the available mapping data that already exists in the state mapping data. Critical wetlands have already been delineated and are online, for example. What the students

can help with is they know where to find this existing mapping info, and they can pull it together in a way that it helps towns and land trusts make informed decisions. Amy says that one of the ideas Chris had communicated to her as a possibility is looking identifying our water bodies and aquifers to help us target protecting them. Planning and taking action takes a lot of time for CC volunteers, so students can help with their time and education. Some commissions have wanted to do a Bio blitz inventory of the biological organisms on town lands – a lot of work, and so students could help organize that.

Charlie says he would be interested in a project that identifies what resource protections exist both state and federally and what are lacking. Amy said that's an option, along with helping towns identify funding opportunities. Charlie is also interested in doing a project to identify and manage invasive species in our area. Amy says the problem with that is that this course is in the winter and early spring, so that would be a better project as an internship beginning in August. But, identifying areas at risk of invasive species could be part of building a larger wildlife corridor map, and then helping build a citizen science initiative using I-naturalist to do a tri-town invasive inventory over the summer/fall. Possibly then a group could analyze the data in the following year's seminary. She had one group of students that were hired by Meredith conservation commission (and paid some due to commuting) one summer to map knotweed.

Chris points out that we need to come up with project suggestions soon since this starts in January. Amy says course starts Jan 24, and she will want to have the abstract ready by then, and that we need to clearly define what our desired endpoint is if we come up with a project. She coaches the students into coming up with how to get to that desired endpoint – they are the project managers.

Chris thinks wildlife corridors and wildlife inventory would be helpful. Linda says that a controversy in Easton is about logging, and maybe students could come up with good information about logging. Amy says that preparing information for the general public, presented accurately and in a visually appealing way – which students are good at -- would be a project option. Ginny brings up education about native plantings as an option. Amy says that one group did in past do a project in which they looked very in-depth at the research on pollinator habitats, and applied it specifically to how to make ground-based solar arrays pollinator supportive. They also did a report that was a trails scorecard for what makes trails helpful to wildlife, as well as trails score on erosion, litter, and cultural features in Plymouth.

Amy says she's heard from us interest in invasives, logging, wildlife corridors, and native species. Ginny is concerned that available logging research is behind the times and that there are new data emerging about old growth soils and ecosystems. She thinks best practices are 25 yrs behind the newest science, especially as used by WMNF, and so it might be better to defer logging education until old growth forest research and data are more available. She says there's an Old Growth Forest conference happening in Moultonborough mid-September 2023 co-sponsored by UNH Coop Ext and Old Growth Forest Network. Linda says she's talked with Dave Govatski about doing a presentation related to logging, who said 2024. Chris adds that a hydrology piece and aquifer piece of the NRI is on the list of interests, and some of the conservation land in Franconia acquired has been to protect that. Linda says that part of Tunnel Brook which has no aquatic organisms, and she would like to know why.

Chris will communicate with Amy in January about ideas, and she wants to hear whether or not we have a project first week of January, and then over the subsequent 2 weeks determine specifics. Amy and the other guests left at about 4:55 pm.

Minutes: Reviewed 11-15-22 minutes. Red moves to approve minutes. Jill seconds. Unanimously approved.

Town Forest (map 17-2) and new town land map 17-3 conservation: Chris notified Smith & Pospesil their bid was the low (winning) bid for the survey. They need a check for \$2400, and Smith is getting an invoice to Kim. Hopefully the SB will sign check from the Conservation Fund this Monday. Chris says we need to get the language for warrant article together. Jill checked with town counsel about the specifics of why warrant article is needed to conserve these town-owned properties, and it's because a conservation easement by an outside entity is equivalent to signing away some property ownership rights. Chris says ACT is going to wait to get involved until after a warrant article authorizes it and land survey is done.

(Jill left meeting at this point: 5:05 pm).

Lawrence Family Forest Meadowbrook Trail icy section seasonal diversion: Chris walked the area with Tim Whalen (stewardship of NEMBA) and they decided there was no need for trail diversion.

Update on Grote sanctuary project – it's moving forward. Mary says they hope to have it done by end of December. The easement will allow walking in summer, and snow shoeing in the winter as the only recreational uses.

Motorized maintenance equipment re fat bikers in Lawrence Family Forest: Chris says he checked with ACT and the easement does not prohibit power equipment for trail maintenance, only prohibits motorized equipment by trail users. Ginny still objects to the fossil fuel-based fat bike trail groomers, because when we bought the Lawrence Fam Forest in 2015, winter fat biking wasn't a thing. It's a new use since. Previous winter trail use was snowshoeing, walking, and cross country skiing. Mary agrees. Ginny thinks we should vote on whether to allow the grooming machines. Chris says the fat bike grooming equipment only happens after snowstorms – it was 5 times last year. Red has no objection to motorized grooming. Dan wants to know what the grooming equipment is. Chris says they have a Snow Dog but doubts they will use it much. They also have a Rokon motorbike, and an e-bike they can pull a sled behind. The e-bike + sled was what they initially used when they started grooming until they obtained the motorized vehicles. Ginny says the Snowdog is the loud fossil fuel based groomer she ran into there and in Fox Hill Park last year, and she says it can damage trees; noise scares off wildlife;; makes fumes. Ginny didn't mind the e-bike pulling a sled. It's the noisy fossil fuel machines she thinks shouldn't be permitted. Dan thinks it's worth discussing, and he's opposed to fossil fuel grooming but isn't sure of our role. Chris thinks that we shouldn't oppose the fat bike winter groomer if we don't also simultaneously oppose using gas-powered equipment to cut edges of trails back, which he thinks is necessary. Chris says it takes 3 times as long to use the e-bike pulling the sled, and motorized grooming is more efficient. Dan thinks it's complicated because we want what's best for nature but there are many people involved who want access to nature too. But he doesn't like noise and fossil fuels either. He thinks communication among parties will help find a balance. Red thinks this groomer noise is a small issue – National Guard planes are much noisier. (Red needs to leave – left at 5:15.) Art thinks the trails are important to the Inns. Ginny says yes but that's not a conservation commission mission. She thinks NEMBA should be aware the fossil fuel machines are an issue. Dan agrees, and thinks it likely they will take that info into account. Chris says that's fair, and that NEMBA is already aware and he will continue to make them aware that using the fossil fuel grooming equipment there is controversial. He would have been happy if NEMBA hadn't gotten it, but they did, and it does save groomers time.

Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act related to Gale River edge construction: Ginny hasn't yet filed a complaint about that previous Main St project, because must be done on paper rather than electronically, including needing photos in print. She agrees we need clarification since building inspector disagreed with us that that project needed a Shoreland permit, and the issue will arise again. Meeting adjourned 5:25 pm.

Next meeting: TBD.

Minutes by Ginny Jeffryes