Franconia Conservation Commission (FCC)

Meeting: May 23, 2017, 8:00 AM

Members present: Kim Cowles, Chris Nicodemus, Jill Brewer, Mary Grote, Red McCarthy, Ginny Jeffryes.

Guests: Greg Weiskerger at 9 A.M. (Fransted Campground)

Visitors present: Peter Grote; Justin Roshak, Littleton Courier reporter

Minutes of 4-18-17 weren’t sent out. Ginny will send. Minutes of March meeting were sent out before that meeting but we didn’t review at April meeting. Deferred to next meeting.

Minutes 5-9-17 meeting reviewed. Correction that OMLF should be OMMLF (Old Man of the Mountain Legacy Fund). Moved and seconded to approve. Motion passes unanimously.

Proposed Profile Lake Trail:

Ginny didn’t get the letter discussed last meeting done yet.

Chris attended the 5/12/17 meeting at Lake as our representative. Tom Mansfield (architect/geologist who represents NH DRED as well as being on the OMMLF), Brian Fowler, Dick Hamilton, Ed Rolfe, Dave Govatski, Chris were there. Chris reports that Ed was incorrect about the OMMLF funds sunsetting. Tom explained that the money remains available. They had intended to finish their work in 2018 however. They have $150,000 available. DOT has large collection of granite taken from bridge dismantling. DES reviewed the wetlands app and came back with response we saw, and a hearing process about the permit will occur over the summer. Tom Mansfield implied the proposed project is open for further discussion. The initial objective of slowing it down has been accomplished.

The other goal of meeting was to assess Ed’s proposed “Plan B”, as reviewed in previous minutes. They were receptive to that idea. Much discussion occurred about the impact of the boardwalk. Exactly how things will evolve is not clear. It may be difficult to make an ADA trail in the meadow wetland north of the lake there, especially due to a unique and special spawning trout area in that area at the headwaters of the Pemi. Trail could be placed near the log cabin. They toured the Pemi trail and also the East side of Lake proposed trail portion at the narrow area right at I-93, which seems to be the loudest [traffic noise] area for the proposed trail, and is very loud.

Red reports he walked the trails there last week, having received Ed’s map of Plan A/B comparison from Ginny, who had updated him on the info from the FCC meetings he’d missed. Red agrees there definitely shouldn’t be a trail on the East side. NEPA requires a need be shown, and there isn’t one, because there isn’t a facility to get to via the trail. Red doesn’t think there is a need. There is already a good stretch of ADA trail - the bike path to the Profile viewing platform, to Echo Lake, to the Tramway.

Chris says that was also the general discussion of that at the 5/12 on-site meeting. [Universal access] trail is a good idea, like Ed’s proposal. Red comments that a west side [universal access] trail would be hard for the State to maintain, for example after winter, due to rock debris, etc. Some discussion of the alternative west side trail possibilities.

Red thinks our point of view should be limited to the fact that we have issues with this trail. Our role is not to recommend alternatives. We should just represent the point of view that we oppose the current project. Red agrees to write that statement.

Lawrence Property:

Greg from Fransted Campground will be coming in later to discuss the Meadow Brook beaver activity. Chris reports that they returned and are active there again, now on upstream part of the land at the most upstream of the 3 tiers of dams. He and Kim checked it out. Water is backing up now. Not enough to be a danger at present. The upstream dam has more buffer below it than the previous downstream dam of last year. If water level got high and there was a breach and water comes gushing down, that could be a problem. Land is doing what it is there for – buffering. Chris says that about 5 or 6 years ago a further downstream 7 foot high dam broke causing small flash flood which did damage at the campground. Red adds that in the 1970s Flintlock Lodge [now Stony Brook Motel] had a flood from a dam upstream of it. Kim says someone saw young beavers with the adults. Chris reports that currently the water height is only a couple feet, and if it does breach, the downstream network of unfilled lower dams will buffer it. Regardless of whether there are beaver dams, there is always a potential for flash flood along the stream due to it draining the mountains. This is a risk anyone along the river assumes. Late last year when Chris [and Mark] worked on breaching the middle dam, they placed into the second (of 3) dam a large tube which happened to be lying nearby. The abandoned dam is not holding water but if beavers got active there it would prevent the water level from going higher than 2 feet in that pond. So there is buffer there. Beavers build height by swimming with sticks to push up onto a dam and if water level can’t reach top they can’t build higher. Also, they need nearby trees to cut to do this. That’s why they’re upstream. Trees dead by older dams. Mary thinks it is wrong to get rid of beavers when they’ve been there a long time. Discussion that trapping/removing - they’ll just return. Chris thinks the current pipe in place is a win win. Beavers stay, breach threat is buffered by the areas just downstream on the land. Discussion of how to get another pipe for the upper dam to prevent beavers from building that one much higher, with no budget. Maybe Greg would fund. Cost unknown. Discussion of how to get it in there. Maybe access from upstream trails near Lovetts field. Or local helicopter pilot persuaded to volunteer?

NEMBA update: Chris went to monthly meeting last night. Discussed labeling bike trails and improving the Valley network. Working on improving existing trail through Lawrence property to remove obstacles like rocks. RTP grant for Lafayette Rec will focus on improving the really wet area within Fox Hill park trail. National Forest $ limited for their portions by current Federal budget situation. Richard Morris has identified a trail that could complete a loop on various landowners’ lands near the airport, if permissions can be obtained.

At 9 a.m. Greg (Fransted Campground owner) arrived to discuss the beavers. The pond of last year idried up since they moved upstream. Their active dam is a threat to the Campground from a public safety issue and from property damage. The flash flood of spring 2013 tore up the adjacent Campground roadway 3 feet deep. He got there 5 minutes afterwards – lots of damage. No one was there because was off-season in the spring. He says spring freezing/thawing of dam caused breach, snowmelt involved. Took weeks to fix damage, cost $15,000. He is willing to pay for someone to trap and move them. They would like an immediate mitigation process to be done. Campground is full this weekend. Will be full all summer. Kids play in the stream. He is very concerned.

Chris explained to Greg the biology of the beavers, and the downstream buffers, keeping the headwater of the dam low will prevent. The dams, when low, do have adequate buffer. The current height of the dam is about a foot higher than last fall when beavers had left the area. Downstream flood very unlikely to occur. Discusses risk of stream flooding from tropical-type storm in the mountains exists regardless of beavers. Greg notes that a tropical storm they can plan for, they have processes in place to plan for that. Can’t plan for dam breaches.

Red comments that spring is the main risk, when there is no foliage, and spring melt is more of a threat on the stream now since there is now snowmaking on Mittersill. Further discussion of addition of pipe to upper dam to keep water low. Greg thinks there need to be more than one. FCC members explain it is not there to buffer a breach or heavy rain, but to keep pressure head of water low by keeping water level down to prevent beavers from building a high dam. Do we need a permit to put in a pipe from DES? Red notes that maintaining a side channel would also be helpful. There is one now.

Greg wants a timeline. He wants something nailed down for action in next 2 weeks, wants another meeting by then. He found a handout about pipes on Mass government website.

FCC members comment that we are a volunteer board, with jobs. We can’t do anything that fast, low risk. Also no budget. We don’t think trapping them is needed. We don’t know the costs of the pipe. Greg reiterates he is very worried. Would be good if we could find an expert to volunteer to assess current risk, to reassure Greg about current low risk. Ideas – ask Rebecca Brown for possibilities (Chris will), Dave Govatski (Chris will), Dawn Steele (Mary will). Greg will check for ideas of cost. He has no time once school is out because campground too busy. Would consider paying but need to determine cost.

Discussion of next meeting: once school is out Kim can’t do Tuesdays. Red can’t do Wednesdays.

Next meeting: Tuesday June 13 at 8 a.m.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:30 a.m.

Minutes submitted by Ginny Jeffryes.