Franconia Conservation Commission (FCC)

Meeting: September 21, 2021, 3 pm, Dow Field pavilion

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

Guests: Tim Clough (Franconia Area chapter of New England Mountain Bike Association = F-NEMBA), Sean Sweeney (Wetlands scientist), Joe Harrison (F-NEMBA), Bill Whalen (F-NEMBA), Rick Walling (Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust - ACT)

Draft minutes of meeting 6-15-21 and 8-23-21 reviewed. Red moves to approve the minutes. Jill seconds. Unanimous vote in favor.

Pebble Beach Trail closure and relocation onto Lawrence Family Forest land: Chris invited Tim Clough to review Franconia Area NEMBA’s plan for this. He has been mapping out/working on preliminary clearing of a new trail. The Lawrence Family Forest is town-owned conservation land, with the conservation easement held by ACT. New trails require the following procedure, per easement: If the FCC votes in favor of any new trails on the land, the proposal then goes to ACT for actual approval, as the legally responsible easement holder. Tim apologizes for not understanding the trail-building process/permissions required, and they already did some sapling clearing and new trail marking on the upland portion of planned route prematurely. He shows on the map – on approximately ¾ of the trail some clearing was done. That stopped a month ago when he was notified. He met with Andrew Schmitt, the new landowner of the approx 60 acre parcel that includes the current trail off the end of County Line Road, and Mr. Schmitt doesn’t want the public trail on his property. He is willing to permit access to Pebble Beach Trail via Tucker’s Trail. F-NEMBA has received a grant of $35,000 from the Tillotson Fund, time limited. Actual build once route determined would be done by Real Life Adventures, an experienced trail company - Blake Roberts is owner. New trails in Franconia are ‘rake and ride’ [meaning once trail mapped out, the traffic essentially creates the durable trail]. But Tim wants to include a trail that everyone can ride – a single track ‘flow trail’ [which are useable by mountain bikers of any skill level] - machine built, unlike current trails in the area. It would start at 4 feet wide, and usually would revert to 36 inches. It’s a small machine used to create. New trail would be from Tucker’s Trail to Meadowbrook Trail, which runs through the bottom edge of new landowner’s property, and he is willing to keep open. F-NEMBA requested Sean to walk the trail today as a wetlands scientist for wetlands perspective. The trail builder has walked the trail with F-NEMBA twice. (Passes out map for specifics.)

Sean says he walked it today and made the map w/ GPS. There are no wetlands along the proposed new trail, so no State permit required. He has certified it as no wetlands.

No new materials would be trucked in. Trail would be machine and hand-built.

Ginny has concerns about wide zigzag trail, having seen the under-construction revised Indian Stream trail [part of the Profile Trail - off Bethlehem’s South Road on The Rocks’ land]. She says that trail is unfriendly to walkers and has destroyed a lot more habitat by all the new areas involved to make it an all-user bike trail. Also she has concerns about whether a new trail would have tree canopy and understory shrub/vegetation retention. She points out that there are a lot of walkers and snow shoe users accessing this extended trail network – more than the mountain bikers.

Red says he likes the zigzag approach. It will prevent erosion, will be gentle S turns down the grade to the brook.

Rick Walling of ACT says it will have to be surveyed where it gets near Meadow Brook at the bottom, since it was a major concern of the major grant funders of the Lawrence Family Forest conservation purchase that no new trails be created within 100 feet of the brook (100 feet on either side of it). He thinks we wouldn’t get permission from those funders, most likely. The lower elevation part of the proposed new trail goes into that 100 foot buffer, so it needs to be redone – the design could be rerouted south of there because Meadow Brook trail is farther from the river there.

Mary is concerned about the walkers vs mountain bikers in various places in town. There are safety issues. Ginny agrees – had a near miss recently with a mountain biker when walking with elderly friends.

General discussion: Tim that if we don’t get this built, then there will be no access per the landowner after October and some people will use the old closed trail anyway, which could cause the landowner to cut off access to all other trails. Chris thinks this trail build needs to move forward. He cites other issues with landowners closing long-standing trails recently – for example, Paine Road [Easton] closed by owners. He mentions that NEMBA is encouraging to its members to be part of the Ride with Gratitude program, which encourages respect for landowners and other users. Ginny says multi-use is important. She is also concerned that heavy equipment used for trail building be clean of invasive seeds – invasive plants are becoming an increasing problem in NH, including just south of us. Tim says he can ask the trail builder to clean his machine before doing the work. Ginny is comfortable with the plan after all the input.

Conditional resolution by Jill: The FCC gives conditional support to the building of a replacement for the Pebble Beach Trail that will connect Meadow brook Trail and Tuckers Trail, assuming the condition be met that the trail can avoid the conservation easement’s 100 foot buffer from Meadow Brook. Red seconds. Unanimous vote in favor.

Rick Walling will take this up with ACT at their upcoming meeting this week.

Available members will go walk the proposed trail after meeting adjourned – only Ginny and Chris able to go right now. Meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Next meeting: Uncertain - possibly 3rd or 4th week of October at the Dow Pavilion.

Minutes by Ginny Jeffryes