

Wantastiquet Local River Subcommittee

Minutes

March 11, 2015

Windham Regional Planning Commission

139 Main Street, Brattleboro, VT

Members Present: Elizabeth McLoughlin, Chair, *Brattleboro, VT*; Donna Drouin, *Walpole, NH*; Don Farquharson, *Westmoreland, NH*; Daniel Marx, Ph.D., *Dummerston, VT*; Alice Maes, *Putney, VT*; Richard Schmidt, *Westmoreland, NH*; Roland Vollbehr, *Chesterfield, NH*.

Staff Present: Lisa Murphy, SWRPC, Keene, NH

Nancy McGarigal, US Fish & Wildlife-Region 5

I. Introductions and approval of minutes

Elizabeth McLoughlin, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Attendees went around the table and introduced themselves and the towns or affiliation that they represent. One change to the minutes of the October 29, 2014 minutes was made. The change was to correct the town that WLRS member, Peter Barrett represents by replacing *Westmoreland, NH* with *Westminster, VT*. The minutes were approved with this edit.

II. Program

Liz Mcloughlin welcomed the guest speaker, Nancy McGarigal, Natural Resource Planner, US Fish & Wildlife Region 5. Nancy stated that her region covers thirteen states from Virginia to Maine. She stated that she has been working on two exciting plans involving the Connecticut River watershed area and is sharing the highlights of both projects with the committee. The projects include the Silvio O Conte Comprehensive Conservation Plan and a project to develop a Landscape Conservation Design in the Connecticut River Watershed.

The first part of the PowerPoint presentation was on the Silvio O Conte Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Nancy gave a brief background on the Silvio O Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. She stated that the refuge was created in 1995 along the entire Connecticut River watershed and spans 7.2 million acres. The refuge acquisition currently has approximately 37,000 acres. The purpose of the refuge is to conserve, protect and enhance species of concern.

The Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is required by law and is to be updated every 15 years. The CCP process was initiated in 2006 with the scoping process to collect habitat information. The US Fish & Wildlife is working with four states (Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut) in this plan. They began by developing a vision statement and goals, and then worked on the draft plan. The plan includes proposed actions with alternatives and an environmental impact statement. The four proposed alternatives include continuing

current management, consolidated stewardship, enhanced conservation connections, and reduced management with an emphasis on back country expeditions.

The common issues and concerns heard during the collection of information were climate change, visitor facilities and public access, impacts on socioeconomics, and others. There are six activities that get enhanced consideration include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation.

Nancy stated that they are anticipating to complete the draft in May 2015 and release it for public meeting sessions. There will be 18 public meetings/information sessions. The estimated final CCP release is late summer with a final decision in late fall of 2015.

The second portion of the presentation was on the Landscape Conservation Design in the Connecticut River Watershed pilot project. Nancy stated that this project is an interconnected resilient network of lands and waterways with many benefits. The plan is a spatial plan for conservation decisions using collaborative planning among many partners. It includes an adaptation strategy. The plan incorporates climate change, urban growth and other potential future changes. There are over thirty partners in this collaborative process.

Nancy stated that the intention is to prioritize places for conserving special ecosystems. The plan will design conservation for the protection of species and ecosystems from the perspective of ecological integrity, resiliency, and rare natural communities. It looks at existing habitats and land use changes to consider for design. As part of the project, they have created a tool for users to zoom in to specific watersheds and towns. They are working with the states to collect information on rare and natural communities which will then be incorporated into the design. All of this information is being merged to find where they come together. It is an attempt to prioritize focus areas and will be useful for widespread conservation planning at all levels, from federal to local. The result will be to integrate species and ecosystem core areas and the connectors.

This project involves a lot of collaboration with the states and their Wildlife Action Plans. The modelling of climate change is helpful for the states since many state wildlife action plans do not include climate change considerations. The plan includes a tool that will overlay aquatic cores and terrestrial cores. It also includes dam removal priorities by looking at how much restoration of the stream will be done if a particular dam was removed. There are 1,470 dams within this area. Another tool that is included is a tool to determine culvert upgrade priorities. There are 27,371 crossings.

Nancy stated that the final design and internal review is projected for April 2015. They are anticipating to communicate and distribute the results and tools in May of 2015.

III. Permit Reviews

Lisa Murphy stated that there were no pending review for this meeting.

IV. Local Issues and Concerns

Lisa Murphy stated that she had previously sent a link to WLRS members regarding Flood Ready Vermont videos from the Connecticut River Watershed Council. She suggested that members share this link with their community officials and consider these in preparation of updating the local Hazard Mitigation Plans.

V. Agenda Ideas for Next Meeting

Liz McLoughlin asked the committee about potential speakers and topics for the next meeting. Lisa Murphy suggested that the next meeting include a discussion about the committee's participation in the Source to Sea River Clean-up event for this year. Several members stated that they would like to participate. Lisa stated that the event was previously held in September or October, and that there would only be 2 meetings of the WLRS before September. We will need to devote some time at the next meeting to begin the planning process. Donna Drouin stated that she would like to see a wider spread event with additional pegs. Liz requested that Lisa look into the date and how to create more pegs. Donna Drouin stated that the Watershed Council will help where they can if they know early enough.

Chairman McLoughlin asked if there was a suggested date for the next meeting. Lisa Murphy suggested that we meet on May 13. Donna Drouin requested that we move the time up an hour to 4:30. A discussion ensued and members were in favor of the date and time. Liz suggested that Lisa check for room availability for the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Murphy
WLRS Staff