

Strafford Conservation Commission
25 February 2014

Present at meeting : Amy Metz, Tii McLane, Mike Hebb, Jared Jenisch, Matt Perry, John Hemenway, J.T. Horn, Steve Willbanks, Ken Alton (TranCanada-Retired).

25 February 2014 Meeting Minutes:

Actions:

- Amy – Contact Select board for appointment of Steve Willbanks to SCC.
- Tii/Mike/Jared – Meet to align on Wetlands Inventory actions for request of funding.
- COMPLETE: Amy review other landowners involved in Maple Hill Road Culvert project
- IN PROGRESS: Mike speak with Rebecca regarding how she would like SCC to be involved with Ben Kilham talk at the library.
- IN PROGRESS– Steve, get latest culvert survey from Jon Mackinnon
- IN PROGRESS–Tii investigate VTRANs funding for wildlife crossing mapping.
- IN PROGRESS - JT - Check with Dave Paganelli regarding Forest Management Plan for Whitcomb Hill. 29 Oct - JT to schedule meeting with Dave. Email discussion ongoing.

Discussions:

- TransCanada Relicensing – Ken Alton attended as a guest speaker to discuss the relicensing of Wilder, Bellows Falls, and Vernon Dams. Full details about these projects can be found at the following website: <http://www.transcanada-relicensing.com>. The Wilder Project covers 7 miles downstream the Ompompanoosuc Watershed, with portions of the West Branch located in Strafford. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) mandates licensing of these dam projects.

The Wilder Project was last relicensed in 1979, with an amendment in 1985 for a fish ladder to help fish passage (Atlantic Salmon and Shad). The projects falling under the current relicensing initiative will be valid for about 40 years. Strafford benefits from this relicensing because of the conditions under the project to support Mitigation Enhancement Fund (MEF) grants. This is the same funding source that was used for the Phase 3 Stream Geomorphic Assessment of the West Branch Ompomp, conducted by Bear Creek Environmental.

Ken had a great deal of information to provide and a lot of the discussions peaked our general interest around the construction of dams, how much water capacity they can handle and how many kilowatts hours can be produced in a month (~720 kw hrs). About 4% of the electric provided in VT comes from the dam projects but electricity can be produced in seconds if needed. We discussed how we might benefit from the MEF grant funding and a suggestion was made to study the affects of the Elizabeth Mine Cleanup and how it has improved the point source copper pollution running into the West Branch. Ken graciously offered is assistance in any future projects.

- Maple Hill Road Culvert Project – This project has 3 components: 1.) Riparian plantings/Livestock exclusion/Alternate water source for landowners, 2.) Culvert Replacement and 3.) Dry Hydrant replacement (dependent on culvert replacement). The second and third projects need Town approval and participation. An email describing the details of the project and the various players/stakeholders was sent to the Select board on February 3. We requested to get on the Select board agenda post Town Meeting to review the project.

Two site visits have occurred:

1. Jan 30 - Amy, Tii, and Ron Rhodes met to assess project site with permission from landowner
2. Feb 13 - Tii, Ron Rhodes, Joan Allen, Troy Dare, Jim Ryan, Jason Fleury.

Professionals helping with the project:

- Ron Rhodes - North Country River Steward, Connecticut River Watershed Council
- Mary Childs - Project Manager, White River Natural Resource Conservation District
- Jim Ryan - Watershed Coordinator, VT Dept. of Environmental Conservation, Watershed Management Division
- Rich Kirn - Fisheries Biologist, VT Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
- Troy Dare - Rural Fire Protection Program Manager (VACD)
- Ryan Patch - Agricultural Resource Specialist & Land Treatment Planner at Vermont Association of Conservation Districts
- Jason Fleury, Soil Conservationist US Dept of Ag (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Status of each project

- Landowner projects – NRCS application due March 21. Ron sent application to landowner and will follow up on Monday March 10.
 - Culvert Replacement – Options for funding are Better Back roads grant and VT Structures. Tii spoke with Jon MacKinnon and Strafford does use VT Structures standards but reserves that funding for class II roads. Funding would be from Better Back roads which will only fund ~10K. Ron believes USFWS (Fish and Wildlife) could fund the rest. Need to find out deadline for Better Back Roads VT. Could only find the 2013 application on the internet.
 - Dry Hydrant replacement – Only needed if culvert replacement is an option. Tii talked to Dave Kendall. He asked if we should put the Maple Hill Road dry hydrant on the list for replacement/relocation. Dave says currently the dry hydrant is not working due to silt build up.
- UFLT Conservation Commission Gathering - Tii and Amy went to the Annual Gathering of Conservation Commissions held on Feb 4. A case study was presented by UVM's Gund Institute for Ecological Economics called "Valuing Ecosystems Services: Flood Mitigation and the Otter Creek Wetlands." Presented by Keri Bryan (Grad Student Fellow), the study showed how wetlands play a role at mitigating potential flood damages by comparing the Irene flood damage in Rutland to Middlebury. Middlebury experienced less damage, with more water volumes and they believe this can be contributed to the Otter Creek Wetlands.

- Open Space Plan Projects – Wetlands Inventory: Tii talked with Kevin Peterson at the NH Charitable Foundation. He confirmed that Thetford used an MEF grant to help fund hiring a consultant to do their Wetlands Inventory. They can support about \$5K worth of funding, unfortunately applications are due in the fall <http://www.nhcf.org/mef>. Tii, Mike, and Jared will regroup on funding and determine if there is any work that can start this year. Otherwise we will wait to apply for a grant in the fall.
- Trails – No new updates. Not much traffic but mostly due to the amount of snow cover.
- Old City Falls Update – Matt found a carpenter to do the outhouse work. Matt also stated that Rhett Emerson will do the work to fabricate the metal hood.
- TRORC Grant from USFS State and Private Forestry – Pete Fellow (TRORC) and Amy Metz were to attend Taylor Valley Initiative meeting but it was canceled. We will attend meeting in April.
- Announcements:
 - We would like to officially nominate Steve Willbanks to the SCC. Amy will contact Selectboard for appointment.

Next Meeting Agenda: 25 March 2014

- Distribution of roles (Secretary, Treasury, etc)
- Maple Hill Road Culvert
- Wetlands Inventory
- Trails
- Old City Falls work preparation
- TRORC USFS Grant

Amy Metz (Co-Chair)

<_____, Recording Secretary>