

**Town of Monkton
Conservation Commission
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, March 15th, 2021 6:00pm
Zoom and Phone Meeting**

Members Present: Chelsea Smiley (Chair), Ann Johnston Miller (Vice-Chair), Jaime Schulte (Clerk), Kevin Lambert (Treasurer), Caroline Alves

Members Absent:

Guests Present: Andrew Wood (Vermont Fish & Wildlife / Agency of Natural Resources), Kate Kelly (Chair of the Hinesburg Conservation Commission), Laura Farrell (MCC advisor), Robert Hyams (Hinesburg Conservation Commission), Ethan Swift (Lewis Creek Association Board), Theresa Payea (Monkton), Prem Linskey (Monkton), John McNerney (Monkton Selectboard), Ivor Hughes (Monkton Planning Commission), Paul and Joanna Stetson (Monkton)

Chelsea called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

Regular Business

- Reviewed agenda
- Set Time/Date of Next Meetings
 - Thursday, April 8th, 2021 at 6:00pm
 - Thursday, May 13th, 2021 at 6:00pm
- Approve Minutes
 - **Kevin moved to approve the minutes of February 11th, 2021 as written. Jaime seconded.** No additional discussion. **All were in favor (3-0-0).** Ann and Caroline joined just after the vote.

Act 171 with Andy Wood (VT Agency of Natural Resources - ANR)

- Andy works for the Community Wildlife program with ANR, assisting towns with this new effort. He refreshed us on the purpose of Act 171. Large blocks of connected forest are important for a number of reasons, including ecological benefits, tourism, forest products, recreation, water quality, etc.
- Towns would identify areas that provide these benefits and act strategically to protect them. Town plans must identify important areas of forest blocks and habitat connectors and plan for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation. Having a map of the areas is also required.
- Forest blocks are contiguous areas of forest not currently developed. May include trails, wetlands or other features that do not involve tree cover.
- Habitat connectors are land or water, or both, that link patches of wildlife habitat within a landscape, allowing movement, migration, and dispersal of animals and plants.
- Most data needed to create mapping is found in the BioFinder website in the VT Conservation Design map layers.
- We reviewed what other towns are doing for Act 171. Examples:
 - Marshfield
 - Their map shows Highest Priority Forest Blocks and Surface Waters, Lakes/Rivers and streams, and mapped Highest Priority Wildlife Crossings.
 - Pownal
 - This town approached it with two maps. One shows connectivity blocks, Interior Forest, and Physical Landscapes layers. Some key segments of wildlife crossings. The other map shows water...riparian areas, surface waters, hydric soils, riparian corridors, etc.
 - Fairfax
 - Their map highlights forest blocks, interior forest blocks, and connectivity blocks. On top of that they added habitat, such as Deer Wintering Areas, to create an “Ecological Resources” map. Shows which blocks warrant different types of protection. Conserved

- lands, town forest, etc., are also shown. Doesn't focus on riparian, habitat connectors, physical landscapes.
- Thetford
 - Created three maps.
 - Forest Block Connectivity, and Resiliency Resources (climate change resistance).
 - Surface Water, Wetland, and Riparian Resources
 - Wildlife, Plant, and Natural Community Resources.
- Andy advises not to undervalue smaller forest blocks. Some town maps only focus on the large blocks.
- Monkton considerations:
 - Andy showed some BioFinder views of Monkton. Forest blocks by size, Interior forest (less edges – speaks to the quality of forest in Monkton), Connectivity Blocks
 - Blocks that provide multiple values in the same location are more useful.
 - Physical Landscape blocks (geologically or ecologically important, but under-represented). Most likely locations for biodiversity to persist in an uncertain future.
 - Looked at the larger regional picture.
 - When identifying habitat connectors look mostly at:
 - Surface Water and Riparian Areas, Terrestrial Wildlife Road Crossings, Riparian Wildlife Road Crossings, forest connections (even narrow ones) between blocks.
 - Looked at the relevant layers on top of each other.
 - Monkton-specific data should be included. Can be a powerful combo with the ANR data. For example where the riparian wildlife underpass is located or the bobcat movement corridors.
- Discussed on-going community outreach. Our recent Values Mapping event focused mostly on human uses of the land. The ecological aspect is more science/data-driven and should be somewhat less about opinion, but it is important to understand the community's vision for the future of Monkton with the goal of balancing protection of Monkton's ecological richness with human uses and landowner interests.
- Eventually the community's priorities (along with mapping of the priority areas) will be given to the Planning Commission to inform Act 171-related policy/zoning that aligns to the previously-approved Town Plan.
- The recording of Andy's presentation is available at: <http://monktonvt.com/boards-and-committees/conservation-commission/>

Water Quality with Kate Kelly of the Lewis Creek Association

- Kate is part of the Lewis Creek Association and is chair of the Hinesburg Conservation Commission. She presented on how to take better care of Lake Champlain by taking a watershed approach (a watershed is all of the land that drains into a particular river or body of water). Need to take an "all in" approach to restore the health and functioning of our water. Takes each landowner and individual doing their part. Phosphorus levels are high from runoff of different kinds. More than 8,000 square miles of land drain into Lake Champlain.
- Monkton contains headwaters of two watersheds... Pond Brook and Little Otter Creek.
- In the past rivers were straightened and banks reinforced to protect homes/farmland, which contributes to erosion and flooding today. Streams that naturally meander flow slower and handle sediment better. Narrow rivers without floodplains flow too quickly, carrying sediments and phosphorus toward the lake rather than depositing it more locally.
- Most phosphorus reaches the lake during heavy storm events. These events are increasing with climate change. Solutions must occur throughout our watersheds.
- Looked at maps and data on water sampling across the watersheds. Regional view of how Monkton forests, riparian areas, and unique wetlands help protect water quality.
- Discussed what we can do to protect water quality (slow, sink, spread water). Looked at examples in our area where stormwater is managed with changing the buffers along streams, managing runoff from parking lots, etc. Can enhance protective buffers along waterways as one way to manage runoff.
- Monkton is not yet taking advantage of available federal funds by adopting river corridor protections.

- Going beyond the state requirements to expect high standards for stormwater management in development. Apply Municipal Roads General Permit rules for private roads and driveways, to reduce erosion/runoff. Crowning driveways, grass-lined ditches/swales, leaving lawns 3” or taller, etc.
- Support a fund to conserve areas of high value (Monkton already has the Agricultural & Natural Areas Fund which helps with this).
- Address existing development in flood-prone areas.
- The recording of Kate’s presentation is available at: <http://monktonvt.com/boards-and-committees/conservation-commission/>

Funding for Field Naturalist Program Proposal

- There is an opportunity to inventory the northern/western portion of Monkton that was not part of the ecological inventory completed in recent years by Lyra Brennan. The work could occur this summer and there is a need to fund the project from a variety of sources.
- **Ann moved that the Conservation Commission recommend to the Selectboard that \$1500 be allocated to partially support this project. Jaime seconded. No additional discussion. All were in favor (5-0-0).**

Morse Park Management Plan

- Discussed that Kevin has assembled an initial draft of a management plan. Chelsea will approach the Rec Committee and Selectboard about next steps before our next meeting.

ANR Permit Discussion

- Ann is looking for assistance in evaluating a stormwater permit that relates to her property, so she would need to recuse herself. It is possible to comment on the permit. Terry Percell is the individual from the state who is managing the storm water permit. Jaime is available to help review the permit when it comes up for public comment.

Pond Brook Management Plan

- Postponed to the next meeting.

Adjournment

- Jaime moved to adjourn. Kevin seconded. All were in favor (5-0-0). Adjourned at 8:01pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jaime Schulte
Clerk