

**Town of Monkton  
Town Forest Committee  
MEETING MINUTES  
Wednesday, April 3rd, 2024, 5:30pm  
Monkton Town Hall & via Zoom  
(Approved: TBD)**

Members present: Callie Brynn (Chair), John McNerney, Peter Dufault, Molly Parren, CJ Buzzy (via Zoom)

Committee members absent: Jaime Schulte (Vice-Chair)

Guests: Monkton residents- Jessica Demeritt, Debbie Houghton, VLT- Bob Heiser (via Zoom), UVM Landscape & Inventory Assessment class (all via Zoom)- Walter Poleman, Maura Muldoon, Rachel Goland, Robert Langellier, Steve Root, Veronica Magner, Alyssa Van Doorn

Note: The committee was unfamiliar with the new “owl” in the community room, and it took a while to set up a system where we could speak to and see people on Zoom using both the community room computer and John McNerney’s laptop. As a result, the meeting started late.

**Call To Order** - Callie called the meeting to order at 5:37pm

1. The meeting started late from technical difficulties, so we jumped into updates from the UVM Landscape and Inventory Assessment class. They are spending their semester focused on the future Monkton Town Forest. Walter Poleman (professor) told the committee that the class had divided into three separate groups and were examining the property from different lenses: humans, vegetation, and wildlife. The class sent their work plans prior to the committee meeting so members could review them and develop questions for the meeting.
  - a. Humans: Alyssa & Veronica
    - i. Looking at the impact and interactions of humans with the Monkton Town Forest (MTF) through time (historic to future).
    - ii. A lot falls under this category so they are trying to prioritize their focus and products given the limited time they have left.
    - iii. Focusing on deliverables based on what the committee is looking for and what the students think will be useful to guide future use and management of the property.
      1. Annotated timeline of MTF starting with bedrock, glaciation, human settlement, mining, present day.
      2. Recommendations related to trails (sensitive areas- what habitats, what species). This includes two main deliverables:
        - a. A sensitivity analysis, giving an overall sense of the site.

- b. Existing trail assessment (based on major trails that are already on community maps). This will include looking at erosion, maintenance, etc.
    - c. Callie asked if any of this will include some kind of buffer of neighboring property boundaries. Students were receptive to this idea and said that they would look into it.
  - 3. Humans and how we will interact with the MTF in the future: looking at educational opportunities and points of interest related to history, wildlife, vegetation (map with annotations about points of interest and why they might be important).
  - 4. The committee had previously asked about what other town forests have done (Alyssa researched this as an individual project- interviewed other town forest committees and Chittenden County forester). They are now creating an outline/guidance document based on what other town forests have done and what they think could be possible for future events and programs (community science and stewardship).
- iv. Bob mentioned that there is a grad student at UVM doing a town forest census of some kind that might be a useful resource (Alyssa mentioned that Julie Frost has already been interviewed)

b. Vegetation: Robert & Rachel

- i. Mentioned that anything they can do at the site will be limited by the fact that it is April in VT, but they have three main focuses:
  - 1. Natural communities: Bob Zaino (VDFW) came out and showed the students how to ground-truth Arrowwood layers about natural communities and they already saw some finer scale differences.
  - 2. Rare & sensitive plants: This is hard to study right now given it is early spring but on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Grace Glynn (VDFW) will be joining them to look for rare plants and will likely focus on the red maple seepage swamp.
  - 3. Exotic species: One of the benefits is that exotics like honeysuckle leaf out before other species. They plan to work with the UVM Spatial Analysis Lab to have a drone out there to try to get good visuals of where invasives are on the property and get some insights from that.
    - a. The committee discussed the need to inform adjacent landowners about the drone so they know what is going on should they see it.
- ii. The students had some questions for the committee as well:

1. Is anything standing out to folks in Monkton that will be of importance/interest?
    - a. Molly mentioned interest in early successional habitat.
    - b. John mentioned that areas closer to the road will inherently get more traffic and if there are “hot spots” nearby, that would be good to know.
    - c. There was some conversation about whether focus and management should be on areas closer to higher traffic areas or the more ecologically sensitive areas.
  2. Spatial perspective: are there areas that we are particularly interested in (drone)?
  3. Are there other people to bring in to ask about vegetation stuff?
- iii. Rachel was interested in creating an iNaturalist project for the MTF but you cannot change the name of the project and given the community has not been able to give their input on the name of the parcel, there was some hesitation about doing that yet. However, there was interest in eventually creating a project so visitors could contribute to the collection of ecological data on site over time.
- c. Wildlife: Steve, Maura, & Lucy (not here-teaching)
- i. In addition to wildlife, this group will also be focusing on hydrology. Their main goals are:
    1. To identify the wildlife habitats on site.
    2. To identify what species might be using that habitat, both projected species and verified. They have wildlife cameras on site already to collect a species list and will have a day where they go out for a bird survey.
    3. To work with the vegetation and human groups to provide useful maps looking at focal species.
  - ii. Their deliverables include:
    1. A species listed of confirmed and projected wildlife.
    2. A story map of wildlife camera data.
    3. To create or obtain layers for different hydrology features such as seeps/swamps and other wetlands.
    4. To provide wildlife management suggestions.
  - iii. The committee members mentioned some questions and interests:
    1. John expressed interest in learning about possible forestry management for wildlife and certain species.
    2. There was some conversation about the possibilities with the drone LiDAR imagery that will be collected. Apparently, the drone must be within the eyeline of the operator, so that will be limiting. This

will probably preclude the opportunity to get imagery of the western section where there are more cliffs/talus.

3. Molly mentioned an interest in knowing if there are fairy shrimp within the vernal pools, even though they do not fall under the category of wildlife as provided by the students (terrestrial vertebrates).
  4. Molly also mentioned an interest in knowing if there is some connection between Bristol Pond and the town forest. Bristol Pond is home to unique and rare species, and it would be interesting if there were similar species in this parcel or some kind of connection.
- d. The class final presentation will be on May 8<sup>th</sup> with a walk on the property from 3 to 5pm, followed by a presentation from 7 to 8:30pm.
    - i. The UVM class left the meeting after giving their updates.
    - ii. The committee discussed the need to inform the community about the presentation and using it as the jumping off point for community meetings for the long-term management plan.
2. Two community members who are interested in the open position on the committee attended the meeting and introduced themselves:
    - a. Jessica Demeritt: Master Naturalist, interested in our community and working through the more difficult topics with the community to create a town forest that works for everyone.
    - b. Debbie Houghton: Grew up on a farm in NY, is interested in horseback riding, interested in the learning opportunities this town forest offers the community, also on ANAC committee. Said she is interested in contributing to this project whether on the committee or not.
    - c. John said that the selectboard will approve committee appointments at their next meeting.
3. The sub-committee working on the interim plan will get a draft to Bob to review and try to formalize the interim plan for the next committee meeting.
    - a. Again, it was emphasized that we need to make it clear that this plan is only for an interim period of ~4 months. It is required by a grant and decisions are not final. This will be a placeholder as the committee works with the community on the long-term management plan.
    - b. Jessica recommended that we provide some kind of monthly status update on the town forest so that when we are ready to work with the community on the long-term plan, they have some foundational knowledge of what we have done and where we are at.

4. The committee discussed the timeline for community engagement and starting the process for drafting the long-term management plan with the community.
  - a. The committee thinks that we should be at the Strawberry Festival this year, and recycling center etc so we can interact with more community members and get their input on the management plan.
  - b. Debbie asked if there were going to be any ADA handicap accessible trails at the MTF. The committee agreed that there should be something in the plan for creating a handicap accessible area at some point. Having this in writing in the plan will likely help with getting future grants if that is a project the community would like to pursue.
  - c. The committee is interested in a survey put together by Huntington for their town forest. Callie will reach out to their town committee to see if we can get access to that survey to help us possibly formulate something for Monkton.
  - d. The committee discussed different ways to solicit community input for the long-term management plan including multiple in-person meetings to give everyone the chance to be heard, anonymous options for those who are less comfortable speaking at meetings, and a combination where there are meetings but people can discreetly put a sticker on a sliding scale showing their support for a use (e.g., strongly disagree to strongly agree).
    - i. Jessica mentioned that there was good community input for the Town Plan and we may want to contact Marilyn Cargill to learn more about how they worked with the community.
5. The closing will likely take place in the second half of 2024 once legal work is completed.
6. Fundraising update from Bob: About 2.5 weeks ago VLT sent out town wide mailing to update Monkton residents. about the town forest. Since then, VLT has received \$2400 from 14 contributors. The hope is to wrap up this stage of fundraising on May 15<sup>th</sup>.
  - a. The committee discussed possibilities for reaching back out to the community about this. We decided it might be best to wait until after the school budget re-vote and that it may be good to develop some kind of goal to work towards.
7. Callie and John said that the Old Airport Road hearing seemed to go well and the next step is the Monkton Selectboard conducting a site inspection on April 21<sup>st</sup> at 10am.
8. Barnum easement: A. Johnson cleared the dam of trees for annual maintenance required by the state, which caused some of the smaller ponds to drain.
9. Next meeting: May 1<sup>st</sup> at 5:30pm. Will look to set up a recurring time.

**Adjournment:** Molly moved to adjourn. Peter seconded. All were in favor (5-0-0). Adjourned around 7:30pm

Minutes taken by Molly Parren.