

MINUTES
Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts*
Winter Board Meeting – January 31, 2023
Virtual Meeting

Board members in attendance: Henry Art, Williamstown (Board Chair); Rick Chandler, Ashfield (Vice Chair); Alain Peteroy, Franklin Land Trust (Clerk); Keith Ross, Society of American Foresters (Treasurer); Amy Shapiro, Franklin County CDC; Robert O’Connor, EOEEA; Dicken Crane, Windsor; Doug Brown, BNRC; Elayne Murphy, Hoosic River Watershed Assoc.; Hannah Poplawski, Rowe; Jeffrey Thomas, Lever, Inc.; Joe Nowak, Adams; Kate Lindroos Conlin, Massachusetts Forest Alliance; Larry Flaccus, Shelburne; Marybeth Chichester, FRCOG; Sam Haupt, Peru; Sheila Kelliher, Deerfield River Watershed Assoc.

Board members absent: Alice Houghtaling, Monroe; Art Schwenger, Heath; Jay Healy, Charlemont; Mark Phelps, New Ashford; Paul Catanzaro, UMass; Paul O’Neil, Leyden; Rick Peltier, UMass.

Staff/partners in attendance: Lisa Hayden, NEFF, Woodlands Partnership Administrative Agent; Sophie Argetsinger, NEFF, Woodlands Partnership Assistant, Constance Carpenter, USFS.

Guests: Peter Church, DCR; Jennifer Fish, DCR; Peter Grima, DCR; Brian Rhodes, iBerkshires; Jane Kaufman, Berkshire Eagle.

1. **Call to Order** at 6:02pm by Hank Art. Roll Call of Board Members and Land Acknowledgement.
2. **Review and approval of October 11, 2022 Board Minutes.** L. Flaccus asked for an amendment to the minutes: At the Oct. 11 meeting, he had suggested that the Board should consider adding a seat on the Board for a member of an Indigenous Peoples group. He asked that this comment be added with a note to put the topic on the next Executive Committee Agenda. The minutes were approved with the above amendment by roll call vote, with two abstentions (Doug Brown and Sam Haupt).
3. **MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Presentation. Guest Speakers: Peter Church, Director of Forest Stewardship; Jennifer Fish, Director of Service Forestry Program.**

H. Art introduced the speakers from DCR, noting that it is essential for the Woodlands Partnership to develop a strong working relationship with DCR in order for the Partnership to accomplish its goals.

P. Church gave an overview of the DCR Bureau of Forest Fire Control and Forestry, including its mission, goals, history, and relationship with other organizations, i.e., the USFS and USDA APHIS. The Bureau offers programs to promote, protect, and enhance healthy and diverse wooded and urban forests and seeks to develop a working relationship with people on the landscape through the Forest Action Plan. P. Church spoke briefly about each of the programs in the Bureau, including:

- Forest Fire Control Program, which operates 42 fire towers around the state
- State Public Lands/Management Forestry Program, which plans and implements Forest Stewardship plans on DCR lands and collects and analyzes forest data from ~2,000 CFI plots
- Private Lands/Service Forestry Program
- Urban and Community Forestry Program
- Forest Health Program, which conducts an annual aerial survey of forest damage in the state (he noted Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is now in every town in the state)

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- Forest Marketing and Utilization Program
- Forest Legacy Program; confirmation was just received that the Woodlands Partnership Region is now included in the Program—contact Lyndsey Nystrom for more info. Requests for proposals usually happen in the summer.

J. Fish discussed the Service Forestry Program in more detail, noting the Pete Grima and Alison Wright are the two district foresters in the Partnership region. The program serves regulatory and administrative roles based on the Forest Cutting Practices Act (MGL 132) and the Forest Tax Law Program (MGL c61), provides technical assistance to private landowners, administers the Working Forest Initiative, Forest Stewardship, Foresters for the Birds (bird habitat assessments), and Climate Forestry programs (including resilience and carbon in which forester trainings have begun to be held with the program being piloted in Northwest MA and eventually moving statewide). Management practices to benefit bird species are often similar to those in response to climate change. She shared the example of the Canada warbler, which unlike people, likes the woods to be “messy” for its habitat. Once more foresters have been trained in climate-informed stewardship plans, now being offered to towns and private woodland owners through the Forest Climate Resilience Program, more landowner outreach will be needed. She shared the top concerns from recent landowner surveys which include: 1) keeping land intact, 2) property taxes, 3) insects and disease, 4) invasive plants, 5) climate change (which has not moved into the top 5 concerns).

Service Forestry does outreach that includes public events, Town Forest Celebrations, and the MA Association of Conservation Commission Conference and would welcome ideas for collaboration from the Woodlands Partnership on events and how to reach landowners. She noted that the Woodlands Partnership region has yet to host an Annual Town Forest event and would be open to doing so in the future.

Questions and comments from Board members:

H. Art asked if it’s possible for a landowner to amend a Ch. 61 plan. J. Fish said that you can amend it at any time, but the most cost-effective time to amend is during the plan’s renew period and there is cost share available to upgrade to a stewardship or climate version of the plan.

J. Nowak said he learned from past work in environmental management that forests are complicated. He is very concerned with new pests and pathogens which keep occurring, which is a reason to focus on resilience as much as on carbon.

K. Ross noted that the forestry-related programs that DCR provides are fantastic and easily accessible by landowners in Massachusetts and thanked DCR for this.

E. Murphy asked for a description of Town Forest Events. J. Fish said they are public state-town partnership events designed for towns to showcase their town forest, talk about what’s important to the town and its residents regarding its forests, and usually involve a discussion and woods walk.

R. O’Connor noted that the Virtual Forest Center might be a good opportunity to collaborate with DCR.

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4. **Board officers recruitment update.** H. Art discussed this topic: The election for Chair, Vice Chair, and Treasurer will take place at the Annual Board meeting in the spring. So far, there have been two nominations for the positions of Chair or Vice Chair: Dicken Crane (Windsor) and Art Schwenger (Heath). If any other Board members who are municipal representatives would like to nominate themselves, they should do so soon. A nomination for Treasurer is still needed—this can be a municipal or non-municipal Board member.

5. **Partnership 10-year Plan design posted on website.** L. Hayden noted that the fully designed Plan is now posted on the Woodlands Partnership website. Final corrections for accuracy will be accepted through the end of February. The final Plan will be posted to the Partnership’s new website. Committees should take a look at the Plan to begin thinking about how they can meet the goals in the Plan that are relevant to each Committee.

6. **Legislative Outreach and funding successes.**
 - a. **Legal name change.** H. Art has been in communication with state Rep. Natalie Blais about the Woodlands Partnership’s name change. Staff members of the state and federal legislators have been made aware and are communicating about the needs of the Partnership, including funding issues and a way for the name change to occur without having to disband and reform the Partnership. However, the process may take time, and in the interim, the Partnership will be operating as the “Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts.”

 - b. **Action on Forest Climate Resilience Congressionally Directed Spending proposal.** L. Hayden gave a brief update on the CDS proposal submitted by the Partnership, which was partially approved, for \$540,000. It is unclear whether or not this funding will be limited to the “implementing climate forestry practices on private family woodlands and town forests” part of the proposal, or if the money could be used for other parts of the proposal as well. At application, it appeared that state match would be required for the grant, which could also be used for some of the other actions, including the next generation climate forestry crew, the conservation due diligence grant fund and circuit rider, and the forest climate fellowship.

7. **Upcoming events.**

February 2, 2023: the Education, Outreach, and Research Committee is hosting a webinar entitled “Waste or Resource? A Panel Discussion on Wood Residue.” [Register here.](#)

February 27, 2023: There will be a Virtual Forest Center stakeholder meeting that is open to the public hosted by Mass Audubon to gather information about what information people would find valuable to have access to via the Virtual Forest Center. Contact Lisa Hayden at lhayden@newenglandforestry.org if you would like to attend.

8. **Scheduling the Woodlands Partnership Annual Meeting.** H. Art noted the annual meeting can take place in April, May, or June, and asked if there was any preference from the Board as to when it should take place. J. Thomas said April or May would be better. R. Chandler, S. Haupt, and A. Shapiro said mid-May would be best. The Executive Committee will come up with potential dates for the meeting. R.

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Chandler said he would prefer either an in-person or fully virtual meeting, as it has been hard to hear all speakers during the hybrid meetings. M. Chichester said we should keep an eye on Town Meeting schedules to avoid conflicts.

9. Standing Committee updates.

J. Thomas shared some of the Natural Resource-Based Economic Development Committee's recent discussions of ways that the Woodlands Partnership might measure changes, progress, or successes in the region over time, noting that it is important for the Partnership to embrace some metrics and track them to realize the difference the Partnership is making and to be able to communicate its impact to stakeholders and potential funders. Categories suggested for monitoring by the Committee include economic development, woodland-related jobs, median income, climate change mitigation, education, tourism, public engagement/marketing/social media, and funding. He noted that it will take resources to do this tracking but it's an important task, so five years from now, measurement can occur.

L. Hayden shared some of the items that the Education, Outreach, and Research Committee has been working on, including: two public mid-winter webinars, planning for the new Partnership website, and working on a logo for the Partnership.

Meetings for the Committees that have not met recently will be scheduled for the spring. The Municipal Financial Sustainability Committee is in need of a Chair.

10. **Adjournment.** D. Crane motioned to adjourn the meeting and J. Thomas seconded. H. Art adjourned the meeting at 7:53 p.m.

***On Oct. 11, 2022, the Board of the public body created in 2018 voted unanimously to change its name from the "Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership" in its bylaws to operating as the "Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts" and requested the state legislature and USDA Forest Service to officially establish and recognize the new name.**