

**Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership
Education, Outreach, and Research Standing Committee
Approved Minutes
March 29, 2021**

Members Present: Committee Chair Beth Girshman, Kate Conlin, Joseph Nowak, Rick Peltier
Others: Board Chair Hank Art, Admin. Agent Lisa Hayden, Whit Sanford, Keith Nislow

The meeting began at 3:03 pm followed by Introductions.

Potential MTWP website update/redesign; uses & needs for website

Committee members discussed the MTWP web site and concerns about an oppositional website that is using the same name: is it legal to use our name? There was discussion about whether to send a letter requesting it to be taken down: **recommendation to the board to decide.**

Other ideas for Website updates and re-design:

Keith noted that maybe there is something the Forest Service could do that could help. Lisa said one idea is to create a YouTube channel for videos and meetings. Beth suggested adding current research to the website, following initial clean-up of the website. Beyond that, how do we use it as an educational space? Ideally, other organizations could link to the MTWP website via UMass, a clearinghouse of information, and the MTWP website could link to programs that private landowners can take advantage of, such as Masswoods, etc.

Outreach - social media, press releases, events - where do we want to put energy?

The committee discussed options for an existing Facebook page created by a local resident, Stacy Kontrabecki, who supports the Partnership, such as removing its "unofficial" tag, or making it "official." Beth will reach out to Stacy to discuss.

Ideas for various events were discussed including inviting speakers for different MVP grants to MTWP towns, such as the climate resilience pilot program being designed to complement the Family Forest Carbon program, or someone to talk about carbon sequestration, invasives and forest health education. Rather than reinvent, let's uplift work that is already being done. Press releases about grants communities have received, like Williamstown and Adams could be highlighted with efforts to expand reach to newspapers in Springfield, Albany, New Hampshire.

Communicating with MTWP towns (select boards, town meetings, general outreach)

There was discussion that all Board members should be talking with our towns and approaching community groups such as Bridge of Flowers group, Agricultural Committees and Conservation Commissions, and thinking about preparing press releases for newspapers.

Time for a new brochure to hand out at spring town meetings?

Beth posed the question whether the brochure from 2018 should be updated to improve communications with towns, open space committees, town meetings, etc. Lisa suggested perhaps waiting a bit as the Committees are just getting going. Beth and Hank suggest we should update and get on the website and wait to print when we can join in person again.

6. Committee review of Partnership Plan for updating

Beth reviewed the reminder from Board Chair Hank Art to create a draft mission statement, review 2015 Plan sections pertinent to this committee, identify projects and programs to the Board and one highest priority for 2021, identify research needs and consider linkages to other committees.

Lisa suggested that a future potential use for a website is to get public input for the revised Partnership plan. Others noted it's important to get input as part of the process of updating the plan. A survey could be a precursor to the public input planning process.

Public education should start with FAQ of the Partnership and education and outreach of a visitor center. Tourism, but also education for tourists and locals, and a focus on the facts of climate change, perhaps with collaboration between state and federal agencies, could be key elements of the envisioned Forest Center.

It was noted that there is some confusion and unrealistic goals about available technical assistance and support to local foresters. NEFF did apply for an RCPP grant, yet to be announced and state MVP grants provide some funding in this area.

Keith noted the effects of the pandemic creating pressure on open space, and wondered if evaluating the needs for parking and tourism will need to be considered? Data will likely need to be compiled about Hunting/Fishing licenses, for example, perhaps by surveying outdoor clubs. Outreach should include ways to represent the value of forests on a broad level.

After discussion, the Committee's consensus for a named priority for 2021: Site walks, filmed, and potentially promoted on YouTube. Local cable stations or college students could help in filming. Ideas for themes include promoting forest health, tourism, and forest literacy.

Ideas for Places and People to be highlighted if they are interested:

- Mike Mauri or other consulting forester on land they manage? Linked with naturalist or ecologist
- Eve-Cowles tree farm
- Conway habitat for birds
- Riparian buffers on farms,
- Jay Healy on the board, runs small sawmill
- Dicken Crane, owner of Holiday Brook Farm
- Ziamba farm in Adams
- NEFF properties in region, could host walk, discuss climate change considerations

Future idea: use the model of CISA to create a "local hero" campaign, get funding from larger donors like Kellogg.

Keith, posed the question: what defines this geography? Outreach communications should highlight the geography, provide straightforward summaries of any given threat, for example Emerald Ash Borer, and offer case studies and different avenues to address forest health issues.

Committee members discussed: Could we work with UMass Environmental Conservation students on the video/webinar idea? Rick could provide contact. Hank noted that Williams College's environmental planning and design workshop has pretty much guaranteed that MTWP could have a student project. Other schools such as BCC, GCC, or MCLA students are other potential partners. There was support for spreading the programming around the region, to share the region through educational programming.

Beth reviewed "To Do" items:

- Hank Art wants further review of the 2015 plan. In the next 2-4 weeks, committee members should send revisions and suggestions.
- Mission statement - Beth will draft
- Revised brochure - Whit and Lisa will review with other committee member feedback
- Talk to people about site visit ideas, such as people, places, filming and video

Meeting adjourned at approximately 4 p.m.

-Respectfully submitted by Kate Lindroos Conlin