

MINUTES
Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership
Board Meeting – November 9, 2021

Board members in attendance: Henry Art, Board Chair; Rick Chandler, Vice Chair, Ashfield; Doug McNally, Windsor; Larry Flaccus, Shelburne; Paul O’Neil, Leyden; Zachary Feury, N. Adams; Kate Lindroos Conlin, MFA; Beth Girshman, Conway (for part of the meeting); Ed Munch, Peru; Andrew Kawczak, HRWA; Joe Nowack, Adams; Sheila Keliher, DRWA; Hannah Poplawski, Rowe; Whit Sanford, GSFABA; Art Schwenger, Heath; Jeffrey Thomas, Lever; Emily Johnson, FRCOG; Alain Peteroy, FLT; Robert O’Connor, EOEEA.

Guests: Jon Leibowitz, NEWT; Robert Perschel, NEFF; David Foster, Harvard Forest; Glen Ayers, Janet Sinclair, Miriam Kurland

Board Members Absent: Nicole Pyser, BNRC; Jay Healy, Charlemont; Mark Phelps, New Ashford; Keith Ross, MA SAF; Rick Peltier, UMass Public Health; Paul Catanzaro, UMass; Alice Houghtaling, Monroe; Mark Buccowich, USFS; Keith Nislow, USFS – NRS.

1. The meeting opened at approximately 6 pm via Zoom with Roll Call of Board Members and introductions.
2. Jeffrey Thomas made a motion, and Doug McNally seconded, to approve the minutes from the June 8, 2021 MTWP Board and Annual meeting. The motion passed unanimously with Paul O’Neil and Beth Girshman abstaining.
3. Admin. Agent Lisa Hayden introduced speakers for the **guest presentation: “Say Yes to Wildlands and Forestry.”** Jon Leibowitz, Ex. Dir. of Northeast Wilderness Trust and Robert Perschel, Exec. Dir. of New England Forestry Foundation, each spoke about their organization’s mission, but also explained the importance of having both wild and sustainably managed forests as part of the landscape. Both serve on the Steering Committee of the Wildlands & Woodlands Vision for conserving 70% of New England as forests.

Perschel noted the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity and focused on NEFF’s Exemplary Forestry standards, which support habitat for umbrella wildlife species, as an example of how adopting improved forestry standards can substantially contribute to reduced emissions, while continuing to provide wood and building materials that also store carbon in products used by society. NEFF has found in studying some of its oldest community forest properties, which are periodically harvested under the long-term advice of a forester, that after 30 years, both more wood can be produced, and a large amount of carbon can be sequestered and stored by growing larger trees that more fully stock the site, while also benefitting certain wildlife species.

Leibowitz noted that practically all of New England has been cut over at one point in its history, and that the concept of wilderness is not about preserving pristine landscapes. About a quarter of New England is conserved, mostly as managed woodlands, and with only about 3 percent conserved as “forever wild,” or untrammled land where trees grow old and die on their own evolutionary time scale, and logging, roads and motorized/mechanized recreation are not allowed. NEWT has a Wildlands Partnership in which they work with land trusts to expand more wilderness conservation to increase that percentage in

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the Northeast. He explained that there is no minimum acreage size required for “wild” conservation, but rather the context is what counts. In summarizing, he said the bottom line is that New England needs both wildlands and woodlands, and we can do both kinds of conservation better if we’re working together.

4. **Dec. Oak Resiliency Virtual Workshop:** Beth Girshman, Chair of Education, Outreach & Research Standing Committee had to depart for a class, so Lisa Hayden reported on plans for the upcoming Oaks webinar, now re-scheduled via Zoom for Saturday, Dec. 11 from 10 am to noon. Speakers will include Desiree Narango, oaks and biodiversity researcher from UMass, and a speaker from the Forest Stewards Guild. Publicity will be released soon, as Beth, Kate Conlin and Lisa Hayden are working on a press release and calendar announcement to be sent to local media, posted on the web site, and circulated among conservation partner organizations and professionals to include in their Events listings.

5. **Administrative Agent Report** – (grants for town forest stewardship plans & riparian tree-planting; assistant role, upcoming meetings): Lisa Hayden gave an update on a new, three-year \$60,000 USFS grant awarded to NEFF on behalf of the MTWP that began in September, focused on the need for a study of a range of riparian buffer restoration scenarios in the Deerfield and Hoosic watersheds, and the planting (with volunteer help) of a minimum of 150 trees in at least four restoration sites identified as high priorities. A 1-year EOOEA state grant will provide match and includes an initial pilot tree-planting site to be identified by a Conway School of Landscape Design study this winter, as well as funding for climate resilience planning in four town-owned forests within the MTWP.

Lisa also reported that NEFF is recruiting for a part-time assistant role to support the Partnership with meeting postings and other administrative and communications support. Following an Oct. meeting of the Ex. Com. with Rep. Blais, another meeting Ex. Com. meeting has been scheduled with Sen. Comerford on Dec. 10, as they attempt to reach out to local lawmakers about MTWP goals.

6. **Update on Forest Center Vision** – A team of two Williams College students are conducting a stakeholder survey as part of a needs assessment project to help identify priority uses of the MTWP Forest Center idea. A link to the survey is on the MTWP web site and Board members have been invited to participate. The student report is due in Dec. and there will be a presentation of their findings, likely via Zoom.

7. **Standing Committee Reports - Mission Statements & priority setting in light of MTWP Plan Update:** Lisa Hayden gave a brief presentation summarizing the elements of a revised Plan for the next 10 years as required by the state statute creating the MTWP. Chair Hank Art asked each Committee Chair to give a brief update on their Committee’s work and discussions this year. Summary sheets provided by Whit Sanford can help to track Committee missions and the work to identify “programmatic vision,” and a small number of high-priority projects to pursue first. Hank Art thanked Whit for helping to focus and provide an early draft of the introductory sections of the updated Plan.

- a. Forest Land Conservation – Chair Kate Conlin reported on a goal to create a fund that would support conservation transaction costs such as appraisal or due diligence. In order to

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address funding needs, one idea is for a specialty license plate that could help fund the MTWP and its conservation goals (design would need to be paid for) and people would need to commit to buy a certain number before the state would allow production and use of them. In concert with the Outreach Com., FC has also identified a high priority for an updated web site and the need to increase social media presence to counter mis-information and raise the MTWP identity, and host more educational events with local landowners about their stewardship.

The Committee adopted a mission statement in Oct.: “Conserve forestland to protect the region’s rural character, forest-based economy, climate resilience, and ecological benefits through funding and planning.”

MTWP Project Goals (from the 2015 MTWP plan):

- Conserve forest land in private ownership to protect the region’s rural character and ecological resources and to support forest based economic development
- Increase funding for flexible Conservation Restrictions for private landowners for sustainable forestry, habitat protection, and/or passive recreation
- Conserve forests for the ecological services they provide including water quality protection, flood control, air quality improvement, carbon sequestration, and habitat protection

b. Finance & Budgeting – Chair Keith Ross reported that the Committee began talking about a Chart of Accounts for the MTWP, and wants to begin drafting a standardized budget. Having a plan is a way to outline many small pots of money that are needed, as larger support on the order of \$30 million for the Trust Fund established in the legislation can be generated. Whit Sanford has asked the Committees to work on sharing their key projects for the coming year, so that appropriate fundraising opportunities can be identified. A bank account will follow, once the Partnership has any funds to directly manage.

c. Natural Resource-based Economic Development – Chair Andrew Kawczak reported on the Committee’s discussions, and information gathering from several speakers. He shared a list of three main categories for projects that could be evaluated and assessed for: usefulness, market forces/prices, transportation/energy/manufacturing costs, environmental/safety issues, sustainability, employment value, funding and finally - MTWP and community acceptance. The list includes:

Tourism/Recreation related

- Mountain biking –trails, events?
- Demonstration forest w/educational out-reach?
- Glamping? (i.e., glamour camping)
- Full service (e.g., sewer, electricity, water) RV/trailer camping?

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Sustainable Forestry and Wood Products related

- Supporting existing sawmills and forest products businesses in the region
 - (e.g., regional wood products marketing program, possibly through a cooperative)
- Protecting and/or promoting rural jobs among foresters, loggers and sawmill operators
Creating or Piloting a forest management viability program the next NRED Committee will be held Dec. 13 or 15 at 3:30 p.m. Sheila suggested adding fishing as an important regional activity.

Waste wood related, (primarily via municipal)

- Fuel – after wood debris re-sizing?
- Wood Mulch? / Animal Bedding?
- Oriented Strand Board (OSB) (low quality plywood) raw stock/ production?
- Raw stock/production for engineered laminated beams?
- Small wood items (e.g., dowels, stakes, etc.)?
* Note: Per Bill Moomaw – Current fiber for disposable paper is now coming from boreal forest that are hundreds of years old and their harvest is releasing large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, especially from soils.

d. Education, Outreach, Research – Chair Beth Girshman could not stay for the full meeting, so, Lisa Hayden reported for the Committee. The Committee’s Mission and Goals are below:

MISSION: The Education, Outreach, and Research sub-committee aims to increase awareness of the complexities and benefits of forest management through readily-available education, accessible resources, and the promotion of relevant research. We support towns, private landowners, and forest-based businesses by providing access to available funds and programs.

GOALS:

- ***Provide education about the benefits of forests and forest management, through demonstration forests, public programs, and updated website***
- ***Increase connections for private landowners and local professional foresters to technical assistance and funding for climate change resiliency, which will improve forest management practices while addressing threats to forest ecosystems, habitat, and local resources***

Other ideas include local forest walks at decentralized demonstration forests or local woodland owners’ land. Bob O’Connor also noted that a successful Grants for Good webinar was hosted in Sept., attended by about 25-30 people, in which towns and regional projects that received MTWP grants for trails, climate resilience and other goals reported on their progress. In the

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chat, Emily Johnson asked whether bridging the research-practice divide might be listed in the EOR priorities.

e. Municipal Financial Sustainability – Ed Munch volunteered to take on Chairing the Committee in August. He reported that at the first meeting in Sept., the Committee discussed the recent state Auditor’s report on problems with the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program. He said a combination of state-owned land and private conservation is “killing” small towns because of the land taken out of the tax base. For example, his town Peru has 7700 acres of state land, about 45% of the town and the PILOT funds are inadequate. The Committee recommended to the Ex. Com. the need to advocate for change to the formula to eliminate inequities to rural towns, which the Ex. Com. also endorsed at their Sept. meeting. There was discussion about how the current formula results in more distressed, rural towns getting a lower rate. Doug McNally noted there are two problems – not enough money in the pot, and the formula is not distributed fairly. Keith Ross noted that E. MA should be paying a carbon tax to W. MA for the fresh air and clean water provided by forests. He noted that conservation provides return in ecosystem services and that housing development usually results in more town costs in roads, schools and other services. There was disagreement between Ed and Keith about Ch. 61 reductions in taxes for open land. Hank Art suggested that the cost of community services, PILOT and related tax base issues could be the subject of a future meeting discussion.

8. **Public Comment** – Glen Ayers spoke, thanking for the presentations, particularly the NEWT perspective. He mentioned new state regulations for a renewable portfolio standard and biomass in which clean energy subsidies from ratepayers are going to Maine and N.H., which he views as unacceptable, when it could be sent to W. MA.

9. Any topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of the meeting: Jeffrey Thomas announced that Lever is conducting another Entrepreneur Challenge, this time focused on forest-based and sustainable wood entrepreneurs, which operate, or the founder resides, in the MTWP. The application deadline is Nov. 19 and there will be an April 27, 2022 pitch event at Foolhardy Hill Campground in Charlemont, winners of the last Challenge. Hank Art also noted that the next Board meeting is planned for March 15, by when the bare bones of the updated Plan should be ready to discuss.

10. Keith Ross moved to adjourn, and Ed Munch seconded, and the meeting ended shortly after 8 p.m.