

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 20, 2023, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

Regular (voting) members: **Jon Campbell**, **Dale Chayes**, Zanna Gruber (Vice-Chair), **Aaron Moore** (Chair), **Bruce Rachman**, **John Watlington**, **Joe Will** (Minutes), Tom Wolf

Associate (nonvoting) members: **Ken Appel**, Josh Haines, **Rebecca Harvey**, Everett Kenerson, Gary Kilpatrick, **Mel Lima**, Bob Mackin, **Adam Nolde**, Hilary Reid, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, **Steve Trimble**, Todd Tsakiris

Others: **Bettina Abe** (Acton Conservation), **Mike Gendron** (Acton Conservation Agent), **Alissa Nicol** (Select Board Liaison), **Bob Walton** (Acton resident)

Aaron opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Review and acceptance of May 16 minutes

Susan Mitchell-Hardt sent a correction that the Stonefield Farm Agricultural Preservation Restriction is co-held by Acton's Agricultural Commission and the Sudbury Valley Trustees, both of whom will be responsible for stewardship tasks. The minutes were accepted as corrected.

Concerns from the public

Per Joe, the latest information from the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail is that Phase 2 (including the Route 2 bridge) will have its formal opening June 30, site yet to be determined. (Clerk's note: The formal opening was later indefinitely postponed although Phase 2 is now open.)

Chair, Vice-Chair, Clerk election

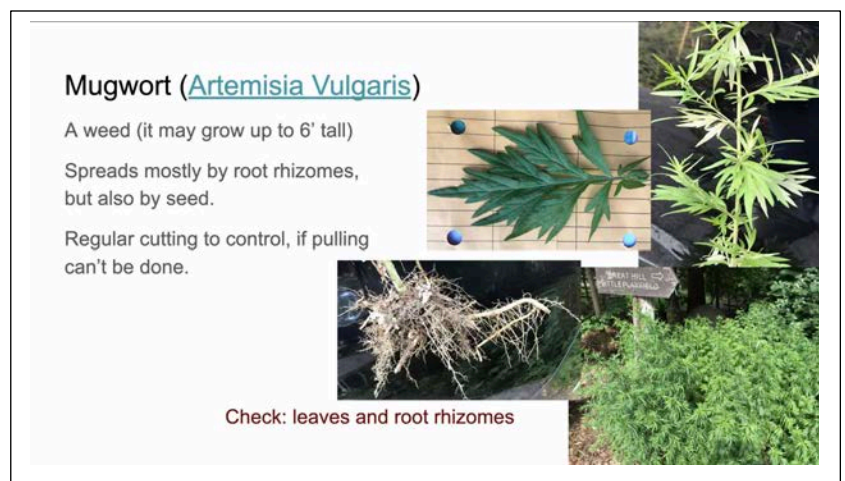
Message to new members, you can nominate yourself. Also, the Vice-Chair is a great "starter" position. One Vice-Chair responsibility is to take over for the Chair when the Chair is absent. Nominated without opposition and voted unanimously by roll call: Aaron for Chair, Jon for Vice-Chair (caveat: can only be present by phone for September, October, November, March, April, May meetings), and Joe for Clerk.

Invasive plants 2023, Part 4

While John talked about multiflora rose at the April meeting (see April minutes), he points out that it's now blooming anywhere it's more than a year old. It should have white flowers on it — a good way to spot it even though there are many other plants with white flowers.

This month's invasive is **mugwort**.

It's a weed but it can grow up to 6 ft tall. An annoying trait is that it spreads by root rhizomes — a good picture of a cluster of these is at the right. If you just cut the plant, it will come back . . . and spread. The best way to control it is to pull it, trying to pull up the rhizomes as well. It is definitely worth trying to eliminate, particularly if there are only small patches of it.



Japanese barberry is a low bush that usually is about 2-3 ft tall, although there are some 10-ft tall “trees” of it along the edge of the Grassy Pond meadow. It has very pretty red berries later in the year. It spreads mostly by seed. If any of the stems get buried, they will grow another plant so if you find one, you often will find satellite plants attached via buried stems. It is relatively easy to eliminate as the root is not deeply embedded. If you can’t get the root out, it will go away rather easily in just one or two cuttings.

Japanese Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)

A low bush (although it may grow up to 8' tall)

Spreads mostly by seed, but also by buried stems.

Regrows from buried stems.

Repeated cuttings at ground level and/or pulling of roots required to kill.



Check: yellow root and stem wood, straight thorns

Japanese barberry has a very thin, straight, and nasty, thorn. It can break off inside your skin and fester. The other big check is that it has a bright yellow root. Seeing such a root when you break the plant at its base or at a root will indicate that you’ve got Japanese barberry.

Observations:

- Japanese barberry is “all over” Pacy in the understory on the Central Street side. We should try to do something about this as it is relatively easy to get rid of.
- Is there a native barberry that we must worry about? There is an American barberry against which the U.S. Department of Agriculture waged war in the 1940s because it harbored whatever it was that caused wheat rust. The USDA encouraged the Japanese barberry in its stead. As best John knows, there is no American barberry in this area.
- Mugwort is all over the Arboretum. It has some redeeming values. You can cut it, dry it, and make a sachet with it. It smells good to some people, but like Mr. Clean to others. To some, it has anti-inflammatory properties. Apply mugwort against an ache or pain and it might help you feel better.
- To eliminate mugwort, you can weed whack it when it’s young. Also, you can put down cardboard with mulch on top, but if there are any cracks in the cardboard, the mugwort will come up.

Acton Nature Guide (<https://www.actonpip.org/events/nature-walks>)

In 2002, Karen Herther, a Troop 32 mom, organized the Acton Parent Involvement Project (PIP). In 2006, Acton PIP became Acton-Boxborough PIP STEM (STEM = Science Technology Engineering Math). The A-B PIP STEM (<https://www.actonpip.org/home>) promotes different types of STEM activities, including the development of a “really cool” brochure, the Acton Nature Guide. The latest version, laminated, with development help from Bettina and Tom Tidman, and including information on invasive plants, can be borrowed from either Acton library, or you can buy it (\$10) at Kitchen Outfitters, the Silver Unicorn Bookstore, or Pedal Power.

Trail maintenance

John points out, particularly for the new stewards, that stewards are requested to maintain the trails by cutting back vegetation if a trail is too narrow, or by blocking off part of a trail that has gotten too wide. Generally, trail width is kept at about 4 ft, sometimes 3 ft if rocks, trees, etc., force it. Trails can widen, generally because of human foot traffic, or they can



narrow due to vegetation. In places where you would like to see regrowth to narrow a trail, you can spread leafy debris and dead wood that it is hard to move out of the way. You would start to see regrowth in about a year. At this time of year, a trail bordered by certain berry bushes could use trimming every week or two to widen them. Also, stewards should try to avoid a trail “splitting”, maintaining a single trail as much as possible.

Observation:

– Sometimes making a narrow trail wider changes the nature of the trail, and it’s possible the people that walk such a trail wouldn’t like that. Example: The Spring Hill red trail in from Jay Lane. John points out that if one does cut it wider, then it doesn’t have to be cut as often. Also, if it’s invasive plants that are closing off a trail, then it’s a “no brainer” that they should be removed. It does change the nature of the trail, but usually for the better. If it’s native plants, sometimes the trail could be moved a little bit to avoid trimming the plants.

Other parcel issues

– Morrison Farm

North of the barn, the dilapidated shed with the corrugated roof that rattles in the wind has been removed. Also, the blackberry bushes northeast of the gardens are heavily in bloom — that’s John’s work. Do we know if there are plans to remove the building that’s falling down in the paddock? No, we know of no such plans. It’s really degenerated in the past year and John is considering marking it off with yellow tape so no one walks into it. This concern should be taken to Corey York. Also, a sign posted by John to discourage dumping of waste food seems to have worked.

– Camp Acton

Mike Gendron is in the process of getting three quotes for repair of the access road.

– Pratts Brook

The kiosk at the Brewster Lane kiosk needs a new map.

– Bulette

Rebecca found some Japanese knotweed and wondered whether there is a spreadsheet that tracks it and other invasives. John is aware of what seems to be the same patch of Japanese knotweed and thinks it may be relatively easy to access with a truck in order to smother it with wood chips (and a tarp). Jim Snyder-Grant has set up and maintains a spreadsheet for tracking only garlic mustard. A discussion ensued about setting up an invasives spreadsheet. Bob does have a spreadsheet that covers Spring Hill, Nashoba Brook, some of Great Hill, Guggins Brook, some of Camp Acton. Bob will send it to Bruce (copying Mike Gendron) who will make it available online for anyone.

Updates

– 549 Main Street: Still working on drafting the Conservation Restriction (CR).

– Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP): Mike Gendron has been looking at the goals and has been separating out those that he would like the LSC to consider. One is to manage control of invasive plants. A second is to develop and expand trail networks. A third is for improved access to and use of managed conservation lands. A fourth is protection of open fields, meadows, and agricultural lands. Mike would like the LSC to suggest some tasks that could be listed under those topics. He will send an email reminder to the LSC for stewards to bring their ideas to the July meeting.

– Morrison Farm CR: No real updates. Two historical groups are looking for ways to make a section of Concord Road into an historic district that would provide protection for the farm buildings, so a Morrison Farm CR could be just for the land.

– Bridges, Board/Bogwalks, Maps, Mowing, Chain sawing, Website:

Maps: Bettina cited a Great Hill map (the “You are Here” map) that does not include the Piper Lane parcel as part of Great Hill. Bettina will talk to IT about making a current Great Hill map that will include the Piper Lane parcel and the trail on it that John flagged a long time ago. Jon walked that trail recently and observed that it seems to be not getting any use. Bettina is about done with a sign for the entrance to that trail. We’ll have to get Jody Harris to blaze it, and John will try to keep it a little clearer.

Per Bob: The Pipsissewa Trail is not on the North Acton Trails map, and there was a hiker who got confused when he thought he was turning onto Nashoba Brook’s main trail but ended up at the Quarry Stone. Bettina is working with IT on the North Acton Trails map.

Bettina and IT are also working on a Bulette map that includes the Anderson land and a little bit of Grassy Pond just to show its proximity. Bettina also noted that there is a new bridge at Bulette.

Re the Heath Hen Meadow bridge/boardwalk: There have been three visits so far this year. The first was essentially for reconnaissance, planning, and preliminary demolition. The second for mainly more demolition. The third with Ken, Steve, Jon, and Bettina was a long day with significant bridge work that Bettina reviewed in detail, as well as sharing some work that’s planned for the next workday.

This Thursday, Ken, Steve, Bettina, and a couple of young men are planning to jack up the observation platform in the Assabet River off the Assabet River Blue and Green Trail. A discussion ensued as to how they will proceed with Bruce suggesting the use of a post sledge.

Sawyer activity as reflected on the sawyers’ spreadsheet (that tracks sawyers’ tasks) seems to have been minimal of late. Both Bruce and John, who manage the spreadsheet with Dale, have had other priorities recently, but have resumed giving the spreadsheet due attention. It is necessary to make sure all new sawyers are on the sawyers’ email shell and that the spreadsheet gets publicized. Adam cannot yet be on the sawyers’ shell as he has not received town-approved training. Bettina will let Adam know when such training is available.

– LSC membership, Mission Statement:

The Acton Select Board approved the LSC Mission Statement that allows for non-Acton residents to be on the Committee and also admits Associate members for three-year terms after they have served their initial one-year term.

– Other:

Bettina shared a sign that will be placed at the Assabet River Rail Trail entrance to the Stonefield Farm 0.23 mi loop trail.

Next month’s (07/18/23) agenda

OSRP feedback for Mike.

Evaluate meeting

Whoo hoo! Under an hour. Good job! To get more persons to attend the next meeting in person, Bruce will make (and bring) brownies.

Adjournment

At 7:57 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, July 18, at 7 p.m.