

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 17, 2024, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

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

Associate (nonvoting) members: Stuart Amir-Lin, **Ken Appel**, Josh Haines, **Jody Harris**, Rebecca Harvey, Everett Kenerson, Mel Lima, Bob Mackin, **Adam Nolde**, David Pinsky, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris, **Bob Walton**

Others: **Ian Bergemann** (Community Conservation Specialist)

Tom opened the meeting at 7 p.m.

Review & acceptance of July 16 and August 20 Minutes

July minutes are not ready yet. Three corrections to the August minutes: 1) Include the size (1/2" x 3") of the carriage bolts in Bob's inventory of fasteners in the shed; 2) We should be thinking of chainsaw training "anytime" rather than just next spring; 3) The ACT asked that there be more information on the Conservation Restrictions for the Anderson Land and Great Hill (Piper Lane). The August minutes were accepted as amended.

Election (Vice Chair) for the coming year

That Jon be Vice Chair was moved (Bettina), seconded (Dale), and voted unanimously by roll call.

Concerns from the public

None.

Invasive plants, September 2024

Japanese knotweed — John presented from the Acton Invasives Wiki Japanese knotweed page:

http://ec2-44-218-8-154.compute-1.amazonaws.com/aiw/index.php?title=Japanese_Knotweed

Japanese knotweed has been taking over the sides of our interstates and other roads — any place where it's ignored. It almost looks like bamboo. It has notches on the stem and a very hollow stem going up. The leaves look like eastern redbud leaves, but eastern redbud grows on a wood stem and tends to have multiple stems whereas Japanese knotweed generally has one big stem and then branches out into leaves. Japanese knotweed is extremely difficult to eliminate, having very deep roots. John described his and Jim Snyder-Grant's efforts to eliminate two patches in Acton, John's at Little Great Hill (efforts beginning in 2008), Jim's in the Wetherbee parcel (2006). Jim tried an herbicide (with all necessary permissions). John is currently in the middle of a five-year effort using a cover of wood chips and plastic.

John urges stewards who find Japanese knotweed growing anywhere in their parcel to let him and Bob (and the LSC) know.

Bob told of a New Hampshire Department of Agriculture paper that said that until Japanese knotweed flowers in August, its nutrients only flow up from the roots to the stems. After flowering they flow the other direction with the consequence that you can't really use herbicides before flowering to get rid of it. (John surmised that that may be why Jim's effort in Wetherbee did not work as Jim applied herbicides early in the summer.) Bob also told of cutting a growth at Wills Hole "to the ground" towards the end of July (just

before flowering time) and a recent check showed almost no regrowth. Bob believes it will be back next year.

Per John, there's also a patch in the Discovery Museum parking lot that's starting to spread into Great Hill.

Bob will prepare some posters for Ian's approval for posting. The posters will ask for volunteers to work on invasives in the southern part of Nashoba Brook Conservation Land.

Ian's Trails Tales

None tonight.

Ian's updates

– Scoutland: Ian is still trying to get in touch with Bill Klauer, Scoutland Trustee.

– Spring Hill boardwalk/bridge: The materials are ready. Bob believes he can proceed with the project with help "here and there". He could use someone to work a short while with him at the shed preparing the wood. He would need a truck to take the 8-ft pieces to Briar Hill Road; then a couple of strong folks with a hand cart at the site to move some heavy rocks. He would then put in the sills and stringers with whomever wants to help (targeting this work to be done by the end of October), leaving only the treads to put installed, and for that there could be a volunteer workday in November.

Ian will meet with Bob to discuss this further, to possibly set up a time to meet at the Morrison shed to cut the wood. Then Ian could deliver it to the site. Possible volunteer help could also come from Scouts, or Groton School students (Ian will check with the school contact, Lizzie, whether timing and tasks will work). John can help with some of the (wood and rocks) transport tasks.

– Pratts Brook bridge: The Conservation Commission has approved its replacement. Ian showed a picture of the bridge in its current state and shared this image of what it will look like when rebuilt:

Ian told of his efforts to find utility poles for the bridge. He would like them to be pressure treated. Cons Comm put no conditions on the poles because they will not be touching the ground.

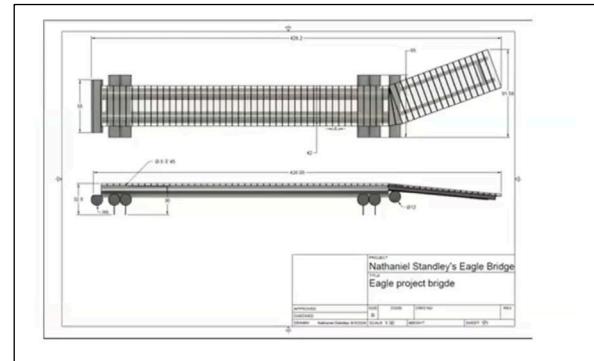
Ian will send stewards work-date possibilities, determine what dates will work for a good number of volunteers, and then target a workday to deconstruct the existing bridge.

This will require a lot of volunteer time and obviously some chainsaw work.

The scout doing this project is still fundraising. Ian told him that when that is done, to have his crew get the materials and start fabricating whatever they can easily move to the site. We would be aiming for no more than a one- or two-day trail closure. The water in the stream is significantly lower than normal so the timeframe is looking good for this project.

Adam pointed out that he has closed the red access trail that goes into Pratts Brook from his Broadview Street driveway. However, when the LSC is working on this project, it has "full permission" to use his property (even if he is not home), open the trail, and use it to access the site.

– Meadow mowing: It has begun. Anthem Village (not a Land Steward's parcel) will be done by the Town (Sam Bell) — an agreement between Village and Town. Shawn O'Malley (DPW) is responsible for the four Arboretum meadows. Shawn has finished mowing at Grassy Pond and Great Hill (a "great job" pushing back the edges — John). Half Moon Hill (not a Land Steward's parcel) will be mowed this week or next. Mowing at Heath Hen Meadow is done or is imminent. Jenks and Knowlton (not a Land Steward's



parcel) will be mowed by Sam. Shawn has finished with Morrison Farm's three meadows (another "great job" — John). At Nagog Hill, the DPW mowed the east half of the meadow that it's responsible for (Ian will check with the DPW about the west half) and Sam will do the two larger meadows. Stoneymeade and Wright Hill will be done by Shawn.

Questions:

Any clue about when Sam is going to mow? Ian: He has indicated mid to late October.

Didn't the Town get a second brush hog? Ian: Mike Gendron was in the process of getting one. Will have to check if that happened,

– Other: Ian has been promoted by the Town to "Community Conservation Specialist". He will continue with the Land Stewards, and he is "now officially the Land Manager for the conservation lands, so (he) can stop beating around the bush when (he has) to give permission. (He) also will be heading environmental education for the Town." There also might be more involvement for Ian with the Community Gardens. Since he now can give permission for things to happen on conservation lands, Ian plans to track permissions for activities and summarize them at the end of the year.

– Other: John expressed concern that "... the Town's IT department is not really in favor of us getting a wiki" to support LSC efforts in dealing with invasives. Ian explained the Town's situation, and the ensuing conversation became technical to the point where Bob moved:

The LSC establish a subcommittee that includes John, Bob, Ian, and Jim Snyder-Grant to deal with web-based documentation of the LSC's work with invasive species.

Ensuing discussion points:

Dale: This seems more appropriately to be something like an ad hoc working group, not a long-term subcommittee.

Tom: So the purpose of forming the subcommittee is so a few people can get together and meet about the issue without having to worry about open meeting law?

John: Right, and the subcommittee doesn't take any actions. It reports back to the LSC in an open meeting where it can then be refuted, or any member of the public can comment on it.

Bettina: Paraphrasing the Rolling Stones, you might not get everything you want. But if you try really hard and work with Ian (and Google Docs), you're going to get what you need.

The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

– Other: There is no new information on a trail system at 549 Main Street. The Acton Water District (AWD) lost a staff member a short while ago, and it is focused on developing a new well at the site, so it probably isn't worrying about a trail system yet. Ian expects to hear from the AWD on the matter.

Parcel issues

Anderson: Jody reported a tree down, having sent the sawyers a note yesterday. (It's on the sawyers' list.) To find the tree, park in the Church of the Good Shepherd parking lot, cross Arlington Street, and it's on the red trail very soon after entering the parcel. It's not a big tree, but there are a lot of pieces, and it's across the trail. Jody will help clear the debris if the sawyer can give her a time.

Camp Acton: Campers come at the middle or end of October, so now is a good time to clean up the tree debris near the pipeline. Two possible actions: 1) Borrow a splitter (Bruce), "log" the wood and leave it and a sign, "Take me and burn me at the campsite." 2) Cut it into big chunks and use a tractor (Dale) with forks to stack the wood "off to the side". Bruce and Dale will coordinate what to do offline.

Also, this Saturday Bruce will help Sam Beebe of a Lexington Scout troop assemble picnic tables that Sam is building on site. Sam is corresponding with Acton Recreation on this.

Also, has the Town sprayed the poison ivy in the parking lot, particularly surrounding the porta potty? Not so far. Ian will check with DPW. If not, Bob might give a try at clearing it

Nagog Hill: Dale would like to go around the edges of the meadows (the large meadow has priority) with his flail mower and forks to clean up the edges before Sam Bell mows to give Sam a comfort level to get out closer to the edge than he normally would. Dale doing it by himself “is a drag” so he will email the stewards to see if anyone wants to help. Whereas the hard part with mowing may be getting the large pieces of wood out of the meadow and over the wall, John wonders whether cutting wood into 6-ft lengths would be helpful. Yes! In fact, in a small Nagog meadow that Shawn had mowed, Dale found a bunch of tree debris that needs to get cut up and boosted into the woods. There was a Girl Scout troop at Nagog this past weekend and they cleared a large part of a stone wall.

General: Steve Trimble, former LSC member, viewed benches in New Hampshire like the one pictured at the right and wanted to know if he could make them for placing in conservation lands. They are called Aldo Leopold benches. They are relatively inexpensive, but it is unclear as to who would buy the materials. For Acton’s Open Space and Recreation Plan there was talk of conservation lands having benches within a half mile of trail heads for folks who need to take a break. Discussion points:

- That’s a step stool.
- If Steve is going to buy the materials, make the benches for free and donate them, we can try them some places and see what happens to them.
- At some point the bench becomes trash and we’re going to have to haul it away.
- I don’t think it’s a good idea. We have a bench-donation program that was hammered out and approved by the committee and is listed online.
- This looks “really tipsy”. If somebody with a disability would think that they could safely sit on it, they could go over backwards. It doesn’t have any handrails so there’s no ease of getting up and down. There’s no concrete pad underneath, so you will get weeds growing up all over.
- In talk about benches for the Red House grounds next door to Town Hall, a member of the public specifically said, “I need benches with arm rails so I can get up.” This is exactly why this type of bench will not be part of the Red House landscape.
- Raccoons will tip over this bench.
- if Steve wants to build them and put them somewhere, how about around the campfires in Camp Acton? What they have now are stumps. There used to be little benches — very primitive. They all eventually rotted and were burned. That’s what would happen to these eventually, maybe sooner than later — sooner if made of non-pressure-treated lumber.
- If they look like they’re going to tip over, you should change the design. Perhaps they should be anchored into the ground.
- If you put them in the accessible campsite, someone could get hurt, thinking that they’ve been approved to be there for folks with disabilities, and they haven’t.



Ian will let Steve know that the Aldo Leopold bench is not the resource we're looking for on the trails. The bench (if free) could work at Camp Acton, but we won't really maintain them, nor should they be placed at the accessible campsite. Also, Recreation may want to respond to Steve about this.

General: If any trail parking lots are not in good condition, let Ian know. He is going to keep track of this as occasionally the DPW has some downtime. It is going to fill in a pothole at Morrison Farm that John has pointed out, and it did a good job improving the trail into Jenks. The Nagog Hill parking lot is starting to get a little patchy in spots, so Ian might direct the DPW there.

Updates

- Website: Needs updating, change “Spring” to “Fall” for Wednesday Walks.
- Blazing: At Great Hill, Jody can blaze the Piper Road trail (Ian can help) as it will not be relocated.
- Shed: John is waiting for a good date to move the trash out of the shed area (low priority). It should be soon now that Ian has more frequent truck access. Also, the loppers are in the truck right now. Ian should be able to return them to the shed tomorrow, including some donated loppers that are in “really good condition.”

In the shed are some 12-inches long, half-inch diameter carriage bolts that we use for putting railings on bridges. Given that stewards can use them, Bob will put them on his shed inventory list. The inventory list does not show quantity, only the presence of items. It tells you whether you should look in the shed for an item before you buy more. Still to be determined is where to keep the inventory list (presently in a Google Doc with Ian) so that all stewards can access and edit it.

– Sawyers: Per Dale, “The perennial pitch for more sawyer training. Let's not wait until next Spring if we don't have to.” Ian will watch for sawyer training being offered in other (not too distant) towns. John notes that the Appalachian Trail Club requires its sawyers to be trained within the last three years (CPR and First Aid upgrade in the last two years), so training should be a regular, ongoing practice — something to which LSC sawyers should aspire. Dale can run a CPR/First Aid class, if wanted.

Announcements and miscellany from Ian

- Water Chestnut Pull: Saturday, September 28, 9 am to noon, Ice House Pond. About 22 people have already signed up. Acton TV will be there.
- “Plantathon” of more than 100 native plants: September 30 to October 4, 9 am to 11 am each day at the Red House next to Town Hall. Interested folks should email Ian.

Related to the above: There are grants available from U.S. Fish and Wildlife to do habitat restoration on conservation lands. Ian will share information with the LSC on any such grants that he comes across.

Ian is working now with AB STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) at the high school to do a trail-like StoryWalk (based on a star-related poetry book, “Stars for Starters: A Night Sky Poetry Guide”) in Wills Hole/Town Forest. The target is to accompany the ACT “Astronomy in the Park” event November 6 at NARA.

For October, Ian is designing a poetry walk for one of our conservation lands. He also plans to create a “kind of monster walk” that would be about the different Massachusetts urban legends. He will keep the appropriate land stewards informed.

Ian will collaborate with any steward who has an idea for a project or educational material for their parcel. Let him know. He plans to send an email asking for stewards' availability to find overlaps with his availability.

One project for Ian: Helping install the caps on the Heath Hen Meadow boardwalk/bridge. The work might require two or three visits of about an hour each, but there is no urgency.

Ian may send out a November request for help to raise and fix Grassy Pond's lopsided boardwalks. If anyone knows of someone who may be willing to join Acton's Agricultural Commission, let Ian know their name, or give them Ian's e-address..

Next month's (10/15/24) agenda

- Geocaches that currently exist.
- A report from the Web-based Invasives Documentation Subcommittee

Evaluate meeting

Totally stellar.

Adjournment

At 8:12 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, October 15, at 7 p.m.