

**Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 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 (with brownies, milk and eggnog) at 7 p.m.

Review & acceptance of September 17 and October 15 Minutes

Accepted as presented.

Concerns from the public

None.

Invasive plants, December 2024

Winter is upon us. Pulling and cutting of invasive plants has slowed down. John expects to start prepping people for next year in January.

Spring Hill boardwalk

Bob shared pictures of the completed boardwalk (shown at right); also, commentary on steps taken for its completion.



Boardwalk design

The current LSC “Boardwalk Construction Guidelines” (BCG), last updated by Bob Guba in 2016 and found here:

<https://trails.actonma.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BoardwalkDesign.pdf>

needs updating or replacement. There was discussion about current contents of the BCG, construction issues that have come to light, and how to proceed with revising the LSC Guide.

Possibilities:

- Consider various issues in upcoming meetings and, when there is “enough material”, consider how to proceed to construct a new Guide.
- Update the BCG itself, considering various issues in upcoming meetings.
- Adopt an existing Guide such as that of the Appalachian Mountain Club or the U.S. Forest Service (which the LSC has used in the past for bridge design). There likely are others.

Bob will “take it as a mission” to research existing guides and post links re same. He will build a web page that will display the results of his research, and eventually lead to a new Guide.

Trail markings

Tom would like everyone to consider trail markings as a “theme” for the next couple of winter months. As you walk your parcels, look closely at the trail markings to see how they could be improved, keeping a mindset of a first-time visitor to the parcel. He listed trail markings with which most stewards should be familiar: blazes, arrows, tags (as on the Bay Circuit Trail), map boards, and simply, signs (e.g., identifying a Conservation Land).

He also offered the check list shown here:

Discussion points:

- Walk a trail in both directions because trail marking can be different on opposite sides of a tree.
- If you have any issues, contact the blazing team (Jody) or the Committee.
- Sometimes trail markings are harder to see in the summer when there's foliage around, so be observant in the summer too when some things get obscured by the greenery.
- Jody has a form for blazing requests that she can send out again. Also, if any signs are needed, this is a great time to get them carved (Jody's husband) and painted (Jody). Let her know what you need.
- Now is not a good time for blazing because the paint needs 50°+ for over 2 hours to dry.
- Why do we continue to use paint for blazes? Why not instead use tags? With tags we are not limited by the weather. They're reusable when, say, the tree falls. Response: We've tried other things besides paint. Metal tags last well but they can grow into the tree. Paint is the least expensive. Inexpensive plastic things that could be used are very brittle. In cold winter weather, they break and pollute when they fall. Squirrels and chipmunks can chew metal markers (teeth maintenance) to where the printing is almost gone.
- Re arrows and directional signage: Neither red nor blue paint on brown shows up very well. Yellow paint on brown shows up great. Suggest a sign have letters painted white and an arrow whatever color is desired.
- One thing we've learned is that people don't look at the arrows.
- Per Ian: People constantly call us and tell us how much they love our trails, compared with every other town around us, due to the lack of signs in our woods.
- Some of Jody's signs are 3D-printed with good color and mounted on wood. They don't look out of place in the woods.
- There is a new scout-built kiosk at Wright Hill (see picture) with a new design that Ian will use for all new kiosks going forward. It features a larger map (~16" x 21") of the parcel.
- Possible idea to consider sometime in the future: Ways to use signage and technology to facilitate locating individuals on our parcels.

Check list

- Are there clear trail markings at major trail intersections?
- When the trail connects to another conservation area, is there a map board?
- Does the map board mark its location on the map?
- Is the laminated map in good condition?
- Are map boards up to date with any trail changes?
- Have arrow signs, map boards or trail tags grown into the tree? (Back out the screws or nails to account for future tree growth)
- When you are standing near a blazed trail marking, can you see the next blaze?
- Have blazed trees fallen?
- Is vegetation covering the blaze?
- Have blazes faded?
- Is there a sign naming the conservation land at main trail entrances?



Land Steward Check Ins

Ian would like to schedule 1.5 hours with each steward towards the end of March or early April to walk and talk about the steward's parcel. He has set up 26 time slots for stewards to use to schedule the meetings and will send them to stewards soon for each steward to select one time slot. Ian will then be in touch to confirm. His plan is to do this in the Spring and, if there is time, in the Summer or the Fall, probably October or November.



Monthly report ideas from Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT)

Building on an idea from the SVT, Ian would like to establish a monthly log-in procedure for stewards. He created an example of a “Monthly Land Steward Log” — a Google form that stewards would be able to test. There are two versions, one for stewards with parcels and one for at-large stewards. A steward would go to the form’s website once a month and

- choose their conservation land,
- record an estimate of the hours spent there that month,
- check off the activities on site that month, e.g., walking the trails and removing some branches; a brief description of some boardwalk repair,
- record problems (e.g., flooding) or violations observed. This would be required, but “nothing” would be acceptable,
- provide optional information (visitors/activities observed).

The at-large form is the same except for the possibility of checking off various parcels rather than just one.

Discussion points:

- Ian applies for grants that are matching. For a lot of them he can use volunteer hours, but “they want to know what’s your average upfront?” So, he would like to track the stewards’ volunteer hours. It would be a huge help in his pursuit of grants. In terms of budgeting for the Town, Ian can access more funds if he can tell the Town that he is saving the Town X amount of dollars.
- One problem is that some stewards report nothing about what’s going on in their parcel, and adding more paperwork doesn’t address that problem. What this seems to be doing is saying to the stewards who are reporting to you, “Let’s do more paperwork.”
- This wouldn’t add more work. It just adds structure to the reports that we already do. This may be faster than typing.
- It seems it would be more important to push on the land stewards for each to please email a report once a month.
- The information currently being reported is helpful, but not consistent.
- The Log is just a few questions that are online and should be easy.
- To the point that stewards aren’t turning in reports: A lot of them just somewhat don’t know what to turn in. They don’t have the structure that would help them. The Log would give a bit of structure.
- Stewards sometimes send reports that sometimes have things that are interesting for others. So, is the Log in place of an email? Will everyone see this information? Per Ian: Every month he could share a PowerPoint that summarizes, or a steward could do both the Log and an email.
- What does your data, Ian, look like when a steward submits? Does it automatically put it in a spreadsheet for you? Google forms will put all of it into a spreadsheet but it’s raw data and its final form is for me to deal with.
- So, this would track normal land steward visiting-their-parcel stuff. It’s not structured to track repairs and maintenance and construction. For that, one would click “Other” and describe the activity.
- Suggest that we just have one form based on the at-large version as many parcel stewards walk parcels other than theirs.
- Chainsaw work is not included on this as that would be redundant.
- We can try this out and see if we get a response from some of the non-responders; to see if this encourages them.

What Ian will do is set up a recurring email. It will send the form to everybody at the beginning of each month.

Ian's updates

– Scoutland: Ian has prepared a letter to Bill Klauer, Scoutland Trustee. It suggests that the Town and LSC are interested in allowing public access to Scoutland for trails and for invasive species management; also, that we are interested in knowing its future. Ian shared the letter with Town Counsel and the Planning Director as some of what it asks for will eventually be in legal documents. Ian will email Tom and Bob re coming to Town Hall to sign it.

– Pratts Brook bridge: No update.

– First approved geocache: Ian shared the document for the first “Approved” geocache. He had sent the application to John for review. John agreed that the Great Hill site was acceptable. Ian so notified the applicant, asking that he (Ian) be informed if there ever would be a plan to remove it. Ian believes it very important that he has the contact information of the applicant, and he feels that the applicant found this to be a very easy process.

How does the Committee want to go forward handling pre-existing geocaches/containers? Per Ian, the solar-powered ones can come down. There are to be no lights in the woods. Following that, a lively discussion ensued on possible directions to take, with the result being that Ian go on geocache.com and email every person who has a geocache in Acton with the same message, that we've updated our rules, and you need to comply or your geocache will be removed within 30 days. Also, geocaching will be on next month's agenda, and we must be sure to discuss existing geocaches.

– Grants: Ian shared a spreadsheet he prepared with grant information: Grant Title, Grant Agency, Grant Category, Deadline, Minimum Grant Amount, Maximum Grant Amount, Match (for which volunteer hours apply), and Reimbursement. Categories include Trail Project, Habitat Project, Land Acquisition, and Equipment/Supplies.

Land and Water Conservation Fund and Mass Trails grants are two with deadlines coming up (Jan 9 and Feb 3, respectively). Right now, Ian, Bruce, and Bettina are trying to apply for either for a project at the Arboretum, or possibly Morrison Farm, but it's a big task to write a grant proposal in a month. A MassWildlife Habitat Management grant would be great if we could align it with something like the pitch pine at Pratts Brook, or any of the invasives work that John has done, or possibly with an herbicide application (if allowable by the grant). Note that the Freedom's Way grant requires a match, something very important.

Ian will make this spreadsheet available to everybody in the next couple of weeks.

– “Wetherbee Woods”: The Town acquired these 33 acres of land (realizing 100+ acres of contiguous conservation land) for \$3.65M, helped by a \$500K grant from the State. In the next few months, the current property owners will remove the radio wave towers, some abandoned vehicles, an old dwelling, and other, hazardous, items from the property. The property has a trail that ACT built and will have to be checked for any changes that might be needed. Still to be determined is how the LSC will refer to this property. Will the LSC refer to the entire 100+-acre site by one name, e.g., Wetherbee Conservation Land, and have one steward assigned to it, or will it have a name, e.g., Moritz Conservation Land, that recognizes the seller and have a steward different from the Wetherbee CL steward (ultimate signage to be based on that naming decision)? Todd, current steward for the Wetherbee CL, would “be excited” to take on stewardship for the combined parcels. Closing on the 33 acres will not occur until at least June 1, so that is the earliest date that the LSC could plan to have access to the property. The Town needs to place a Conservation Restriction on the property by June 30.

– 549 Main Street: Ian will be mapping out a new trail system. The Acton Water District is planning to develop two new sections of trails to create a full loop that would be our yellow loop. Officials are pleased that the LSC would like to provide a steward for the site — a future agenda item. The AWD is pleased to be able to work with the LSC, including eventually the blazing of the trails. The Isaac Davis Trail would be left unmarked, i.e., no blazing. However, all trails that go off from it would be marked. Re invasive species:

The AWD knows there is a lot of glossy buckthorn and it would be pleased for the LSC to work on invasive species control. Ian suggested that the LSC probably will first map out the invasives, and those sites would be LSC work areas.

Could Brewster Conant, former owner of the land, be its steward? Per Ian: There's some conflict of interest with that because of 1) the CR, 2) some of what he knows about the land, 3) the possibility that he might be a little too close to it, and 4) he might not like some of the things that the LSC or the AWD do. The AWD, not the LSC, will be mowing the parcel's meadow and meadow trails. Also, the Colebrook School towards the end of Post Office Square Road seems amenable to the idea of having two of its parking spaces designated for trail parking for the parcel.

Other parcel issues

Nagog Hill, Grassy Pond: The New England Orienteering Society has created a couple of paths that are going to be in place through Dec 22. There are some orange tags and some yellow tags that presumably the Society will remove after that date.

Wills Hole/Town Forest: Ian wants to bring Story Walks into the forest, and he did so here to coincide with ACT's Astronomy in the Park event at NARA. He didn't want to mount the story visuals using stakes in the ground, so he wired them to trees. That worked until the first storm. He replaced the paper-clip fasteners with staples and now the pictures seem to stay in place — where they will be until the end of the month. Ian will let the appropriate steward know in advance of the next Story Walk on Conservation Land.

General: There was discussion of the “trashing” of conservation lands.

Discussion points:

- John noted a steward's report of someone decorating trees on conservation land. The decorations used this way are trash and should be removed right away.
- Also cited were graffiti and spray painting appearing in different places. If any of this is found, let Ian know and he will keep track of it. (Spray paint remover on tree bark is not an answer as it leaves another color.)
- There was extended conversation about not picking up one's dog's waste. Greatest frustration are folks who leave poop bags in place, often with the thought “I'll be back for this” and then forget. Even more maddening are folks who throw the bags off the trail or into the trees.
- The national parks have a B.A.R.K. Rangers program where your dog “signs” a form with its paw that says it will adhere to all these things about rules.

(Clerk's note: Bag your pet's waste Always leash your pet Respect wildlife Know where you can go)

- For Trustees of Reservations lands you must submit an application and the dog's DNA. Then if the Trustees find poop, they will run its DNA.
- Instead of regulations, provide recommendations, e.g., “Do not leave poop bags beside the trail.”
- Dog rules must be written in a way that dog owners will enforce them with each other.
- An interesting rule that we could think about for conservation lands is not requiring people to leash their dogs, but requiring them to have with them one leash per dog. A sign in Weston's Cat Rock Park says, “you must carry a leash and you must carry poop bags.” It does not say that you must use them but it's implied. In other words, if you're carrying a leash and you're carrying poop bags and someone else sees you failing to use them, you can't say “No bag!” as an excuse.
- Ian's programming this year for the Conservation Division will alternate monthly between issues and habitat. April will focus on invasive species, May will be wetlands, June will focus on dog etiquette. Ian believes that focusing in June on educating dog walkers will be a good first step. Then, introduce some signage and spend the month talking about how dogs should be treated on the trails. A goal would be to give people “more oomph” to call out others with a friendly word on a seemingly overlooked poop bag, or curtailing a dog that's overly aggressive.

General (continued): Rebecca described difficulties she was having in creating a large high-resolution wall map of the Town (not a satellite view) because of her interest in its conservation lands and its trails. She described her progress and her progressive frustration to the point where she is reaching out to Ian and the LSC for assistance. Dale suggested she go to the CalTopo website (caltopo.com) as it likely will allow her to do everything she wants, plus. Rebecca will check it out.

Updates

- Wheeler Lane mulberry branches: Ian arranged for the Acton Tree Warden to pick them up. The Tree Warden may be a little bit backlogged,
- Acton Trails Website: The Anderson parcel has its own page: <https://trails.actonma.gov/anderson/>
- Sawyers: Per Dale: Sawyers need more training and equipment!
- Shed trash: Bob has some wood and metal ready to go to the Transfer Station. He can take it to the Route 2 entrance, tell the attendant that he is on the Land Stewardship Committee, and ask where he should dispose of the pressure treated wood. Also, Ian can help move some trash with his truck.
- Cameras: Bettina has one camera from Camp Acton and Rebecca has 5-10 “dead” wildlife cameras that can go into the shed for future use in helping to prevent abuse to conservation properties, notably those with heavier public use such as Camp Acton. The cameras can be dropped off at Ian’s office in Town Hall.

Next month’s (01/21/25) agenda

Geocaching, Land Stewards’ Check-Ins, Trail Markings, the Boardwalk Design Guide as a regular agenda item. Ian would like to hear ideas on what to do about some members “chronic” absenteeism. He would like to “retire” some members whom he has seldom, or never, met so that we don’t have to turn someone away who really wants to participate in LSC activities. He sensed consensus from the Committee. Adam asked about a lower age limit for LSC volunteers as his 16-year-old son would be interested. Members must be at least 18.

Evaluate meeting

Brownies (Tom’s) were awesome!
We got an unusually large amount done.

Adjournment

At 8:36 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, January 21, 2025, at 7 p.m.