

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes
September 15, 2010, 4:00 PM
Acton Town Hall

Present: Bettina Abe, Tom Arnold, Joan Cirillo, Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Philip Keyes, Peggy Liversidge (minute-taker), Heidi Sikina, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair), Tom Tidman, Laurie Ullmann

Minutes: The July meeting minutes were approved.

Annual swearing in of committee members: It was noted that it is time again for committee members to go to Town Hall to be sworn in. This applies to all associate members and to the full members whose terms need to be renewed this year.

Written parcel reports: There was a brief discussion of whether all stewards, not just those who do not plan to attend a meeting, should submit written parcel reports each month via email. There was no consensus on this, so the current policy of only requiring written reports from nonattenders will stay in place, although attenders may also choose to send a report.

Parcel reports: Bulette: Andy Gatesman has notified us of a jagged branch that is caught in a tree and hanging directly over the main trail. Bob said he will check out the situation and see if we can handle it or if a Town crew will need to be called on.

Grassy Pond: Bob reported that one of this summer's boardwalk projects was construction of a 24-foot extension of the Newtown Road access trail boardwalk.

Nagog Hill: Bob and Jim have brushed out the new Quail Ridge trail, and the location of the boardwalk now needs to be staked. Tom T. said he can provide the stakes for this.

Nashoba Brook: Laurie reported that mountain bikers have been taking a shortcut at one spot along the upper main loop trail, near the Wheeler Lane bridge. He will put down brush in the new path to try to discourage its use.

Also at Nashoba Brook this summer, Bob reported that an 8-foot extension was added to the 180-foot boardwalk to cover a depression that had developed. Also, Laurie and a youth group from his church laid rocks among tree roots between this boardwalk extension and another 12-foot boardwalk segment.

Spring Hill: Bob reported that several employees of Acton's Eastern Mountain Sports store, participating in this year's EMS Cleanup Day, have relocated to the conservation land easement a short section of the Jay Lane access trail, near the trailhead, that had been mistakenly cut on private property. The new segment will need to be reblazed.

Camp Acton gates and steward issues: Camp Acton has two gates to restrict vehicle traffic, one at the entrance at Pope Road and the other on the west side of the parking lot, at the beginning of the fire road/trail that goes by the campsites. Presently the hinges of the inner gate are broken, neither gate has a lock, and the outer gate is at times propped open, so questions were raised about getting the one gate fixed and clarifying the policy about whether one or both gates should or should not be locked.

Tom A. stated that he thinks the parking lot should be for campers only, so the entrance gate at Pope Road should be locked. Also, a deposit should be required of people/groups who register to use the campsites. A gate key would then be provided, and the deposit would be returned after a steward has checked the campsite(s) for cleanup.

Bob stated that he thinks the inner gate should also be kept locked. The road/trail beyond it can be considered a fire road, and the lock on this gate should be the same as on all the other locked gates on Town lands, to which the fire department has keys.

In response to Tom's suggestions, there appeared not to be full agreement that the parking lot should be for campers only. Also, questions were raised about whether a deposit (at least, too high a deposit) for camping would discourage use of the campsites and whether we would find a steward who would be willing/able to check campsites soon enough after each official use to determine whether any trash found was left by the official user (upon which the decision to return the deposit would presumably be based).

As to the related problem of trash at the campsites that came up in the discussion, it is clear that we don't know if this is caused by official users or by people who walk or drive in. It was suggested that putting a lock at the Pope Road entrance gate would at least let us see if it helped reduce the trash problem. It was also noted that the police should be notified about this problem.

The discussion was inconclusive, and it will need to be continued at a later meeting. Also, the question of gate repair was not talked about. In the meantime, Tom A. volunteered to speak with Tom T. (who had left the meeting by this point) about these issues.

Concerning the further but related issue of finding a new steward for Camp Acton, Jim stated that the notice on the parcel's kiosk has not led anyone to volunteer. It was suggested that we should advertise the opening in an email to the volunteer list, and Jim said he will do this.

Great Hill trail reroute and blazing problems: It was decided that it is OK to go ahead with cutting a reroute of an already-well-used informal trail that has developed down the eastern side of the Great Hill (in the direction of Piper Road). The original trail includes a steep section, and the S-shaped reroute is designed to prevent erosion. Jim stated that the new trail is too well developed to abandon.

This discussion tied in with Joan's comments about getting disoriented while walking at Great Hill, perhaps because some reblazing is needed, and Peggy's questioning of whether our three-color blazing system is sufficient for dealing with the proliferation of official trails within the loop trail. Under the current system, all of these trails would need to be blazed blue, but this would probably be confusing. Bob suggested using some two-color blazes (e.g., blue with red and blue with yellow). More discussion is needed, as is reblazing of this parcel.

Mowing of Nagog Hill meadow behind Youngs': Tom A. wants to get this meadow mowed. Bob clarified that access is across the Young land with Jimmy Young's permission and said that now is a good time because it is dry.

Hybrid Farm: Tom A. said that he has a meeting scheduled with the McConnors tomorrow to begin a discussion of issues relating to the farm's lease.

Kiosk notices: Jim reported that all of the new kiosk notices, except for some recently printed tick information sheets, have been put up by the volunteers who have been helping with this, but it was noted that the maps at the Davis Road and Capt. Handley Road kiosks, at least, still have not been updated. Jim said that the kiosk volunteers can put up these remaining notices and maps.

8th-grade Community Service Day: There will be teams this year helping out at the Newtown Road access to Grassy Pond, at either the Willis Holden entrance to Grassy Pond or at Pratt's Brook (because there are probably only enough bucket backpacks for both locations), and perhaps at Pacy. Jim will send the list to Tom when it is finalized.

Photo contest: Deadline for entries is October 31, with judging to be done the following week. Jim will laminate a few more notices about this.

Proposed Conservation Commission management plans: Tom A. reported that the idea of writing management plans for the Town's conservation properties was raised at a recent ConsCom meeting. These could include such things as timber cutting and meadow mowing.

Meadow subgroup update: Jim stated that no meetings of this subgroup have been held, and the group may be suspended because the person who was trying to get it established, Maya Spies, is apparently moving away from Acton.

Suggestion for future agenda item: Joan said that at a future meeting she would like to discuss the possibility of acquiring land to provide additional access points for our parcels.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 20, at 4:00.

List of documents used: The documents used as background for committee discussion have been posted on the Town's public DocuShare system at <https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-3576>. Here is a list of those documents:

8th-grade Community Service Day, Sept. 24
Camp Acton
New rerouted trail at Great Hill
Parcel updates
Update on kiosk notices