

## **Joint Conservation Commission/Land Stewardship Committee Meeting**

**January 27, 2022 regarding proposed Towle Field Mowing Protocols, Sept. 2021**

### **Minutes**

The discussion with the Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) opened at 8:20 PM. LSC members present for the (Zoom) meeting were Judy Asarkof, Tom Brownrigg, Debby Geltner, Warren Lyman (co-chair), Rhonda Michaud (co-chair), and Nick Ognibene, also a member of the Conservation Commission (ConsCom). Dwight DeMay was absent. Also present was ConsCom Administrator Sylvia Willard. Guests Steve Tobin (Trails Committee) and Kay Hurley made comments.

Lyman showed two documents, appended, which explained the proposed new mowing protocol and the reasons for proposing this. After Lyman's presentation, ConsCom chair Alex Parra opened the meeting to questions or comments from ConsCom members and the public.

ConsCom member Helen Young expressed concern about reduced mowing creating more tick habitat. Lyman said that if the main trails were mowed periodically and people stayed on trails, they would be less likely to get ticks.

ConsCom member Lee Tatistcheff asked about the proposed 20 ft. shrub border for the west field, which would be mowed every five years. She was concerned about how invasive plants would be controlled. She also was concerned about how the maintenance budget would be impacted by the new protocol. Lyman said that there was a "pithy comment" at the end of the report that suggested that since the field would be mowed less often, mowing costs should be lower (the field has been mowed twice yearly).

Tatistcheff noted that the ConsCom budget is limited, and the current mower's price is low. She thought the proposal should include cost estimates. Asarkof said that it should be possible to find other people interested in mowing the fields, and she has names of several local mowers.

ConsCom/LSC member Ognibene expressed support for the proposal but said there are budget concerns. ConsCom member Navneet Hundal agreed that there are budget constraints. Tatistcheff noted that the protocol would involve using different equipment for shrub border management that could be more costly, and that the current maintenance budget is \$6000.

Guest Steve Tobin of the Trails Committee asked who would mow the trails; he is currently doing that himself. He said mowing takes about two hours using a string trimmer (?). He said that there are unofficial trails leading into Towle field from neighboring properties and he did not mow these. Lyman agreed that only the trails shown on the Trails in Carlisle booklet should be mowed.

Parra said he would like to know the cost of mowing the shrub border, assuming it would go out for bids. He also asked whether the fields could be mowed only once a year, and if so, when this should be. Lyman said mowing should be after the first hard frost and might be done as late as December. Geltner said that mowing the dead vegetation was not desirable, since certain insects or their eggs overwinter.

ConCom member Brian Murphy said that “conservation should be blind to cost”, meaning that ConsCom should decide upon the best approach for mowing and then decide how to pay for this.

Guest Kay Hurley mentioned a “no-mow” area established in the south part of the main field by Asarkof last year as a study area. Hurley said that recording the growth rate of trees and shrubs in this area could be useful in determining how frequently a shrub border should be mowed.

Parra said that the proposal was well presented but did not ask for a vote. He suggested waiting until LSC had obtained cost estimates. Willard suggested that ConsCom and LSC visit Towle Field in the spring since some ConsCom members might be unfamiliar with the fields. The discussion ended at 9:10 PM.

Submitted by Tom Brownrigg

Minutes approved: 2/15/22

## **Appendix**

### **Purpose: Improved Habitat & More Diversity**

#### **Primary Goal for Towle Field Management**

- Conservation of all non-invasive flora and fauna
- *Towle Baseline Assessment (2010)*: “The entire field should be maintained to provide sustainable habitat for flora and fauna.”

Note: Special protection for Bobolinks - grassland-nesting birds - is not currently necessary but this habitat should be preserved for other species.

#### **Other Goals - Preservation of:**

- Passive recreation
- Vistas and other cultural or aesthetic features
- Educational opportunities

#### ***Towle Field Mowing Protocols (2021):***

“We can help relieve the stressor of habitat loss and degradation that impacts birds, insects and native plant populations by improving the ecological value of the conservation land, especially fields. Improving ecological value of preserved land entails optimally managing it to support a diversity of plants and wildlife.”

### **Key Element of Protocol Proposed for Towle**

Less frequent mowing and exclusion of mowing during the growing season.

### **Field Management Protocols Recommended by Others**

The mowing protocols recommended for Towle are consistent with those recommended by other environmental organizations.

### **LSC’s Preferred Mowing Protocol for Towle Field**

<b>Main Field</b>	<b>West Field</b>
<p>Mow half of the field once a year, after the first hard frost; mow this section every other year thereafter, again after the first hard frost.</p> <p>Mow the other half of the field, after the first hard frost, on alternate years (i.e., starting the year after mowing the initial half).</p> <p>Mow the east side of the field 2-3 times per year to a distance of approximately 50 ft. from the wooded edge. This will incorporate a significant portion of the existing trails. (The east side is delineated by the trail marker sequence T15-T14-T13; see map below.)</p> <p>Mow the field portion of the Towle Inner Loop trail that goes to the knoll to a width of 5 ft. several times a year or as needed.</p>	<p>Mow the field interior every other year after the first hard frost, except for a 20-ft wide border around the field edges left to grow as a native shrub border (see more below).</p> <p>The native shrub border should be divided into as few ecologically based sections as possible, then rotationally mowed every 5 years in a manner that hopefully preserves some portion of each section’s ecology.</p> <p>Mow the field perimeter trail that goes around the south, west, and north sides of the field, to a width of 5 ft., several times during the growing season or as needed.</p>
<b>Both Fields</b>	

If chemical treatment of non-native or noxious plants is needed, then volunteers will be needed to assist the licensed applicator by flagging the targeted plants. Herbicide applications for some plants (e.g., poison ivy) are best done in early summer before other plants grow too tall. ConsCom may approve mowing restrictions for habitat protection (e.g., ground-nesting birds) or study areas.

