

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting
February 15, 2022
Via teleconference - 7:00 PM

Meeting Minutes

Present: Judy Asarkof, Tom Brownrigg, Dwight DeMay, Debbie Geltner, Warren Lyman, Rhonda Michaud, and Nick Ognibene. Conservation Administrator Sylvia Willard was present.

This meeting was conducted by Zoom teleconference due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with all participants at home. The meeting was opened at 7:05 PM by Chair Lyman.

The minutes of the December 7, 2021, and January 11, 2022 minutes were approved as amended. The notes of the January 27, 2022 joint meeting of LSC with ConsCom for discussion of the proposed Towle Field Mowing Protocol were approved as amended. Lyman asked that the header be changed to say that they were minutes of a joint LSC/ConsCom meeting, and that they be submitted to Town Clerk as minutes.

New Business

1. Summary of 1/27/22 meeting with ConsCom re: Towle Field Mowing Protocol

Lyman began the discussion by asking “What do we [LSC] need to do?” Asarkof said she wonders if ConsCom members have the knowledge to appreciate keeping meadows in their natural state. She noted that ConsCom Chair Alex Parra asked why vegetation should be kept long during the winter; she thought that his question needed to be answered. Ognibene thought that ConsCom members understood the reasons for the proposed changes in mowing, but the main issue was cost. He thought if the new mowing program was about the same cost or lower than the present cost, ConsCom would be in favor. Lyman said another matter of concern to ConsCom was the proposed 5-year mowing of the west field edges, in terms of both cost and control of invasive plants.

Asarkof has been in contact with several potential field mowers, including Jason Metivier (Carlisle) and Sam (last name?, Littleton). She also said her husband enjoys mowing fields and could submit an estimate. Lyman has contacted Matt Svatek (Carlisle) but has not heard back. Some of these mowers also have brush hogs that could be used for removal of trees and shrubs, something that the current mower Jack O’Connor, is not able to do. Geltner said that mowing should be selective to preserve native plants and asked how selective the mowers could be.

Asarkof said that she could prepare a map of Towle Field showing the areas to be mowed or brush-hogged to give to potential mowers for cost estimates. She suggested that LSC members visit Towle soon to decide how to mow the field. Geltner said that people should consider water run-off in terms of how this could be affected by mowing. A visit to Towle was scheduled for Saturday February 19, at 2 PM.

2. Notes from 2/7/22 Cranberry Bog Working Group meeting

Lyman attended the meeting and said that ConsCom has issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) to remove phragmites but is still working on a NOI for repair of Cranberry Bog Dam #1. He said that there have been no decisions on environmental work associated with the bog, and a funding request will not be ready in time for spring Town Meeting. Willard said that the ConsCom budget has adequate funds for phragmites removal.

3. Habitat/Pollinator Project

Lyman said the project still needs to have a title and he would like to have this decided at the next meeting. Prior to the meeting Geltner sent a mission statement, and Lyman suggested a few revisions. DeMay volunteered to survey activities by other organizations and provided a preliminary report. He has obtained information from neighboring towns, where pollinator programs have started in the past two or three years. There is also information available on soils, insects, etc. that lead to success. He plans to follow up with these towns as to how the programs have been accepted by the public and the pollinators. Willard requested that DeMay include information about how different towns control invasive plants, and DeMay said he will add this to his list of topics.

Asarkof mentioned that she maintains a garden with native plants and enjoys observing insects that visit the plants. She has tripled the number of pollinators since adding native plants and removing invasives. Geltner said that she has maintained a native habitat garden since 2016. Ognibene thought it would be useful for LSC members to visit Asarkof's and/or Geltner's gardens. Asarkof said July-early August would be a good time to see a variety of plants in bloom, and she will send photos of her garden. Lyman suggested that people visit some fields in Lincoln that are part of their pollinator habitat program. Willard said that Dr. Richard Gegear is a good source of information on pollinators. Asarkof mentioned a chart that Gegear produced that lists plants used by different insects and their blooming times.

Regarding potential topics to cover, Geltner said she will have a list for the next meeting. Asarkof had previously sent members information on native plants, and where they can be purchased. Willard mentioned that former ConsCom member Angie Verge made a list of native plants for Middlesex County, and a short list is on the Town's website. A more extensive version can be obtained from Willard by request.

4. Proposed wildflower plantings at Cranberry Bog and Greenough

Lyman contacted botanist Walter Kittredge regarding whether rosemallow is a native plant found in this area, and Kittredge said it is. Lyman will make a map showing the proposed planting locations of rosemallow (near Greenough Dam) and New England blazing star (Cranberry Bog). If LSC approval is forthcoming, then Lyman will seek a Land Use Approval from ConsCom for the planting.

5. Draft Annual Report for 2021

Members reviewed the draft report and approved the report as amended. Brownrigg will revise the report with the proper format and submit to the Select Board by February 25.

6. Update on Baseline Reports

Lyman said he has almost finished the Benfield report and will send a draft before the next meeting. Brownrigg said he has not made much progress on the Woodward report but will start working on it this spring. Asarkof said that she has a list of biota at Woodward field, and will send this to Brownrigg. Lyman said other properties, e.g. the Russell Land, need reports and volunteers to work on these.

7. Reminder to check “orphan properties” and condition of signs, etc.

Lyman said people should try to check their assigned properties as the weather improves. Brownrigg requested Lyman or Michaud resend the list of properties with assignments.

Old Business

There was no further discussion.

Next Meetings:

March 15, 2022 @ 7 PM

April 19, 2022 @ 7 PM

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Submitted by Tom Brownrigg

Minutes approved: 3/15/22