

**Minutes of the Joint Land Stewardship Committee
and Carlisle Conservation Commission Meeting**

May 12, 2022

Via teleconference from 8:35 PM – 9:15PM

Present for Land Stewards: Tom Brownrigg, Debby Geltner, Dwight DeMay, Warren Lyman (Co-Chair), Rhonda Michaud (Co-Chair), and Nick Ognibene; Judy Asarkof was absent.

Present for the Conservation Commission: Alex Parra (Chair), Navneet Hundal, Nick Ognibene, Dan Wells, and Helen Young.

Conservation Administrator Sylvia Willard and Assistant Administrator Mary Hopkins were present.

Purpose of Joint Meeting

The purpose of this joint meeting between the Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) and the Conservation Commission was for the LSC to seek approval of a new mowing protocol for Towle Field. The proposed protocol was described in the document “Towle Field Mowing Protocols – Revised Protocol and Estimated Costs”, prepared by the LSC and dated April 2022, which had been submitted to the Commission for their review prior to the joint meeting.

Meeting Discussion

Parra opened the discussion at 8:35 PM. Lyman gave a summary of the revised protocol, noting that the key elements of the proposed protocol were: (1) dividing the field into three sections and mowing each section, in rotation every third year, after the first hard frost; (2) mowing the field edges every year, after the first hard frost; (3) mowing of trails in the field by Judy Asarkof; and (4) monitoring the resulting change in flora and fauna, with special attention to any invasive or unwanted plants. Lyman also noted that Asarkof did substantial research that included talking with other environmental organizations such as Sudbury Valley Trustees and Xerces Society regarding mowing frequency and obtaining mowing cost estimates from three people. The proposed mowing protocol document provided estimates of mowing costs that showed that the new protocol would result in significant cost savings over the costs allocated to mowing in 2021 and prior years.

Parra asked about mowing of trails at Towle. Lyman said that Asarkof will mow the trails following a protocol used by the Trails Committee. The trails would only be “official” trails shown in Trails in Carlisle (2018 edition). Asarkof has already mowed these trails twice this year.

Parra had several concerns regarding the protocol. He expressed that the new protocol would result in a less satisfying vista, thinking some might prefer that of a hay field. He said that in the past there was a “recreation aesthetic” for Towle Field and asked how the reduced mowing would affect recreational uses. Lyman said that the Management Plan for Towle Land encourages both conservation and recreational uses, but in recent years there has not been much recreational activity except for people walking the trails. Lyman also noted that there are several fields, not on conservation lands, available for recreation. Parra was concerned that the new protocol might favor the spread of more invasive plants and asked how the plant life there would change. Geltner said that it is difficult to predict how invasive plants will react, but that there is a native seed source present that will potentially germinate over time. She mentioned the presence of Coastal Joe-Pye Weed and other native species found recently in the unmown areas. Brownrigg said that there is already funding for long-term management of invasive plants such as poison ivy, buckthorn, and others. Ognibene said that there is a possibility of more invasive *species*, but that this is offset by the greater number of native plants that will grow.

Parra asked other ConsCom members for their opinion on the proposed protocol. Wells thought it was “terrific” idea but should include checks on invasive plants. Hundal was in favor also, but her only concern was originally the cost, which is expected to be much lower. Both Young and Parra expressed support for the plan. Willard suggested that a two-acre section left unmown since last year be monitored in following years and compared with an adjacent area that will be mowed on a different schedule. She was concerned about incursion of buckthorn and thought the unmown area should be monitored for several more years before adopting the three-year mowing schedule. Willard noted that a mowing contract for this year has not been awarded.

Wells requested a report on the outcome of the trial no-mow area (~ 2 acres) managed by Judy Asarkof in 2021.

Conservation Commission Motion and Vote

Parra asked ConsCom members for a motion regarding the proposal. Wells moved to approve the mowing proposal by LSC, and Young seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. Parra thanked LSC members for their proposal and asked them to monitor the field closely in the future. The discussion ended at 9:15 PM.

Submitted by Tom Brownrigg and Warren Lyman

Minutes approved: 5/17/22