

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting
August 9, 2022
Via teleconference - 7:00 PM
Meeting Minutes

Present: Judy Asarkof, Tom Brownrigg, Debbie Geltner, Warren Lyman, Rhonda Michaud, and Nick Ognibene. Dwight DeMay was absent. 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.

Guests: prospective LSC member Julie Durrell and John Ballantine

The July 12, 2022, minutes were approved as amended.

Julie Durrell's membership will be voted at the next ConsCom meeting on August 18. Members Geltner and Ognibene, who were not at the previous meeting, welcomed Durrell and noted why they joined LSC.

1. Towle Field

a. Additional flagging and treatment

Michaud and her son visited the west side of the west field and placed flags at locations of poison ivy. John Bakewell will return later this summer to complete herbicide treatments. Brownrigg mentioned that he found a moderately large cluster of PI in the southwest part of the main field, close to the border with Asarkof's study area. There is currently a pink flag and a driveway marker in this area. This area should be marked prior to Bakewell's next visit. Bakewell removed all the flags after treatment, and these are now at Michaud's home.

b. Find and fix stakes by rocks, as necessary

Lyman said that metal stakes, including some with bird nest boxes, mark the locations of rocks. These should be checked prior to the fall mowing. Brownrigg said there are six metal stakes marking the former "bobolink" area; he will remove these before mowing. These stakes can be used to mark locations of other rocks or obstacles. Asarkof noted that she found some holes while mowing the paths that should be marked.

c. Proposal for initial fall mowing of 1/3 of the field

Prior to the meeting Asarkof sent a map of Towle Field with three sections, and suggestions as to how these should be mowed. She favors starting with part A (north side of main field) since this

part is more visible from Westford St. and some people prefer a grassier “view scape”. This would be followed next year by mowing part B (west field), and then part C (south part of main field) the next two years. The border between parts A and C is an unofficial trail that should be visible to the mower.

Geltner mentioned that there are many small trees, possibly aspens, growing in the south part of B, and that these should be mowed before they become too large. Asarkof would like to discuss the mowing of these with Maddie Kiszewski, who visited Towle Field at the end of July with Asarkof. Asarkof has requested a cost estimate from Kiszewski for removal of non-native plants using mechanical methods. Brownrigg said he would like to learn more about these methods and suggested that Kiszewski attend an LSC meeting or a field trip.

Willard said that she will seek potential mowers in addition to those found by Asarkof: Sam Bell, Jason Metivier, and Jack O’Connor.

Geltner suggested that a sign be posted in the Towle parking lot that describes the new mowing protocol, and why it was implemented. Lyman suggested that Geltner and Asarkof draft a sign, which might include art by Julie Durrell. Both Ognibene and Willard thought the sign should keep the amount of text to a minimum, e.g., 100 words or less.

d. Future test sites – discussion

Lyman raised the question of how to locate test sites that would help answer the question as to how well the new mowing protocol was working in terms of encouraging native plants. This would require visits and recording plant species and their numbers. Geltner has done this type of survey at the Cranberry Bog as part of her master’s degree research and is familiar with the protocols. She will think about how a standard protocol could be simplified for use at Towle.

Asarkof said that Walter Kittredge, a retired Harvard botanist, might help with plant identification. Kittredge has visited Towle in the past and discovered Coastal Joe-Pye Weed and other unusual plants (?).

2. Foss Farm – protection of sandplain/grassland habitat

a. Suggested protection (posts) of sensitive areas and pull-overs

Prior to the meeting, Asarkof sent maps showing the sensitive area near the access road. This area is used by tiger beetles (one of which is a species of special concern), ground-nesting wasps, and other uncommon insects. Her maps also show the possible locations of pull-over areas and suggestions for fencing. After discussion, it was decided to use driveway markers (whips) or small stakes, since these would be inexpensive. Signage would also be needed along the staked area.

b. Suggested signage and/or note to community gardeners

Lyman drafted a note that explains the need for fencing. This would be sent to Foss Farm gardeners and Pony Club members. Asarkof believes that the Pony Club is no longer active. Willard will contact the Pony Club personnel for more information.

3. Cranberry Bog

The next Cranberry Bog Working Group meeting is August 22. Lyman is not able to attend and asked if one or more members could listen. Both Geltner and Michaud indicated that they could attend. Willard said that several residents of Chelmsford who live near Heart Pond will attend.

Prior to the meeting, Lyman spoke with John Ballantine, who is an abutter to the bog and is very concerned about water levels. At the meeting, Ballantine noted that beavers have always been a problem since beaver dams block water flow into the east bog field (near Martin St.). Mark Duffy still removes debris from culverts but will eventually stop doing this. Asarkof asked why a “beaver deceiver” was not installed at this dam. Willard said that the company that installs these said that the water levels are too low. Geltner noted that the ponds are slowly silting up, and the water levels are getting lower.

Willard walked the Cranberry Bog and noted water levels this summer, during a drought. With Geltner’s help, she found that the Fiske St. dam (west side of the bog) is at higher elevation near the pump house than at the other end. On May 30, 2022, Willard and Geltner measured the water level at the west dike at about 13 in. below the top of the dike. Later measurements during the drought showed even lower water levels. Willard also found that the pond in the Chelmsford Cranberry Bog Reservation is nearly dry since there is no water flowing out of Heart Pond. Heart Pond residents want to maintain high water levels for swimming and boating.

Lyman proposed having a joint meeting with ConsCom, LSC, and CBWG to discuss the issue of water management. He thought that Alex Hackman, Dept. of Environmental Restoration, and consultant MaryAnn DiPinto might attend and provide useful information.

4. Greenough Barn

Willard said that the Select Board has decided to demolish the barn. There was no further discussion of this or other Greenough issues.

5. Benfield Land

Willard said that the Benfield Baseline Report will be on the agenda for the August 18 ConsCom meeting.

6. Russell Conservation Land

Willard said that there is a conservation land field near Spencer Brook that the Senior Residential Open Space Community has agreed to mow. However, parts of it are being overgrown with invasive plants such as multiflora rose. The field can be used for agriculture, but Andrew Rodgers of Clark Farm is not interested in using it. She would like LSC members to visit the field and will prepare a map showing the location.

She also mentioned that a Conservation Restriction (CR) is being prepared on an abutting property that includes a portion of an existing conservation land trail. The CR will allow public access along a section of the trail where there is a good view of a Great Blue Heron rookery with 11 nests observed this year.

7. Other business

Lyman said that he will need help installing new conservation land signs. Several members offered to help. The first sign will be installed at Town Forest.

Next Meetings:

September 13, 2022 @ 7 PM

October 11, 2022 @ 7 PM

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 PM.

Submitted by Tom Brownrigg

Minutes approved: 9/13/22