

DRAFT

Calais Conservation Commission Meeting May 12, 2016, 7pm

Members present: Drew Lamb, Stephanie Kaplan, Neal Maker, Julie Hand, Larry Bush

Guests: Jan Ohlsson, Michael Sweatman (Friends of Bobolink).

Time start: 7:10

Conservation Fund Balance: TBA

Friends of Bobolinks:

Bobolink Project discussion: Michael Sweatman, from Friends of Bobolinks explained his purpose in helping to revive Bobolink populations. Bobolink populations have declined in the past 40 years due to intensified agriculture. Farmers are mowing earlier - some trying to get in a crop in mid-late May, hoping to get three to four cuts in over the summer. This timing is just when Bobolinks are arriving and nesting, hence in fields where there is early and intensive mowing, Bobolinks do not settle in and breed.

Michael realizes that we cannot ask farmers with milk cows to reduce mowing. But there may be other grasslands, such as those with beef cattle and non-farmed fields. Because of the presence of Bobolinks, The Bobolink project encourages farmers and private land owners with health grassland to delay first mowing until the second or third week of July. The idea is to meet with farmers and ask them if they might be willing to either delay mowing or leave one or two fields uncut.

Michael asked if we would like to be involved, which means going out now and finding fields where Bobolinks might be nesting. These birds have a distinctive, bubbly song, easy to recognize via a drive, walk or bike by fields that where they might live. They like fields of 20-plus acres, or 10 acres surrounded by open areas. They are drawn to good fields with smooth grass. Once Bobolink fields have been identified, volunteers approach farmers to see if they would be willing to comply with the project.

Calais Conservation Commission voted to be volunteers for the Bobolink Project in Calais.

The Armstrong property is a potential site for this project. The first step will be to identify large landowners using tax maps as well as GPS maps that show fields. The CCC will put a notice in Front Porch Forum as well, asking people where they think Bobolinks might be nesting.

Report on Planning Commission - Shoreland Zoning Meeting:

Larry Bush attended this meeting on May 3rd

The PC met to consider all parcels affected by reducing the Depth of Shoreland District from 800' (current Calais Regs) to 250' (proposed regs). The question PC is exploring is: can land-owners still develop, and what is the real issue. Adamant and Curtis are exempt as they come under Village district rules. Number 10, Nelson, Bliss, and Sodom Pond fall under the new rules as they are rural-residential.

Planning Commission's reason for making the change is to be in compliance with State Regs, therefor eliminating the need for landowners to bring development proposals to the Design and Review Board before going to to Planning Commission. The PC argues that development potential is not affected by decreasing the Depth of Shoreland District.

The Conservation Commission's primary concern about any changes in current Shoreland Zoning changes is protection of water quality. The CC feels more stringent regs are best for this.

Armstrong Property

Meeting with Conservation Commission, Selectboard, Vermont Land Trust, Liz Thompson (state ecologist) will take place Wed. May 25 5pm. We will meet at Town Office. We will discuss mutual interests, and tour the property. The CC is particularly interested to know what Liz sees and feels about the property.

The Land Trust thinks there is enough agricultural value in the property and made an offer to Ella, which is below the town's appraisal value. She would like to see the land conserved and wants to sell as soon as possible. There is concern that this will lower tax revenue thus affecting school taxes.

VLT wants written support from the town as well as a financial contribution (from CCC fund).

Natural Resource Inventory update

We divided calls to landowners asking permission for access to properties involved in phase two of the NRI.

Next meeting June 1, 2016 at the Calais Town Office

Meeting adjourned: 9:05pm