

**Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes**  
**Calais Town Office**  
**Wednesday, December 11, 2019, 7:00 pm**

**Present:** Stephanie Kaplan, Larry Bush, Neal Maker, Julie Hand, Drew Lamb (arriving 7:10), Pat Johnson, Mark Brown

**Guests:** Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes), Scott Bassage

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7 pm.
2. Agenda revisions or additions: Julie will share questions she drafted for future potential member conversations (under “New Business”).
3. Approve minutes: Neal Maker made a motion and Julie Hand seconded to approve the minutes of the November 6, 2019 meeting, as edited. The motion passed unanimously.
4. Conservation Fund Balance: The Fund balance is currently \$69,846.31.
5. Town Report: The Commission agreed that Larry’s work on the report for submission for the Calais Town Report is well done; Larry will submit to town office staff.
6. Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Plan for Calais: The Commission discussed various strategies for dealing with the coming EAB apocalypse and specifically at what point the roadside ash trees should be cut down, by whom, and at what costs.

The Commission and Scott Bassage engaged an extended conversation. Discussion included the multifaceted nature of the imminent ash tree decimation, particulars of Calais’s roadways, pros and cons of various courses of action, and ultimately focused on three types of management identified in the CVRPC’s draft Calais EAB Management Plan: Preemptive, Selective, and Reactive Management.”

The group also discussed planting new trees and potential locations for plantings either to fill in roadside areas that would be left open after the ash trees die or any areas along roadsides or in public spaces that would benefit from new trees.

The Commission will confirm if the grant will permit essentially opening a line of credit/getting a gift certificate from a nursery for springtime purchase of trees for planting.

Stephanie had spoken to several members of the East Montpelier EAB Committee. They have a pilot program on Gallison Hill Road where ash trees are being marked to offer the public a way to learn to recognize them, and to then remove (cut down) those ash trees to focus public awareness of what the impact will be when the trees are gone due to EAB. The Committee had consulted an arborist who estimated a price of \$10,000 to cut down the row of trees on Gallison Hill Road. There may be less expensive ways of dealing with the trees that need to be taken down. For example, according to the East Montpelier Committee, one of Montpelier's arborists has become certified for pesticide application; he has calculated that treating a 24" tree with insecticides to save it from death from the EAB may cost around \$120 per tree every two years. (The cost would likely be significantly more to hire a professional who is not also a town employee.) Neal communicated with the Calais Road Commissioner who has stated his willingness to deal with cutting trees when needed and as their time permits.

Ash trees in the right of way are not considered "hazard trees" until they have been shown to have the borers. A tree being taken down that does not qualify as a "hazard tree" must first have a public hearing which includes inviting the landowner.

The group considered proposing that the Town set aside money each year for dealing with the EAB impact when it arrives, discussing \$5,000 a year as a potential number. Once EAB has been confirmed in an area, experts estimate 3-5 years until most ash trees have died. Experts also have explained that it is much more expensive to cut down a dead or dying ash than a live one.

The group was in agreement that they are ready to present the options and the pros/cons and decided to request an information meeting with the Selectboard and the road crew sometime in January after the Selectboard has completed its budget. Once the Selectboard understands everything involved in deciding on an EAB management strategy, a public meeting will be held for public input and discussion.

The group also wants to ask arborist Nate Ebert to attend the next meeting and share his experience going through the EAB crisis in the Midwest.

7. Bliss Pond Town Forest: A public meeting for gaining input from townspeople on the future of Bliss Pond Town Forest will be scheduled in the future. Two potential proposals have been entertained and discussed by the Commission: 1) to protect the forest as the first preserved old growth forest in town, or 2) to promote it as a model for a well-managed forest. Also the question of whether the forest should be permanently conserved as a Town Forest (and not be permitted to be developed) should be addressed. Larry

led the walk at Bliss Pond Town Forest at Fall Foliage weekend, which was very well attended with approximately 30 people.

The group considered how to engage resident input: Front Porch Forum, a public meeting, a walk in the forest, including an emphasized announcement at Town Meeting. A public meeting and sponsored walk, possibly held in May, may be used to provide an understanding of the Forest to the public, including the history of the Forest, and to hear townspeople's thoughts and desires about the future of the Forest.

The question of improving signage of trails in Bliss Pond Forest was again brought up. The group decided springtime would make more sense for trail marking improvements.

8. Fish and Wildlife Board: House Bill 190 was submitted last February to create a Vermont working group on wildlife governance. Among other things, such a working group would advise if there should be any changes to the Fish and Wildlife Board membership, which currently has only hunters and trappers as members. Sponsor Rep. Amy Sheldon, Chair of the Wildlife Committee, responded to Larry's inquiry about the status of this bill with the following statement:

*"House Natural Resources will start the session working on Act 250 and it is my plan to take up wildlife issues, of which there are a few. I know there is another bill in the works to address larger issues of wildlife governance more directly than what H190 contemplates. It is being drafted right now and seeks to modernize the enabling language for fish and wildlife management. You may also know that we had a small group working on a wanton waste bill last session and the issue of bear hunting with hounds has moved to the fore as a result of an unfortunate incident that occurred here in Addison County this Fall."*

The group decided that it would follow what comes up in the upcoming legislative session and get involved then if warranted.

9. Other business: When a person expresses interest in serving or participating on the Conservation Commission, an email will be shared with the candidate with questions to guide a conversation with the Commission. The group thanked Julie for drafting questions to put in place for the process.
10. Public comment: None.
11. Adjournment: motioned to adjourn at 8:51 pm; seconded.

Date: 12/14/2019 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas

*Approved by the Conservation Commission at the 2/11/2020 meeting*