

Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Calais Town Office
June 20, 2019, 7:00 pm

Present: Stephanie Kaplan (recorder), Larry Bush, Neal Maker, Julie Hand, Mark Brown, Drew Lamb

Absent: Pat Johnson

Guests: Joanne Garton, Dan Singleton

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. There were no additions or revisions to the agenda.
2. The minutes of May 15, 2019 were approved.
3. Ash tree inventory. The Commission reviewed with Joanne Garton from the state Forestry Program the roads that have been inventoried. Neal said more than half have been done, and the rest of the roads have been assigned to volunteers. He will contact them to find out if they've finished their routes. Joanne said to let her know in the next few weeks if there are priority roads that still haven't been done. Joanne said that the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission has a grant to do the analysis of our inventory once we've finished it. She needs to find out from them what they need from us by September and will let us know. There was discussion about the required volunteer match for the grant from her program as well as for the CVRPC grant, and Joanne said she'll find out what their requirements are. Her program's grant counts volunteer time at \$25/hour. We need a total of \$2,000 of volunteer time and that shouldn't be difficult for us to document since a lot of people have already spent a lot of time on it. Joanne had lent us two iPads and needs them back by July 8.

Joanne also mentioned that she brought hard copies of the Resilient Rights of Way report for the committee. Neal and Stephanie will get them to the rest of the committee members.

4. Bliss Pond Town Forest. The Commission discussed the existence of an easement along the shore of Bliss Pond that Commission members just found out about that is held by the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board. Stephanie had been contacted by someone from the VHCB who wanted to go look at the area of the easement to make sure it had not been violated. Larry went out with the VHCB representative and asked him to send a copy of the easement document. The VHCB would have to review any management plan for the Forest. Stephanie said she will ask VHCB and the Vermont Land Trust if they hold any other easements in Calais that we're not aware of.

Larry had sent to the Commission members and County Forester Dan Singleton his proposal to create an old growth (late successional) forest reserve in the Bliss Pond Town Forest. Dan gave an overview of the history of the forest and its management, and suggested the Commission review previous management plans for information about the forest.

The Commission discussed Larry's proposal. Neal explained why he thinks it would be better to manage the forest as an educational model for the public to see a well managed and innovative forest, with the opportunity to engage people to learn about the benefits of a well managed working forest. Julie stated that she believes that some forests should be left alone to let the forests evolve in their natural way without human interference, and that doing that with the Bliss forest would be as educational as managing it. Larry further expounded on the reasons he believes the forest should be left alone. The Commission discussed the different points of view about the use of this forest.

Dan explained that forests don't need human involvement, and that management is simply a tool to make sure that people's expectations for a forest are met. He said that until recently town forests were managed for their timber, but there has been a shift in people's attitudes and now they are often viewed more holistically. He said different towns in Vermont have different approaches and it might be useful to contact some of them for their perspectives and ideas. He said whatever is decided for this forest, it needs to be set out in a plan. In order to ensure that any decisions made now are maintained in the future, there might need to be some kind of easement on the property.

Dan and the Commission all agreed that input from Calais residents will be important in deciding the best way to manage this forest. Dan emphasized the importance of taking time and getting the word out as much as possible. Some ideas for getting townspeople involved included scheduling public forums, speaking about it at town meeting similar to what was done with the EAB inventory, doing the usual fall foliage walk in this forest, reaching out to users of the forest, using Front Porch Forum, and perhaps printing some kind of informational brochure or hand-out to have at the local stores and post offices.

5. There was no other business and no public comment. The meeting was adjourned at 9:15. The next meeting will be on July 10.

The minutes were approved at the 7/17/2019 Conservation Commission meeting.