

Calais Conservation Commission Minutes 02/07/2024 - Calais Town Office

Present: Larry Bush, Paul Olander, Neal Maker, Walt Amses, and via Zoom: Stephanie Kaplan, Tracy Coolidge, and Mark Brown, also Noreen Bryan of the Conservation Commission adjunct Calais Lakes and Streams Committee joined for our discussion of invasives.

Proceedings:

Chairman Larry Bush called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm. He added two agenda items, and an Executive Session at the end of the meeting.

- Neal was contacted by Joanne Garton about a retired UVM professor wishing to lead a bike trip to the several Calais Town Forests this summer. He will follow up to help provide assistance if needed.
- The CC was asked if we wish to have an informational table at Town Meeting. It was decided we did, and will display the maps John McCullough made illustrating some of the conservation features, core habitat blocks, river corridors, etc. We also decided to have available materials relative to the CC's focus on invasives; Neal will make a poster showing a "rogues gallery" of the 12 most prevalent invasive plants. Paul will provide a card table and Walt is looking for an easel or two.

- The minutes from December 6, 2023 were approved as drafted.

-There was no public comment.

-Larry attended the 2/6 Planning Commission meeting and reported that most of that meeting concerned planning for the 2/18 "listening session" from 1 to 3 PM at the Town Hall. There was also some discussion of the dichotomy of affordable housing "versus" conservation. Larry has been apprising PC members of the recent legislation and conservation issues that must be considered in the framing of the Town Plan.

-The CC intends to conduct outreach/education seminars during the year and one of the topics will be invasive species – identification, controls, and the CC's efforts in those regards. This may take the form of "Invasives Walks" with guided discussions. In conjunction with this effort Noreen presented an overview of her interim report on the research she has been doing on the invasive land-based plants in Calais and methods for their control. This very informative report will be posted on the CC webpage as an appendix to these minutes and addresses these questions:

- What land-based plants are considered invasive by the State of Vermont? Does the State track the location of invasive land-based plants? What data bases are used for this purpose?
- Which of these plants exist in Calais?
- What are the state laws and regulations regarding these plants?
- Given that there are many invasive species in Calais, how should they be prioritized for eradication and/or removal?

- Should a management plan for invasive land-based plants in Calais be created? Are there templates for creating a management plan? Is there information from the state or other towns that document their efforts and their successes and failures? What are the protocols and guidance for using herbicides?
- When land-based invasive plants are located on private property or public rights-of-way, how should access and authority be obtained for their eradication or management?
- Does the existing state data in INaturalist provide any indications about the spread of these plants?
- Is there funding or grants to help with eradication and/or management of land-based invasive plants?

Noreen explained her intent is for the report to help guide our March meeting discussions on moving our invasives work forward. She will continue her research on these topics.

-Tracey volunteered to lead the “Invasives Walks” and will propose some dates. She asked that CC members consider and suggest locations for the walks. Ideally several species would be in close proximity, and she explained we should target the plants in the category of “The 12 Most Common” so that people can learn them and methods for their control so they can take action on their own property.

-Other outreach/education seminars were mentioned; in addition to Larry’s list in the meeting agenda, forest blocks, Act 59 goals and conservation easements, changes in UVA (“Current Use”) eligibility, we added a possible seminar on working with a Land Trust through the land conservation process. Paul offered to put such a seminar together based on a project he is working on with Northern Rivers Land Trust.

-In support of the Friends of Calais Discovery Walks Larry has volunteered to lead a walk in the Bliss Pond Town Forest some Saturday AM in late April or early May. He invited other CC members to take part.

-Executive Session - Chairman Larry Bush made a motion to go into Executive Session at 8:12 pm under 1 VSA 313(a)(2) “negotiating or securing of real estate purchase options”. This motion was seconded, voted on and carried 7-0. The Chair made a motion to come out of ES at 8:46 pm, which was seconded, voted on, and carried 7-0. The Conservation Commission had nothing to publicly report.

-The CC continued discussions on the conservation issues to be included in the new Town Plan, and voted to adjourn at 9:02 PM