

## **Calais Conservation Commission Minutes 03/06/2024 – Via Zoom Only**

**Present:** Due to the status of some sections of the Town roads Chairman Larry Bush polled CC members and called and warned a change to a Zoom-only meeting. Present were: Neal Maker, Walt Amses, Stephanie Kaplan, Tracy Coolidge, and Mark Brown, also Noreen Bryan of the Conservation Commission's associated Calais Lakes and Streams Committee, and guest Peter Harvey joined for our discussion of invasives. Paul Olander's 15-yo laptop has neither camera nor microphone, but does have video and sound, enabling him to take minutes and to "call-in" some discussion via telephone.

### **Proceedings:**

Chairman Larry Bush called the meeting to order at 7:13 pm following some technical difficulties. He added three agenda items:

- Larry reminded us that we had begun discussion about the possibility of officially bringing the Calais Lakes and Streams Committee in with the Conservation Commission in some fashion. Larry will check into questions of procedural and legal nature regarding bringing the CLSC in as a CC adjunct.
  - The CC budget for '24-'25 contains \$750 for support of the CLSC's newsletter. It is estimated publication cost will be considerably higher. Larry suggested we take an additional amount from the CC's Education fund. More discussion at the end of the meeting if time allowed.
  - Larry noted that the curb cut ordinance, to which the CC had considerable input, was not adopted by the previous Selectboard (a year+ ago) and consideration was put on hold by the new SB. Stephanie advised she had spoken recently to SB Chair Anne Winchester about the ordinance, who said the SB was in the process of reviewing all Town ordinances and for us to check back with the SB after Town Meeting. Larry said he will check in.
- The minutes from February 7, 2024 were approved as drafted.
- There was no public comment.

**-Election of Officers:** Larry as Chair, Neal as Vice Chair and Paul as Recorder/Secretary/Clerk were all elected by unanimous vote.

**-Invasives** – Tracy is planning to hold three guided "Invasives Walks" this year. Based on information from CC members and iNaturalist, walks are planned for the Curtis Pond access area in May, the Adamant center area in summer sometime, and a third, TBD. She and the CC will finalize the schedule at our April meeting, so the first walk can be posted.

-Noreen told us that during her conversations with Kathy Decker of VTFPR she had said she'd be available to assist with conducting such walks, providing materials, etc. She had also told Noreen that students at St Johnsbury Academy had taken on an invasives control efforts as part of their community

service requirements. Walt and Mark thought we should investigate the possibility of something similar in Calais. Mark will pursue this at U-32.

-Noreen furthered discussion of our future actions on invasives stating as she saw it there were two models for an approach, either the CC can educate landowners as to identification and appropriate control measures and rely on landowners to do the work on their own properties, or the CC could “draft” a corps of volunteers, educate them, and lead the control efforts. She noted that the CC and CLSC were not enough and CC members voiced their agreement! Noreen stated no matter which model is chosen, the best approach will be to target the efforts – focus on a few species that can be controlled, perhaps have one individual to lead the effort for each chosen species.

-Given that there are many invasive species in Calais, how should they be prioritized for eradication and/or removal? Noreen suggested the CC should concentrate on four or five of the “Rogues Gallery of 12”, that are present in Calais but are not virtually ubiquitous like chervil, species such as Phragmites, Japanese Knotweed, Yellow Flag Iris, Autumn Olive, and Multiflora Rose (if the clumps on Bayne-Comolli are indeed Multiflora, and the only occurrence of this invasive in Calais). Tracy offered to help Noreen with this.

-Noreen and Tracy discussed whether to work with the Town road crew to try to time roadside mowing to limit the spread of invasives. This would be extremely difficult to coordinate as there can be infestations of differing invasives, with differing flowering periods, along a given roadway section. Cleanliness of mowing machinery and of fill were also discussed as ways to potentially limit the spread of invasive plants, although Tracy indicated that based on her considerable experience with roadways and rights-of-way, this has shown little success. Larry remembered a discussion with John Brabant about past efforts with the road crew. Stephanie will speak with John and with Road Commissioner Kari Bradley about this. Perhaps, as Neal suggested, the mower could just skip over flowering patches.

-Peter Harvey related some observations based on his extensive efforts toward controlling chervil. He told us about a project that involved not mowing a total of about 6 miles of four roads, and about horse and goat consumption of chervil, especially young plants, while cows did not prefer it. He also said that East Montpelier is actively addressing roadside invasives, and to contact Road Commissioner Seth Gardner for more information.

-Larry asked if there are patches of Wild Parsnip in Calais as he has seen a patch of what looks like it near the Chickering Bog parking area, at Lightening Ridge and George Roads. We will investigate further, as Tracy’s assessment is that Parsnip is not yet a problem in Calais and a small patch may be a candidate for control or eradication.

**-Town Plan** – the Commission continued our discussion of ways to contribute to the Planning Commission’s current major undertaking, the complete re-write of the Town Plan.

-Stephanie observed that while the Natural Resources section of the current TP is quite long, the extensive descriptions of the resources and their conservation is important to keep. They provide an important guide and serve to educate. There are, however, far too many “Tasks” in the ambitious-in-the-extreme “To-Do” lists, and those sections could be pared down or dropped entirely she noted.

-Neal introduced the first draft of a conservation map that he prepared as a way to distill the separate mapping and discussion of multiple values, the wildlife and physical features in the TP, Vermont Conservation Design, the Calais Inventory done by Matt Peters, and other sources, into a single map that shows high-priority and medium-priority areas for conservation in Calais. The CC members thoroughly approved of the idea. Larry saw this map as a start toward the map required by statute to be a “centerpiece” of an approved Town Plan. Mark suggested that the map should also show areas where development should be encouraged, since the Town must do both land conservation and housing

development. Paul suggested using slopes, soils, proximity to paved roads/Village centers, etc. to create a layer showing potentially developable areas.

-There was some discussion of the data that have been used to create the mapping that Neal used to create his first draft of this Calais-centered map. The Vermont Conservation Design is 6+ years old and is being re-done. More “fine-scale” data would be needed to produce the best map for Calais. The road crossings shown, for example, come from mapping algorithms (habitat block-to-habitat block, no development at the roadside, etc) not actual surveys. Stephanie recalled a road-crossing survey had been done years ago and will look for that in her CC archives. Tracy suggested that an update might be done via Front Porch Forum – asking respondents to report crossings known to them and the species using them. Neal, Tracy and Stephanie discussed some of the other layers: wetlands mapping is much better, deer yards, grassland bird and turtle habitats are mostly just algorithmic in nature.

**-New Agenda Items** – we finished the meeting with a further discussion of the CLSC newsletter, having disposed of two of the three added agenda items at the beginning of the meeting, the curb cut ordinance and adopting the CLSC as an adjunct under the CC.

- The CLSC is bringing out another edition of the newsletter, with a focus on the recently approved Shoreland zoning regulations, the importance of a wooded shoreline, and other water quality improvement ideas. In the now approved '24-'25 CC budget we had inserted a line for \$750 to support publication of the Lakes and Streams newsletter. Publication costs are estimated to be well in excess of \$1000. The CC is in favor of providing further support from the CC's Education Fund; an amount of \$250 was discussed, but it was decided that we would wait to hear back from the CLSC at our next meeting on the exact cost and any additional funding the CLSC might be able to obtain.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 PM