

Calais Conservation Commission Minutes 04/03/2024 – Calais Town Hall and Via Zoom

Present: In person: Chairman Larry Bush, Walt Amses, Paul Olander; Via Zoom: Stephanie Kaplan, Tracy Coolidge; Guests: Noreen Bryan, representing Calais Lakes and Streams Committee; Claire Haskell, prospective Conservation Commission member; and Paul Hannan, to discuss the completion of his survey of the Bliss Pond Town Forest.

Proceedings:

Chairman Larry Bush called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm. Stephanie requested the addition to the agenda of a discussion about the number of Commissioners: whether to reduce the authorized seats from the current nine.

- The minutes from March 6, 2024 were approved as drafted.

-There was no public comment.

-Bliss Pond Town Forest Survey – for some time now Paul Hannan, Licensed Surveyor and past CC member, has been conducting a survey of the Bliss Pond Town Forest. He has been doing this as his time permitted and at no cost to the Town. The survey is nearly complete but Paul is soon moving south and will not be able to finish it. The deed research is done or nearly so; the lines have been identified, mapped and flagged. Stephanie asked, and Paul stated there were 10 different abutters to this parcel. Paul has prepared an aerial photo showing all lines, tie-ins, abutters, etc. for the Town Forest.

Given the value to the Town to have a complete survey of the BPTF Paul strongly advises finishing this effort. He has recommended Becky Gilson of Gilson Land Surveying, Waterbury Center. He is willing to turn over all of his work on this project to her and has already walked the boundaries with her. Although the CC will need to speak directly with Becky, his ballpark estimate of the cost to finish the survey is \$5000, perhaps less if CC members or other volunteers assist with boundary markers and blazing and painting the flagged lines. (In that regard, Paul reminded us that the flagging will last only a few years so this should be done sooner rather than later. He also noted that the Chapin Town Forest boundaries also need blazing and painting – that parcel was flagged about 1 1/2 years ago.) Paul estimates the total value of the completed survey if done today to be around \$20,000.

Paul said he would be glad to go with the CC to the Selectboard to highlight the need for completion. Larry recalled that when the BPTF was logged a number of years ago the \$14,000 in timber proceeds had been designated for future use for the BPTF, and to his knowledge this money had not been spent. He suggested this survey would be an obvious use for some of that money. The Commission moved, seconded, and voted to approve a motion to spend up to \$5000 to complete the BPTF survey.

Introduction of Prospective New CC Member – Claire Haskell has expressed her interest in potentially joining the CC. After a brief introduction from Larry the CC members and CLSC member gave their own brief CVs. Claire told us her studies were in environmental studies and recreation and tourism, but she is currently working in the mental health field. Her interest in joining the CC is in contributing in the areas of access to recreation and public education. Stephanie assured her that you

don't have to be an environmental scientist to contribute to the CC and Larry noted her background in public environmental education would be especially valuable in our coming outreach efforts regarding the Town Plan and Invasives Control.

Larry instructed Claire she should email her desire to the SB if she was still interested in joining the CC.

-Invasives – Tracy is planning to hold three guided “Invasives Walks” this year. Walks are planned for the Maple Corner area in May, the Adamant center area in July, and a third in October. The walks will be of moderate duration on roadsides rather than hikes, and will focus on invasive plant identification and what the landowner can do to control them. She is planning to announce the first walk for May 11th and will circulate a draft FPF announcement for review.

-Noreen introduced the Invasives Strategy table she and Tracy have constructed showing 22 invasive plants, the number of observed occurrences known in Calais, an assessment of control actions needed, the method of propagation and the relative threat to local natural communities posed by the plants. It organizes the plants in the categories of “Few known plants”, “Limited number of colonies”, “Widely distributed in Calais”, and a few “Not known in Calais”. Taken together the information in this table will indicate the priority of the control efforts needed and help to develop our strategy. Noreen and Tracy request comments from the CC at our May meeting.

Other strategy ideas were discussed: Noreen proposed the idea of finding volunteer “champions” for individual target invasives, someone who would take over organizing control efforts in town for that particular species. Tracy suggested the CC purchase a few of the ANR’s full-color wall charts of invasive plants to be posted at various public locations. Larry mentioned that there are Federal grant-based programs for invasives control such as through Cooperative Invasive Species Management Associations, and wondered if the CC should investigate these further.

CC and CLSC Merger and CLSC Newsletter – the Lakes and Streams Committee met and discussed further the idea of a merger they and we have been considering. They voted not to pursue becoming a Public Body, in favor of remaining a more informal organization. The CLSC wants to continue to partner with the CC on invasives, the newsletter, and other conservation issues.

At our last meeting the CC discussed the request from CLSC for assistance with funding the production of another issue of the Newsletter. The Selectboard has approved \$750 and the CC was willing to appropriate another \$250 from the CC’s budgeted education fund, but discussion was tabled pending the CLSC being able to obtain more funding sufficient to publish this edition. The CLSC has approached the Maple Corner Community Center for this funding and publication looks likely. It was moved, seconded and approved that the CC will give \$250 toward funding the newsletter. Larry will communicate this to the SB.

-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.

-We should develop Neal’s conservation map further with blocks, crossings, current use, conserved lands, riparian corridors, etc. It will provide the centerpiece graphic to the “Natural Resources” section of the Plan.

- Larry informed us that the Planning Commission's re-write timetable has held the Natural Resources section for consideration until later this summer, toward the end of the process, giving the CC plenty of time for input, such as in the language explaining the Town's values with respect to Natural Resources and other conservation goals.

-There is currently work on-going with ANR and Vermont Housing Conservation Board to frame the specifics of "30 X 30", for example: which land types will qualify to be considered under the Act. This framework will help us to better understand the task of achieving the Biodiversity and Resilience goals here in Calais.

-New Agenda Items – several new items were able to be considered:

-the question of the CC size, as raised by Stephanie: there has been some discussion outside the CC of paring the size down from nine to seven members. There have been long-standing vacancies of at least 2 seats, and that would reduce the quorum to 4 members. The CC is now at seven, and if Claire chooses to join we will be eight. Larry has asked the SB to keep the CC at nine members.

-Larry has volunteered to lead a Friends of Calais "Discovery Walk" in the Bliss Pond Town Forest. This will take place April 27, at 9:30 AM and everyone's invited.

-Paul commented that the "Understanding Vermont Conservation Design" and "Using BioFinder4.0" webinars were excellent, and will be a big help to us in determining how we prioritize conservation in Town. There are more webinar dates upcoming, and Larry has asked Jens Hilke, one of the webinar developers, if they would record the sessions for viewing by anyone who couldn't attend a webinars.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM