

# Calais Conservation Commission Minutes

## 8/2/2023 - Calais Town Hall & online

### Approved 9/5/2023

**Present:** Larry Bush, Paul Olander, recorder, Mark Brown, Neal Maker, and  
via Zoom: Stephanie Kaplan, Tracy Coolidge

**Guests:** Noreen Bryan, Galen Whittaker, Walt Amses

**Proceedings:**

- *Meeting called to order at 7:00 pm.*
  
- Additions to agenda: Black Rock Coal permit amendment/town contracts, Moscow Mills dam, Balentine property sale
  
- The minutes of July 5, 2023 were approved
  
- There was no public comment
  
- Non-native invasive species
  - Larry introduced discussion of the Phragmites map produced by Noreen from roadside “windshield” surveys done by her, Mark, Tracy, Larry and Paul. Fifteen patches have been identified in town, from very small ones to much larger ones like the one at the WEC substation near Maple Corner.
  - Seven patches (map # 1-7) are located near or on the Kingsbury Branch along VT Rte 14. Larry has contacted VTrans and was told that any work done in the State ROW will require a permit. The group felt that given the likely delay we would not attempt to work in these locations at this time.
  - After some discussion it was decided we would attempt to cut all of the patches listed as small, (#9, 10, 12 and 13) and some of those listed as larger (#8, #14, #15).
  - Noreen suggested that more assessment of the much larger substation patch (#11) is needed before planning any work in there. There is concern for difficult working conditions due to deep holes and hummocky ground, and a significant number of other wetland plants within the patch. It may be found that the best approach for this year might be to encircle the present patch with a cut “belt” on the existing edge.
  - Noreen noted there is little flowering at this time and the cut canes can be left on the ground; there is no need to pile or remove.
  - The group discussed the range of equipment that may be suitable and available for the cutting project. Since the optimum cutting height is around 4 inches, the equipment used should ideally allow the operator to stand comfortably. While manual hedge clippers or gas/electric hedge trimmers may work well on the semi-woody canes, it may be preferable to do so only in very small patches. Paul will test a standard electric weedwhacker on patch #15. Neal will test his scythe with brush blade. Both of these tools would allow operation in a standing position.
  - A bit of discussion of the fact that cutting projects may slow the spread, but eradication of any but the smallest of patches would require that herbicide be

employed. The group decided to defer that conversation, which would involve certainly the landowners, the SB, and perhaps the entire Town, for next year.

- See the extract below from Larry's email of 8/3 "Notes on Phragmites Cutting Project After 2 August 2023 Meeting" under "Action Items" below for individual patch work assignments.
  
- The group reviewed Noreen and Larry's excellent draft of an FPF item on the CC's current efforts on invasives. It was suggested to remove a call for volunteers to assist us in cutting efforts until we've done some and can see whether we need volunteers and what equipment works best.
  
- Walt Amses said he wishes to join the Conservation Commission. His nomination was heartily approved by the group and Walt will email Barbara Butler, ATC, and Anne Winchester, SB Chair his application for approval by the Selectboard.
  
- Other Agenda Items:
  - Black Rock Quarry – the State has given approval to an amendment to the Pelchuk's permit to allow longer hours of operation, more trucks per day, and an additional two weeks of operation this fall. SB member Gabrielle Malina had asked the CC for review and comment on the SB's proposed public announcement for the Front Porch Forum and other public venues. Stephanie proposed that the notice should contain the specifics of the changes to the permit (hours increased from 8AM to 5PM to 7AM-6PM, loads per day from 4 to 50, and closure date from November 30 to December 15), and should note that it is a "one-time" only change, and that the neighbors have been advised. It was voted and approved by the group to reply that the CC agrees in principle with the notice but with Stephanie's additions. Larry will respond to Gabrielle.
  
  - Moscow Mills dam – after the catastrophic flooding the MM dam has been inspected and its condition downgraded from "low danger" to "high danger". The owners were told by the DEC Dams program rep that it must be repaired or breached. The owners do not have the money required to do so. The group briefly discussed possible funding sources but agreed that with the flooding costs not yet know but anticipated to be very high, the recent bond for the Curtis Pond Dam, and other projects around town, there is not likely to be local funding found. Larry noted this may mean the Town will lose yet another feature of the historical industrial East Calais.
  
  - Balentine property - Larry noted that the Balentines intend to sell the house, barn and 31-acre tract that borders a third of the Bliss Pond shoreline and the Town Forest there. When first proposed, inquiries were made of the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing Conservation Board about

purchasing and conserving some of that acreage as an addition to the Town Forest for the protection of Bliss Pond. Neither body was interested, if the Town had not reached any agreement with the Balentines, and it is extremely unlikely that the Town could afford to purchase the property. The realtor has the house, barn and 31 acres listed at \$740K. Unfortunately it appears this conservation opportunity will be lost.

○ **Action Items:**

- From Larry's notes during the meeting:

Conservation Commission  
Notes on phragmites cutting project after 2 August 2023 meeting

1. Larry and Walt will do short session at the Adamant patch (#8), to get a sense of what cutting the phragmites involves—3 August 2023, 1:00 p.m.
2. Paul will cut the Dugar Brook/Bayne Comolli patch (#15)
3. Larry will seek landowners' approval for the Elmslie Road patch (#13) and the North Calais Road patch (#14).
4. Neal will contact Nancy Purchase, the landowner for the County Road patch (#10)
5. Once landowners' approval obtained, Paul (and others?) will cut the North Calais Road patch (#14)
6. Neal, Mark, Noreen and Larry will cut the Adamant patch – 13 August 2023, 10:00 a.m.

No specific arrangements yet for cutting the Elmslie Road patch (#13), the County Road patch (#10)(Neal?).

The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 PM