

**Calais Conservation Commission Minutes**  
**9/5/2023 - Calais Town Office & online**  
**Approved 10/4/2023**

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

**Guests:** Noreen Bryan, Reed Cherington, Scott Bassage

**Proceedings:**

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

Walt Amses was appointed to the CC at the recent Selectboard meeting and joined us as an official member – congratulations and thank you Walt

Additions to agenda: Moscow Mills dam, Fall Foliage Festival, Town Hall tree planting, Town Plan revision

The minutes of August 8, 2023 were approved as drafted

There was no public comment

**Moscow Mills Dam** –

The meeting began with a short discussion of the status of the Moscow Mills dam. The owners have decided not to pursue dam repairs and the State will begin the process to take the dam down. While many of us regret the loss of the historic dam and mill pond, and the change this will effect on the village of East Calais, in terms of natural resource conservation removal of the dam and allowing the run of the river will lower stream temperature, raise oxygen-holding capacity, and improve conditions for fish and other aquatic organisms. The Conservation Commission has no official position on the removal of the dam.

**Non-native Invasive Species** –

Noreen introduced for discussion the 2023 Log of Phragmites Cutting she prepared showing the cutting activities of CC members in the 15 patches identified during last month's survey. The Log follows, with minor additions from the discussions:

**2023 Log of Phragmites cutting**

**Sites # 1 thru #7- Route 14- no cutting done**

- Since Route 14 is a state highway, individual State permits as well as landowner permissions are required for each property. Deferred until next year.

**# 8 - Adamant and Quarry Road - north side - August 13, 2023**

- Group of six (Larry, Neal, Mark, Walt, Galen and Noreen).
- Cut for two hours and nearly completed the work (~90%) except for a small wet patch. Otherwise the location was easy to access. Ground was firm without standing water.
- The live canes as well as the dead canes were cut. All the cuttings were left where they fell.
- There were no flowers.
- The boundaries of the patch were Quarry Road to the west, Adamant Road to the south, a neighbor's lawn to the east. The patch ran to a depth of about 50 feet to the north.
- Neal used his brush scythe in the open patches. The rest of us used hand cutters to reach the canes of phragmites integrated in the alders. Without Neal's work with the scythe or a mechanical tool, it would have been difficult to undertake this project.
- We worked from the farthest edges in toward the middle.

**# 9 - Adamant and Quarry Road- south side - sometime in July**

- Only two dead canes were found. These were pulled, not dug.

**#10 -County Road- August 31, 2023**

- Group of four (Larry, Neal, Galen and Noreen).
- Cut for two hours and reached 80% (?) of the canes. Very wet after 0.8 inches of rain on the previous day. For much of the cutting, the beautiful clear water was knee deep.
- The live canes as well as the dead canes were cut. All the cuttings were left where they fell.
- There were a few flowers on less than 1% (?) of the canes.
- The boundaries of the patch were the tamarack tree to the south and the end of the alders to the north. The County Road is the boundary to the east and the patch runs west through the swamp to a depth of 60 to 80 feet (?). As the patch gets further from the road, it becomes more sparse and much narrower from north to south.
- The Calais Road crew provided us with gas-powered weed cutters with star-shaped metal blades which was very effective. Neal was able to use these along the road banks and into the open areas. Larry, Galen and Noreen used hand cutters to reach the canes intertwined with the alders.
- Again we worked from the farthest edges in toward the middle.

**#11. - Kent Hill Road- near WEC substation -north side - TBD**

- A very large patch, the largest known in town and very wet.

**#12. - Kent Hill Road- near WEC substation -south side – TBD**

- A small patch near the culvert. The heavy rain and flood on 9 and 10 July reshaped the stream and its banks. There wasn't any evidence of the phragmites that was found and cut in 2022. [ Rhizomes may have been swept downstream to new locations – should check next year]

**#13 -Elmslie Road and Kent Hill Road-** August 8 or 9, 2023 (?)

- Larry did this himself. He found that the patch was larger than it looked in the survey. Not surprising.

**#14. -North Calais Road-**

- The property owner of the large patch on east side of the road was concerned about liability and did not give consent to cut the *Phragmites*; property owner of medium patch on west side of the road was not approached.

**#15. - Intersection of Dugar Brook and Bayne-Comolli Roads** – Paul did this one the first week of September. There were some flowers but still early in development, on less than 10 % of the canes. The patch on the south side was the size of a tabletop, but on the north side it runs about 40-50 feet along the road and extends north some three to eight feet in width, into the alders and up to the brook edge in some places. This patch was cut with an electric weedwhacker with a fairly light-duty string and was “finished” with an electric hedge trimmer. This took about 1.5 hours and got all but the canes on the steep muddy bank in the alders (no boots!). While the line trimmer did the job, it went through the entire 16 feet of string on the head, and threw short sharp chunks of cane like shrapnel. The hedge trimmer worked well on the Phrag canes and could be pushed in between the alder stems, but got tangled in thick grass and required work from the knees.

**#16. - Curtis Pond near the dam - August 11, 2023**

- This patch has been cut since 2004 and hasn't seemed to have spread via rhizomes.
- Group of seven (Heidi, Lewis, Nette, Zora, John, Noreen, Ginger)
- 100% cut in 20 minutes. The cuttings were collected in a black plastic bag and taken to Noreen's property to be composted in the bag.
- Only live canes at this site. The maximum height of the canes was 3 feet. Most were 12 to 18 inches compared to 8 foot canes at other sites.
- There were no flowers.
- The boundaries of the patch are Camp Road to the east, 3-4 feet into Curtis Pond to the west, the end of the pond to the south and Chris Miller's dock to the north.
- All the cutting was done by hand.

**Questions:**

- Should we mark the boundaries of the patches?
- Should other patches be cut in 2023?
- Should permitting for the patches along RT 14 be explored over the fall and winter?
- Based on the location of the patches, most of which are located along the edges of the road, it raises the question of whether phragmites was brought there in the material used by road crews. Should we talk with the Calais road crew and see what their thoughts are? RT 14, a state highway, seems like a more challenging issue. Should the patches be marked to alert the road crew so that they can avoid digging into these patches?

The group then took up these and other questions:

Putting stakes or pin flags at the perimeter of the *Phragmites* patches would allow us to determine whether the patches are spreading over time. This would be done with landowner permission and in such a way as to not interfere with mowing, etc.

It was decided that Larry, Neal and Noreen will survey Patch #11, the WEC substation site, to determine the extent and wetness of the site with an eye toward future work. No cutting will be done there this year.

We discussed the pattern of Phrag infestations and the evident connection to roadwork done at these sites. The exact method of dispersal and establishment is probably from either rhizome material from a previous work site adhering to equipment and dropped at the new site, rhizome pieces in fill material brought to the site, or seeds/rhizome bits in hay used to mulch grass seeded over the finished work. We will discuss this further, and then with the Road Crew at a later date.

Noreen told us that the Calais Lakes and Stream Committee is trying to get the newsletter going again. It will be a good vehicle for raising awareness about invasives, and possible recruitment for future work. The CLSC may come back to the CC with a request for publishing support. The past distribution was to Calais property owners; it may be desirable to mail to all residents in the future.

Larry posed the questions: Where do we go from here? Can, or should, the CC become the Invasives Crew for the Town? Can we, should we, get volunteers, and what would be the liability in that? What other species should we address? The Knotweed patches growing in size all over Town, the Wild Parsnip now spreading along Lightning Ridge Rd. and George Rd., the Goutweed everywhere? Paul again related his conversation with Robert Nelson, Washington County Forester, who asked: what do you want your forest (our Town) to look like? Are you willing to tolerate the very short-term effects of herbicide in trade against a landscape filled with invasives that outcompete native plants and are of relatively low value to wildlife? All good topics for much further and wider conversation this winter.

### **Fall Foliage Festival –**

In recent years the CC has led a hike during the Fall Foliage Weekend on one of the trails around Town. Past hikes with guides – Toni Kaeding last year on the trail on their property, Neal on the Robinson Hill trail, were well-received. It was decided to again offer a hike on Saturday morning, October 7, at 9AM. Since west side trails were done the last two years it would be nice to conduct the hike this year on the east side, such as on the Blachy trails.

Larry will check with the owner to see if this could be done, and about parking, dogs on leashes, etc., and if Tom Blachly would lead the group for a two-hour hike.

### **Tree planting at the Town Hall-**

The new generator at the Town Hall was installed in a poor location, too close to the building, and it and the associated power panel look poor. An *excrescence* was the term used in an emergency Design Advisory Board meeting. The generator will be moved to a location behind the panel and it is desired to use some sort of screening, trees, or bushes. Stephanie said that there was \$1774 (less a couple of crabapples at the Town Office) in the budget for landscaping at the Hall/Town Office. It was noted this should be coordinated with the Friends of the Town Hall.

Reed Cherington spoke to the general aesthetics of landscaping 19th century historical buildings, usually just surrounded by grass within 20 feet of the building. He stated it is important to see our restored Town Hall in its historical, austere setting. This is particularly important, he said, in light of the reforestation in Town and the change in our historical look.

### **Town Plan revision –**

The Planning Commission is embroiled now in the Zoning Regulations changes but will be getting ready for their review and revision of the Town Plan next. This will include significant work to the current Natural Resource protection sections which are extensive. While there may be a desire on the PC to pare this down, Larry relayed that there are many new regulations regarding habitat, connectivity, etc., that came out of the recent legislation (the so-called 30 by 30, 50 by 50, or Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act) and will need to be addressed. Stephanie suggested we should meet with the person on the PC assigned to this section and offer to help with the re-draft.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 PM