

HARVARD CONSERVATION COMMISSION - Land Stewardship Subcommittee

MINUTES OF MEETING

September 26, 2023

Virtual Meeting called to order @ 7:15pm

Present: Wendy Sisson, Brian McClain, Peter von Conta, Jim Gorss, Petri Flint

1. Minutes of LSS meeting on August 22, 2023 approved unanimously.
2. Report on Prospect Hill trail rerouting:
On 9/22/2023, Wendy, Petri and Jim met to reroute the yellow trail around a corner of private property so that it now lies entirely on town land. Also, they removed any remaining trail markers from the now closed blue trail, adding clear boundary markers at its former junction with the yellow trail. With the property bounds now marked by a surveyor for the abutter to the South, we discussed maintaining the bound by posting it where feasible and perhaps planting a row of shrubs like willows in the wet meadow so both the town's agents and the abutter can see and respect the line. A large pile of grass clippings was noted extending onto the conservation land in that wet meadow.
3. Lands and trails updates:
Peter did work in Clapp-Scorgie to clear some large downed trees and a widow-maker.
4. Possible collaboration with HCT stewardship in clearing downed trees:
LSS members agreed that collaboration with HCT on downed trees is a good idea. It was noted that a better system of communication would be helpful to smoothly integrate that collaboration, since the TrailCare app does not include a communication function that would allow all users to see who has reported and dealt with any trail issues that are logged on the app. Peter proposed using the Trail Status Log as a better alternative that would allow more information to be shared. A group email list was also proposed as way to coordinate. It was noted that the chainsaw volunteer list tab on the log could use updating, and the suggestion was to begin creating a new list from a smaller group of people who are known to be trained and interested in doing this work. Peter volunteered to connect with John Lee about organizing the collaborative effort. It was noted that we need to make sure that everyone becoming involved has submitted the town's liability waiver and is aware of our standards for trail care and for personal safety.
5. Hunting season signage responsibilities:
Hunting season for the deer management program begins on Oct. 2 east of Rte. 495 and Oct. 16 to its west. Wendy has normally volunteered to help place hunting notices in the relevant town lands that have multiple points of entry, to ensure that all are covered, plus this year's new sites, Tripp and Old Mill. However, since she will be out of town in

early October, Petri volunteered to handle posting signage for the multiple entry points in Great Elms, and Brian volunteered to serve as the contact person for questions from DMS about any other town lands that might come up or where our help is needed.

6. Pollinator plantings and chestnut orchard on Powell:

The pollinator garden is well-established and the plants are thriving.

Concern had been raised about one of the Chestnut trees that had apparently snapped, and Brian examined it to find that the break in the trunk occurred in a spot that was impacted by blight, which had weakened the tree. He reported that the tree would trunk-sprout by next spring and should grow back vigorously.

7. Invasive plants:

- Stow Rd and Mass Ave roadside knotweed sites are due to be sprayed this week, although the work has been delayed for several weeks.
- Small plots of previously treated knotweed on Powell, Williams, Maxant and Stone have received follow-up treatments.
- Phragmites near Bare Hill Pond dam was treated but a satellite stand near Green Eyrie could not be sprayed, because the depth of the water made the site inaccessible.
- Autumn olive and burning bush will be controlled on the Stone land using cut stump treatment.
- Cut stump treatment of buckthorn on Powell will continue in October.
- Williams land invasive control is being skipped this year, due to a shortage of funds.
- A plan to suppress weeds on Haskell by planting buckwheat was not feasible because the buckwheat could not grow in the wet conditions that we had this summer.

8. Fall walk:

Our fall walk on November 4 will honor Jim Adelson this year. Potential sites for the walk were discussed, and we settled on Great Elms, meeting at the parking loop at the end of Murray Lane by the Brown-Burgess lands to begin the walk.

9. Recommendations for Rodriguez, plans for Hermann Orchard:

- LSS members met to conduct a site visit to the area on 9/24 & 26 to review the advisability of establishing possible new snowmobile tracks. Our examination of the land, and our follow-up discussion at this meeting, led us to the following recommendations:
- We would not object to a new track through the Rodriguez land along a path that has already been cleared passing onto private land to reach Hermann Orchard and its existing trails. The corridor there, hugging a section of the western boundary of Rodriguez, appears to follow an old logging track on upland mineral soils and does not pose significant new disturbance. However, we are

aware that there is a Conservation Restriction that prohibits snowmobile use on the portion of private land where this potential trail joins Hermann Orchard.

- We do not recommend the alternative of cutting a new track to connect from Rodriguez through the forest below Hermann Orchard, as this is an exemplary hardwood forest with mature oaks and a notably healthy, dense understory on deep humus interspersed with many boulders. A 6' wide cleared corridor through this area, travelled by snowmobiles, would be disruptive to this valued ecosystem which is part of a protective buffer above Bowers Brook.

Meeting adjourned 9:05pm.

Petri Flint