

## **Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) Advisory Committee Meeting**

March 27, 2018

\*March 13, 2018 meeting was cancelled due to snowstorm

### **Berkshire East Ski Lodge, 66 Thunder Mountain Road, Charlemont, MA**

Staff: Alyssa Larose, Tom Matuszko, Bob O'Connor, Deirdre Rose, Peggy Sloan and Wendy Ferris

Members Attending: Greg Cox (Hawley), Kyle Hanlon (BRPC/North Adams), Jay Healy (Charlemont), Stacy Kontrabecki (Buckland), Ed Munch (Peru), Joe Nowak (Adams), Jim Perry (DRWA), Mark Phelps (New Ashford), Keith Ross (MA Chapter - Society of Foresters), Whit Sanford (GSFABA), Art Schwenger (Heath), Janet Sinclair (Alternate – Buckland), Gisela Walker (FRPB)

Others Attending: Dwayne Breger (UMass CEE), Jonathan Parrott (DOER), Richard Stafursky (Species Forest, Inc.), Martha Taft-Ferguson (Buckland Board of Health)

### **1. Introductions**

P. Sloan commenced the meeting at 6:00 p.m. A round of introductions followed. J. Sinclair stated that she would like to record the meeting and turned on a recorder.

### **2. Review and Approval of January 9, 2018 Meeting Notes**

At 6:02 p.m., M. Phelps motioned to approve the Meeting Notes of January 9, 2018. A. Schwenger seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### **3. Review and Discussion of Legislation for the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership and Next Steps**

T. Matuszko handed out a summary of changes to the legislation. He noted that at the last MTWP Advisory Committee meeting, the Committee reviewed and accepted a number of changes to the draft legislation which were submitted to the Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture Committee ("ENRA Committee"). Many of the changes were incorporated into the draft legislation by the ENRA Committee. Matuszko outlined the progress of the legislation. The report-out date was extended and the legislation was reported out favorably as redrafted. The legislation is presently at the Clerk's office for assignment.

Matuszko reviewed changes to the legislation made by the ENRA Committee, which are identified in the handout. A key item was the removal of the request for funds. Discussion followed. A comment was made that the plan had always been for the State to provide some funds and then to request funds from the Federal government. Matuszko responded that the passage of the legislation still provides the opportunity for the MTWP to receive funds. B. O'Connor stated that money can be sought in different ways to capitalize the trust fund, which is key to the MTWP program.

J. Sinclair asked if the Partnership will pursue the full \$6 million in State funding. Matuszko responded that was the proposed amount and if Federal funding is received the combined funding would make the

Partnership sustainable over the long-term. Sinclair asked if \$6 million would be requested from the Environmental Bond bill. Matuszko answered funding might be sought from the Environmental Bond bill but that staff will work with their legislators to see what is acceptable.

J. Nowak noted that a political ad was recently in the Berkshire Eagle opposing the legislation. The ad was not signed and was misleading and inaccurate. Nowak shared a letter he wrote to his Representatives after seeing the ad to express his views and support for the project.

Matuszko continued with reviewing changes to the legislation. One change from the Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture Committee is to specify that the public health and forest ecology representatives on the Partnership board be UMass Amherst faculty member.

W. Sanford asked how long the process of moving the legislation forward will take. Matuszko said that normally bills reported out of Committee go in and out of the Clerk's office in a day or two, but there are many bills at the Clerk's office at present so it may take several weeks. G. Walker asked if the bill misses this legislative session, does the process need to start over again? Matuszko answered yes, which is why it is critical for action this session.

The next change Matuszko presented was a clarification that the non-profit would be activated after the Partnership board is established, not after the act is enacted. As discussed at the last MTWP Advisory Committee meeting, reference to the current MTWP Plan was removed, and language was added that no funding received by the Partnership may be used for the construction or operation of a wood pellet manufacturing plant.

At 6:20 p.m. A. Schwenger motioned to support the changes to the legislation as presented. W. Sanford seconded the motion. Discussion followed. J. Sinclair asked if the language in the legislation about not funding a pellet plant would mean that the Partnership would refrain from supporting any use of wood for heat. Matuszko answered that the key concern heard was funding for pellet manufacturing. J. Sinclair stated that she protests the language because it is not inclusive enough to prohibit all wood heat related activity.

B. O'Connor noted that DCR keeps track of cutting plans and around the year 2000, only 10% of wood harvested across the state was done under a professional forest management plan. Last year with support from DCR, about 46% of wood harvested was done under a forest or stewardship plan with a licensed forester. O'Connor would like to see this percent increased to support good forestry practices. K. Ross noted that income received by a landowner from selling a Conservation Restriction can delay harvesting because they have funds to pay for taxes etc., which leads to a longer rotational age and a higher quality product later.

At 6:29 p.m. the motion to support the changes to the legislation as presented passed, with J. Sinclair opposing the motion.

P. Sloan asked whether it would be helpful for project staff and MTWP Advisory Committee members to meet with Select Boards at this time, or wait until the legislative process is through. MTWP Advisory

Committee members felt that their Select Boards are informed and that staff time would be better spent on public outreach to residents to explain the benefits of the MTWP legislation. T. Matuszko asked MTWP Advisory Committee members to contact him or P. Sloan if they would like staff to meet with their Select Board.

G. Walker offered to organize any MTWP Advisory Committee members who want to work on getting a positive message out about the MTWP. S. Kontrabecki noted it would be helpful to have a central place on the web with the FAQ, link to legislation etc. and asked if there is a plan to get the message out. T. Matuszko answered that a project website has been created - mohawktrailwoodlandpartnership.org. He will email the link to everyone. It is a simple website with a summary and links to the FAQ, quarterly update, legislation, and project team websites, as well as contact information if people want to send comments.

B. Armstrong asked if any lobbying is currently being done on behalf of the project. Matuszko answered that the regional planning agencies are not lobbying. W. Ferris noted that the project has support from Mass Audubon, the Trustees of Reservations, The Nature Conservancy, and the Appalachian Mountain Club, and these organizations have lobbyists. There was general agreement about the uniqueness and strength of the project, and that now is the time to get the word out.

#### **4. Review and Discussion of Frequently Asked Questions / Other Public Outreach**

P. Sloan handed out hard copies of the draft FAQ. She explained that the Franklin Land Trust created the initial draft FAQ, which has since been broadened. It now includes an introduction, and is organized by the project's three main goals. Sloan received comments from W. Quist. If others have detailed comments, she asked that they email them to her. T. Matuszko emphasized the need to get the FAQ done, and asked MTWP Advisory Committee members to provide comments as soon as possible.

A comment was made to change language in question #13 to read "towns that opt in to the MTWP will be eligible for municipal grants *from the MTWP...*" otherwise it sounds like the grants are coming from the towns. P. Sloan noted that W. Quist suggested that the FAQ explain better why the effort is needed, such as protecting large forest blocks and providing information to landowners to support better forest management. G. Walker commented that the document should focus more on the benefits.

A comment was made that the introduction should be more inspirational and should include language about why we value our forests and how the MTWP project will be beneficial. A question was asked about funding priority for CRs going to Ch. 61 properties. P. Sloan noted that the criteria for funding priorities would be worked out by the Partnership board. Initially Ch. 61 lands were identified as a priority because placing them under permanent protection is expected to have a neutral tax impact on towns and because there is a gap in funding for conserving woodlands.

D. Rose noted that the Natural Resource Economic Development section could be expanded upon, since it was seen by the towns as equally important to forest conservation. J. Healy agreed and asked that language be included about the opportunity to use more local wood in the region to create jobs and support value added products.

P. Sloan asked for additional comments by the end of the week. Comments received will be incorporated and a final draft will be emailed out. When the FAQ is finalized it will be posted to the website.

### **5. Update on the UMass CEE Heat Demand & Air Quality and Public Health Study**

D. Breger provided an update on energy assessments. Fifteen towns are participating in energy assessments; eight have been finalized and delivered. Five have been drafted and CEE is waiting for feedback from towns. Two towns, Adams and Cheshire, would like a clean energy assessment, but additional information is needed before moving forward. CEE is also offering clean heating and cooling screenings as a follow up to the assessments, which would identify buildings that may benefit from energy efficiency and renewable energy opportunities. A screening tool is used to look at heating load, and analyze the potential for clean energy systems with some preliminary performance and economic results. CEE will be working with Windsor and Peru, and are happy to work with other interested towns. A MTWP Advisory Committee member asked how towns can contact CEE for a clean heating and cooling screening. Breger answered that they can contact River Strong at UMass CEE.

Next Breger provided a report from Rick Peltier from the UMass Department of Health Sciences, who is conducting the air quality monitoring project. The monitoring truck has been taking measurements all winter at different sites. Peltier hopes to get to Rowe for monitoring before the end of the season and then they will be done for the year. An enormous amount of data has been collected and needs to be analyzed in the lab. This is time-consuming and the expectation is that results will be ready mid to end of the summer.

Matuszko asked how many sites were monitored. Breger said sites were monitored in Ashburnham, Wachusett, Ashfield, Belchertown, and Rowe. All of the systems were pellet systems, none were wood chip systems. Peltier is hoping to monitor an oil system in Rowe since the Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School didn't work out. Some sites don't lend themselves to monitoring for various reasons.

J. Healy asked if the study will have any comparison to wood stoves or boilers, or benchmark existing conditions in the region. Monitoring of wood stoves was not part of the scope this winter. They could potentially study this next winter, but would need more funding.

A question was asked whether any monitoring was addressing indoor air quality in schools. Breger answered that generally the pellet boilers are vented to the outside, but in all cases UMass offered indoor monitoring to the schools if they wanted to put small self-contained monitoring units in the buildings. He was not sure if any sites chose to do that.

### **6. Voluntary Public Access Program / Carbon Credit Market Project Update**

W. Ferris from the Franklin Land Trust presented a new program called the Voluntary Public Access Program. It provides funding to purchase temporary or permanent easements from landowners for public access to private lands for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and hiking. The program is available in the 21-town region as well as a few communities to the south. Franklin Land Trust is working to get

the word out to landowners who may already allow public access as now they can receive some funding. A question was asked about liability. Ferris said that when the landowner does not charge a fee for access, they are protected under the State's recreational use statute.

The Voluntary Public Access Program provides \$50 per acre for temporary access, and \$75 per acre for permanent access. The maximum payment limit is \$35,000 per landowner. J. Sinclair asked if there is a minimum acreage requirement. Ferris answered no. Payment is based on the total number of acres accessed by the easement, and landowners can choose which areas of their land to allow access.

A MTWP Advisory Committee member asked if trails are prioritized. Ferris answered that a goal of the program is to provide more access for hunting, fishing, and hiking. There is strong interest in trails in this region, so for this reason trails have been included for funding through this program. Trails need to be maintained by a third party trail group in order to be eligible.

State and Federal land is not eligible, and previously conserved land is eligible if the restriction does not include public access. The program can be used in conjunction with a CR if still in process but not if the CR restricts public access. Ferris noted that it is a limited amount of money and there is only a year to allocate it. The total amount is \$500,000 from the Natural Resource Conservation Service. The program exists in other parts of the country, but this is the first time funding has been received in Massachusetts.

A discussion followed about access to streams. Ferris stated that one issue is parking. The program could provide a safe area to access a river. Once at the river, a person could walk along it. Ferris noted that the FLT is doing a press release and several events this spring to get the word out.

P. Sloan provided an update on the carbon market project. She met with town officials in Heath and Rowe which would like to learn more about how this project might work. There needs to be enough towns interested to pursue funding for a feasibility study. The New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) is interested in partnering with towns to add to the overall acreage. NEFF just sold their first carbon credit on a property in New Hampshire and received \$500,000.

J. Sinclair asked if there was a good resource for learning about carbon credits. B. O'Connor noted that interns at Boston University are working on a municipal guide on how to do carbon credits. P. Sloan said that she can provide the presentation slides on forest carbon markets from a previous MTWP Advisory Committee meeting for those who want more information.

#### **7. Other Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of the meeting/ MTWP Advisory Committee Member or Public Comment/ Adjourn**

Public comment was heard from R. Stafursky, who asked that any reference to "clean wood" be stricken from the record.

The next MTWP Advisory Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 12, 2018. At 7:40 p.m. the meeting was adjourned.