

Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) Advisory Committee Meeting

January 9, 2018

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

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

Members Attending: T. Brule (Florida), R. Chandler (Ashfield), G. Cox (Hawley), D. Crane (Windsor), L. Flaccus (Shelburne), K. Hanlon (BRPC/North Adams), J. Healy (Charlemont), C. LaViola (Savoy), N. L'Etoile (MFA), B. Girshman (Conway), E. Munch (Peru), J. Nowak (Adams), J. Perry (DRWA), M. Phelps (New Ashford), W. Quist (Rowe), K. Ross (MSF), A. Schwenger (Heath), J. Sinclair (Alternate – Buckland), and G. Walker (FRPB)

Others Attending: Dwayne Breger (UMass CEE), River Strong (UMass CEE), Jonathan Parrott (DOER), Richard Stafursky (Species Forest, Inc.), Terry Estes (Buckland Board of Health), Kimberly Wetherell (Peru Conservation Commission), Ann Galt (Pittsfield), John Galt (Pittsfield)

1. Introductions

P. Sloan commenced the meeting at 6:06 p.m. A round of introductions followed.

2. Review and Approval of October 3, 2017 Meeting Notes

At 6:09 p.m., A. Schwenger motioned to approve the Meeting Notes of October 3, 2017. K. Hanlon seconded the motion. J. Nowak noted that he attended the October meeting but that his name is omitted in the Meeting Notes. The Meeting Notes with the addition of J. Nowak to the list of attendees were approved unanimously.

3. Presentation on Stewardship of our Region's Forests to Provide a Range of Services

J. Sinclair stated that she would like to record the presentation by Harvard Forest and turned on a recorder. At 6:10 p.m., B. O'Connor introduced David Foster, the Director of Harvard Forest, which is the first research forest to begin monitoring climate change in forests. Foster provided an overview of forests in North America, and emphasized the important role of New England forests in connecting forests in the southern U.S. to Canada. Foster then outlined the historical perspective of forests in the northeast, where deforestation reached a peak in the mid-1800s. With industrialization and agricultural expansion to the west, forests began reclaiming the land and have been growing from the 1850s to now. More recently, a second wave of deforestation is occurring due to development. This phase of deforestation is a "hard" conversion, whereas the first phase of deforestation was a "soft" conversion of forest land that allowed for eventual reforestation.

Foster presented forest changes over time. He noted that since pre-colonial times, there has been a shift from long-lived species to short or medium lived species. Harvard Forest has been measuring carbon storage since the late 1980s in its forest. They have found that carbon storage has increased over time, partly due to ongoing forest development, featuring an increasing role for red oak, and more carbon in

the atmosphere. In addition, Harvard Forest has been less intensively harvested than surrounding forests and trees are storing carbon more efficiently. Foster noted that approximately 24,000 acres of forest are lost in New England each year to development, and that land use in terms of forest conversion to development is a more immediate threat to forests than climate change over the next 50 years. Foster presented a carbon storage map highlighting that western MA forests have higher carbon storage than much of the rest of New England. He noted that this area has been harvested less intensively, demonstrating that how forests are managed makes a big difference.

As part of the Paris Climate Accord, all countries agree to manage forests well. In the U.S. this concern (management, deforestation, and degradation) was largely not being discussed. In response, Harvard Forest published the Wildlands and Woodlands (W&W) report. The newest version includes communities and agriculture. The W&W vision is to permanently conserve 70% of New England in forest, along with all of the existing agricultural land. The vision calls for about 10% of the conserved forests to be set aside as large wildland reserves that are not actively managed. Ninety percent (90%) of the conserved forests could be managed woodlands. The bulk of the regions' forests are privately owned, so landowners may want to manage them in many different ways. The vision allows for development to continue, but argues to do it smartly to avoid forest conversion.

Foster noted that New England has a strong history of land protection, and that the rate of land protection has increased in the last 25 years. However, conserved areas are isolated, not contiguous. Harvard Forests' Changes to the Land report assesses the future of the Massachusetts landscape in 50-100 years under different scenarios that were developed with input from many stakeholders. Under the Forest as Infrastructure scenario, which ranked #1 among the four scenarios over a 50 year simulation period, there would be a 20% increase in tree species with high commercial and wildlife value, twice as much local wood harvested and a 35% increase in the amount of carbon stored in the forests.

Foster stated that the 2010 MA Forest Assessment identified large interior forest blocks in the State, which are mostly concentrated in western MA. These areas have high amounts of forest cover and high quality habitat. There is a high concentration of forests around 75 years in age, presenting an opportunity to continue to grow older forests while managing others for a diversity of age structure. For State-owned lands, the largest reserves are in western MA, but still represent a small percent of forests in the region. The State could place more of its land in reserves in this region and should follow through with the existing reserves designation to make sure that these areas remain as wildland reserves.

Examples of forest stewardship and conservation were then presented. Harvard Forest manages its land and is building new structures on the property with wood from its forest. The buildings are heated with a cordwood system that is highly efficient and clean burning. The W&W vision focuses on retaining forests for nature and people. Foster noted that we (Petersham, Massachusetts, and much of New England) can use our forest resources more than we currently do. Harvard Forests' publication "The Illusion of Preservation" discusses how efforts to curtail harvesting in MA forests is misguided, and that efforts should instead focus on being engaged in the process of managing forests well. Foster highlighted the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership as an example of a successful forest conservation effort with a focus on well-managed forests. Foster then described his own family's

approach to forest landownership in Vermont, where they placed a CR on the property. They manage portions of the property but designated an area (representing 10% of their ownership) in a watershed as a wildland reserve.

Foster answered questions from the Advisory Committee. A member asked if Chestnut would ever return to New England forests. Foster noted that there is promising research being done to cripple the fungus that kills young Chestnut trees. A comment was made that placing land under a CR seems great, but it hurts a town's tax base. Foster answered he is sympathetic to the issue. He noted the benefit of a CR is that the land remains in private ownership and taxes are still paid. A question was asked about Harvard Forests' attitude towards managing forests. Foster answered that Harvard Forest is managed, but not intensively. The forest is studied so intensively that it doesn't make sense to do commercial harvesting. If carbon is all that is of interest, then don't touch the forest. But carbon is not the only interest, habitat and local wood products are also important.

A question was asked regarding what species require wildlands. Foster answered that the argument for wildlands is that there are a whole range of habitats that are missing in New England due to past intensive management, and that a range of conditions are needed. He also stressed that the origins of the Wilderness Society and wilderness thinking in the U.S. focused on the benefits of these areas to people and society, so he and the Wildlands and Woodlands group did not see wildlands as strictly supporting biodiversity. A committee member asked if the W&W vision is compatible with U.S. Forest Service management practices. Foster answered he is not in a position to judge. He has seen poor management practices on private and public lands. The vision calls for 10% wildlands and 90% woodlands with an emphasis on conserving the land from development. Most private landowners want to conserve their land if the funding works. A question was asked whether the 10% wildlands was scalable. Foster noted that wildlands should be large tracts of forest rather than small ones to accommodate natural processes. Foster concluded his presentation saying that hard copies of the Wildlands and Woodlands report are available for meeting attendees.

4. Review and Discussion of Possible Amendments to the Legislation for the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership

T. Matuszko led a discussion of potential amendments to the MTWP state legislation. Matuszko stated that the legislation has not been released out of Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. Proposed changes to the legislation include: clearly linking any forest management supported by the MTWP to sustainable forestry practices; emphasizing natural-resource based economic development including tourism as well as wood products; and greater emphasis on carbon storage. In addition, there was a specific suggestion related to the start-up of the Partnership Board which should only occur after a sufficient number of towns opt in. This is a critical time for the legislation, so the goal is to go through potential changes to the legislation tonight and present them to Chairman Pignatelli and Chairwoman Gobi with the hope that they will report the legislation out of Committee.

T. Matuszko began going through the suggested changes to the legislation. A committee member asked why monitoring has to be called out separately from forest management, when taking periodic inventories of a forest is already part of forestry practices? Matuszko answered that it is not separating it out, but highlighting it. A question was asked what is meant by soil productivity. Matuszko answered it means the ability to retain soil productivity going forward. Matuszko noted a change on page 58 that creates a “lasting” partnership rather than a “long-term” partnership. A committee member asked why the ability of towns to opt-out of the partnership would be removed. Matuszko answered that there is no opt-out provision. Towns need to choose to opt in, and that process has not changed.

On page 6 Matuszko highlighted a substantial change that requires at least 11 towns to opt in before the Partnership Board can be established. Discussion followed. A decision was made to proceed with a simple majority of 11 towns opting in to trigger the ability to establish the Board. Matuszko presented changes on page 8 to include a public health representative and a forest ecology/climate change representative to the Board, to be appointed by UMass Amherst. Discussion followed. A decision was made to add Harvard Forest as an entity for a possible forest ecology/climate change appointee.

Matuszko then presented several options for changes on page 13. Matuszko explained that there is opposition to pellet manufacturing, even though the legislation does not include funding for a pellet manufacturing plant. The legislation mentions the MTWP Plan, which includes a recommendation to conduct a feasibility study for a community scale pellet facility in the region sized to serve the 21 towns. The legislative committee wants this addressed but did not provide any guidance on how to change the legislation. Matuszko provided two options. The plan could be changed to remove the pellet mill feasibility study recommendation, or the legislation could remove reference to the current plan and state that a plan will be developed in x amount of years. Discussion of the options followed.

N. L’Etoile moved that the reference to the existing MTWP Plan be removed from the legislation, and to amend line 241 to state “Within 3 years after the establishment of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Board and receipt of sufficient federal or state appropriations, the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership shall develop a partnership plan...” G. Walker seconded the motion. There was a unanimous vote to remove reference to the plan as a recommended change to the legislation.

Matuszko continued with proposed changes to the legislation. On page 14, “Forestry” Center is changed to “Forest” Center to better encompass the broad purpose of the center. K. Ross asked that line 349 be amended to include a “qualified” non-profit “conservation” land trust. A. Schwenger suggested the Committee vote to approve all of the proposed changes to the legislation. At 8:19 p.m., K. Hanlon motioned to approve the proposed changes to legislation with the discussed amendments. E. Munch seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously.

5. Update on the UMass CEE Wood Heat and Air Quality and Public Health Study

D. Breger from the UMass Clean Energy Extension (CEE) provided updates on the air quality monitoring project. He outlined a schedule for the air quality monitoring mobile truck, which will be parked at 4 or 5 locations for approximately 3 weeks at a time to monitor particulate emissions from pellet and oil heating systems. The locations currently scheduled are the Briggs Elementary School in Ashburnham, the DCR Wachusett Visitor Center, and Sanderson Academy in Ashfield. CEE is having discussions with the Buckland Shelburne Elementary School to monitor its oil burning system, and is also in discussion with the Hawlemont Elementary School to monitor its pellet system. CEE is still looking for one or two locations that heat with oil or pellets. W. Quist noted that Rowe has buildings with pellet and oil boilers that could be possible sites to monitor.

A member of the public asked if gas heating systems would also be monitored. Breger answered no, because gas is not widely available in the region and oil is the fuel that is more likely to be replaced. J. Sinclair commented that the original study included a Greenhouse Gas analysis, and asked why that is not part of the current study. Breger answered that if it is of interest, CEE could look into it. A Committee member commented that particulate matter is the focus of the study because there are few or no similar studies to refer to.

Breger noted that a demand study of current and future heating needs in the region will be looking at municipal buildings as well as residential and commercial users. R. Strong from CEE then presented updates on the municipal energy assessments. Fifteen of the 21 towns in the MTWP region are participating in energy assessments that look at efficiency opportunities in municipal buildings. The next phase is to conduct heating system analyses to determine opportunities for clean heating technologies.

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

This agenda item was not discussed due to the late time.

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

Public comment was heard from R. Stafursky. Stafursky provided a handout to Committee members.

At 8:31 p.m. the meeting was adjourned.