

Montague Conservation Commission

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MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, March 13, 2014 – 6:30 pm

Second Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall, One Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA

Commissioners Present: Mark Fairbrother, Justin Fermann, Sean Werle, Deb Picking, Alex Peterkin and Addie Holland

Commissioners Absent: Donna Francis

Staff Present: Walter Ramsey- Agent

Mark Fairbrother called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM

Approval of January 9, 2014 Minutes:

***Motion** made by Justin Fermann to accept the January 9, 2014 minutes. Seconded by Addie Holland. Motion passed unanimously.*

Public Hearing: NOI #2014-01 by New England Power Company (d/b/a/ National Grid)

To conduct exploratory and geotechnical soil borings within Bordering Vegetated Wetland along a transmission line right-of-way between the Connecticut River (affecting Assessors Map 12 Lot 2 and Map 8 Lot 2). The borings are necessary for planning and design purposes associated with future improvements to the existing electric transmission system. Work will require temporary placement of swamp mats over BVW to support drilling equipment.

Guests: Mathew Waldrip, Environmental Scientist with BSC Group and Paul Knapik, Project Manager from BSC Group.

Mathew W: The NOI is filed for borings that will be necessary for planning and design purposes associated with future improvements to the existing electric transmission system. All but three (3) of the twenty (20) borings fall outside the jurisdiction of the Wetlands Protection Act. The 3 jurisdictional borings are in BVW. These require placement of swamp mats in BVW to support drilling equipment during the process. As mentioned in section 3.1 of the narrative and on page 3 of the form all the impacts will be temporary in nature with no net loss of wetlands. The area affected by the swamp mats will be mulched and restored to preconstruction grade. The borings will be 4 to 6 inches in diameter and backfilled upon completion; with a possibility of going down as far as 25 feet. The crew is expected to be 1-2 days at each boring site with a maximum of a week if needed. The plans show light shading NHESP habitats but borings in the habitat zone are exempt from Massachusetts Endangered Species Act review as investigation/property due diligence activities. Copies of the NOI have been sent to NHESP and no comments have been received back. BSC Group does not expect any taking of species on site there will be minimal vegetation disturbance and no major tree clearing. Soil borings will be the only soil that will be disturbed during the project.

Mark F questioned if BSC Group is prepared for an artesian situation due to the fact that the canal will be full during the project. BSC does not anticipate this issue, but have made a note to look into this.

Walter Ramsey noted that FirstLight is currently working on a NOI for the dredging of the drainage canal to help with drainage through that area. BSC Group stated that this project will help with future project conditions.

Paul K: This area has the bike path and lattice power lines run along a berm this is part of an investigation project a circuit separation project that begins off of Adams Road in Greenfield where the lines tap into the grid lines and come into Montague sub-station. There have been “need” studies done with double circuit lines in Pittsfield, MA and Greenfield, MA. The study showed that on a double circuit line if one line went out of service due to weather conditions or another situation that it would take out all lines and lose reliability in the system in that area. Due to this NEP is planning to separate the circuits to remove the center lattice tower lines and install two new lines running parallel down the right-of-way. Because of this situation and the berm FirstLight is trying to restore the berm to its original condition which has led BSC Group is relocating the lines in a new right-of-way.

Mathew W: This does qualify for a limited project under the wetlands protection act for public utilities provision. A brief alternative analysis was done by BSC Group and New England Power Company to look at other locations for proposed borings and access; it was concluded other options would impact the areas of BVW, NHESP (sturgeon and 3 dragonfly species) more. BSC Group believes that this project would not impact negatively the interests outlined in the act. BSC Group looks to have the project proceed as presented and an order of conditions to be issued. BSC Group wants to start the borings in mid to the late April. At the end of the project the swamp mats are retracted from the farthest mat being removed first and retract forward and stack in an upland area. If they see damaged vegetation they will do seeding and stabilization such as a straw mulch. Doing the project during this time of year the chance of good re-growth after the removal of the swamp mats is expected. There is another document that is contained in the EG303 has swamp mat details from their environmental documents that have all the BMP’s. After a brief looking by BSC Group there is some purple loosestrife in the area. BSC Group will not be accessing through or doing borings in the area that contains purple loosestrife. The 3 borings that fall under the Wetlands Protection Act but are not in the NHESP so the committee can issue an order of conditions without a letter. The Department of Environmental Protection number has been assigned to this file along with a request for a water quality test. BSC Group spoke to Mr. Fowler from DEP regarding this and it is now not needed for the project. As the project expands and continues BSC Group will need to submit documentation to:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) – Expanded E & F (design)
- Department of Public Utilities (DPU) – Section 72 approval
- Army Core of Engineers (ACE) – 404 and 401
- Orders of Conditions (OOC) - Greenfield & Montague

Motion made by, Sean Werle to issue an order of conditions for NOI# 2014-01 filed by New England Power Company d/b/a National Grid. Seconded by Justin Fermann. ***Motion passed unanimously.***

Agent Updates:

- Consider seeking supplemental appropriation for Conservation Fund at Annual Town Meeting.

Walter wanted to see if at Town Meeting the Conservation Committee would like to add in \$10,000 to the Conservation Fund. Currently the fund is at \$39,000. Walter has put in a place holder article if the commission agrees.

Motion made by, Addie Rose Holland to request a supplemental \$10,000 appropriation for the Wildlife Conservation Fund at Annual Town Meeting. Seconded by Sean Werle. ***Motion passed unanimously.***

- Forest Cutting Plan – Owner: Leon Laster Work Area: South Prospect Street

This is an isolated woodlot with no frontage. The land is in 61A and he is doing commercial thinning.

- Forest Cutting Plan- Owner: Division of Fish and Wildlife Work Area: Montague Plains.
Project includes proposed work on municipal land Map 33 lot 31.

The Department of Fish and Game is doing this for wildfire protection and wildlife habitat management. This was last done in 2007. This currently is a thinning operation to touch up on 2007 work and do some more work in and around this area. The Department of Fish and Game will be doing some prescribed burns later on this year.

Motion made by Justin Fermann to adjourn the meeting Seconded by Addie Holland. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:12 PM

Approved by: _____ Date: _____