

Montague Conservation Commission

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MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, February 12, 2015 – 6:30 pm

Upstairs Meeting Room, Town Hall, One Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA

Commissioners Present: Mark Fairbrother - Chair, Alex Peterkin, Sean Werle, Donna Francis (6:40), Addie Rose Holland and Justin Fermann

Commissioners Absent: Deb Picking

Staff Present: Walter Ramsey - Agent

Mark Fairbrother called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

Approval of Minutes:

Motion made by Sean Werle to approve the December 11, 2014 minutes with Sean Werle's amendments. Seconded by Addie Rose Holland. **Motion passed unanimously.** Justin Fermann abstaining.

Motion made by Sean Werle to approve the January 8, 2015 minutes. Seconded by Justin Fermann. **Motion passed unanimously.** Addie Rose Holland abstaining.

Public Hearing: Notice of Intent #2015-01 filed by Mass Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program for a proposed resource improvement project on the Montague Plains off Plains Road. Portions of the above-referenced activities will occur within Bordering Vegetated Wetlands and the Bank of an intermittent stream Proposed work involves repair a hydrologic connection between intermittent stream and adjacent wetland, roadway maintenance, control invasive species.

Representing the applicant: Brian Hawthorne - Mass Dept. Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program

Agent noted that a DEP File number has not yet been received, so an Order of Conditions cannot be issued tonight. NHESP has issued a comment letter stating that this project will have "no taking" of endangered species. There were only two abutters under the recent Wetland Protection Act updates. The abutters are the applicant (DFW Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program) and the Town of Montague.

Brian Hawthorne along with Donna Francis, Sean Werle and Walter Ramsey attended a site visit in 2014 in preparation of this Notice of Intent coming before the commission.

Mr. Hawthorne: This locus is Wills Hill Brook and the direction it drains from the south-east side of Wills Hill which is categorized as an intermittent stream it then crosses the power lines and loses its natural state coming to drain on the Plains Road. The original channel course has been mapped and its original course was to feed a wetland and then sink down into the 300 feet of sand that make up the Montague Sand Plains.

According to Mr. Hawthorne, the current issues with Wills Hill brook include the following:

- Wetland area is currently degraded.
- Invasive plants are present in the project area
- Natural hydrology of Wills Hills Brook has been changed
- Plains Road floods due to the drainage, this is a Public Safety concern
- Massachusetts Department of Fisheries and Wildlife is prevented from doing their NHESP management as it uses a prescribed fire during the spring, and due to the access problem in and around that area due to the current flooding issues.

The proposal consists of putting the Wills Hills Brook back into its original drainage pattern. At some point when a ditch was created the Wills Hills Brook got re-positioned into the ditch which then goes to Plains Road causing the flooding issues. The access to the project area will be on the power line access road. The utility has granted access permission

The project includes:

- Reopening of the channel into the wetlands – using handwork and removal of natural debris
- Using re-grading to redirect the flow into the channel area
- The work area footprint is completely within the power line area
- The secondary work area is in the ditch area. There is concern here of continued illegal all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use. As to prevent the water ending up back in the ditch due to ATV use a berm will be installed across the ditch to redirect water and direct the flow onto the plains away from Plains Road. This secondary work will hopefully also deter ATV use in and around the area.

As hydrology is improved, conditions in and around the wetlands will improve as well and expand out into the topography. The equipment contract has been awarded to TR Landworks and they plan to use a Komatsu excavator and CAT D5 bulldozer. Both of these pieces of equipment have less ground pressure than a human but do have more impact than a human due to skidding/sliding and moving/turning radius of the machines.

Mark Fairbrother had a comment regarding the degraded wetlands: It appears to be a Red Maple swamp with Big Tooth Aspen. Japanese Barberry is present. Brian Hawthorne noted that an increase in moisture might take them out but a request for herbicide has been applied for.

Alex Peterkin inquired about whether the proposed Kinder Morgan pipeline will impact or otherwise nullify the proposed project. The pipeline map proposal from Kindermorgan would utilize the power line corridor where the work is taking place. According to Mr. Hawthorne, The Massachusetts Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will continue to move forward on their ecological restoration projects as they cannot tell the future regarding the pipeline project and if it may or may not happen. The work needs to be done regardless of the potential of a pipeline project going through in 2017.

In light of the forthcoming DEP file number, Brian Hawthorne requested a continuance of the Public Hearing NOI#2015-01 from the Conservation Commission.

Mark Fairbrother accepted the request for the continuance of the Public Hearing to the next regularly scheduled meeting on March 12, 2015 at 6:35 PM.

Discussion with Bruce Griffin of New England Environmental on behalf of FirstLight Power Resources/ GDF Suez for proposed work at Camp 3E off Industrial Boulevard.

Guests: Bruce Griffin – New England Environmental and Beth Bazler – FirstLight Power Resources/GDF.

The camps located on the Connecticut River shoreline and are in various conditions of decay. Camp 3E is the first of the camps that will need to be addressed.

At Camp 3E there is a gravel parking lot and steep steps from the gravel parking area to the camp structure; this is followed by another steep slope down to the river's edge. There is a retaining wall near the edge of the river which is eroding. The concept proposal consists of:

- Construction of temporary access road (barge deemed infeasible)
- Remove retaining wall. Grade back retaining wall area so there is a gradual slope to the water.
- At the edge of the water Geo-lifts will be planted with wooded vegetation, intermittent stones and root wads to help stabilize the toe of the slope and provide a variety of vegetation along the edge of the water.
- Due to the prevailing winds and wave lapping an aquatic shelf will be installed with logs anchored with cables and planted with water vegetation.
- Due to the fact that rare species have been identified at water's edge NHESP has requested that mixes of materials be used throughout the project(s) to provide variety.

FirstLight plans to file a Notice of Intent in the coming weeks.

Agent Updates:

- Millers Falls River Access. 3 riverfront parcels across from the IP mill was recently listed for sale (The property is in tax title and has been noted by the Commission as a priority for conservation). Franklin Land Trust and American Whitewater have expressed interest in the parcels. Land Trust is in discussion with the seller's agent. There may be a role for the Commission to partner, but that role is not defined at the moment.
- South Street Bridge River Restoration. Agent is still seeking construction access permission from fourth and final affected party. File is still open.

Motion made by Justin F to adjourn the meeting Seconded by Sean W. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:45 PM.

Approved by: _____ Date: _____