

Minutes of the Norwich Trails Committee for April 6, 2016

Present: George Clark, Eric Dole, Jennifer Goulet, Peter Griggs, Doug Hardy, Byron Haynes, David Hubbard, David and Susan Jorgensen, Nick Krembs, John Phipps, Cathie Redpath, Liz Russell, Bill Scavone, Mary Sellmann, Stanley Teeter, Richard Zuckerman

The Gile Mountain Trail remains closed. Mud season has been severe this year along the outermost part of Turnpike Road in the vicinity of the Gile Mountain Trail trailhead to the point that even some 4WD vehicles were at times unable to traverse the road. The road condition has been particularly exacerbated by visitors coming to use the Gile Mountain Trail. Although signs announcing closure of that trail for mud season were placed along Turnpike Road, and notices also distributed on several listserves, individuals continued to come to the trail, and some of them deliberately went onto the trail even after being personally told of the trail closure. The number of visitors coming to use the trail declined notably over the several weeks during which the notices were in place on roadside signs and repeatedly distributed online. For future years, advanced notices, both online and elsewhere, of mud season closures should be placed earlier in anticipation of the actual closures.

Among Norwich trails, that at Gile Mountain is exceptional in being widely known to provide users with a splendid view for relatively minimal effort. Because of its exceptional features, the Gile Mountain Trail has in recent years attracted 5000 or more visitors per year. Problems of the kinds experienced at Gile have not been encountered at other trails in town, whether closed or not.

Because there is currently no way to enforce trail and parking lot closures, several Turnpike Road residents have proposed that the Selectboard adopt an appropriate ordinance. An upgrade of the road could facilitate mud season travel for the local residents. The Trails Committee supports efforts toward a solution of the mud season problems experienced by neighbors at the upper end of Turnpike Road.

A new private association, as yet unnamed, has proposed establishment of an extended loop trail within Norwich. A well-attended, initial, meeting of that group was held on April 4 at the Norwich Inn. This new association is independent of the Trails Committee, but the Trails Committee would work cooperatively with the new association. Plans for the new trail loop have not been developed in detail by that association, but the former Blue Ribbon Trail might in its construction and maintenance be taken as a model for the proposed loop trail. Among the concerns expressed and considered for the loop trail were: effect on wildlife, trail size/footprint, trail points of access, volume of use, user positive and negative behavior, using paths and woods roads that already exist on private land. A major leg of this loop will be a revised Blue Ribbon Trail from Gile Mountain to Beaver Meadow Road, a woodland link to the Brookmead Conservation Area trails, which connect to the Parcel 5 trails. This season the two trail groups will be working on the connectivity of this stretch and extending both ends of it, while talking to landowners about the other possible stretches of a loop trail.

Respectfully submitted,
George Clark