

NORWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING DRAFT MINUTES: 23 January 2024

Members Present: Craig Layne (Chair), Lynnwood Andrews, Cheryl Asa, Alex Gottlieb, Lindsay Putnam, Chris Rimmer, Andy Torkelson, Cody Williams

Guests: A.J. Follensbee (Windsor County Forester), Mike Loots (Montshire Museum)

Meeting convened at 7:05 PM

Additional Agenda items

There were no additions to the agenda.

Public Comments

A.J. Follensbee, Windsor County Forester, joined by Zoom to give an update on management approaches to protect ash trees from the emerald ash borer (EAB), which has now been detected in Norwich. He covered topics such as ash tree surveys and factors affecting decisions on whether to remove ash trees before or after they've died from EAB infestation. He also explained chemical treatments now available and bio-control methods that are being tested.

Mike Loots, Climate and Environmental Education Program Manager at the Montshire Museum, attended to learn more about NCC activities and to explore opportunities for collaboration.

Deer Exclusion Plots Signage

Craig presented signs that incorporated suggestions from NCC members, but the consensus was that they contained so much detail that many people might not bother to read them through. Mike and Cheryl made some suggestions for strategies to break down the information into shorter segments. Cheryl will work on that for the next meeting.

Educational Presentations

Cheryl reported on her discussion with a forester about leading tours to one or more of the deer enclosure plots to explain how deer affect growth of vegetation and forest regeneration. It could also be useful to have a general lecture/presentation and webinar on the topic of deer overbrowsing and forest regeneration as background. However, there may not be enough growth inside the enclosures this first year to show the difference. Andy suggested that we take regular photos of the plot sites, inside and out, over time to document the timeline as growth differences appear. We can re-evaluate the option for tours during the year as we see how much growth occurs inside the enclosures.

Lynnwood asked if there might be someone in the area who already has an enclosure in place that they might allow us to use for a guided public tour this year. Members will ask around and report back.

Lynnwood and Chris have spoken with people who might give presentations on bats, to provide background and context for the bat houses they have installed at various locations around town. No one is available at this time, but they will follow up about later dates.

Invasive Plants Management Strategies

Chris reported on his discussions with the Warner Meadows Assoc (WMA) that is beginning invasive plant control measures on Warner Meadows. Bittersweet is a particular problem, as it has grown into the canopy where it's starting to affect native trees. Similar to other locations, knotweed needs to be controlled before it crowds out native vegetation, especially along the brook. Chris has started some of the work and has also consulted Redstart about professional help with the project. He will draft a policy statement on invasive plant management approaches for the NCC to consider.

Climate Club for Kids and LEEEP

Lindsay gave an update on the work planned for LEEEP (Learning about the Environment through Experiential Projects) with Marion Cross School classes. The main project will be composting, with students involved in and documenting all steps of the process, concluding with it being added to the school garden. Members of the Climate Club for Kids at the Library could participate by organizing data and helping produce materials for a presentation.

A climate change project for K-1 students will document seasonal changes, such as date of first robin singing, time of sugaring, and tulips blooming, since these annual cycles are sensitive to the changing climate. They will focus especially on tulips, from planting bulbs, to emergence, to bud burst. Labeled photos can be displayed at the Post Office.

Later in the spring, students might help with invasive plant removal in the Milton Frye Nature Area.

Milton Frye Nature Area Committee

Chris reported that he will be attending the next Selectboard meeting to present a proposal that "Milton Frye Nature Area" be approved as the formal name of the Town property that has been informally referred to by that name.

Trails Committee

Lindsay recommended that signage on proper trail use in winter be added to kiosks at trailheads, so trails remain usable for skiing and snowshoeing.

Cody reported that the main business last Committee meeting was planning trail projects for spring and summer. Those projects include trail maintenance such as managing drainage, removal of downed trees, and updating blazing.

Updates from Public Forums, Meetings, and Minutes:

Lynnwood reported that the Norwich Historical Society has scheduled a program about the Library's Big Tree Quest as part of its February Discover Norwich program. She and Lindsay will present general information about the NCC, which she provided to members for review and input.

Craig mentioned that he has spoken with Barbara McIlroy of Sustainable Hanover about the NCC potentially collaborating on their program about hunting, deer numbers, and forest regeneration.

The Land Steward from UVLT will be making the annual monitoring visit to the Woody Adams Conservation Forest.

Approval of December Minutes: Lynnwood moved to accept the December minutes, Andy seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

The meeting ended at 8:58 PM

Minutes compiled by Cheryl Asa