

Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
7:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 14, 2023
Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom

Minutes

Attendees:

- HMPUC Members
 - In person: Diana Todd (chair), Mike Purcell
 - via Zoom: Sarah Grant, Amanda Whiting
- Guest (via Zoom)
 - Lindy Corman (co-chair, Marlboro Conservation Commission) (did not attend full session)

Call to order: 7:38 pm

1. Introductions and preliminaries
 - Amanda will take minutes and Sarah will be the Zoom host.
 - Committee members and guest Lindy Corman introduced themselves.
2. The minutes of the May 24, 2023 meeting were approved unanimously.
3. Open Meeting Law and Google Drive Reminders
 - Open Meeting Law states that we cannot work collaboratively on documents outside of meetings. The protocol for using Google Drive was discussed.
 - We are allowed to have small groups (no more than three people) meet to work collectively on tasks.
4. Develop list of topics to consider during the update process in a master list
 - Share thoughts on existing Management Plan – what’s missing, what needs to be changed
 - We shared initial thoughts and ideas about the management plan update. A list will be appended to the minutes.
 - Reports on review of Management Plans and Case Studies from other towns
 - Each committee member shared insights from a management plan and a case study from other towns. Absent committee members submitted thoughts in writing. Summaries will be appended to the minutes.
 - We discussed whether to start from scratch with the new management plan or focus on making revisions of the existing plan.
5. Plan the public survey
 - Google Forms was recommended as an easy and free survey tool which can create a spreadsheet and graphs of responses.
 - We want to make sure each person fills out the survey only once.
 - There was general agreement about creating a concise survey with a mix of written responses and multiple choice.
 - We would like to ask demographic questions to determine whether the respondent is or is not a Marlboro town resident.
 - The last public survey about Hogback occurred in 2008. It was very simple and open-ended and mostly concerned recreational uses. This was completed before our conservation easement was in place.
 - We may consider using a QR code, paper surveys, and other methods in addition to an online survey to make sure everyone can participate.

- It may be too early in the process to develop survey questions.
 - We may want to focus on specific questions related to the existing management plan.
6. Assignments for next meeting
 - A small working group will organize the list of ideas and present a draft masterlist at the next meeting. Diana volunteers.
 - Diana will send out information on how we will use Google Drive.
 7. The meeting was adjourned at 8:58pm.

See attachments.

Attachment A: Topics to consider during the Update Process (gleaned from review of Hogback docs and review of plans from other towns)

Attachment B: Use of Google Drive by HMPUC

Topics to consider during the Update Process (gleaned from review of Hogback docs and review of plans from other towns)

Thoughts about the existing Hogback Management Plan

- recreation – what’s allowed, what’s not – types and where
- better info on use of buildings, present use and future use
- target shooting
 - bow & arrow
- level of detail
- processes for approval
 - trails
 - use permit
- invasives
- water quality – status as headwaters
- climate change
- drones
- campfires
 - camping
- protecting cultural history
 - ski area
 - Bishop site
- hunting
 - bow & arrow
- parking
- vernal pools
- fishing
- wildlife corridors
- horseback riding
- rare, threatened, endangered species
- eco protection zones
- enforcement
- trapping
- biodiversity inventory to inform our decisions
 - RTE species
 - rich forest
 - ESH – should we renew
- periodic review of collaborations
- ebikes
- town policies
 - metal detectors
 - alcohol
- foraging, gathering forest products
- zones
 - recreation
 - timber harvest

- protection of forest
- multi-use trails or single use
- use by camps
- update the history of the conservation area – it's been 14 years

Thoughts on Management Plans of Other Towns

Stowe/Sterling - Mike Purcell

- Conservation Commission managing the land (not non-profit group)
- identified broad objectives and guidelines at the beginning
- revising every 10 years
- wildlife/people/woods
- talking about regenerative treatments for early successional habitat
- managing deer wintering areas
- timbering AMP manual for best practices
- input/advice from VLT Forest Steward
- legal considerations (enforcement)

Barre - Diana Todd

- intense mountain biking community
- primary purpose was recreation
- managed by the Recreation Committee
- agreement with an outside group to maintain and manage the trails
- dual responsibility for the forest, similar to HPC and HMCA
- post signs on their trails when you are leaving the Town Forest
- in their timber management section they address avoiding conflicts with recreation
- allow hunting, but prohibit tree stands, allow ground blinds with prior permission; during rifle and muzzleloader season, close trails for use by bikes but not hiking
- addresses “collecting”/foraging (can't remove nests or plants); may collect fungi, berries, ferns
- prohibits alcohol
- adopts the Leave No Trace hiking ethic
- has an index at the end

Bolton/Preston Pond - Sarah Grant

- described how they developed the management plan (survey, workshops, etc.)
- they have the VAST trail for snowmobiles
- trails are maintained by volunteers
- forest steward volunteer is responsible for enforcement
- details about the ecology (no biodiversity inventory)
- had a section on climate change (a lot of detail)
- evaluate the different trail uses every five years
- dogs are allowed but need to be under control
- trapping is allowed (evaluated every 3 years by a biologist) and hunting and fishing is allowed.

Richmond/Andrews Forest - Amanda Whiting

- similar forest to Hogback
- include management objectives and actions for each section and a summary chart at the end
- used a grant to hire two consulting groups to write the management plan and manage the public input process
- extremely detailed plan which is very long and includes all the visioning workshop and survey results

- incorporated recommendations from a biodiversity inventory
- they do not allow trapping, restrict usage based on dawn to dusk
- specific actions to protect water quality and soil health
- environmental protection zones around vernal pools and other areas
- very specific trail development policies

Submitted written summaries from committee members not in attendance:

West Windsor town forest plan – Pieter Van Loon

- It is similar to Hogback, but on a much grander scale, in that it contains an old ski area and is an place where a lot of recreation happens.
- I like the way they get pretty specific about goals for each asset they want to manage for on the property, natural resources, recreation, education, cultural, and timber.
- They include the easement and forest management plan as appendices, which I think makes sense. In the body of the plan, they provide short summaries to explain how the easement guides what happens on the property and how forest management can will promote other goals, such as wildlife habitat enhancement and adaptation for climate change.
- They broke the property up into "compartments" and explained what would happen to achieve various goals in each compartment.
- They include a long history of the property, which is interesting, but makes the plan very long and hard to get through.
- Because of the two previous points, the plan is way too long for anyone but the most dedicated West Windsor Town Forest aficionado to get through.
- I think we need to keep readability and accessibility top of mind as we create this new plan. Information needs to be clearly and succinctly presented so the public and public officials can quickly find what they are looking for or can settle in and read the whole thing in relatively short order.

West Windsor - Town Forest 2017 – Christine Colella

Nice Intro Statement: “The residents of West Windsor have decided that the town’s highly valued features are scenic beauty, natural resources, wildlife habitat, and recreational trails. The Town is committed to protecting these features for future generations.” (p. 7)

Plan links to VT: Vermont State Wildlife Action Plan: Conservation of the West Windsor Town Forest area will address many of the Vermont State Wildlife Action priorities by addressing threats to Species of Greatest Conservation Need, as outlined in the Vermont Wildlife Action Plan (2005). - Habitat Loss, Impact of Roads, Pollutants and Sedimentation. (p.9)... then follows with how plan supports this.

Nice UDL design - simplify and bullet important points in the plan. Reduce wording in our plan for ease of review (i.e. reduce narrative so people reading can see important points and facts). The following are all in a heading and points bulleted in this plan:

- General Objectives to their plan is bulleted - p.11
- Natural Resource Goals - p.11
- Recreation, Educational and Cultural Goals - p.12
- Timber Management Goals - p.12

Bulleted items are specific and clearly stated. Like invasives bullet mentions in Timber Management goals.

Management areas delineated. 6 areas. Because back-country skiing covers all areas, includes info on management of back-country skiing (p. 14):

Back-country Skiing: "Ascutney Mountain, and the original West Windsor Town Forest parcel in particular, has a long history of quality back-country skiing. This recreation use is among the hardest to incorporate into the easement because it extends across the majority of the property. If poorly managed, it has the potential for negative impact on forest habitat and regeneration. To address this concern, the easement sets up a system of management under three specific regimes related to the intensity of vegetation management:..." "

- The big picture – are there any interesting concepts we could consider for Hogback? Big picture - would be great to have the town decide on a vision statement.
- What level of detail is in the plan? Sections and format of the plan is great. Bulleted - ease of review
- Did they do a survey? What questions did they ask? Did not see
- Are there topics they cover that we don't mention? Of note was the back country skiing - we should look at this. Also like how they pointed out invasives.
- How do they address enforcement of their rules? Did not look - realized I was reviewing the incorrect plan!
- Do they use multi-purpose trails or single-use trails? Did not look - realized I was reviewing the incorrect plan!

Waitsfield Scrag Forest Review – Christine Colella

Vision and goals statement (p. 8)

Don't like the "article" format - too difficult for ease of review

Sections based on:

- Forest Bird habitat and describes habitat for particular bird species
- Water and Wetlands - includes seeps, beaver habitat, vernal pools, tamarack swamp, emergent marshes, and streams.
- Recreation and Access - parking, trails, recreation uses
- Policies and Guidelines
- Forestry and Wildlife
- Forest Management Guidelines
- Protecting Vernal Pools
- Logging Operations
- Water Quality
- Aesthetics (Act250 terminology)

- Forest Health
- Boundary Maintenance
- Liability (p. 31) - Like any town owned land in Vermont, the WSF is afforded some protection from liability under the doctrine of sovereign immunity, as well as case law. In addition, the Town has additional liability insurance through a policy that covers all public land and facilities. Since trails may be maintained in a primitive condition, signs at all entry points should say, "Use at your own risk."
- Development
- Wildfire - consider in new plan?
- Climate Change - consider in new plan? (p. 32)
- Adaptive Management - consider in new plan? (p. 33) - "Over time, change is inevitable on the WSF – whether from climate change, natural cycles, timber harvesting activities, or other factors. And scientific knowledge and best practices in forest management will continue to evolve. Recognizing this, and in keeping with the spirit of this plan's Management Goal #10 to "monitor and respond to changes" (see p. 2), the Town will adopt a flexible adaptive management approach...."

Upon review of this plan and the W. Windsor plan, we need to format and outline sections for management. This plan is older but has some sections we should consider in our plan.

Review a Management Plan from another town

1. The big picture – are there any interesting concepts we could consider for Hogback? - plan is old and in "article" format. Could be organized better for ease of review. Like the sections approach, however. If we created a plan, should be in a google doc with links to particular sections.
 - a. Interesting concepts: liability, wildfire management, climate changes, adaptive management
2. What level of detail is in the plan? Decently detailed. The sections in Water and Wetlands is good.
3. Did they do a survey? What questions did they ask? - Do not see any reference to a survey.
4. Are there topics they cover that we don't mention? Different set up. Ours is too wordy and need sections for ease of reference. Includes invasives management.
5. How do they address enforcement of their rules? I do not see any enforcements in the plan. They have guidelines for public use (p. 24)
6. Do they use multi-purpose trails or single-use trails? Foot traffic only.

Thoughts on Case Studies of Other Towns

Middlesex - Mike Purcell

- managed by the conservation commission
- details about public input

Mills Riverside - Diana Todd

- zones were defined in the conservation easement
 - sports, recreation and agriculture
 - wildlife preserve (no timber harvesting or trails)
 - general use – timber harvest OK, trails OK
- a lot of acreage in fields (ex. soccer and ball fields)
- many comments about dogs in the public survey
- management by a park district since there are two towns

Canaan - Amanda Whiting

- concern about ATV use
- archaeological resource assessment to determine pre-colonial Native American settlement of the land
- maple-sugaring educational component with schools
- recommended getting public input while on walks out in the forest vs. indoor meetings
- gathering community input is a long slow process, but makes the final plan much better
- town forest as outdoor classroom

Waitsfield - Sarah Grant

- didn't have a lot of controversy with their meetings
- hiking vs. conservation
- concerns about dogs
- had a county forester provide a free assessment
- VYCC built trails
- lease with a sugar-maker
- diverse group of people involved

West Windsor - Diana Todd

- felt like public input meetings were too generalized and not very useful
- recommended being more focused with public input; get a first draft first so people have something to react to

2023_06_14 HMPUC Meeting Minutes Attachment B

HMPUC use of Google Drive

To: HMPUC committee members

From: Diana Todd, HMPUC Chair

Some of you tried to upload your reviews of other town's Management Plans to our HMPUC Google Drive, and got frustrated when you couldn't make it work. Here's what is going on:

Under Open Meeting protocols, we are not allowed to work collaboratively on documents in a shared online system like Google Drive. However, we can use the Drive as a file cabinet, where docs are stored and can be viewed or downloaded. Anything like that which we use has to be available to anybody from the public who asks to see the docs.

To keep things clean and clear, I'm following recommendations from Forrest and only giving "View" access to our Google Drive HMPUC file cabinet, not "Edit" access. No one can add or delete or modify anything in the "file cabinet" except the owner of the account, which is a Google account I created called "hogbackplanning@gmail.com". If you have a doc that you want to share with the committee, send it to me, and I'll load it onto the Google Drive HMPUC file cabinet.

If I get hit by a bus, whoever takes over the committee can find the password to the hogbackplanning@gmail.com account on my personal computer in a Word document here:
Documents/Hogback/HPC documents/Management Plan Update/How We Do Things HMPUC