

**Hogback Management Plan Update Committee**  
**7:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 12, 2023**  
**Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom**

**Minutes**

Convene: 7:32pm

Attendees: In person: Diana Todd, Mike Purcell. Via Zoom: Christine Colella, Amanda Whiting, Eric Slayton

- **Preliminaries**
  - Christine Colella named to take minutes.
  - Amanda Whiting named to manage Zoom features.
  
- **Approve minutes of previous meeting: Unanimously approved**
  
- **Review findings of the Biodiversity Inventory, performed by biologist Charley Eiseman in 2018-2019.**
  - RTE and uncommon species:
    - Rare/threatened/endangered species – highest level of concern. None found on Hogback
    - Uncommon species – 7 uncommon plants, 1 butterfly (tentative identification, not confirmed)
    - No protected bird species observed
    - Some uncommon plants found at Hogback do well in areas of disturbance like foot traffic – ex. purple milkwort, bog muhly, grass-leaved rush
    - One uncommon species (poke milkweed) might benefit from forestry work like a timber harvest that opens the canopy and brings in more sunlight
    - For other uncommon plants, Eiseman recommends that any new trails and any timber harvests steer clear of areas with uncommon plants
    - Committee discussed need to take into consideration natural succession and natural progression of changes of flora and fauna of the area. When working on the management plan, we need to take into account what is “not enough” and what is “too much” management.
    - **Consensus agreement: Management plan should state that no RTE species have been found, but some uncommon species exist. When addressing recreation, trails, timber harvests and other forests management practices, include recommendations about protecting uncommon species.**
  - Early Successional Habitat (ESH)
    - Eiseman did not find that the ESH work done by Hogback volunteers from 2013-2018 to clear former ski slopes and allow them to regrow had succeeded in attracting birds or other wildlife
      - Of bird species expected to be found in ESH areas, he heard/saw more of them in non-managed areas than in the ESH project areas
      - He saw no evidence that “focal mammal species” were using the ESH project areas.

- He noted that the long, narrow forest openings created by clearing former ski slopes favored predator species that thrive in forest edge environments.
      - He suggested that if creation of ESH is a priority, a better approach than following old ski trails would be to tie it in with a timber harvest.
      - Amanda noted that the recommendations for creating ESH patches are continually being improved, and current recommendations are for larger patches than are possible on the former ski slopes
    - The committee discussed whether creating or refreshing ESH patches should be a goal for the conservation area in the next decade or so.
      - **Consensus agreement: Do not renew the original ski-slope focused ESH program.**
      - The following recommendation by Eiseman was noted. *“I do not feel that ensuring the “biological health” of the Conservation Area requires any management beyond removal of invasive species.”* (p. 29, last paragraph of the section on ESH and Timber Harvest)
      - Spots where bird diversity is currently high were noted. An idea for establishing a small grass meadow space on a former ski slope (as opposed to the woody young growth of ESH) was discussed.
      - **Consensus agreement: The Management Plan will not propose an active program to create new ESH patches, but it should define a process by which ESH and other habitat improvement projects can be proposed and approved.**
  - Areas deserving special protection
    - Eiseman’s report recommended providing special protection for the following types of features. The report includes maps showing the locations of these features.
      - Rich Northern Hardwood stands (a specific type of forest community)
      - vernal pools, seeps, and streams
      - existing stands of mast-producing beech and oak
      - ledges (that can be/are used by bobcats and other wildlife for dens) and other known porcupine dens
    - Protection would include
      - limiting any new recreation trails near these areas, no specific buffer sizes were suggested for recreation trails
      - establishing a minimum 100’ buffer around these areas for any timber harvest activities
- **Consider whether to adopt management zones.**
  - Our earlier reviews of plans by other towns show that most towns are taking this approach, and it seems to offer a lot of benefits, including simplifying the organization of the Plan itself.
  - Should there be a zone where no timber harvests take place?
    - Some committee members would prefer to see timber harvests be excluded from the entire conservation area.
    - We reviewed the conservation easement perspective, which allows for timber harvests, but does not require them.

- We reviewed history of the formation of the conservation area.
  - We understand that at the time the conservation area was proposed, some members of the public expressed concern about having such a large piece of land removed from the tax base. We understand that the idea that the loss of tax revenue could be offset by timber income was proposed at that time.
  - Other support for timber harvests in the early years of the conservation area came from the idea of having timber harvests fund major projects in the conservation area.
- When we seek public input on the update, we will gain insight into current attitudes about potential timber harvests on Hogback.
- We reviewed potential benefits of setting aside a no-harvest zone.
  - Intended results of active management are never guaranteed. Open an ESH patch, but will the birds come? Thin the stand to encourage regeneration, but will the desired species take hold?
  - Timber harvests require creation of haul roads, log landings and other significant changes which are semi-permanent. These impacts would not occur if harvests don't occur.
  - In a non-managed/non-harvested zone, wildlife and existing natural communities can exist and evolve undisturbed.
  - Having a non-harvested area provides an example of how forests evolve when human intervention is minimized, providing an opportunity to compare harvested forests to an un-harvested sample.
    - The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has set standards for sustainable timber harvests. One requirement is that a portion of the forest be set aside as never-harvested to serve as a control and comparison. For family forests (defined as less than 2,500 acres) the set-aside forest can be nearby public land that is designated as not to be harvested. Setting aside part of the conservation area in this way would benefit local landowners who wish to participate in certified sustainable harvest practices. The FSC standard does allow management for invasives, fire, and pathogens in the no-harvest area.
- We discussed the need to retain some flexibility in designating what things are and are not allowed in a no-harvest zone, so that future managers aren't handcuffed in the face of unforeseen future challenges, for example, problems that might come with the changing climate.
- **Consensus agreement: The Management Plan should consider setting aside an area or areas where timber harvests will not occur.**
- Should there be a zone dedicated to recreation?
  - **Consensus agreement: The area encompassing the former ski area is well suited to being designated a Recreation Zone.**
    - The area is already densely packed with trails.
    - The area has been intensely impacted by human activities for centuries – the existing forest is fragmented and far from a “natural” state.
    - There is already access to multiple scenic views that will be relatively easy to keep open over the years.

- What does the establishment of a no-harvest zone and a recreation zone mean about the rest of the land?
  - Does it mean that all the rest of the land will be harvested for timber?
    - Not necessarily. This is where the help of the County Forester (discussed at the June 28 meeting) will be key.
    - The protective buffers around special features identified by Eiseman (e.g. vernal pools, Rich Northern Hardwood stands) need to be respected.
    - As specified in the conservation easement, up-to-date best practices for timber harvests must be followed.
  - Since the committee will be getting input and advice from the County Forester, who will presumably be encouraging timber harvests, some committee members felt that it would be useful to hear from an expert who could explain the rationale for setting aside the entire conservation area as a no-harvest area. ***Eric will look into identifying an appropriate person.***
  - We discussed the idea that when and if harvests do occur, they could be designed as demonstration projects to illustrate best practices, or low-impact harvesting, or some other special feature of forestry, rather than being simply an income-generating effort.
  - **Consensus agreement: Rather than including a specific harvest plan, the Management Plan should lay out the framework for how any decision to harvest will be made. Who will make the decision? What criteria will need to be met?**
- **Consensus agreement: Yes, the updated plan will adopt management zones.**
- **Adjourned at 9:02 pm.**
  - Next meeting will be on July 26, 2023.