

Minutes of Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept 27, 2023
Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom

Minutes

Convene: 7:33 pm

Attendees:

- In person: Diana Todd
- Via Zoom:
 - committee members - Mike Purcell, Pieter Van Loon, Amanda Whiting
 - invited speaker – Sam Schneski, Windham County Forester
 - members of the public – Nancy Anderson, Cherrie Corey, Lindy Corman

1. Preliminaries
 - a. choose a secretary to take minutes - Mike
 - b. choose a Zoom host - Amanda
 - c. start Zoom recording
2. Minutes of previous meeting (Sept 13, 2023) were approved unanimously.
3. New topics added to master list of ideas to consider during the update. These came up at various times during the meeting and are collected at this point in the minutes in order to better track them:
 - a. Use of chemicals such as pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides, likely in the context of dealing with invasives, but also ask whether it applies in other situations.
 - b. Money, especially with regard to forest management activities
 - i. Some projects would cost money. Where would the money come from?
 - ii. Some projects might generate income. How should that money be used?
4. Discussed forest management concepts with County Forester Sam Schneski.
 - a. Role of the County Forester
 - i. As state employees, County Foresters may assist towns in managing their town-owned forests if the activities benefit the county and the general public, not just the town. Demonstration projects, educational programs, research efforts, and wildlife habitat improvement are examples of management activities that have a benefit beyond just the town.
 - ii. Schneski can assist HMPUC with data collection and in identifying potential forest management actions. He has worked with other towns, such as Londonderry and Chester, through conservation commissions or forest management committees. He has found that public input from a wide range of forest users is important.
 - iii. Schneski reported that in his own work with towns and work of other County Foresters, delineating zones is becoming more common and seems to be helpful in some situations. Examples of zones: recreation, sensitive ecological areas.
 - b. How to make forest management decisions
 - i. Forest management is not synonymous with timber harvesting. Timber harvesting is one type of management activity, but there are many others.
 - ii. Goals need to be identified. Possible non-financial goals include things like:
 1. improving wildlife habitat

2. increasing resilience to climate change
3. enhancing carbon sequestration and/or storage
4. controlling invasive pests and plants
5. protecting vulnerable areas or populations
6. developing old growth forest characteristics
- iii. Management decisions should be data-based.
 1. We have the Biodiversity Inventory from 2018-2019.
 2. We still need a Forest Inventory, which gives more detailed information.
- iv. With data in hand, consider whether the forest is as robust as it could be. If not, are there actions that could be taken to nudge it in a healthier direction? Consider the goals that were identified.
 1. The current condition exists because of past human activities. Pieter stated that at least some sections of Hogback have been heavily affected (even abused?) in the past. Less than ideal conditions exist in places, such as stands of even-aged monoculture, areas with lack of regeneration, dense beech thickets.
 2. An overall goal of silviculture as an art/science is to grow the right trees in the right site. Example, it's not good management to try to grow a tree that needs moist soils on a dry ridge. If past human activities have led to trees growing in sites where they won't do well, it might be reasonable to take actions to encourage other trees at the site that would do better.
 3. Consider both passive and active approaches.
 - a. We can't guarantee the outcome of either approach.
 - b. In passive approaches, change is generally much slower.
 4. In any forest, there will be some areas where no active management is needed to achieve the goals for the forest.
- v. Many management actions, even if aimed at a non-financial goal, will include cutting trees.
 1. Some of these culled trees may have commercial value, thus a project may generate some income. Other management projects may have costs that exceed the value of any harvested logs. The Management Plan should consider how projects might be funded, and how any funds generated should be allocated.
 2. Some towns have been able to use culled or harvested trees in town projects, such as a new floor for the library in Brandon.
- c. Other aspects of making a forest management decision.
 - i. Concern was expressed that non-commercial management activities could be used as whitewash, where the primary goal is actually to generate income but the publically state goal is something like habitat improvement.
 - ii. The need for public education was discussed. The perception that any tree-cutting is inherently bad is common. Most forest management involves cutting at least some trees, typically to improve the situation for other trees or other desirable forest components.
 - iii. The Forest Stewardship Council's program for certifying timber as sustainably harvested was mentioned. It requires that a "control" parcel be set aside as not actively managed for comparison purposes. For small landowners,

public land that is being left unmanaged can serve as the control. Is it appropriate to designate a section of Hogback land as such a control parcel?

- d. Examples of potential management activities that are not aimed at generating income
 - i. Create a series of one-acre test-plots for controlling beech (which although it is a native plant, has been becoming almost invasive due to pressures from beech bark disease), using a different approach in each plot and measuring the effectiveness of each.
 - ii. Identify several mature female ash trees and inoculate them to try to help them survive the emerald ash beetle.
 - iii. Improve resilience to climate change by developing more variety in age classes. This might include cutting patches a few acres in size to generate spots of younger forest.
 - iv. Enhance old growth forest characteristics. We can't speed up time, but we can give the forest more characteristics of old forests, such as standing dead snags, large dead trees on the ground, and small openings with young growth.
 - v. Control invasive plants and pests.
 - vi. Enhance habitat for bear by building substantial brush piles in suitable areas.
- e. Next steps
 - i. Schneski and Van Loon will develop a Forest Inventory and identify areas for potential management activities that support the goals that the committee identifies.
 - ii. The work will take a long time, especially since they both work full time and will need to fit this in as essentially volunteer work. They expect the project covering the entire 600 acres will not be complete until spring 2024.
 - iii. Before they start, they need to know what the goals for the forest are.
- 5. Develop plans for next several meetings.
 - a. Oct 11. Agreed to postpone our originally planned agenda to instead focus on identifying and articulating goals that should guide any active forest management.
 - b. Oct 25. Review the draft sections of the Plan that were assigned to committee members at the Sept 13 meeting.
- 6. Adjourned – 8:54 PM