

**Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee**  
**7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct 11, 2023**  
**Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom**

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:33pm.

Attendees:

- In person: Diana Todd, Mike Purcell, invited speaker Jenny Ramstetter
- Via Zoom:
  - committee members – Amanda Whiting, Eric Slayton
  - members of the public – Nancy Anderson, Cherrie Corey

**1. Preliminaries**

- a. choose a secretary to take minutes (Amanda Whiting)
- b. choose a Zoom host (Diana Todd)
- c. start Zoom recording

**2. Approve minutes of previous meeting (Sept 27, 2023).**

The minutes of the previous meeting on Wednesday, September 27, 2023 were unanimously approved.

**3. Add any new topics that have come up or that people have thought of to the master list of issues to consider during the update.**

**TOPIC TO ADD:** Selective cutting of trees along trails for public safety reasons.

**4. Discuss forest management with guest Jenny Ramstetter** (Professor Emerita, Emerson College's Marlboro Institute).

We welcomed ecologist Jenny Ramstetter to the meeting to speak about forest management. Each of the meeting participants introduced themselves.

Diana gave a brief overview of the Plan update project so far, noting that although the existing Management Plan calls for timber harvesting, none has been done since the conservation area was created. She noted that the biodiversity inventory did not recommend any forest management actions other than controlling invasives.

Jenny started by acknowledging that we (human society) need wood, for example, for our houses, and therefore forests (at least some of them) need to be managed for timber production. She talked about the history of timber management in general and cutting and the

different philosophies that affect those decisions. Does the forest “need” to be cut? She feels that in New England, there aren’t enough forests where timber harvest is not the primary purpose of managing the forest. The way we have treated our forests has been very extractive for a long time, and we haven’t been putting much back into them. Instead of focusing on timber extractions, we could focus on carbon sequestration, improving biodiversity, and watershed protection. She noted that Hogback has a unique position as a headwaters area. Jenny is in favor of not harvesting the majority of Hogback, such as setting aside a substantial portion for no harvest. Could Hogback be an interesting example with areas of no harvest beside small areas with demonstration harvests? Jenny is interested in the idea of managing for old forest characteristics, such as leaving a lot of downed timber. How can we manage for carbon sequestration and invasive species? Jenny would support either a hands-off approach or managing for old growth characteristics.

How do we manage the forest for old growth characteristics?

- leave large diameter trees intact, regardless of their market value, because that would be typical of an old forest
- make sure you leave any snags or standing dead trees
- harvest very little from the forest
- leave or create gaps in the forest

We referred to the old-growth restoration strategies chart in the Vermont Land Trust’s Restoring Old Growth Characteristics document: <https://masswoods.org/sites/default/files/pdf-doc-ppt/Restoring-Old-Growth-Characteristics.pdf>

Discussion: Have we messed up the forest so badly that we need to step in and do some active management? We are starting from a heavily human-impacted situation. Can we nudge the forest in a different direction that makes it a better version of itself? Is the forest we have the best it can be?

Cherrie mentioned that there may need to be selective cutting of trees along trails if there are public safety issues due to weakened trees falling due to climate change, fungal infiltration, etc.

Eric brought up the idea of “thoughtful management,” to approach this as a human community doing the best for the natural communities.

When we did the Early Successional Habitat project, that subject was a hot topic in the forestry community. We didn’t have enough information at the time to make our project successful, and ended up creating smaller and narrower openings than are now recommended. Managing for old growth characteristics is a topic of intense interest in the forestry community today. While we don’t want to just be jumping onto the latest fad, we do want to be taking advantage of the most up-to-date thinking in the field.

Cherrie asked if the VAST trail through Hogback might have any effect on our forest management. The answer was no, because VAST does not own the land under their trail, nor

do they have any legal easement. They need to get landowner permission every year in order to continue to use the trail.

At the last meeting, we asked Sam Schneski and Pieter van Loon to do a forest inventory in the next few seasons. They have asked us for our priorities.

## **5. Develop goals of forest management activities on Hogback.**

The following potential goals were suggested.

- Nudge the forest in the direction of its best possible version. (How do we define forest health? Carbon sequestration? Biodiversity?)
- Any forest management should have an educational component/demonstration area.
- How will we limit or prohibit harvest of trees? How will we designate areas of no harvest?
- Management of invasive species or diseases
- Promoting old growth characteristics
- That financial motivation should not be the purpose of any forest management project on Hogback. (No timber harvests designed with generating income as the intent.) If this is a goal, how do we make sure this is followed?
- Can any money raised by timber harvest (such as harvest incidental to some other goal, like opening a wildlife patch cut) be designated to go back into Hogback rather than going into the General Fund? Some forest management projects, like protecting selected ash trees from the emerald ash borer, will cost money, not generate money.
- Peaceful recreation.
- Protect the natural resources, especially watershed systems and wildlife corridors.
- Promote carbon sequestration.
- Protect aesthetic values.

How specific should the Management Plan be? There is an idea that the plan should be less specific, but should instead outline values, guidelines and procedures for making decisions.

## **6. Develop plans for the next several meetings.**

### **Next Meeting**

#### **Wednesday, October 25**

Get clarification from Pieter about what Pieter & Sam need before their forest inventory.

Review draft sections of the plan that committee members have written.

Draft sections are due to be emailed to Diana by Wednesday, October 18.

## **7. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:04pm.