

Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec 13, 2023
Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82119973527>

Meeting ID: 821 1997 3527

To join by phone: 1-646-558-8656
no password required

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm.

Attendees:

- via Zoom: committee members Diana Todd, Eric Slayton, Amanda Whiting

1. Preliminaries

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

2. Approve minutes of previous meeting (Nov 29, 2023).

- a. 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.

- a. Geocaching

4. Plan next steps for Forest Management discussion, including potential field visit.

- a. After the previous meeting, as directed by the committee, Diana contacted County Forester Sam Schneski about a potential committee visit to a town forest where he has designed forest management projects. Sam told us that there are projects in Jamaica and Londonderry we could look at.
- b. The idea of having a field trip to Hogback itself was discussed. A possible focus would be to look at areas Pieter had described at the last meeting as having had aggressive harvests in the past, where he (as a forester) has concerns about regeneration and forest health.
- c. It was noted that any field trip would need to be considered an official meeting of HMPUC and would need to be warned with an agenda and minutes. In addition to those mandatory notices, we agreed to promote the meeting as an educational event open to the public.
- d. We need more input on when is a good time for such a field trip. Will we be able to see what we want to see during winter conditions?

5. Review portions of first draft, as time permits:

- a. Copies of sections that were reviewed are attached as an appendix to these minutes.
- b. Trail Management
 - i. The draft as written was endorsed, including the concepts of:
 1. differentiating between the existing trail-dense regions and the current trail-less areas
 2. having all trails be multi-use, but providing a mechanism for creating single use trails in the future

3. allowing temporary (or in some cases permanent) foot-traffic-only trails to be created in currently trail-less areas if needed to access forestry or research projects for purposes of educating the public.
 - ii. It was agreed that there is no need to ban off-trail use. We noted that many educational programs on Hogback take groups off-trail. Protection doesn't seem necessary because a) traffic isn't as high as at places like Mt Monadnock, and b) the vegetation isn't as vulnerable to disturbance as alpine or sub-alpine communities that need protection on mountain summits. It was agreed that there is no need to specifically mention the topic of off-trail use in the Management Plan.
 - c. Administration – Management Structure
 - i. More information is needed on the section about the HPC's responsibilities.
 1. HPC should be responsible for assessing contracts such as with National Grid and VAST and advising and assisting the Selectboard in negotiations.
 2. HPC should be responsible for the buildings.
 - ii. More description is needed on the interaction between HPC and HMCA.
 1. HPC should monitor the work of the HMCA. Are their efforts adhering to the Management Plan and the conservation easement? Are they maintaining trails and the website in good order?
 2. More definition is needed on the collaboration between the two organizations. When (on what topics) should HPC ask for input from HMCA?
 - iii. More work is needed on this section before inviting HPC and HMCA to review and comment.
- 6. Develop plans for next several meetings.**
- a. Dec 27
 - i. We will not meet on Dec 27.
 - b. Jan 10
 - i. We will resume the regular schedule of meeting the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month as of Jan 10, 2024.
 - ii. Continue review of draft plan.
 1. Briefly re-address Trails and Administration to get input from committee members who weren't at today's meeting.
 2. Address new sections to be determined later. Diana will continue to draft additional sections.
 - c. Jan 24
 - i. Continue discussion of field trip to learn more about forest management issues.
 - ii. Continue review of draft plan.
- 7. Adjourn** – The meeting was adjourned at 8:37.

Portions of the draft Management Plan that were reviewed and discussed at the meeting

Trail Management

See Section XXX on Recreation Management for permitted, restricted, and prohibited uses.

General Description

North of Route 9, a set of nested-loop single track recreation trails runs along the high ground from Old Hogback Road to the summit of Hogback Mountain in the northeast corner of the conservation area. A former logging road on the western flank of the mountain runs north-south and is now used as a recreation trail, primarily by VAST. This old road has also been designated a part of the “Wilmington Through Trail,” enabling hikers from the Lake Raponda area to connect with trails in Molly Stark State Park (both in Wilmington).

On the south side of Route 9, a network of trails and skiable routes exist within the former ski area. The Tower Trail is a former access road used for ski area maintenance, and is the primary hiking trail used by visitors to the conservation area to access the fire tower at the summit of Mount Olga in Molly Stark State Park. The town leases access to this road/hiking trail to the National Grid power company so that they can access their communication tower on Mount Olga. (See more information about this lease in Section XXX.)

Other areas of the conservation area do not have any recreation or other trails as of 2023.

Trail philosophy

1. The concentration of trails in specific areas is desirable, providing a way to meet the potentially conflicting purposes of the conservation easement: providing options for non-motorized recreation in some areas, and supporting wildlife and natural communities in others. Trails should not be allowed to proliferate so that they are uniformly spread throughout the conservation area. Significant portions of the property should remain essentially trail-less.
2. All trails in the Conservation Area are multi-use trails.
3. If a special interest group wishes to develop a dedicated use trail such as a bike trail or horseback-riding trail, which would ban use by other types of users, they may propose the trail to the HPC, explaining not only why limiting use by the general public is desirable, but also how they expect to enforce the limitation. HPC shall ask for analysis and input from the HMCA and the HMCA Trails Committee before making a decision.
4. VAST - The conservation easement does not allow the use of motor vehicles in the conservation area, with some exceptions. (See Sec XXX for details.) One such exception allows the Town to grant the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) authorization to use a specific route through the conservation area as a snowmobile trail in the winter months. VAST normally posts

their trails as being off limits to use by wheeled vehicles. In the conservation area, the VAST policy in this regard is overridden. Even though VAST has been granted authorization to use a specific trail, all other authorized types of use (e.g. skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, and mountain biking) may also occur on that trail, year round.

Trail Maintenance

1. HMCA - The HMCA is responsible for maintaining the recreation trails and skiable routes.
 - a. Trails may be temporarily closed to some or all uses for any reason, for example due to mud or due to a hazardous tree that needs removal.
 - b. Minor rerouting of existing trails by the HMCA Trails Committee is allowed without needing specific approval by the HMCA Board or the HPC.
 - c. Skiable routes
 - i. Having a former ski area as part of the conservation area creates a great addition to recreational opportunities. The slopes of Mount Olga (aka Hogback Ski Area) were ideal for skiing when the ski area was in operation. Those slopes are still great for skiing today, by backcountry skiers, who climb slopes or mountains under their own power without using a ski lift. Skiing down the mountain does not make use of “trails” in the narrow sense of hiking trails. It also does not require the creation of perfectly cleared, wide open slopes like those at commercial ski areas. But for safety’s sake, it is necessary to clear some of the young trees that have grown up on the abandoned ski slopes, and to clear things like face-slapping branches and blowdowns that could snare ski tips. These lightly opened areas can be considered skiable routes.
 - ii. All ski slopes, lift lines, access roads and other areas that had been cleared in the past as part of the former Hogback Ski Area may be maintained as skiable routes.
2. VAST - The local affiliate of VAST is responsible for maintaining the trail that has been authorized for use by VAST, including its bridges, culverts, and other water management structures. Plans for any maintenance work more extensive than yearly mowing and clearing of ditches should be shared with the HMCA and HPC prior to implementation.
3. National Grid - The National Grid (power company) leases a right of way on the Tower Trail from Route 9 to the town line just below the summit of Mt Olga to allow their serviced vehicles access to their communication tower in Molly Stark State Park. Prior to 2023, they were responsible for maintaining that trail in a condition adequate for use by their vehicles. In 2023, the terms of the lease were changed, with National Grid paying an additional yearly amount intended to cover maintenance of the route, which is now to be managed by the Town. HPC will oversee this effort.

Trail Development

1. New trails may be created if they are endorsed by the HMCA Trails Committee and the HMCA Board of Directors, and approved by the HPC.

2. Ideally, new trails will be located within the existing envelope of trails, i.e. the former ski area terrain south of Route 9 and along the higher ground to the summit of Hogback Mountain north of Route 9.
3. If forest management demonstration projects or other educational opportunities are developed in areas of the conservation area where the intent is to limit recreation, it may be desirable to create either temporary or permanent trails so that the public can observe and learn from the project. If so, these trails should be limited to pedestrian (or snowshoe) traffic only.

Management Structure

1. Select Board
 - a. The ultimate arbiter for all decisions is the Marlboro Select Board (SB).
2. Hogback Preservation Commission (HPC)
 - a. The HPC advises the Select Board on matters of policy regarding the Conservation Area.
 - b. HPC members are appointed by the Select Board. A majority must be Marlboro residents.
 - c. For a full description of the HPC, see the HPC “Rules of Procedure” appended to this document.
 - d. Items and issues that come before the HPC are evaluated and reviewed to determine if they adhere to the conservation easement and the Management Plan.
 - i. For items that are within the normal scope of operations on the Conservation Area that are deemed to comply as specified above, the HPC can authorize the proposal or activity without additional review and approval by the Select Board.
 - ii. Select Board review is required for:
 1. the annual proposed budget
 - a. Once the budget is approved, the SB does not need to authorize each expenditure as it arises.
 2. Facility Use Agreements
 3. any topic the HPC feels is beyond normal operations
 4. any topic on which the HPC and the HMCA disagree
3. Hogback Mountain Conservation Association (HMCA)
 - a. HMCA is a non-governmental private volunteer organization registered as a non-profit in the state of Vermont.
 - b. HMCA oversees the day to day management of the conservation area, including:
 - i. organizing and promoting public events, both educational and recreational
 - ii. maintaining the trails, signs, trail markers, and the trail map
 - iii. operating the Conservation Area website: hogbackvt.org
 - c. HMCA advises the HPC on:
 - i. Facility Use Agreement applications (See section XXX for more detail)
 - ii. creation of new trails- (See section XXX for more detail)
 - iii. proposed revisions to and updates of the Management Plan
 - iv. any topic requested by the HPC
 - d. HMCA funding – *to be completed*

- i. The HMCA manages an endowment fund that was created . . .*
- ii. memorandum of understanding*
- iii. what funds can and can't be used for*

4. The Marlboro Town Office

- a. The Town Clerk's office fields inquiries from the public.
 - i. Most inquiries can be directed to the HMCA-maintained website, hogbackvt.org.
 - ii. Facility Use Agreements – Inquiries about use by large groups, researchers, commercial enterprises, and any other organization that may require a Facility Use Agreement should be directed to the HMCA . See Section XXX for more detail.