

**Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee**  
**7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 3, 2024**  
**via Zoom only**

**Minutes**

Attending: Pieter van Loon, Mike Purcell, Diana Todd, Amanda Whiting

1. Preliminaries
  - a. choose a secretary to take minutes: Amanda
  - b. choose a Zoom host: Diana
  - c. start Zoom recording at 7:36pm.
2. Approve minutes of previous regular meeting (Mar 20, 2024).

Minutes approved unanimously.
3. Continue planning public outreach efforts.
  - a. identify potential moderator for our indoor public info/feedback session  
Diana spoke to Lucy Gratwick, who is willing to be the moderator.
  - b. should we have another HMCA/HPC joint meeting/review before starting the public outreach efforts?  
Before starting outreach to the public, we will send the draft to HMCA/HPC by email and ask for comments.
  - c. public survey – what to ask  
Diana reviewed six other town’s management plans to see if they had done surveys and what questions they asked, and what their public input process was. Only half of them mentioned seeking public input, and none listed actual survey questions or listed presentation topics. Waitsfield did summarize questions raised by the public in one meeting, and the answers that were provided.  
We brainstormed ideas for sample questions for a survey.  
Name (optional), Town of Residence, How often do you visit Hogback? What do you love about Hogback? What’s your favorite memory on Hogback? Comments/Questions.  
Broad questions can get at people’s values.  
More specific questions might be: How important is it to provide access to special/ecologically sensitive locations? Do you think we should allow private events (not open to the public)? If so should they be limited to selected areas of the conservation area?  
We considered whether we should have a survey after all. How can you ask about a potentially controversial topic without tilting the question towards one viewpoint or another? Public input is required, but it doesn’t have to be in the form of a survey.  
We noted that it is important to provide a way for the public to give input that does not require attending a meeting (like the expected public sit-down meeting and the walk in the woods). We decided that we will post the draft and invite comments by email. We can also make a paper copies available and accept written comments.  
We always planned to reach out to individual and organizational stakeholders, such as local ecologists and Windham Regional Commission. For next meeting, let’s make a list of these.
  - d. walk in the woods – what to present  
Pieter suggests the walk having the topics of forestry, recreation, wildlife values. Spring or summer.

- e. indoor meeting – what to present  
Downstairs at the Community Center or Jr. High Room at MES. Should we display some maps? Expect maximum of 30 people.
4. Discuss items from master list of topics that still need to be addressed. See attachment.
  - Should we have a Vision Statement for the conservation area? Diana will work on this.
  - Should we be guided by/refer to state plans? Many of the topics in statewide planning efforts, like wildlife linkage and wildlife crossings, will be addressed when the Forest Management Plan is created. This edition of the MP can mention that these concepts should be considered when specific projects are planned.
  - We need a section on invasive insects and other animals, addressing what the response should be if/when they are detected. Pieter will create a draft for review. He expects that the Forestry Plan (due in 2026) will specifically address Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and Emerald Ash Borer.
  - Should we have a section on Education? Yes, and it can point to other sections of the plan where education is addressed.
  - Should we list the research recommendations from the Biodiversity Inventory? Decided to include mention of them in Education section, but not list them as a project that should be aggressively pursued (finding funding, soliciting a researcher) by the town.
  - What should we put about money in the plan? What authority does the HPC have to direct how the town accounts for Hogback-generated income, such as from the lease to National Grid, or any potential excess income from forest management activities? Diana will research this more, starting by reaching out to the Town Treasurer.
5. Plan next few meetings.
  - Apr 17 - Review drafts and revisions created as a result of today's discussions. Continue discussions about public meetings and surveys.
6. Adjourned at 8:49pm

## 2024\_04\_03 Topics still to discuss

items left to discuss, from previous meetings and the running list of topics

- Intro material
  - is there, or should there be, a Vision Statement for the conservation area?
- should we be guided/refer to state-wide plans, like
  - Vermont State Wildlife Action Plan
  - Species of Greatest Conservation Need
  - Wildlife Linkage Habitat ratings and Wildlife Crossing Values
- Invasives: We haven't addressed invasive insects or other creatures yet (wild pigs?)
- Education
  - Do we need a separate section in the MP that addresses this?
  - The BioDiv Inventory recommended some specific future studies. Should the MP call for these studies to be done? If so, by whom?
- Money
  - Should Plan say anything about the money that National Grid pays to the town to lease access to the Tower Trail for their maintenance vehicles?
  - We are recommending that any excess funds generated by forest management activities be set aside for use at Hogback and not go into the general fund. Is this out of our purview? Talk to the Town Treasurer or the SB.
- Permitted, restricted, and prohibited activities
  - should nighttime activities be allowed
  - winter use of "fat bikes" on snow-covered trails, mechanical snow-packing to make such use possible?
  - geocaching
  - Foraging – yes? no? limits?
    - for personal use vs for commercial use
    - berries, fruit, fungi, flowers, ferns, leaves
    - boughs (balsam for wreaths), poles
    - Any need to discuss firewood? What if forest management activities leave unmerchantable wood on the ground? Can people come and "glean" it?
  - No unauthorized cutting – covers many topics – should it be dealt with in a dedicated section, or in prohibited uses, or in multiple areas, as it arises in context?
    - no cutting to open skiable routes (except as part of authorized volunteer work days)
    - no cutting new trails without permission
    - no cutting to widen or "improve" trails except as part of authorized volunteer work days
    - no cutting to open shooting lanes for hunting
    - no cutting firewood (not even fallen dead?)
    - no cutting trees or poles (young trees) for woodworking or other projects
  - Maple sugaring –Is there any need to address this?
- Special Use Permits (Facility Use Agreements)
  - for non-educational, non-public activities (e.g. weddings are mentioned in existing MP), should they be limited to specific locations?

- should anything specific be said about use by commercial organizations? Should they be banned? The land is supposed to be open to the public.
  - summer day camps
  - tour groups
- should there be a maximum group size allowed?
  - should large groups be required to develop a safety plan or have a safety officer, like is required for using some public buildings or public spaces? For examples, ask Bob Milligan, HMCA Director
- Getting the word out to the public about what is and isn't allowed
  - Should the MP specifically say we need more/better postings at the kiosks, boundaries, and on the website about what is and isn't allowed?
  - Should public postings (kiosks, boundaries, website) have a "use at your own risk" component?
- Buildings
  - establish overall philosophy for all buildings – Repair and preserve them? Tear them down? Let them decay on their own?
  - what uses should be allowed? Current draft describes how the buildings are currently used, but doesn't discuss how to decide on potential future uses of buildings
  - Should there be specific plans in the Management Plan for some buildings? Benedict Cottage? First Aid building? The Castle?
    - Should Benedict Cottage be demolished? Preserved?
- the "map policy" that was part of the previous MP
  - it said it couldn't be shared with most online organizations – only governmental orgs
  - HMCA was responsible for producing the map, but HPC approved the content should we just drop this as overly nit-picky? Or is this something worth addressing?
- Recommended management actions/activities
  - Should we recommend an identity sign visible at a drive-by glance on Route 9? Like at entrances to parks and at edges of National Forests?
  - Should active measures be taken to preserve the lift towers, like oiling or painting them?
  - Should we recommend building a wheelchair-accessible hiking trail?
  - Should the woods road from the Grant Road entrance to the Quonset Hut be maintained at a level able to support vehicles like maintenance trucks, tractors, or even heavy equipment?
- Do we need a wildfire plan?
- Do we need to discuss our relationship with Molly Stark State Park?