

Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 17, 2024
Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom

Minutes

Meeting called to order at 7:32 pm.

Present: in person, Diana Todd; via Zoom, Mike Purcell, Pieter Van Loon

abbreviations used:

MP = Management Plan

SB = Selectboard

1. Preliminaries
 - a. choose a secretary to take minutes - Diana
 - b. choose a Zoom host - Diana
 - c. start Zoom recording
2. Minutes of previous regular meeting (Apr 3, 2024) approved as submitted.
3. Discuss items from master list of topics that still need to be addressed. See attachment for list. The committee reviewed written comments submitted by HMPUC member Eric Slayton, who was unable to attend in person.
 - a. Money-related topics. Diana reported on an informal meeting with Assistant Town Treasurer Rebecca Sevigny and Town Clerk Forrest Holzapfel at which the lack of any existing plan for either short or long term funding for Hogback was discussed. The committee agreed that we need to look into the situation further. This will be the topic of the next HMPUC meeting (May 1, 2024). HPC Commissioners and HMCA Directors will be invited to attend. After that meeting, HMPUC representatives will ask for time at an upcoming Selectboard meeting to seek input from the SB.
 - b. Permitted, restricted, and prohibited activities. Decisions were as follows:
 - i. Nighttime use. No need to restrict or prohibit. No need to overtly address in the MP. Leave status as is – tacitly accepted.
 - ii. Winter use of “fat bikes”, use of mechanical groomer to maintain trails. HPC discussed and approved this use, including mechanical grooming, several years ago, but it has not been implemented. We noted that grooming of trails is allowed for VAST; this is a mini version of that, done using a “snow-dog.” The track that is created is too narrow for use by modern snowmobiles, but is usable by XC skiers and fat bikes. Agreed to include this as a permitted use and an allowed exception to the ban on motorized vehicles.
 - iii. Geocaching. People have been participating in this activity on Hogback for many years. It has not caused any problems. A ban would be impossible to enforce. No need to address this explicitly in the MP. Leave the status as is – tacitly accepted.
 - iv. Foraging. Agreed that foraging for personal use is acceptable. Considered whether there should be an effort to protect any vulnerable species, such as ramps or ginseng; monitoring and enforcement would be extremely difficult. Discussed difficulty of enforcing any limits on “commercial” use of foraged materials. Foraging has not caused any problems that we know of. Considered

- leaving the topic unmentioned in the MP and tacitly accepted, but decided the MP should have a statement. Personal use OK, commercial use not allowed.
- v. Cutting trees.
 - 1. Agreed that no unauthorized cutting is allowed. Need to make clear that it applies to more than just chainsaw-sized trees, but also applies to cutting side branches and saplings to “improve” trails and ski slopes, unless part of an authorized project. Text should include overall ban, then include list of examples: “including but not limited to . . .”
 - 2. Firewood. Agreed that any program to permit culling of firewood would need to be part of the Forest Management Plan, which will be developed in the next few years.
 - vi. Maple sugaring. The conservation agreement gives the town authority to contract with a sugaring operation. Agreed that if the topic comes up, the guidance in the easement is sufficient. No need to explicitly address it in the MP.
 - c. Special Use Permits (Facility Use Agreements)
 - i. Non-public, non-educational events. Agreed there is no need to ban or limit private events, as long as they do not impede public use of the site (as required by the conservation easement). The permit process already deals with this. No need to single out private events in the MP.
 - ii. Commercial use. Ditto above. Follow guidance in the easement and the permit process. No need for MP to single this out as a special category.
 - iii. Maximum group size?
 - 1. Agreed to not specify a group size limit, but deal with the topic on a case-by-case basis in the permit process.
 - 2. Should large groups be required to establish a safety plan and/or name a safety officer? No. The permit process should make clear that “use at your own risk” applies.
 - d. Getting the word out to the public. Agreed the kiosks need to have more administrative info. At a minimum: map, list of restricted and prohibited activities, “use at your own risk” notice, and “remove dog waste from trails.” Also agree that there should be signs or kiosks at all entry points, not just at trailheads on the roads, at a minimum saying “you are now entering Hogback.”
 - e. Buildings
 - i. Agreed MP should include some overall philosophy about buildings AND other infrastructure. More discussion needed.
 - ii. Agreed a process for making decisions about buildings should be specified, particularly for actions that will require significant funding. More discussion needed.
 - iii. Agreed the First Aid Building and Benedict Cottage are not usable for any purpose in their current states. For the Castle and the Quonset Hut, agreed there is no need to specify allowed and prohibited uses. Deal with it on a case-by-case basis via the permit process.
 - f. Map policy as included in existing MP. Agreed there is no need for this section. Agreed that the related section of the existing MP that urged caution in publicizing the existence of the trails was also not needed. Overuse has not been a problem. Public sharing of trail information online can’t be controlled, and there’s no need to try.
 - g. Recommended Actions – should any of these be implemented?

- i. Big sign along route 9? No.
 - ii. Active measures to preserve the lift towers? Not at this time.
 - iii. Develop an “accessible” trail (usable by wheelchair or other mobility-assisted device)? Yes. The overall philosophy should be to allow as many people as possible to enjoy the conservation area. Grants for creating accessible trails (although competitive) are available. HMCA, as the party responsible for trails, should be encouraged to explore the feasibility of creating such a trail.
 - iv. Should the service road from Grant Road to the Quonset Hut be maintained at a level that would support maintenance equipment, tractors, or heavy equipment? No. VAST already is responsible for maintaining it to support their mechanical groomers, which is sufficient to support UTV’s and maybe light tractors.
 - h. Do we need a wildfire plan? No.
 - i. Should the MP discuss the relationship with Molly Stark State Park? No. There is and has been no significant coordination between the two entities, and no need for greater interaction is anticipated.
4. Review new draft sections and revised sections based on discussions at previous meetings. We did not have time to address this scheduled topic.
 5. Plan next few meetings. As mentioned above, invite HPC and HMCA to May 1 meeting to discuss short and long range funding strategies. Follow up by attending SB meeting to bring them into the conversation. (Mike Purcell, who is HPC Chair as well as a HMPUC member, noted that he will be out of the country for the first three weeks in May and unable to attend any meetings in that time period.)
 6. Adjourned at 8:57 pm.

2024_04_17 Topics still to discuss

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

- 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?