

Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
7:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 5, 2024
Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:42 pm.

Present: In person, Diana Todd. Via Zoom, Mike Purcell, Eric Slayton

Abbreviations used:

HMCA = Hogback Mountain Conservation Association
HMPUC = Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
HPC = Hogback Preservation Commission
MP = Management Plan
SB = Selectboard
VAST = Vermont Association of Snow Travelers
VCF = Vermont Community Foundation
VLT = Vermont Land Trust

1. Preliminaries
 - a. choose a secretary to take minutes – Diana
 - b. choose a Zoom host – Diana
 - c. start Zoom recording
2. Noted for the record: The May 15, 2024 meeting was not held due to lack of a quorum.
3. Minutes of previous meeting, May 1, 2024, were approved as submitted.
4. Irregular dates of July and Sept meetings were reviewed. Meetings will be July 10 & 24 (2nd & 4th Wednesdays) and Sept 11 & 18 (2nd & 3rd Wednesdays).
5. The draft article for July/Aug Marlboro Mixer was reviewed and approved as submitted (see attached). The town will post drafts of the management plan on the town website, so there is no need to use a Google Drive site for public access. The public can reach the committee directly via email at: hogbackplanning@gmail.com. Diana will monitor that email address.
6. Diana reported on the May 9 Selectboard meeting where she presented ideas for long-term funding options for Hogback projects.
 - a. The SB is not planning to request any property-tax-generated funds for use on Hogback projects.
 - b. The SB noted that the HPC, HMCA, or even individuals can use the standard procedure (collect signatures, etc) for putting an article on the Town Meeting agenda to ask for funds for Hogback projects.
 - c. Diana got the impression that the income from the lease to the National Grid (other than the \$1,000 per year designated for maintenance of the Tower Trail) will not be earmarked for Hogback projects, but will go into the general fund.
 - d. Town Administrator Nick Morgan encouraged HMCA to aggressively use the matchmaking service VCF offers to its investing non-profit members, which tries to find grant opportunities and even individual donors for specific projects.
 - e. The SB encouraged HPC and HMCA to look into selling carbon offset credits as a way to raise funds. Diana pointed out to the SB that such a program would need to allow active forest management.

- f. The SB seemed to support the approach of not using timber harvesting as an income generation scheme.
7. The HMCA concerns about recent VAST trail maintenance were discussed.
 - a. The HMCA letter of concern was sent to “Diana and all,” implying that it was aimed at HMPUC. The committee agreed that HMPUC has no role in solving HMCA’s concerns about last fall’s trail maintenance by the local VAST club, but that we can consider whether the MP can include any language that may help avoid a similar problem in the future.
 - b. The report by Spencer Knickerbocker was discussed. Knickerbocker is a professional designer, builder, maintainer, and groomer of XC-ski trails. He was hired by HMCA to provide an independent review of the quality of the work done by the VAST club. Knickerbocker judged the work to have been largely well done and appropriate, with some minor potential improvements identified.
 - c. In their letter of concern, HMCA had asked that HPC “prevent the use of heavy equipment in the future without prior engagement with the HMCA Board of Directors.” Consistent with HMPUC’s overall philosophy of the MP – that it shouldn’t try to micromanage - the committee agreed that the MP should not include any limitations on size or type of equipment. Instead, it should include a statement that all trail construction and maintenance should meet appropriate standards.
 - d. The HMCA letter of concern showed that the MP needs to be more clear about what it means when it says that the trails are “multi-use.” HMCA took that phrase to mean that all trails should be well suited for all activities. That was not the intent. Diana will add language to the draft to indicate that although some trails are designed for specific uses (such as snowmobiling or mountain biking), those trails may be used by any (allowed) user. Snowmobiles are only allowed to use the designated VAST trail, and horses may not use single track trails, but all other users may use any trail in the conservation area, even though that trail might not provide them with an ideal outdoor experience.
 8. Diana reported on the recent site visit to Hogback by Jennifer Garrett of VLT. These site visits typically occur every three years, as part of the oversight by VLT to ensure that the requirements of the conservation easement are being met. This visit was primarily focused on a review of the VAST trail maintenance. Jennifer seemed to think that the work was appropriate. She emphasized the importance of controlling drainage (which was the primary focus of the VAST work).
 9. The committee reviewed new draft sections and revised sections. (See the agenda for this meeting for a copy.) The new and revised sections were approved as submitted, with the following suggested changes:
 - a. In the section on ways that cutting wood can be authorized, in the last bullet item, change “programs, educational events and the like” to “programs and events.”
 - b. In the section on minimum information to be posted on kiosks, add standard “Leave No Trace” language.
 10. Ideas for seeking public review and comment on the draft MP were discussed.
 - a. The Marlboro Mixer article (in item 5 above) is needed because we’re not yet ready to set a date for the public review meetings.
 - i. Diana will send a courtesy copy of the article beforehand to Lucy Gratwick, who had agreed to serve as Moderator for our public outreach meeting(s).
 - ii. After it is printed in the Marlboro Mixer, Diana will submit a condensed version of the report to Front Porch Forum.

- b. Once the MP draft is complete, Diana will create a PowerPoint presentation about the MP.
 - c. Before presenting it to the public, we will do a dry run presentation to an audience of HMPUC, HMCA, and HPC.
 - d. We can expect HMCA and HPC to review the document before the presentation, but even though the draft MP will be made easily available to the public for review prior to the public presentation, we can't expect the public to have done a thorough review of the draft.
 - i. The public presentation will not go through every detail of the draft MP, but will instead present general concepts and invite discussion and input from the audience.
 - ii. The public will be invited to read the entire draft and submit detailed comments via email or in writing.
 - e. The on-mountain walk-and-talk will need to address more than just forest management concepts, but will also need to address ideas about recreation, cultural resources, education, and other major themes of the MP.
11. The next meeting will be on June 19.
12. The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 pm.

D R A F T for review at 2024_06_05 HMPUC meeting
for submittal to July/Aug Marlboro Mixer

Hogback Management Plan Update Update

You read that right. This is an Update update. The Hogback Management Plan Update Committee (HMPUC) has been working for over a year and is seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. It's a good time for an update on their update work. We're going to be holding some public review and input sessions later this summer, both a walk/talk in the woods at the conservation area, and a sit-down meeting. Stay tuned.

In the meantime, here's a big picture overview of the draft Management Plan as it is evolving. The Hogback Mountain Conservation Area was created in 2010, after the Hogback Mountain Conservation Association (HMCA) raised \$1.7 million to buy the 600-acre property. A conservation easement was put on the land to ensure it would never be subdivided or developed. The conserved property was donated to the town, the Hogback Preservation Commission (HPC) was created to advise the Selectboard, and a Management Plan was drafted. Today, 14 years later, that plan is being revised to incorporate what we've learned about what works, what's been problematic, and what new issues have come up. In general, the basic approach of the original Management Plan (MP) has served us well and will be continued.

The MP must be consistent with the conservation easement, which is a legal document that defines allowable, restricted, and prohibited uses of the property. To reconcile potential conflicts between the goal of providing free outdoor non-motorized recreational opportunities to the public with the goal of providing supportive habitat for wildlife and developing a healthy forest, the MP will steer recreation and new trails into the areas where hiking and recreation trails already exist. This will prevent saturating the entire conservation area with a web of trails. Where the ski area formerly existed (encompassing about 80 of the 600-acre total), all former ski slopes, lift lines and access roads will be deemed suitable for maintenance as recreation sites.

Although it is allowed by the conservation easement, the MP will not endorse harvesting timber to generate income. However, active forest management projects that support the health of the forest, improve habitat for wildlife, enhance the forest's resilience in the face of climate change and other suitable goals will be permitted. Many of these projects will include removal of mature trees. These logs can be sold to offset the cost of the work. A detailed Forest Management Plan (FMP) will be created in a separate planning process in 2025.

The process for obtaining a permit to use the conservation area will be better defined in the updated MP. Permits will be needed for things like large groups and scientific research projects. The existing list of prohibited uses will now include drones, game cameras, and e-bikes. Note that waivers can be obtained to allow most of the prohibited activities if they are for a good reason (research, education, etc). The permit process is the way to get a waiver.

If you'd like to read the draft MP as it is under construction, you can find it at this Google Drive site: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Y_-Szd0Uj76MBp48etxx7VkWILVaKFwY?usp=sharing

Questions? You can reach the committee at hogbackplanning@gmail.com.