

Special Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
10:00 a.m. Saturday, October 12, 2024
at the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area

no Zoom option – in-person only

D R A F T
Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 am.

Present:

Committee members: Diana Todd, Mike Purcell, Pieter Van Loon.

Members of the public: Nancy Anderson (Marlboro), Julia Arduini (Marlboro), Laurel Copeland (Halifax), Cherrie Corey (Marlboro), Calvin Farwell (Dummerston), Anastasia Houze (Marlboro), Bill Johnson (Dummerston), Kate Kirkwood (Marlboro), Heather Meldner (Pittsburgh PA), Steve Sage (Somerville MA and Whitingham), Lou Tognan (Marlboro), Nancy Tognan (Marlboro), Jack Widness (Wilmington), Roger Wilson (Winchester MA and Marlboro).

1. The group walked about a mile along Conservation Area trails on the north side of Route 9, using the White’s Loop and MES trails, stopping at various points to discuss ideas for forest management, trails, and recreation from the draft Management Plan.
2. Background information was presented:
 - a. History:
 - i. how the conservation area came into being in 2010
 - ii. what a conservation easement is; VLT and VHCB hold a conservation easement on the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area land
 - iii. the management structure for the conservation area: Select Board, Hogback Preservation Commission, Hogback Mountain Conservation Association
 - b. The four primary purposes of the conservation easement were presented. The Town’s management plan must conform to the easement requirements.
 - c. Why update the Management Plan now?
 - i. make changes based on what have we learned from public use over the past 14 years
 - ii. consider new uses that didn’t exist when the current plan was written
 - iii. respond to new information from the 2018-2019 Biodiversity Inventory
3. Proposed refinements to recreation management were presented.
 - a. Concentrate future development of recreation into regions where trails already exist, leaving large sections of the conservation area essentially trail-less.
 - b. Clearer definition of who can use which trails:
 - i. snowmobiles – no changes recommended, continue policy of allowing use on the north-south trail designated for VAST use
 - ii. horseback riding – make clear that no trails are being maintained specifically for horseback riding (high clearance is needed), but that riding is allowed, but limited to wider trails (not allowed on single-track trails)
 - iii. mountain biking – codify the existing use. The existing plan says bikes are limited to certain trails, but those limitations were never posted on any of the kiosks, so users have been effectively free to ride on any trail. No known

- problems have occurred. Reframe the management plan guidance to match this reality.
- iv. hiking, running, snowshoeing, XC skiing, etc – no changes. Allow all uses on all trails.
 - v. backcountry skiing – allow the slopes, lift lines, access roads and any other path formerly cleared as part of the Hogback Ski Area to be maintained in a semi-open condition suitable for backcountry skiing.
- c. Introduce some new restrictions. Do not allow:
- i. target shooting
 - ii. drones
 - iii. game cameras
 - iv. unauthorized removal of wood
 - v. e-bikes
- d. Public comments on the above:
- i. Concerns about allowing bikes on the trails.
 - 1. Experiences in other towns closer to large population bases have included:
 - a. great increase in use once trails are “discovered” by bike riders
 - b. aggressive, seemingly intentional riding through muddy trails, causing ruts and erosion
 - c. walkers being frightened by bikes approaching from behind
 - 2. Having some trails off-limits to bikes would allow walkers who are seeking a quiet interaction with the forest to be confident that they would not be disturbed by bike riders.
 - ii. Concerns about NOT allowing e-bikes.
 - 1. e-bikes allow people with limited strength or mobility to enjoy the trails; as an example, a multi-generation family bike ride becomes possible when some people use e-bikes
 - 2. the additional speed that e-bikes can provide wouldn’t be used on Hogback trails – the trails are not like a paved road where e-bikes make high speeds possible – the trails are too narrow, steep, and twisty for fast riding to be safe even on non-e-bikes
 - 3. e-bike tire types and widths are no different from regular mountain bikes, so additional trail erosion shouldn’t be a problem
4. Proposed refinements to forest management activities were presented.
- a. The goal of all active forest management activities will be aimed at helping the forest survive in the face of the threats we know are at our doorstep, such as insects, diseases, competition from invasive plants, and climate change.
 - b. Where past human actions such as “high grading” (aggressive extraction of high-value logs) have resulted in a degraded forest, humans have a responsibility to take action to help the forest recover.
 - c. Some actions to improve forest resiliency and increase the variety of species present will require the cutting of some existing trees. Some of these trees will have monetary value and will be sold. Some will only be suitable for firewood, and could be sold, or could be diverted into a firewood program for low-income residents. In any case, no management activities will be undertaken solely to generate income from timber sales.
 - d. Detailed plans for forest management will be developed in the next year or two. Sam Schneski, the county forester, will help develop the plan, but only if the work

exemplifies current best practices and can be used as a demonstration project or educational site for public programs.

- e. Examples of possible projects were given, including:
 - i. strategies for helping maple, oak, cherry, birch and other species to regenerate in areas where only diseased beech is currently growing
 - ii. ideas for preserving sources of genetic diversity for ash in the face of the anticipated intense wave of mortality due to the emerald ash borer, which is already present in the county
 - iii. ways to encourage dense spruce thickets, which are very valuable wildlife habitats, where they are currently being suppressed by beech
- f. Public comments on the above:
 - i. Using the term “stewardship” rather than “management” would emphasize the forest health perspective and reduce the historic connotations of timber extraction.
 - ii. Even if the plan is well intentioned, if it is poorly implemented, it might cause more harm than good.
5. The group stopped to examine a round-leaved orchid, recently discovered by Cherrie Corey, which is classified as an S1 rare species by the state. The need to provide a wide buffer around this plant and any other rare species or fragile environments was discussed.
6. The meeting adjourned at 12:27 pm.