

Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee
7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov 13, 2024
Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom

D R A F T
Minutes

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

Present:

In person: Diana Todd, HMPUC Chair; Members of the public: Jack Widness, Allison Turner
Via Zoom: HMPUC members Mike Purcell and Pieter Van Loon; HMCA VP Lou Tognan

Abbreviations used:

ESH = early successional habitat

FUA = Facility Use Agreement

HMCA = Hogback Mountain Conservation Association

HMPUC = Hogback Management Plan Update Committee

HPC = Hogback Preservation Commission

MES = Marlboro Elementary School

SB = Select Board

VHCB = Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

VLT = Vermont Land Trust

1. Introductions and preliminaries
 - a. choose a secretary to take minutes – Diana
 - b. choose a Zoom host – Diana
 - c. start Zoom recording
2. Minutes of the following meetings were approved: Oct 2, Oct 12, Oct 23 (all 2024).
3. Proposed revisions to the draft Management Plan based on public comments were reviewed. All proposed changes were accepted, with the following points noted and minor modifications made:
 - a. Should the location of the rare orchid that was recently found be worded to make the location more vague in order to protect it? We decided the existing language was appropriate: “on White’s Loop”
 - b. Regarding the need for Facility Use Agreements (aka Special Use Permits) - The proposed change to remove the blanket exemption previously granted to HMCA and the Museum for their events was discussed. Widness noted that there had never been a problem with any HMCA or Museum or MES events in the 14 years that the conservation area has existed. He was concerned that the additional administrative burden that would be created by requiring permits would reduce the number of events that are held, and reduce the number of people willing to volunteer. Tognan also objected to removing the exemption. Van Loon felt that the related proposed change to the group size that triggers the need for a permit (from 20 to 30) might open the door too wide to use by potentially irresponsible groups. After considerable discussion, including considering asking the HPC for input, it was decided to return the triggering group size to 20 and to leave the other changes as proposed (i.e. require all groups who want to host an event that includes a “triggering” event to apply for a permit).

- c. The impossibility of enforcing the “no smoking” addition to the ban on fires of any kind was noted. Turner, as a volunteer firefighter, encouraged leaving the language in, even though it is virtually unenforceable, because it serves as an educational point. The fact that the prohibited uses listed in the existing Management Plan have never been posted on the trailhead kiosks was noted. The intent is to post notices about the prohibited uses going forward.
 - d. Regarding the trail concentration plan, Purcell inquired whether there was a procedure for getting permission to create a trail outside the recreation concentration area. Yes, the same procedure would be used as for any newly proposed trail (seek review and approval by first HMCA Trail committee, then HMCA, then HPC). The proposer can expect it to be much more difficult to get permission to build a trail outside the recreation concentration area, but it is not outright banned.
 - e. Section 7.3.1.b about the permissibility of creating skiable routes on former ski slopes, lift lines, access roads or other paths formerly cleared as part of the ski area included a sentence stating that all work needed to be done under the supervision of the HMCA Trails Committee. Purcell noted that such work should also be allowed under the supervision of the HPC. Further discussion zeroed in on the key point: not which Hogback management group could or could not lead a work party, but the fact that no *unauthorized* cutting can be done. The statement allowing skiable routes to be created does not grant blanket permission to anyone who wants to ski at Hogback to go out and open new skiable routes on their own. The language will be revised to put the focus on banning “pirate” cutting, not on defining who leads work crews.
 - f. There was wide-spread and enthusiastic support for the revision that encouraged periodic clearing of the former ski slopes (as had been done in the 2013-2022 ESH plan), even though the Biodiversity Inventory found that the work did not lead to an increase in birds that use ESH. This revision was based on a comment by Turner at the Oct 23 meeting, noting that if the ski slopes are allowed to return to forest, a massive reduction in plant diversity will occur. Turner also noted that insect life would also be drastically affected if open spaces and forest edges were lost, and that a huge variety of small animals rely on those types of habitats. Van Loon agreed that developing plans for maintaining open spaces was an appropriate aspect of the Forest Management Plan that will be drafted in 2025-2026.
 - g. The revisions to the section on scenic views were deemed helpful in clarifying the goal of keeping the views open through collaboration between the conservation area and the adjacent landowners, with no landowner having the right to demand the removal of trees on another owner’s land.
4. Next steps were planned
- a. Diana will add final touches to the document:
 - i. table of contents
 - ii. appendices
 - iii. signature page for Select Board members
 - iv. minor revisions as noted above
 - v. a history of the (draft) Plan development process
 - b. The finalized draft will be distributed to the committee members. If any member wishes to discuss any aspect of the draft in more detail, another HMPUC meeting will be called. If not, then the committee will consider its work done.
 - c. If no further HMPUC meetings are deemed necessary, the draft Plan will be forwarded to the HPC and to VLT simultaneously. (VLT will coordinate review with the co-holder of

the conservation easement, the VHCB.) It was noted that the next regular meeting of HPC won't be until January 2025. HMPUC encourages HPC to hold a special meeting before then in order to review and approve the draft, after modifying it if they deem it necessary. HPC will be responsible for forwarding an approved draft to the Select Board for adoption.

5. The meeting was adjourned at 9:13 pm.