

Town of Mansfield  
**CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**  
Special Joint Meeting of 27 March 2019  
Conference B, Audrey P. Beck Building  
**MINUTES**

*Commission members present:* Quentin Kessel, Erin King, Scott Lehmann, Chadwick Rittenhouse (Alt.), John Silander, Michael Soares. *Commission members absent:* Mary Harper, Julia Rogers (Alt.). *Committee members present:* Susan & Tom Harrington, Quentin Kessel, James Morrow, Michael Soares. *Others present:* Robert Beach, Ann Dunnack (Joshua's Trust), Jennifer Kaufman (Wetlands Agent), Jackie Kulig (Wenberg Hill Forestry Services), Genevieve Rigler (prospective Commission member).

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 7:02p by Commission Chair Michael Soares & Committee Chair Jim Morrow. In the absence of one Commission member, Alternate Rittenhouse was entitled to vote at this special meeting.

**2. Whetten Woods Forest Management Plan.** A Forest Management Plan (FMP) has been prepared by Jackie Kulig for a 70.1 acre tract of interior forestland on contiguous parcels totaling 73.1 acres in the area bounded by Storrs Center, Dog Lane, Farrell & Hanks Hill Roads. The FMP was commissioned by owners of the parcels – Town of Mansfield, Joshua's Trust, Robert & Susan Beach, and Jennifer Bellino – with a grant from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Robert Beach indicated that Hope Lutheran Church wanted its contiguous parcel on Dog Lane included in the FMP but could not secure timely approval from Higher Powers; a separate FMP has been prepared for the church's land.

Kulig reviewed the FMP, which is designed to achieve "[t]he landowners' primary goals for this property" enumerated on p.2:

- 1) Enhancing native plant and animal habitat
- 2) Promoting a diversity of healthy, vigorous native trees and shrubs that are resilient against insects, diseases, climate change, etc.
- 3) Protecting the integrity of sensitive habitats, such as the vernal pool located in Stand 1
- 4) Controlling non-native, invasive plants
- 5) Removing hazardous and threatened trees
- 6) Maintaining or enhancing the recreational and educational values on the Trust and Town properties

The FMP divides the forestland into five stands, characterized on pp.6-8 in terms of present and "desired future" condition. Plans for managing these stands over the next 10 years are outlined on pp.14-15. They are designed to set each stand on a course to its desired future condition. In general the plans call for thinning and selective cutting to improve forest quality over the long term. Some timber would be harvested to finance this work. Kulig emphasized the importance of attacking invasive plants on the tract from the beginning, lest they become even more entrenched and widespread as thinning and cutting open the canopy. Options for controlling invasives are described on p.15

The FMP includes a letter dated 22 February 2019 from DEEP that gives notice of state-listed species that may be present in this forest tract and recommendations for minimizing impacts on them. While some of the species named in DEEP's letter may not actually be present in the tract, Jennifer Kaufman thought that any management activity should proceed under the assumption that they are there. The management proposals for individual stands call for restricting timber harvesting to the winter (11/01 – 03/31) to protect listed species.

Chadwick Rittenhouse mentioned that some foresters recommend cutting ash in the spring to encourage sprouting, advice that seems difficult to reconcile with concern for listed species.

In response to a question from John Silander about implementing the FMP, Kulig said that she could probably get NRCS money to mark trees for thinning & harvest. Then the project would be put out to bid. Speaking from experience with timber sales on family property in Michigan, Silander urged that no bid be accepted without a thorough vetting of the logging company.

Kaufman confirmed that the goals enumerated in the FMP are consistent with the Town-approved management plan (April 2017) for the Whetten Woods Preserve. This 24.3 acre parcel was deeded to the Town in 2012 by UConn, which retains a conservation easement on it. Kaufman believes that the FMP honors the terms of this easement, but UConn has the final say.

Assuming UConn approves, the FMP would need public support to be approved by the Town Council and implemented. To accept the short-term costs of a not-so-pretty logging operation on public land, people must be convinced of substantial long-term benefits. Education might include walks on the tract, meetings with abutters, and presentations on well-done forest management projects of this sort. Pointing to the hazards of dead and dying trees along existing trails (Morrow) and to increased mortality of ash & oak in the tract from the emerald ash borer & gypsy moth (Beach) could help get people's attention. Genevieve Rigler suggested that "or" in goal 6) be strengthened to "and".

Barred owls have been heard in the tract. Kulig agreed that enthusiasm for removing dead and dying trees should not extend to those with cavities for nesting. {See the attached 3/29/19 e-mail from Erin King regarding the potential for logging in March to disrupt owl breeding.}

Soares proposed a 200 ft buffer around the vernal pool in Stand 1 to protect it from potentially damaging logging operations. Kaufman thought that doing so would help ease public concerns about logging. Silander suggested consulting Mark Urban (EEB Department at UConn) about what protection of the vernal pool is needed. Rittenhouse noted that the pool is close to Stand 4 and could be impacted if significant quantities of white pine are logged from that stand. Silander wondered whether logging this area would be worthwhile; the FMP's description of Stand 4 concludes: "Due to the proximity of this stand to 'Storrs Center' and the existing wildlife values, the landowners may alternatively choose to leave this area as a reserve." Kulig noted that pine is low-value timber relative to hardwood.

Soares wondered how the protections of streams and wetlands called for in DEEP's letter would be specified and enforced. Beach said that contracts for logging and other forest management operations should stipulate what is expected. Kaufman added that any project involving wetlands would need IWA approval.

Consideration of the proposed FMP ended with unanimous approval of a **motion** (Kessel, T. Harrington):

The Commission and Committee endorse the proposed Whetten Woods Forest Management Plan, subject to approval by their Chairs of amendments extracted from discussion by Jennifer Kaufman.

**3. Bicentennial Pond 2018 Data Review.** In 2016 the Town tried to remove invasive aquatic plants at Bicentennial Pond by suction dredging, but gave up when vegetation clogged the machinery. Herbicide was applied with some success; it also met with public opposition. Hand pulling to clear water chestnut from the swimming area has been effective but laborious.

In 2018 the Town commissioned Northeast Aquatic Research (NAR) to gather data on the pond's aquatic plants and water quality, and to recommend steps to deal with problems revealed by the data. NAR's report, dated 2/18/19, concludes on p.15 with recommended management actions, classed as short-, middle-, and long-term. Two might be regarded as capital investments: (1) in the short- and mid-term, install benthic barriers – essentially, underwater

weed cloth of limited longevity – in the swimming area; (2) in the long-term, renovate the pond by dredging. The other recommendations call for ongoing monitoring and maintenance: continued testing for water quality, hand pulling of water chestnut, diver-assisted suction harvesting of aquatic plants, applying herbicides as needed to control spiny naiad and lyngbya, curtailing use of fertilizer in the park.

Silander and Rettenhouse wondered if it made sense to proceed with half-measures like installing benthic barriers, if dredging could restore the Pond to its original condition. Kaufman will ask the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District to comment on this. Morrow suggested enhancing upstream wetlands to capture sediment and improve water quality. Concerning nitrogen inputs, Lehmann asked whether fertilizer is used on playing fields at the Middle School (Kaufman will find out), and King asked anything had been done to discourage geese from hanging out at the pond (apparently nothing that worked).

**4. Adjourned** at 9:00p. Next regular Commission meeting: 7:00p, Wednesday, 17 April 2019.

Scott Lehmann, Commission Secretary, 02 April 2019; approved 17 April 2019.

Addendum: Erin King e-mail of 3/29

Since raptors and owls do conduct breeding activities in March, and the harvest window is during this time, I think we should add a caveat about if a harvest is conducted in March then a qualified observer should at least survey the affected areas for potential breeding raptors and owls (or something like that). We also discussed the possibility of harvesting during the growing season to encourage recruitment of ash. This caveat would also apply then and could also affect additional bird species (and other wildlife) that may be breeding during that time.