

WAITSFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
September 28, 2006

DRAFT

Commissioners present: Mark Grosby (chair), Phil Huffman, Ted Joslin, Leo Laferriere
No members of the public or town staff were present.

The meeting began at 7:15 p.m. in the Joslin Memorial Library.

1. Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the August 31, 2006 meeting were approved as submitted.
2. Mowing of Tardy and Austin meadows: Commissioners agreed on the need for mowing these meadows (and at the Lareau Swimhole, which is not under the Commission's jurisdiction. Hadley Gaylord has done this in the past. The group agreed to ask Town Administrator Valerie Capels whether there is an existing policy or protocol for keeping the meadows open.
3. Liability: The group noted the follow-up information on this topic provided by Valerie Capels from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. Mark Grosby indicated that Vermont statutes are very strong in providing liability protection for landowners.
4. Mad River Valley Town Forest Celebration: Phil Huffman provided an update and reviewed the agenda for the Valley-wide town forest celebration scheduled for Saturday afternoon, October 14 at the Fayston Elementary School and adjacent town-owned Chase Brook and Van Loon parcels. The group also discussed the budget and funding for the event. Mark Grosby offered to help with fundraising from local businesses.
5. "Trail-athon" on Wu Ledges and adjacent town parcels: Phil Huffman updated the group on planning for the "trail-athon" scheduled for Sunday, October 15 to collect GPS data and map trails on the Wu Ledges parcel and adjacent town lands. Stephen Engle of the Quebec-Labrador Foundation's Center for Community GIS will be providing technical support for the event. The group discussed publicity, funding, and logistical issues related to the event, and agreed on the importance of collecting trails data only for those parcels that the town owns or has trail and conservation rights. Mark Grosby offered to spearhead fundraising from local businesses to support the event, and he and Phil Huffman agreed to meet before the event to finalize a more detailed game plan for effective use of the volunteers who agree to participate.
6. Possible assistance from Audubon Vermont with habitat management for forest birds: The Commission agreed to accept Audubon Vermont's offer of assistance with this aspect of management, with the hope that it could be applied to all of the parcels under the Commission's purview. Members agreed that it would be desirable to have at least one Commissioner or another knowledgeable local volunteer accompany the Audubon Vermont staff on their site visit(s) to the town parcels. Phil Huffman offered to follow up with Bridget Butler from Audubon's staff to discuss arrangements.

7. Wu Ledges signage and/or other public information on use of town lands: Phil Huffman noted a concern raised by Waitsfield resident and Wu Ledges abutter Jon Jamieson about a bonfire that occurred recently at the Ledges, and his suggestion that signage be installed to discourage such activity. Members agreed on the need for signage, but felt the first necessary step is to officially identify access points and locations where trails cross from private to town lands and vice versa. The October 15th trail-athon should help with the latter. The group agreed that a constructive short-term step could be to have an article and/or ad in the Valley Reporter discussing use of town lands (e.g., no fires, no motorized vehicles, pack in – pack out). Leo Laferriere offered to pursue this possibility in conjunction with local fire chief Delbert Palmer. Members also agreed that in the longer term it would be useful and efficient to develop generic signs that could be posted in appropriate locations on all town lands, and to develop a brochure with a map of town lands and a description of “countryside etiquette”, as is frequently publicized and widely accepted in Great Britain.

8. Next Meeting: The next meeting was confirmed for Thursday, October 26, 2006, 7:00 p.m. at the Town Office. The group agreed to invite John Atkinson (Moretown resident, mountain bike leader of the Mad River Riders, and Vice President of the Vermont Mountain Bike Association) to discuss trail management issues. Phil Huffman offered to follow up with John.

9. Executive Session: Upon motion made and seconded, the Commission voted unanimously to go into executive session pursuant to 1 VSA 313(2) to discuss possible real estate acquisitions by the town.

10. Watershed grants: The group discussed a recent email from Leo Laferriere regarding the availability of grants from the state for watershed projects. All agreed that this could be very useful, although it does not appear feasible to pursue this year because of a late October application deadline and the considerable amount of things already on the Commission’s plate. Looking ahead, Leo Laferriere raised the possibility of pursuing grant funding from this source to support a fish habitat enhancement project in the Mad River, and Ted Joslin suggested initiating a project focused on the re-establishment of stream buffers. Members agreed that such activities would be ideal opportunities for collaboration with the Friends of the Mad River, and possibly with other Valley towns.

11. Funding for October 14th event: Phil Huffman recommended, and the group agreed, that the Commission should continue to hold off on allocating any funding to the Valley-wide town forest celebration until the actual costs for the trail-athon on October 15 are known.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Philip B. Huffman, Secretary