

**WAITSFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**April 18, 2007**

**DRAFT**

*Commissioners present:* Mark Grosby (chair), Paul Hartshorn, Phil Huffman, Leo Laferriere  
*Members of the public present:* Spencer Potter, Liza Walker (VT Land Trust/Mad River Watershed Conservation Partnership), George Gay (Northern Forest Alliance)

The meeting began at 7:05 p.m. at the Waitsfield Town Offices.

1. Minutes: The minutes of the March 21, 2007 meeting were reviewed. Approval was deferred until the next meeting due to the lack of a quorum of members who had attended the March meeting (Leo and Phil had been absent and therefore abstained from voting).
2. Public comment: In response to questions from Spencer Potter, the Commission reiterated its openness to managing some portion of town lands for early successional habitat for grouse and other species, but emphasized that it would not be appropriate to make decisions on specific locations for such management until additional inventory work and management planning are completed. Commissioners explained that the possible salvage harvest of ice damaged trees on newly acquired land east of the Northfield Range ridgeline is a different and unique situation because any harvest would need to be done soon before the wood is no longer merchantable, and there is no easement on the parcel that explicitly requires an approved management plan before any harvesting can occur. Commissioners expressed openness to receiving input and recommendations from the Ruffed Grouse Society as a complement to information that will be provided by Audubon Vermont from their upcoming habitat assessment for forest birds (scheduled for this summer – see item #6 below).
3. Expansion of Commission membership: There was discussion about candidates for the four new vacancies created by the Town Meeting article that increased the Commission's size to up to nine members. The Selectboard will make appointments. The Commission hopes to be able to provide input for their consideration.
4. New town parcels on Northfield ridgeline: The Commission discussed conservation easement options and considerations for these parcels with Liza Walker from the Vermont Land Trust. The Commission thought it was important to get a clearer sense from the anonymous donor of two of the parcels regarding their expectations of whether there would be a third-party easement held by VLT for the lands, or whether they would be open to the Conservation Commission filling that role. The proposed Letter of Intent between the Town and VLT for moving forward with the project was not available for the Commission's review, but Liza indicated that signing the Letter of Intent would not irrevocably commit the Town to agreeing to a final easement. As discussed at the March 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, the Commission feels the Town should retain the ability to use the parcels for future uses or needs for the community's benefit (possible examples might include wind power, telecommunications, water supply, etc.). The Commission believes that this is generally consistent with the donor's perspective. Leo expressed concerns about a provision in a generic easement template from VLT that Liza had provided regarding limitations on the size of any clearcuts, which Leo indicated could reduce wildlife benefits. However, Liza said the section

from the generic easement that includes the clearcut limitation likely would not be included in an easement tailored to the newly acquired parcels.

Leo moved, Mark seconded, and all members voted in favor of a two-part motion regarding next steps:

- 1) Mark will follow up with the donor as quickly as possible to clarify their wishes, expectations, and understanding regarding whether a third-party easement with VLT would be established for their former parcels.
- 2) If they are intent on an easement held by VLT, then the Commission recommends that the Selectboard sign the Letter of Intent with VLT, with the understanding that concerns about retaining flexibility to accommodate future community needs and uses of the parcels would need to be addressed in the development of the easement.

The Commission also revisited the possibility of including the Tucker parcel in the easement. There are differing perspectives among the Commissioners about whether this should be pursued. The group agreed that it should be kept open as a possibility for the time-being, and evaluated further as the specific provisions for the easement are developed by the Town and VLT in the coming months.

5. Discussion with George Gay, Northern Forest Alliance: The group discussed the proposal recently submitted by the Northern Forest Alliance for funding to support several forest-related activities in Waitsfield. Phil and Leo both requested to recuse themselves due to the possibility they might pursue paid contract work through the grant funding if it is awarded. Mark ruled that they both could participate in the discussion, and that the Commission recognizes the potential that either or both of them might be hired for work under the grant.

There was discussion about whether there would be any flexibility in using funding under the grant to meet existing needs and priorities (e.g., natural community inventories and management planning). George and Mark indicated that the grant would be essentially for a new community outreach and engagement program, which could complement the Commission's ongoing efforts by building public awareness, involvement, and support for planning and management efforts. Members generally saw value in this type of outreach effort, but expressed concern that it could add to the Commission's already substantial workload, even if the bulk of the work was done by paid contractors.

George said that if possible, it would be helpful to get a letter of support for the grant request from the Commission. Mark and Paul indicated they were comfortable with the idea, provided the activities funded by the grant do not interfere with or add to the Commission's existing efforts and responsibilities. However, since Leo and Phil had recused themselves from voting on this matter, there was not a quorum to make a decision. Mark offered to discuss the matter with Commissioner Ted Joslin as soon as possible, and then proceed as appropriate in light of his position.

6. Audubon Vermont bird habitat assessment: Leo reported that he had submitted a request for an assessment of the town's lands along the Northfield Range ridgeline, and would be preparing a similar request for the Wu Ledges/Hastings Woods/Austin/Lareau/Tardy parcels in the near future. Audubon Vermont has indicated they anticipate completing the field work and reporting for all parcels this summer.

7. Trail management agreement: Discussion was tabled until the next meeting to enable Commissioner Ted Joslin to provide input on the sample agreement provided by the Mad River Riders.

8. Trail mapping for Wu Ledges Municipal Forest and adjacent town parcels: Mark stated that there was nothing new to report.

9. Meeting dates: The next meeting was confirmed for Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m. at the Town Office. Miranda Lescaze, coordinator for the Friends of the Mad River, has been invited to attend. Linda Lloyd, Executive Director of the Mad River Valley Planning District, is tentatively scheduled to attend the following meeting, on June 20<sup>th</sup>.

10. Executive Session: Upon motion made and seconded, the Commission voted unanimously to go into executive session pursuant to 1 VSA 313(2) to discuss personnel matters related to potential inventory work.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Philip B. Huffman, Secretary