

**LAND STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 4, 2004, 4:00 P.M.
ACTON TOWN HALL**

Present: Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Maura Herlihy, Gigi Hopkins, Philip Keyes, Peggy Liversidge, Linda McElroy, Nan Millett, Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair), Tom Tidman, Paul Wasserboehr

* Next lecture?: Last fall, bird expert David Sibley was suggested as a possibility for our next lecture. Philip reported that he had contacted Mass. Audubon at one point to see if they could help put him in touch with Sibley, but nothing came of that inquiry and he hasn't pursued the idea further. Those present indicated that a Sibley lecture still seems like a good idea, and Tom suggested that Karen O'Neill or Andy Magee might be able to help put us in touch with him. Another suggestion for a birding lecturer, should Sibley not be available, was Wayne Petersen, a field ornithologist with Mass. Audubon; another possible birding topic was bluebirds, though no lecturer was suggested. Two suggestions for different lecture topics and lecturers were ancient stone structures, such as the Acton chamber (Linda suggested Jim Mavor, a NEARA member) and animal tracking (Gigi suggested John McCarter, associated with well-known Massachusetts tracker Paul Rezendes, who is now focusing instead on nature photography).

* Earth Day: Nan, who has been involved for a number of years with planning Acton's Earth Day, reported that the group has decided not to organize an Earth Day observance this year. However, Jim noted that a new group with an environmental focus that he is getting involved with, which will become a local chapter of the Massachusetts Climate Action Network, hopes to have a party/get-together around Earth Day to which those involved in Acton environmental organizations may be invited. (They're not sure of the openness of the event yet, having just started the planning.)

* Wills Hole educational panels: Bob has added the trim to the panels and, except for digging the post holes, they are ready for installation, which he would like to do just before the dedication ceremony. Dave will arrange a date sometime in the spring, and he plans to invite Ed Kaufman (director of the service learning program), the Merriam School students who participated (now eighth-graders) and their parents, someone from Tufts, and one or more selectmen; the *Beacon* will also be notified. Tom offered to arrange for help with the hole digging if Bob needs it.

* Possibility of moving portion of trail at Nashoba Brook: It was noted that we need to see if it would be possible to move the yellow trail up the hillside in the stretch along the brook that is being submerged because of the beaver dam.

* Possible Girl Scout Gold Award project at Guggins: Jim reported that a high school junior in the New View neighborhood, Becky Nourse-Van Meter, would like to undertake a construction project at Guggins for her Gold Award project (equivalent to the Boy Scouts' Eagle project). Specifically, she proposes to build 8-ft. boardwalk sections that would be laid down over muddy stretches along the blue loop trail bordering the Boxborough line. As with Eagle projects, this would involve fundraising, organizing, and getting others involved in the project. No objections were raised, and Jim said he would speak to Laurie about whether he would be willing to supervise the project. Bob agreed to provide a drawing of an 8-ft. section.

* Chamber stabilization project idea: Linda reported that she has spoken with the president of NEARA (New England Antiquities Research Association) about the possibility of stabilizing and restoring the stone chamber at Nashoba Brook, a structure with which NEARA is already familiar. The initial response was positive and the issue will be discussed further at a NEARA board meeting scheduled for February 7. Linda will emphasize that this would be an LSCom project with NEARA assistance rather than vice versa. After some discussion, our group agreed that we should proceed with the first step of having a NEARA expert assess the structure to determine the nature and extent of the work that would be needed. Philip agreed to investigate what state regulations apply to archaeological projects, and Tom will look into the issue of the town's liability for accidents that might occur at the site. Linda noted her concern about an unofficial trail that presently passes close to the chamber and said that she would like to re-establish an official trail leading from the Northbriar subdivision to the Nashoba Brook yellow trail via an existing conservation corridor, which is a bit further removed from the site. There was also some discussion of the extent to which the structure's location should be publicized because of concern about the possibility of vandalism and/or accidents.

* Project list: In a Jan. 30 e-mail, Jim provided the URL, "screen name," and password for a QuickBase form of our ongoing project list, which can be added to or edited by any of us. He brought copies to the meeting but time didn't permit review or discussion; we will begin doing so at our next meeting.

* ATVs on conservation land: Maura reported that she recently found ATV tracks along some of the trails near the quarry at Town Forest, and she wanted advice on how to proceed. She thinks there were at least two vehicles and that the signs prohibiting motorized vehicles. Philip's suggestions included speaking firmly to the people if she ever encounters them in person, noting the ATV tag number(s), getting the car plate number(s) if it/they can be identified, notifying the police with that information plus any description of the people involved, and possibly speaking with residents along Quarry Road to get their help watching for this kind of activity.

Philip also reported that he has seen vehicle tracks made by either a wide ATV or a tractor at Spring Hill.

* Vernal pools: Last year Gigi gathered the required data (photos and tape recordings) to certify one pool on the Morrison property, two near the main Post Office, and one at the Arboretum, but she didn't submit the forms because of personnel cutbacks and low morale at the Mass. Wildlife office. She hopes to submit them this year as well as to gather the data for one pool at Grassy Pond (with Ann), two pools at Jenks (with Cyril), and perhaps at the Arboretum's farm pond, which Tom stated is a vernal pool.

* Inquiries from other towns about forming LSCOM-type groups: Linda, Bob, and Tom have all received inquiries about forming committees similar to ours. Linda reported that she recently had a productive meeting with Michael Wierbonics, Boxborough's Conservation Agent, and Bob has spoken with Norm Hanover of Boxborough's Conservation Commission. Linda has also had an inquiry from Bruce Trefrey in Stow, including a request for our list of steward duties. She has set up a meeting with him and the Town administrator, Pat Perry, to share her observations and experience with them. Tom, who has heard from people in Concord and elsewhere, wondered if we might at some point offer a workshop on the topic. Linda said she thinks it is a good idea to share our experiences and observations with interested individuals or small groups one town at a time but isn't sure whether the workshop format would be as helpful.

* Cornell University bird monitoring project: Maura reported on a Cornell Ornithology Lab bird-monitoring project, Birds in Forested Landscapes, in which she will participate this spring and early summer. One of the lab's nationwide "Citizen Science" projects, it involves picking specific monitoring sites and choosing from a list of bird species provided by the lab, and then monitoring the sites twice following the lab's instructions. Maura has chosen sites at the Town Forest and Nashoba Brook, and perhaps also at Nagog Hill, and she will be monitoring for the presence of the wood thrush, hermit thrush, veery, and cerulean warbler. The monitoring periods are after the birds arrive and are preparing their nests (probably late May) and two to four weeks later, during the breeding period. Although Cornell provides a list of the species' anticipated arrival and breeding times, she would be happy to hear from birders when they first hear or see any of these four species.

* Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 3.