

**LAND STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 5, 2003, 4:00 P.M.
ACTON TOWN HALL**

Present: Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Maura Herlihy, Gigi Hopkins, Peggy Liversidge, Linda McElroy, Nan Millett, Rich Rhode, Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant, Laurie Ullmann; guest: Hart Millett

* New steward for Wills Hole: Maura Herlihy, the new Wills Hole steward, attended this month's meeting and was welcomed to the committee. An active birdwatcher, she is involved with the Acton Bluebird Recovery Program and will also be participating this spring in one of Cornell University's "citizen science" bird studies. This one, called Birds in Forested Landscapes, focuses on 48 threatened forest species, with each participant choosing the bird(s) and site(s) that he or she will focus on. Maura has chosen two thrushes (hermit and wood) and the veery and will be observing for them twice during the breeding season in accordance with the study's protocol. It was suggested that this would be a good subject for a future *Beacon* article as well as for inclusion on the website.

Maura's e-mail address is maura@copper.net.

* Guidebook: The guidebook committee has met twice since the last meeting of the full committee, addressing primarily visual issues, including choosing the cover photo, and Lynn Horsky has begun incorporating these decisions. The cover photo, taken by Belle Choate along the Jay Lane access trail at Spring Hill, will be an attractive summer woods picture with dappled sunlight that includes a short segment of one of Bob's boardwalks. Bob has read through the text and offered his corrections and suggestions, and Ann will also be reading through all the entries. It is hoped that the book will be ready for the printer by the end of March or early April and that the printing can proceed in time for the books to be ready for Acton's Earth Day (to be held May 3, not late April as was mentioned in last month's minutes).

* Guidebook fundraising: Nan has continued to personally contact local businesses but has not had much success due to the current business climate. Bob suggested that a request for donations be put in the *Beacon*, and Gigi volunteered to contact Paul to see whether he could either include this at the end of an article, if he plans to submit one soon, or write up a shorter item specifically for this purpose. Rich said he could also put this request on the website.

Linda reported that the ACT has officially voted to donate \$2,000, plus an additional \$500 if a suitable mention of ACT can be agreed upon for inclusion either on the sponsor page or on a separate page. Linda said that a separate page won't be possible but that she will work with Morene Bodner to try to work out a mutually acceptable wording for the sponsor page.

* Remaining money from this year's budget: Since the last meeting Bob has put in an order with Dave Lee for eight picnic tables (7 for Camp Acton, 1 for the Pratt's Brook senior park) and they have already been completed. This leaves \$980 in this year's budget. Four more kiosks (for Wetherbee, Stoneymeade, Jenks, and the Capt. Handley Rd. entrance to Wills Hole) will cost \$130 each, or \$520 total. He already has the lumber for the Bulette stream crossing and suggests that we wait until summer (and next year's budget) to evaluate our needs for the Grassy Pond boardwalk. It was suggested that the remaining \$460 be put toward the support structure for the Wills Hole educational kiosk (the Tufts grant covers only the design and fabrication of the two panels).

* Installation of picnic tables: Bob reported that the new picnic tables are sturdy and quite heavy and will probably require four people to move into place. He would like to be able to install them the same day they are delivered. That date hasn't yet been determined, but he will be sending out a request for volunteers at some point.

* Kiosk notices: Bob has recently made a personal purchase of a laminating machine, and he has offered to laminate LSCOM kiosk notices using laminating pouches purchased with committee funds. He suggested that we remove stewards' names from these notices since virtually no one has been contacted as a result of these being posted; this way there will be no need to change kiosk notices when stewards change. The website URL and Natural Resources Office phone number will remain, but we should add the LSCOM e-mail address. There was no objection to this change.

* Pratt's Brook brush piles: Bob, Rich, Laurie, Jim, and Jim's neighbor Mary McLane helped to move and burn four piles of brush; a bit of additional work will have to be done to clean up some debris after the snow melts. Bob reported that some of the work crew had suggested that in the future we not burn debris from cutting, but instead distribute it in piles in the woods as shelter for small rodents, birds, and other animals. Linda agreed that this is an approved silvicultural practice, but suggested that we should restrict our use of it to areas where we have completed cutting the gray birch so that piles can be moved easily into the woods beyond the barrens.

* Wills Hole educational kiosk: Dave hasn't heard from Scott Hancock since the last meeting but will contact him soon to see what progress is being made. Dave still hopes the two panels will be ready for installation (and an installation ceremony) by late spring or early summer; if it is later in the summer, fewer of the students who participated in the project will be able to attend the ceremony. Dave also noted that we will need to have a plaque made to acknowledge both the Tufts grant and the students' contributions.

* Merriam School program: Dave stated that the Merriam School's Service Learning Program, which he has helped with for the last four years, will be happening again this year. Starting either March 26 or 27 (a Wednesday or a Thursday), it will meet once a week for six weeks, and Dave hopes he will be able to participate if it is scheduled on Wednesdays. He would like to try to certify one vernal pool at Heath Hen, though this year's weather might present a problem, and he will also have the students do some trail work. He asked whether building birdhouses might be a back-up indoor project, and while Gigi and Nan indicated that they already have too many bluebird boxes, Gigi suggested they might consider kestrel boxes.

* Letter to East Acton Village Planning Committee: After e-mailing committee members a draft of a letter about the possible rezoning of the Moritz property, to which he received only one response with suggested changes, Dave sent the letter to Tom's office so that it could be put on Conservation Office letterhead and signed by Tom. Dave does not know whether it has been sent out yet.

* OSRP report update: Morene Bodner has told Linda that Acton's OSRP report has been unofficially approved by the state (pending submission of some maps) and that it received praise for being so well written and in such good compliance with the required information and format.

* Invasives plan: Jim has obtained the state's official list of invasive species and pictures from the New England Wild Flower Society, and he and Gigi have begun identifying sites in town with particularly bad invasives problems. These will be part of a website that Jim has begun constructing and that will eventually be incorporated into the LSCom website.

* Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and Mass. Greenway and Trail Partnership meetings: Jim reported on two meetings that he recently attended. The first, which Nan also attended, was a discussion of a recently completed town-funded engineering feasibility study for the proposed Acton portion of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. It would follow the abandoned track from Westford (near NARA) through East Acton and on to near the Concord rotary. The engineers are proposing to pave a ten-foot-wide section to one side of the tracks, which would not be removed because of the high disposal cost, and to replace four bridge crossings over Nashoba Brook but retain the existing abutments. The problems of crossing Routes 2 and 2A are unresolved. Presently the anticipated cost is \$1.5 million, with the town potentially being responsible for 10%, which could be paid for by in-kind (engineering) services.

The Mass. Greenway and Trail Partnership meeting, held in Worcester, brought together a wide coalition of groups from around the state under the auspices of the state Department of Environmental Management to discuss a vision for expanding the trail and greenway network that already exists in the state and for improving communication among the groups. Gigi, who also attended, added that they have put together a very nice booklet called Commonwealth Connections; it can be accessed at <http://www.state.ma.us/dem/programs/greenway/>.

* E-mail address change for Nan: Please change Nan's e-mail address to hmillett 'at' rcn.com.

* Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 2, at 4:00 at Town Hall.