

**LAND STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
MAY 7, 2003, 4:00 P.M.
ACTON TOWN HALL**

Present: Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Gigi Hopkins, Philip Keyes, Peggy Liversidge, Linda McElroy, Nan Millett, Cyril Murphy, Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant

* Guidebook: Progress is being made, though a bit more slowly than had been projected. Linda has just received what we hope is the final proof and will return it within a day or two to Lynn Horsky. Linda's present estimate is that we will have the finished product in hand by early June. Phil recommended that we get several CD copies of the booklet from Lynn and that these be kept in separate locations.

Nan reported that she has now raised \$2,780, and Linda stated that with this and other sources, we now have more than enough money for the printing. Tom has suggested that we put any excess money into a revolving fund to be earmarked for the next print run. He also suggested we print 750 copies this time and sell them for \$10, with the proceeds going into the same revolving fund. This was agreed to.

Linda raised the issue of complimentary copies, which she suggested should be distributed to certain individuals and organizations besides the sponsors. She estimated that we might need around 75 copies for this purpose. Although Bob thought this was excessive, the general sense was that this would be good public relations. A tentative list was compiled. In addition to committee members and sponsors, it included organizations listed as links on our website, ConsCom, the Board of Selectmen, the public library, the Mass. Association of Conservation Commissions, DEM/Mass. Greenways, and the Cape Cod Commission (Linda's daughter Heather, who drew several of the guidebook's illustrations, works for the commission's Natural Resources and Land Protection Program). Nan noted that a thank-you letter should be included with the sponsors' copies.

Distribution was briefly discussed. Besides Tom's office, suggestions for places where the guidebook might be sold include Willow Books (which stocks the Acton Historical Society booklet), the West Acton Market (whose owner, Skip Kennedy, wasn't able to make a contribution but indicated to Nan he would sell the book), and EMS. Events where it might be sold include Acton Day in September and West Acton's Oktoberfest.

Linda suggested that maps be kept current at all times so that they will be ready whenever a new print run is needed.

* Beaver lecture/future lectures: Linda thanked Phil for his work in arranging last month's successful beaver lecture, which was attended by 65 people. Suggestions for future presentation topics included white-tail deer, birds (with David Sibley as presenter), animal tracking, and hands-on vernal pool work. The two that generated the most interest were a bird lecture by David Sibley (Concord-based author of *Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior* and, according to several, an excellent speaker) and a wintertime animal tracking event (or lecture, if there is no snow). Phil agreed to start looking into the Sibley idea for sometime in the fall. Noting that the fee might be high, he said that he would try to interest Mass. Audubon in cosponsoring the event. It was suggested that Karen O'Neill, an ACT board member who is also involved with Mass. Audubon, might help facilitate this.

* Vernal pool update: Gigi is continuing to monitor and gather data on several vernal pools. She has discovered a way to photograph fairy shrimp, an obligate species that is transparent and therefore difficult to get on film. Up to this point she has used audiotapes of wood frogs as her sole means of documenting an obligate species. Wood frogs are one of the earliest obligate species to come to life in the spring, while fairy shrimp appear a bit later, so besides now being able to document two species, Gigi also has a longer period during which to gather data.

* Wetherbee boundary violations: Bob brought up the problem of two backyards along Berry Lane that have been extended onto conservation land. The worse of the two, at 2 Berry Lane, involved removal of the stone wall that marked the conservation land boundary, extension of the lawn onto conservation land, and installation of a railroad-tie border and a pagoda (see e-mail from Bob dated 5/6 with attached photographs). He estimates that the encroachment, which was done before the present owner bought the property around a year ago, is about 100 ft. long by 50 ft. deep. He would like the boundary to be marked again, perhaps using stones piled nearby, and to have the area beyond this return to woodland, either naturally or with some help. Ideally, he would like to see the Engineering

Department and the homeowner reach an agreement on the boundary and decide how to return the conservation land to a more natural state.

Bob has been aware of these encroachments for some time and has spoken with Tom about them but gotten no action, so he is unsure how to proceed. Phil suggested bringing up the matter with Andy Magee of the Conservation Commission, with the hope that the commission will request action to resolve the problem.

* Norway maple control project: After laying out a grid in the area of the Arboretum that has been chosen as the first site for Norway maple control, Jim spent two hours removing the smallest seedlings and saplings, by hand or with a weed wrench, from one square. Later, medium-sized trees will be cut down and the largest ones will have cuts made around the base; Roundup will then be applied to the stumps or gashes by town employees. The project area, covering around 1.75 acres, will have 32 squares, each 60 feet on a side. Volunteers are needed for more hand-pulling/weed-wrenching; contact Jim, who can be flexible in making arrangements that suit others' schedules. Jim also reported that the FAA is considering how to replant this area.

* Bob's update: (1) At Wetherbee, Gigi and Phil helped Bob establish the route of the new yellow and blue trails, and the cutting was done by Bob, Rich, Laurie, and Jim. They are now ready to be blazed. (2) Bob and Laurie purchased lumber and hardware for constructing two kiosks, as this is the limit his truck rack can carry. On turning in the invoices Bob was informed that there is a temporary moratorium on purchasing for all town departments. Lumber for the remaining three entrance kiosks and the informational kiosk at Wills Hole is on hold until the committee receives purchasing approval. (3) Bob requested and received permission to purchase a new battery for our cordless power tools. (4) Bob would also like to order Acton Conservation Land decals that can be affixed to items such as map boxes and equipment. He has only two left from those purchased earlier. He will check into where to get these made. (5) Using downloaded aerial photographs of the town in conjunction with the GPS trail coordinates, Bob is now able to produce trail maps showing the trails (in color) superimposed on aerial photographs. He brought in a sample showing the Wetherbee Land as a demonstration of what could be done.

* Arboretum blazing and bog bridge repair: The board of the Friends of the Acton Arboretum (FAA) has decided that they would like to have the Arboretum trails blazed. They have the workers and the money for supplies but need guidance on how to do the work. Cyril agreed to help with this. Jim, who attended the most recent FAA board meeting, reported that they would also like help repairing or rebuilding the boardwalk in the Highland/Bog Loop. Again, they have funds but lack expertise. Bob said that he thinks the work would not be major: some planks will need replacing and some segments may need to be jacked up. He would be willing to provide advice. Jim will help coordinate between Bob and the FAA on this project.

* Other blazing needs: Linda noted that we need to begin touching up some of our original blazes, especially on trees with rough bark. She has the name of a family, the Billings, who at one point expressed interest in helping with trail work, and she will contact them to see if they would be interested in this project. The new Wetherbee trails are also ready to be blazed.

* Horse use along Nagog Hill access trail: In an attempt to deal with the problem of horse traffic on the Nagog Hill access trail next to Hi-Bid Farm, Bob had the students who participated in the Community Service Day put down a thick layer of wood chips on the south side of the path (closer to the corral), leaving an unchipped path beside it for horse traffic. At either end of the muddy stretch he has put up a sign, at a height suitable for someone on horseback, directing riders to keep their horses to the north side.

* Projects list: Bob brought in a copy of a "List of Projects Desirable for the Next Five Years," an undated list we compiled some time ago. Since many of the items have been completed, he suggested that we update the list. Stewards should think about what needs to be done on their properties and bring those suggestions to the next meeting.

* Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 4, at 4:00 at Town Hall. Regular meetings will not be held in July or August.