

From: jim.snyder.grant@gmail.com on behalf of [Jim Snyder-Grant](#)
To: [Andrea Ristine; Conservation Commission](#)
Subject: Re: FW: Wetherbee plan
Date: Monday, June 13, 2011 10:43:12 AM

I'll be unable to attend on Wednesday, because of a competing meeting (Acton 2020), so I wanted to pass on some first impressions, and a recommendation.

I was happy to see the detailed characterization off Wetherbee, including the division in to zones, which seems like a sound approach to me.

However, I think the goals are missing an important factor: preserving large trees to continue their role in carbon sequestration. And this missing goal skews the plan. I also have some comments about invasive species control. Together, I think these concerns warrant enough discussion that I'd recommend the Commission not sign off on the plan in its current form.

Large Trees:

It used to be generally thought that mature forests reach a limit and that effective carbon sequestration stops after a forest reaches a certain average age. Recent research shows instead that old large root systems and thick trunks continue storing carbon. (I can provide the relevant cites if the conversation goes in this direction). Acton has agreed, through both the ICLEI protocol it has signed, and the Green Communities Act, to carbon emissions reductions over the next few decades. Removing large trees gets in the way of that.

I think that this analysis might shift us towards targeting the removal of smaller trees instead of larger trees, if tree removal is desired.

I recognize this is partially in tension with the biodiversity goals, so this is a tricky discussion to get right. My personal sense is that we humans have only a few decades to make good progress on reducing atmospheric carbon if we want a climate that is similar to the one in which our current biological regime evolved, and that if we can manage our way through that neck of risk&opportunity, then we will have breathing room to deal with longer-term biodiversity issues. So I'd place a higher priority on preserving the larger trees than on creating stands of biodiversity.

In addition: the possibility of raising significant cash via selective timbering seems like a non-goal. On the one hand, I can't think of a project we've wanted to do as land stewards that has been stopped by a lack of funds. What holds us back (or allows us to move forward) is the level of volunteer enthusiasm. Enthusiasm can generate cash, via fundraising or lobbying, a lot more effectively than cash can generate enthusiasm. And careful selective timbering is not cheap. A few years ago, at least, the cost of doing this was approximately equal to the cash that could be obtained by the timber, and so it was often done as a barter: a careful entrepreneur would offer to selectively clear a stand in exchange for the value they could extract from the lumber. I'm sure the market has shifted up and down since I last looked at this, but I'll bet the net cash we can

extract is still low, and not worth the extra time and disturbance.

And, if we take the larger trees out of the equation, there is even less money to be made.

Finally, invasive species management....

We've pulled some autumn olives out of the inner meadow, and we mow there, and we briefly had a project to remove the Japanese knotweed near Rte 2 and the old building foundation there. The knotweed control was done with the help of Dean's crew to spray. As you know, the use of herbicides in a conservation land requires the use of certified applicators. There are only a couple among town staff, and they are usually kept very busy - we've had little success bringing them in to do other invasive control projects. Frankly, part of the appeal of open space for the municipality is how little it costs to maintain compared to other town land and buildings, so I don't see approvals being granted for the thousands of dollars or hundreds of hours it would take to have trained applicators use a lot of herbicide on town properties. So, we are left with how we do invasive control elsewhere on town conservation lands: hand control by volunteers. Buckthorn pops out of the ground with a weed wrench, and in a pine forest, sometimes can just be pulled without the use of tools. At Guggins Brook Conservation Area we have been experimenting with an area of control, slowly removing buckthorn from a scenic area of hemlocks growing under large pines. It's a good project because we can throw volunteers at it when we have them, almost any time of year. And enthusiastic local users of the forest have been picking away at the issue for a couple years, with good results. There are still vast stands of buckthorn at Guggins outside the zone of control, and I have no viable plan for getting rid of them for now. Maybe there will be biological controls some day - I think that's my best hope.

Would we able to mount a similar effort at Wetherbee? I wonder. There is a much smaller set of regular users of the land, and there is not quite the same zone of beauty to motivate volunteers. I am skeptical of our ability to take this on, and I have many higher-priority invasive control projects for the next few years to absorb volunteer energy,

That's all for now - thans for launching this useful discussion, and bringing in Chuck's expertise.

If you think it appropriate, feel free to put any or all of this in the packet, and/or pass it on to Chuck.

-Jim, associate commissioner and Land Stewardship chair

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On Mon, Jun 13, 2011 at 9:50 AM, Andrea Ristine <aristine@acton-ma.gov> wrote:

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> From: Caronenv [<mailto:caronenv@aol.com>]
> Sent: Monday, June 13, 2011 9:43 AM
> To: Tom Tidman; Andrea Ristine
> Subject: Wetherbee plan

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> Hi Tom and Andrea:

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> Attached is my draft of the Forest Stewardship Plan. Please take a look at
> it and let me know if you see anything I need to change. I apologize for
> not getting it to you last week so that it could go to the members on
> Friday. Would it be possible for you to email it to them so they can take a
> look if they have time.

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> I will bring the original plan with me Wednesday so that it can be signed.

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> Do you need me to bring copies for the members?

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> Also, could you please let me know what time this is scheduled for.

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> Very truly yours,

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> Chuck Caron