

**Westfield River Wild & Scenic Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes**

**January 8th, 2009
Notchview Reservation, Windsor**

Attendance: Carrie Banks, Coordinator; Wendy Sweetser, TTOR; Mercedes Gallagher, Becket; Greg Lawson, Pittsfield; Matt Barron, Chesterfield; Liz Lacy, NPS; Carl LaFreniere, Middlefield; Bob Thompson, Chester; Jim Caffrey, Windsor.

- 1. Review of November 13th, 2008 Meeting Minutes:** M.G. motioned to accept minutes as presented; seconded by C.L. Minutes accepted.
- 2. Treasurer's Report:** M.G. will wait to receive a copy of the most recent bank statement before finalizing the end of the year report. There have been no new transactions since the last meeting. C.B. noted that \$13,452.44 has been spent out of the Partnership Rivers budget. The Treasurer will meet with C.B. on a quarterly basis to go over the Partnership Rivers account. These meetings will correspond to the quarterly submittals to the National Park Service.
- 3. Elections:** M.B. nominated the current slate of officers (Robert Thompson, Chair; Jeff Penn, Vice-Chair; Jim Caffrey, Secretary; Mercedes Gallagher, Treasurer); seconded by W.S. Slate of officers as presented were elected.
- 4. Section 7 Review of Case Studies, MassHighway & Next Steps:** After the last meeting, Congressman Olver's office was contacted regarding the McNearney Road project in Becket. The concern was that the project was being held up by the National Park Service. L.L. and C.B. explained some the key issues which arose on the project. First, L.L. met with MassHighway at the sight and went over the key concerns and issues the NPS and Committee would likely have on the project. Then an outside engineering firm had met with the Conservation Commission with plans that did not meet any of the objectives discussed between MassHighway and NPS. Shortly afterwards, Jim McCartney, River Restoration Consultant with the NPS/Trout Unlimited, met with MassHighway engineers on several occasions and worked on a restoration plan that would reconstruct the natural stream channel and avoid filling in a scoured out tailwater pool with cement and/or hardened substrate. Once these plans were submitted, an engineer in Boston was responsible for the landscaping plan. One of the key issues that remained was revegetation and reconstruction of a natural riverbank. Both L.L. and C.B. noted an area on the plan, where the reconstructed channel just downstream of the culvert was narrowed from the current scoured size back to the natural bankfull width, did not adequately provide plans for restoration of this area. Simply, there were no hatch marks and based on past experiences contractors would just place riprap or other random material if it is not clearly shown on the plans. After a series of back and forth calls, the engineer finally agreed to meet NPS's request to show this area as a restoration area. Just before all the issues go resolved, there was a plan to hold a meeting with MassHighway, NPS and the Committee. In response, C.B. organized a presentation to highlight several case studies of projects subject to Section 7 review, sample conditions included on these projects and recommendations on how to make the projects run more smoothly. She shared the presentation to allow the Committee members to provide comments, make suggestions and ask questions. M.G. suggested it would be helpful to highlight the 'Outstandingly Remarkable Resources' of the Westfield River Wild & Scenic designation and to better cite the authority under the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. Andrew Schlenker from MassHighway supposedly will be setting up a meeting, but would likely include Boston engineers and less District 1 personnel and may also include perspectives from other Wild & Scenic Rivers in the state.

The Committee decided the best next step is to request a special meeting with District 1 MassHighway to explain the Westfield River Wild & Scenic designation and to work together to find solutions to make project reviews run more smoothly. Another suggestion was to include Town Representatives in all correspondence that way they can keep informed and meet with their Selectboards to explain why certain aspects are being requested and/or required on projects. The Committee also noted the Accelerated Bridge Program may mean additional projects coming down the pipeline.

5. **Stewardship Update:** Meredyth Babcock, Stream Team Volunteer Coordinator and M.G. met with the Becket Selectboard to float the idea of improving stormwater runoff flowing into Yokum Brook near the confluence with the West Branch by diverting it into a rain garden. Meredyth B. also met with J.C. to talk about making improvements at Glendale Falls to try to improve access and restore trampled vegetation. The Committee wondered about the status of the East Branch Trail following the recent ice storm. It may have been at a low enough elevation that the tree damage was limited and likely the Chesterfield 4 Seasons Club has tackled the big downed trees. B.T. will have a student out working on a project along the East Branch and will check with him on how the trail looks. Likely the volunteer trail crew will need to conduct an early spring cleaning to remove downed limbs and trees along the trail. C.B. will be working with Meredyth B. on planning spring volunteer trainings and activities. A Resource Stewardship Sub-Committee meeting will be held before the next meeting.
6. **Operations Update:**
 - a. **Community Projects:** The Operations Sub-Committee met prior to the meeting. They decided the Representatives from the 4 towns (Becket, Middlefield, Windsor, & Worthington) interested in conducting a drainage study will work together to develop a scope for the project. C.B. will initiate discussion by sending around an e-mail requesting certain details from each of the Representatives, e.g. which roads to focus efforts on. The Committee will also issue a general press release with some info about the grant programs to see if any additional ideas can be solicited, especially from communities which have yet to identify projects.
 - b. **Coordinator Status:** Due to recent state budget cuts to the Riverways Program, C.B. will be taking 20 days of furlough time or every Friday off through the middle of February and then 2 weeks in the beginning of March. Additional state budget cuts will likely affect all state agencies and programs.
 - c. **Partnership Rivers:** The Connecticut delegation is spearheading the FY10 Partnership Rivers ask letter. In general, the Partnership Rivers Program is liked because it requires minimal staff and does not own land. A meeting of all the Partnership Rivers will be held in Washington, D.C. on February 9th & 10th. The Committee noted that \$2,500 from the Committee's Partnership Rivers Budget has been set aside to allow Committee members to attend meetings and conferences. M.B. will check to see if he can attend.
7. **Outreach Update:** The website has been launched at www.westfieldriverwildscenic.org. C.B. requested ideas on how to make the blog an interactive and effective feature. Suggestions include posting of videos, news clips, articles, press releases, etc. Steve Hamlin, New England WebArt will attend the next meeting to give a little tutorial and discuss the capabilities of the new website. The Committee will also issue a press release to highlight the new website.
8. **Local Updates:**
 - a. **Berkshire Hardwoods, Chesterfield:** The owner recently talked with M.B. about the possibility they will need to close due to the downturn in the economy. They own almost 20 acres along the Dead Branch in Chesterfield. M.B. will be working with them to meet with some of the local land trusts and other organizations to see what possibilities there are to try and keep the business running, especially since it is the largest employer in Chesterfield.

- b. **Bryant Homestead:** J.C. reported out of the 5 check dams and erosional control structures they installed this past Fall, 3 are almost full with sediment on what was supposed to be an inactive channel. Most of the sediment is from pasture runoff from a neighboring farm. He believes the Committee needs to advocate for additional retention capacity including structural and wetland creation.
- c. **Middlefield Geothermal Discharge:** A permit notice was in the paper and C.B. and C.L. both spoke with a neighbor regarding concerns. The key issue is whether there was going to be a surface discharge and if so, where does the receiving water body drain. If it drains to the Middle Branch, then the Outstanding Resource Water designation prevents any new discharges. Depending on how the water is treated or heated, then it could impact the receiving water body and may require a National Pollutant Discharge Permit Elimination System (NPDES) permit which may be subject to Section 7 review. C.L. will call DEP to see if this was going to be required.

M.B. motioned to adjourn; seconded by J.C. Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting: Thursday, February 5th at a location to be determined.