

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

**Middlefield Town Hall
October 16th, 2008**

Attendance: Carrie Banks, Wild & Scenic Coordinator; Bob Thompson, Chester; Mercedes Gallagher, Becket; Jeff Penn, Huntington; Jim Dodge, Worthington; John Richardson, Middlefield; Carl Lafreniere, Middlefield; Dave Pierce, Chester.

1. **Review of September 11th, 2008 Minutes:** Jeff P. motioned to accept the minutes as presented; seconded by Carl L. Minutes accepted.
2. **Treasurer's Report:** There were no transactions recorded as of the last Treasurer's report. There is approximately \$540 in the general fund and the total account has a little less than \$1900.
3. **Operations Update:**
 - a. **Partnership Rivers:** The Cooperative Agreement has been finalized and Carrie B. has been executing scopes for the projects. The Committee drafted a whitepaper and submitted it to Congressman Olver for the FY10 budget. The whitepaper outlined a request for \$200,000 in funds which included additional funds for the community grants and riparian conservation program, water quality monitoring, Stream Teams, East Branch Trail and Oral History Documentary. Bob T. noted that Ed Klekowski's "Beneath The River" was a partnership between UMASS and PBS – Channel 57. This might be also a good template for documenting oral history or film about the Westfield River. Geoff Alson, the videographer filming the Keystone Arch Bridge documentary, offered us use of his video images either for a future documentary or to post clips on the web.
 - b. **Community Grants Ideas and Feedback:** The Committee reported on potential projects the towns might be interested in submitting for funds. Chester may be interested in funds to reestablish the banks with vegetation along East River and Old State Road. Jeff P. says the Huntington Selectboard has been focused on other priorities, but he spoke with Amy Burnham about some ideas. Carrie B. noted that she also mentioned the funding opportunity to Rte 112 Scenic Byway Committee in case the towns wanted to submit a joint project for funding. Jim D. noted the Selectboard had talked about doing a runoff and sedimentation study along River Road. This could be a combined project targeting Windsor, Becket, Worthington and Middlefield. Becket would like to work with Foresight Engineers.
4. **Stewardship Update:**
 - a. **Riparian Conservation Project Recommendation:** Based on questions from the Committee and responses and feedback from The Nature Conservancy and Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, the Sub-Committee endorsed the proposal to fund their request for an appraisal for parcels along the West Branch in Chester. Jeff P. brought forward another potential project involving a group of neighbors who have tried to protect approx. 65 acres adjacent to Pond Brook, one of the tributaries to the East Branch. The parcel also borders ACOE and Hull Forestlands properties. For the last 10 years, neighbors have been paying taxes on the parcel to keep it from being sold and developed. They are now interested in seeking a conservation restriction or donation to the Hilltown Land Trust. The biggest obstacle may be the monitoring funds needed, approximately \$4000. Jeff P. has talked with one of the neighbors and asked for them to list out the compelling reasons why this parcel is important to Wild & Scenic resources.

He asked the Committee if they had any questions or concerns, especially since the parcel was not located directly on the river. One question was how do or how would other Partnership Rivers perceive such a project. Since the parcel abuts a tributary to the designated reach and is in close proximity, then this might be one of the compelling reasons. The Committee also wondered if there could possibly be a match of funds. Jeff P. noted Audubon was interested in the parcel at one time, but did not have the funds to secure the conservation restriction. He will see if there are any reports from Audubon which outline the values of the property.

- b. **Volunteer Coordinator and Projects:** Meredyth Babcock will once again be the Stream Team and Project Volunteer Coordinator for the Committee. This fall she hopes to recruit a few volunteers to survey sections of the river adjacent to the water quality monitoring sites. The goal would be to identify any potential sources of pollutants so sites can be bracketed if water quality problems are identified. In addition, she is working on organizing a **trail work day for the East Branch Trail**, scheduled **Sunday, November 9th at 10:30 am to meet at the Chesterfield Gorge**. With the Stream Team funds the Committee will purchase some shovels, rakes, tarps, gloves, etc. The goal is to have a trail work crew which meets on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to walk and clean-up the trail corridor.

5. Outreach Update:

- a. **Website:** The Sub-Committee met before tonight's meeting and selected Steve Hamlin, New England Webart, to help design a new website for the Committee. Steve H. and his wife, Linda, have lived in Huntington near the West Branch for many years and has been active volunteers with the Committee, Planning Board and Jacob's Ladder Scenic Byway. The Committee also reviewed an outline and text for what the website will look like. The goal is to have a website launched by the end of November.

6. Local Updates:

- a. **Cell Towers:** Cell towers have been proposed or permitted in several of the Wild & Scenic Communities. These included: Route 20 near Pine Hill Cemetery in Chester; Pine Street in Huntington (visible from the river); Cummington's existing tower (visible from the river) and a new tower on Stage Road; and Windsor (tower visible from Notchview). The Committee believes either Worthington/Chesterfield or Worthington/Middlefield had worked together a few years ago to identify the best locations for towers to have the ability to control where they can go.
- b. **Sustainability Library:** The Cummington Creamery has opened a Sustainability Library upstairs from the store. It is available for the public and customers to use and includes a variety of books and publications which promote sustainable communities, e.g. a lot of how-to books on growing your own food or stacking your own cord wood.
- c. **Natural Heritage Endangered Species Updates:** The NHESP recently updated their endangered species maps. It appears large chunks along the 3 branches of the Westfield River have been removed from the Priority and Estimated Habitat for Rare and Endangered Species. These areas could have been removed because (1) the species record expired, (2) the species was delisted, and/or (3) new mapping or information changed estimates for habitat areas. A few months ago when the Committee discussed the Rivers Protection Bylaw, it was assumed since most of the Wild & Scenic reaches were within Estimated Habitat, then no additional protections were needed under the model bylaw. The Committee discussed how this might affect protections along the river, e.g. an expanded buffer zone under the Forest Cutting Plans may not be required now. The suspicion is some of the areas removed may be from expired records and some regions with no estimated habitat occur because there is no one documenting the species,

not necessarily that they are not there. The Committee will check in with Mike Downey the Service Forester and NHESP about the changes.

- d. **State Budget Cuts:** Due to the economic downturn, the Governor recently announced budget cuts to all the state agencies. Most of the cuts were in the 7-10% range. However, the Riverways Program sustained a 30% cut to their budget. The Committee discussed how important Riverways has been from helping secure the Wild & Scenic designation, leveraging dollars and assisting the communities in the region on a range of topics.
- e. **Forest Conservation Zoning:** Mercedes G. noted Jeff Lacy was going to give a presentation on the Forest Conservation Zoning recently passed in Shutesbury on Wednesday, October 22nd. The Committee wondered if he would be willing to share his presentation or a shortened version at a future Committee meeting.
- f. **Woolly Adelgid:** It has been found at Glendale Falls. The hope was that it might not be found at higher elevations where temperatures tend to be cooler.
- g. **Water Quality Monitoring:** 23 people are interested and will be attending an initial training session at Westfield State College.
- h. **ArcGIS 9.3 Course:** Will be offered by ESRI at Westfield State College.
- i. **TNC, Land Protection Specialist:** Markelle Smith recently joined TNC and will be working on land protection projects in the region. The Committee would like to extend an invitation to her to attend one of the upcoming meetings.

Next meeting: THURSDAY, November 13th at a location TBD.