

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

**November 13th, 2008
Becket Town Hall**

Attendance: Carrie Banks, Wild & Scenic Coordinator; Robert Thompson, Chester; Liz Lacy, NPS; Carl Lafreniere, Middlefield; Jeff Penn, Huntington; Markelle Smith, TNC; John Richardson, Middlefield; Mercedes Gallagher, Becket; Dave Pierce, Chester; Meredyth Babcock, Volunteer Coordinator; Joan Kimball, Commonwealth/Riverways (via phone); Jim Caffrey, Windsor.

1. **Review of October 16th, 2008 Meeting Minutes:** Dave P. motioned to accept the minutes as presented, seconded by Jeff P. Minutes accepted.
2. **Treasurer's Report:** Mercedes G. received additional checks from WRWA. The only expenditure from this account was for \$40.00 for the Cummington Fair. Carrie B. noted the Finance Committee approved a reallocation of \$200 from the Partnership Rivers budget to provide funds to Friends of the Keystone Arches to sponsor a flyover of the Westfield River from the confluence with the Connecticut River Agawam/West Springfield to Muddy Pond in Washington. The goal is to capture footage of the river along the Mainstem and West Branch for the Keystone Arch Documentary. The footage will also be made available to the Committee to use for educational and outreach purposes, including posting clips on the website. Carrie B. also noted an account for the Committee was open at Cummington Supply for Partnership River projects (e.g. East Branch Trail & Kiosk). Only she and Meredyth B. are authorized, at this time, to charge to the account.
3. **Meet & Greet:**
 - a. **Markelle Smith, TNC Land Protection Specialist:** Markelle began with The Nature Conservancy in August. Her role as land protection specialist is to work on land protection projects at the landscape scale and with a bit of a broader focus. This includes focused land protection along the East and West Branches. She has begun to familiarize herself with the currently protected lands, including repairing signs, monitoring and marking boundaries on Gobble Mountain and properties in Middlefield. The Committee talked about some of the projects (e.g. Riparian Conservation Grant) and areas surrounding the Wild & Scenic reaches and offered ideas on how we could support each others work. The Committee encouraged Markelle to use them as a resource.
 - b. **Meredyth Babcock, Stream Team Volunteer Coordinator:** This is the first time Meredyth B. has met many of the Committee members. She updated them on several projects:
 - i. **Survey Trainings:** She will help organize and recruit volunteers to continue Shoreline Surveys of the river. Trainings will be held next spring and some of the sections to be surveyed overlap with the Water Quality Monitoring sites.
 - ii. **Stream Team Projects:** A project will be selected along each of the branches based on priorities identified by Stream Team volunteers last year. Meredyth B. will help organize these projects and recruit the necessary volunteers to get them done. Projects include establish a work crew and crew leaders for the East Branch Trail; work with TTOR to designate an official trail at Glendale Falls to reduce erosion; and to make drainage improvements along the West Branch in Becket.
 - iii. **Stream Explorers & Watershed Model:** Meredyth has also volunteered with the local PTO and sponsored the Stream Explorers who are working on building a watershed model at the Becket-Washington Elementary School. Her connections with these schoolchildren and their families also encouraged some to participate in the Shoreline Surveys last year.

- iv. **Watershed Waltz:** The Committee helped fund shows in the upper part of the watershed. She held the shows at Savoy and Cummington Elementary Schools. The Savoy teachers requested a copy of the curriculum developed with the show and seem enthusiastic to get involved. She will see if any of them have suggestions for possible Savoy representatives for the Committee. The next shows will be Thursday, November 20th at Russell H. Conwell Elementary School in Worthington at 9:30 am and Chester Elementary School at 2:00 pm. Anyone interested in attending should let Meredyth B. know so she can put you on the guest list.
- v. **Town Meetings:** Meredyth B. is planning to meet with as many of the Town Selectboards as possible to share the Stream Team Executive Summaries and discuss the upcoming volunteer activities and projects. She will try to let the respective Town Committee representatives know beforehand.

4. Operations Update:

- a. **Partnership Rivers Funding:** The whitepaper requesting \$200,000 for Westfield River in the FY10 Partnership Rivers Budget was submitted to Congressman Olver's office. Committee members will meet with him this winter to update on the current projects funded under the Partnership Rivers Funding. Carrie B. will pull together some worksheets which highlight the projects and leveraged funding which she calculates could be about \$50,000 based on the current projects being implemented.
- b. **Community Grants:** The Committee discussed how the Towns may need a bit more guidance on projects. Liz L. noted that Jim McCartney felt he could not provide adequate information to fully assess the conditions on Depot Brook for the Town of Washington. He suggested the Town hire a consultant that could provide more guidance. Liz L. will see if he could provide a bulleted list of services a consultant could provide to the town to move in the right direction. The drainage projects for 4 towns was discussed and the best method to proceed since each town will likely want their work customized and it is important to feel like the funds are being used for their town. The Committee decided the Sub-Committee should discuss this further. One suggestion was doing the work for the 4 towns based on their needs and then pick 1 project from each to highlight BMPs which could be shared with other towns and MassHighway. The Committee noted whichever engineers are selected for these types of projects, then it is important they have an understanding about river ecology and processes.

5. Stewardship Update:

- a. **Riparian Conservation Projects:** Jeff P. noted the Norwich Hill Conservancy is working with the Hilltown Land Trust to explore conservation options and likely will not need assistance from the Committee at this time. He will keep us posted. He also reported the Town of Huntington seeks to sell 2 landlocked parcels totaling 140+ acres to the highest bidder. One parcel has potential access from Goss Hill Road. The goal is to sell them for conservation purposes and reportedly they have been in discussion with DFW about protection. Jeff P. will be attending a special town meeting where the Town seeks approval for funds to conduct an appraisal. He asked the Committee if it would be alright to offer the Town some assistance either through their Community Grant or the Riparian Conservation Grant. The Committee said if it could meet the goals of conservation of Wild & Scenic resources then those funds could be potentially used.

The Committee also discussed whether towns who take parcels under a tax title taking could place certain ones under a Conservation Restriction before selling them off again. Mercedes G. highlighted one example of a parcel the town sold off which was then developed in close proximity to wetlands. After the foundation was poured, construction was shutdown because of violations to the Wetlands Protection Act. The Town then had to expend lawyer fees costing taxpayers more money than what the parcel was purchased.

- b. **Stream Team Projects:** See update from Meredyth Babcock above. In addition, 10 volunteers participated in a Trail Work Day along the East Branch Trail. Several folks seemed interested in continuing to volunteer and to possibly become a trail crew leader. Additional workdays will be conducted next spring.
- c. **Section 7 Projects:** Liz L. reported that MassHighway has brought another project forward for Section 7 Review. This is for George Miller Road over the Middle Branch in Chester. The 25% design submitted by MassHighway seems to not address any of the typical comments and conditions submitted to previous projects. For example, the new concrete slab bridge is proposed upstream with no good argument or analysis on why this is the most appropriate alternative for this site. The bridge services two houses with no indication if they are year-round residences – a Committee member who use to live in one of the houses confirmed they are occupied year round. The proposed bridge abutments are still located on the stream edge, even though we have requested numerous times for them to be out of the active channel to minimize disturbance and to increase flood capacity. The original bridge is suspected to have been built in the 1840's, likely reconstructed in the 1960's. The area has a rich historical context and the Committee should request a copy of the archeological report as soon as possible. Liz L. reported that the Section 7 Reviews are eating up a large chunk of her time (activity on at least 10 MassHighway Projects and 5 Town Projects in the last 6 months) and that it seems to be the same process over and over again. In particular, each project seems to have different MassHighway personnel who seem not to understand river processes and ignore the guidance already offered by the NPS and the Committee. Recently, MassHighway has complained that the NPS is delaying the McNearney Road project, even though Liz L. said she would approve the projects weeks ago as long as a couple of minor details get worked out. For example, one of the landscape and bank stabilization plans seems to have a blank void where a new riverbank area will be established as part of the plans. The Committee decided the best way to proceed is to request a meeting with MassHighway District 1 Director and explain the Section 7 process, typical concerns and/or conditions on projects and ideas on how to make process more efficient, including a request to appoint a MassHighway liaison to the Committee. Carrie will prepare a 1-2 page sheet on how to work with the Committee on Section 7 projects which can also be shared with the Towns.

6. Outreach Updates:

- a. **Website:** Bob T. and Steve H. met to discuss pulling together an interactive map. The site should be launched by the end of the November with a couple of active pages. Additional pages will be added in later. The URL for the site will be www.westfieldriverwildscenic.org.

7. Local Updates:

- a. **Dog Poop:** A resident in Chester reported seeing someone discard dog poop by removing it from their yard and placing it directly on the storm drain. The Committee suggested contacting the Board of Health.
- b. **Chesterfield Grange:** Jim C. reported he and their historian recently met with folks from the Chesterfield Grange who had a ton of stories to share about the Chesterfield Gorge, Indian Hollow and surrounding area. He thought this would be a great group to work with when we begin the oral history collection for the watershed. Jeff P. noted Jacob's Ladder Scenic Byway had also conducted a flyover and captured oral histories which may also be available. Bob T. noted the College history department was interested in an oral history project as well. Carrie B. suggested this would be a good collaborative project which could also be connected to the local historical commissions and Local Cultural Councils.
- c. **Keystone Cooperators:** Applications are now being accepted to become a Keystone Cooperator (formerly Coverts). A 3-day workshop will be held in the Spring. Carrie B. suggested it might be worthwhile to send 2-3 people, either Committee members, Stream Team Volunteers or the Volunteer Coordinator. It only costs \$50.00 contribution from each person and the rest is

covered. Cooperators become resources in their community on forest stewardship issues and are required to volunteer a certain amount of time following their workshop. This might include giving a presentation on what they learned at a future Committee meeting or sponsored workshop. For more information, visit <http://masskeystone.net/about/index.html>.

- d. **November 20th, WSC Speaker Series:** Tracy Adamski will present on environmental activities of a for-profit business.
- e. **Water Quality Monitoring:** Initial sampling was conducted at 3 locations – Gardner State Park, Little River, and Jacks Brook. Every sample was off the charts for coliform bacteria. Samples were taken shortly after a rain event. Sampling will resume at the end of March.
- f. **Watershed Association Remediation Funds:** The Westfield River Watershed Association received \$20,000 in remediation funds which will be used to hire an assistant and who will hopefully be able to write grants to continue for the long-term.

Next Meeting: Thursday, December 11th from 6:30-8:30pm at Stanton Hall in Huntington.