# Wolcott Community Forest Committee

General Meeting notes, Thursday November 14, 2024
6 pm – 8 pm

Attending: Gordon, Roger, Dave, Matt Peters, Jack, Gabe
Online: Brooke, Maxfield

## Agenda

1. Call to order (6 pm)
2. Organizational actions
    a. Amendments to agenda
        i. Spending committee funds, process
            1. [Roger] **Building a tracking sheet that will be posted in the shared drive. Feel free to leave feedback.**
    b. Approve minutes from last meeting
        **i. Moved, Dave; Seconded, Roger**
            **1. 3 yes, 1 abstain**
            **2. Passes**
3. Public comment
    a. none
4. Ongoing
    a. Status report from TPL (6:10 pm)
        i. [Gordon] retested site around the pole; tested positive; will have to go back and address the contamination; waiting for a reply from Kate/Stone with more details
            1. [Dave] put a cable across the access road, sign that says “Keep Gate Closed” and cable clamps; can remove it if they call ahead
        ii. [Gordon] they want to know our details for the Grand Opening party
    b. Trail building update from Sinuosity (6:15 pm)

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i. [Brooke] focused on the school trail, both directions; finished the connection to the main intersection; worked the trail down towards Flat Iron Rd; bridge work is not done yet
    1. [Gordon] is it visible, yet?
        a. [Brooke] stopped just short of the road; directly behind the equipment; put a culvert on the old road; some switchbacks
        b. [Gordon] where does it pull off from the school to access the trail?
        c. [Brooke] at the western end of the field, by some plastic chairs
        d. [Gordon] how much more work this year?
        e. [Brooke] done with the machine work; could do more corridor clearing, but the crew has mostly wrapped up for the year…unless there is a group of volunteers
        f. [Gordon] haven't had much luck getting volunteers; but if we did, you would come back and guide them? Is 2 or 3 enough?
        g. [Brooke] that's fine; we will be out of town for the next couple of weeks, but maybe after
        h. [Gordon] good, as a small crew is more likely at this stage
        i. [Brooke] Roger can brief volunteers on how we like to clear brush, etc.
        j. [Gabe] can we work through the winter?
        k. [Brooke] there are a lot of cuts, with trees on the ground; once it ices over, it's a lot harder

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2. [Brooke] neighbors
    a. Ryan B., lives on Flat Iron Rd, thanked me for the work; maybe a possible volunteer
    b. Met Eric, the "volunteer trail-builder" and dog-walker, lives on Flat Iron Rd; explained how efforts should be coordinated through the committee, as there are sensitive areas; wants to contribute
        i. [Gordon] just met him, about an hour ago; you got the message across to him; will likely stay on the "path" once they are marked; his enthusiasm is a good sign
        ii. [Brooke] wants a shorter loop for his aging dog

5. New business (6:20 pm)
    a. Presentation, Matt Peters, botanist
        i. [Ecological Assessment, abbreviated presentation from slide show]
            1. [Jack] are the rare species identified here to stay, or just passing through?
                a. [Matt] these rare species are dialed in to the conditions that are present, specifically the geology; they are generally self-protecting (grow on cliffs, etc.), so are likely okay with light recreational use nearby

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2. [Gordon] are these outcroppings common along this stretch of the river?
    a. [Matt] likely not, but would have to assess the whole stretch
3. [Gordon] what nearby locations have also had ecological assessments?
    a. [Matt] would have to research it, but likely some properties have been investigated; however, few people have a detailed familiarity with these species to tell the difference
4. [Gordon] as stewards, we have this little piece of habitat, what are the ongoing trends for how it is evolving, and how can we use this knowledge to be good stewards?
    a. [Matt] the Bedell and Bourne plots have different species based on their land use histories, and can be reflected in the species and dynamics present in each; hard to understand the impacts of oncoming climate change; distribution of species moves around the landscape; these are essentially unpredictable with any certainty at this time
    b. [Gordon] the less disturbance, the greater the resilience, then?
        i. [Matt] well, there are not many occurrences of invasive species at this time; additional disturbances could change this over time

ii. [Matt] regarding recreational uses, most of the identified sensitive species are off the beaten path and self-protected; are most vulnerable to changes in the humidity environment; needs to be considered if there is any harvesting nearby

c. [Gabe] have you worked to introduce old-growth characteristics to the landscape?
    i. [Matt] there are some sections that lend themselves to that type of development; mostly needs time and some low-key, active management to encourage them; from a structural perspective, there are some key sites that would take to this well, but a forester would have a more informed perspective
    ii. [Gabe] are you more interested in what is currently present, or do you consider the outcomes of management choices?
        1. [Matt] more focused on what's current rather than what could be; especially when doing rapid assessment, it tends to be wide ranging
d. [Gabe] do you have an opinion on treating the ash trees for borers?

    i. [Matt] there are circumstances where it makes sense, but is costly an likely not practical to treat every tree; a bio-control would likely be more effective long-term

e. [Gordon] do you have sense of how similar this property others in this area?
    i. [Matt] there is a mix, but I'm not familiar with every area; from a geological perspective there are many similarities with regional properties; but there are some uncommon hotspots here

f. [Roger] Do any of these areas lend themselves for teaching moments, for elementary-age kids?
    i. [Matt] good to consider the land use history are areas that are proximal to the school; areas where there are photos where one can demonstrate how the land has changed significantly over time; around the Elmore Bridge, through the gorge, up to meadow; rivers are always dynamic;

g. [Gordon] can you speak about restoring rivers to their natural state, to improve shade cover, to control floods?

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i. [Matt] it's mostly open right now, likely due to both land use history and natural history; not necessarily the most suitable location for this; however, there are sections that were upland habitat that used to be forested; alluvial meadow areas may benefit from some work; some evidence of ditching across that area, which could be plugged to restore the wetland hydrology, but would need more careful field analysis

ii. [Matt] I have a connection that can inform you about improving wood turtle habitat, too

b. Outreach and engaging volunteers
    i. [Roger] we had "a swing and a miss" last month. Going to change our approach and compile an email list.
    **ii.** [Gordon] **let's launch a recruitment drive, with repeated posts on FPF, and keeping a list; poster at Wolcott Store, maybe other places; identify local bikers (at bike shops); backcountry skiers; build out the website with QR code;**
        1. [Maxfield] could use Dennis' email to reach out

c. Planning trails, Phase 2
    i. [Gordon] would like to mobilize volunteers to start planning/clearing another trail, to go up the ROW to the top of the hill and to the pond; more to do than helping Sinuosity
        1. [Gabe] are we talking more active trail building?

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a. [Gordon] there are a lot of ways we can go; to begin, simple flagging and lopping off strategic limbs, stacking stones; to begin, can chase log roads, add water bars; leaf blowing to establish the trail; identify areas that may require more robust engineering; would like to establish a robust, grassroots trail network; many community trails that are accessible, but not advertised ("Keep Calais mysterious!"); opportunities to bring in artisans to enhance trails, bridges, etc.
b. [Maxfield] are they policing the road-building since it is more freeform? Are they mapped?
    i. [Gordon] likely not; talk to several locals, most of the builds are on private property and they know each other; may be interested in helping/consulting our build out as their trails are saturated; only mapped via my own app, but they work to keep them out of other services
    ii. [Gabe] easy to do all of this open private land; harder to accomplish here
    iii. [Roger] as a public forest, could still be an opportunity to add artisanal enhancements; to create memories
    iv. [Gordon] due to our location, we're likely to bring in more traffic

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d. Recruiting committee members, two vacancies
    i. **[Moved to next meeting, due to time]**
e. Forest management, stand 8
    i. [Gordon] **proposing that we engage Emily Potter for detailed advice of how to manage this area to consider and pitch to the Select Board**; it is a plantation and is not doing particularly well; could benefit from some targeted action
        1. [Jack] in terms of contacting easement holders, bring it to me first; would be easier in the long run, as we are working with the other easement holders to streamline communications and management decisions; common approach to easement management with multiple parties
f. Erosion mitigation, Gates Farm Rd
    i. **[Moved to next meeting, due to time]**
g. Brush-hogging
    i. [Dave] can only access about 15% of the area; will pitch a proposal to do work in May; leaving soft edges; should treat the bridge with linseed oil (about $500)
        1. [Gordon] would make sense to preserve it; Select Board is researching the possibility of insuring the bridge; questions about intended use of the bridge (pedestrian or vehicle use); I question how necessary it is in the long run; may not be money well spent
    ii. [Dave] cut some brush on the dam; average height in 35', 12" diameter; they all lean in towards the water; will try again later with more volunteers; dam is 200' long, too; would like to check its depth in the winter

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h. Budget

i. [Gordon] Submitted a budget for the town's consideration at last Select Board meeting. Document in shared file

**i. No meeting in December. Our next meeting is on Jan 9, 2025**

6. Adjourn (8:20 pm)