

EATON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

January 8, 2024

1. Meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm. Members present were Marnie Cobbs, Dick Fortin, Holly Fortin, Robin Nuccio and Paul Nuccio. Also present was Dagmar von Schwerin.

2. **ADMINISTRATION** – Minutes of the December 11 meeting were accepted.

3. TREASURER'S REPORT

Conservation Fund	\$15,780.46	CD \$10,080.50
Foss Mountain Fund	\$16,280.22	
Forest Management Fund	\$18,111.68	CD \$30,241.50
Land Conservation Fund	\$ 5,741.76	CD \$10,080.50
TOTAL	\$55,914.12	CD \$50,402.50
Donation box at trailhead	\$0	
Website Donation Income	(\$70 Dec Jan)	

ECC voted to accept 2 checks from the Town's Land Use Conversion Tax account in the amount of \$3,624 for deposit in the Land Conservation Fund.

Treasurer's report was accepted.

4. **SELECTMEN'S REPORT** – The Selectmen are in negotiations with a local landowner regarding unpaid timber yield taxes.

The Capital Improvement presentation was discussed. Selectmen will inform the Town of their choice of action and how projects will be paid for, including tax rate increases, at a Bond Public Hearing on January 16 at 6:30 pm.

The 21 acres seized for non-payment of taxes will be held by the Town for now as the larger scale Capital Improvement issues need to be managed in the next couple of years.

5. **PLANNING BOARD** – The Board wrote a letter of support for Green Mountain Conservation group's proposal to FEMA on culvert upgrade assessment. The Board reviewed and approved 11 amendments to the Zoning Ordinance with a public hearing scheduled for January 17th at 6:15 pm. The Board discussed next steps for completion of a new Town Master Plan in 2025. To that end, a questionnaire will be developed in the spring by the Board and the ECC to be sent to town residents and property owners during the summer and reviewed in the fall.

6. **FOSS MANAGEMENT** – There have been some areas of erosion damage on the trail, but Dick has heard that many trails are now washing out below the tree line and this is not unusual. Repairs should not be major, water bars can be moved or added, and in the meantime, the trail is quite passable.

The future of Foss was discussed related to sustainability of maintaining its "unnatural" state of openness going into the future. Without cutting, Foss would be forested in a number of years.

Shall we ask in the questionnaire being developed for the Master Plan how the Town feels about Foss, and whether it is willing to commit some funds to its maintenance? Should we reach out for sustaining donations, so we don't fundraise every year? The volunteer workforce and contracted cutting options may not be available in future. Blueberry income may continue to diminish or disappear, so more funds would be needed to keep Foss open. Foss does represent a rare open grassland which hosts many species not found in forests, especially pollinators and birds. Foss and its blueberry fields are also a key feature in Eaton, enjoyed by many - it would be good to know how many users are local versus out-of-towners.

Some options related to the future of the blueberry fields were discussed including pay to pick and honor system picking if additional commercial pickers cannot be found, but concerns exist about overuse.

7. TOWN LAND MANAGEMENT – a Warrant Article will be submitted for a vote at the next Town Meeting to formally designate parcels Tax Map R-12 Lot 10 and Tax Map R-13 Lots 1,3,5,11 as Town Forest, with parcels Tax Map R-8 Lots 6,7,8,9,10 remaining as Conservation Land.

\$500 is being set aside each year for the next three years for wetlands management training for Paul from the Henney fund. The amount given to local children attending Tin Mountain's summer camps will be reduced by \$500 for the next three years, unless we find donors willing to support this continuing education to benefit the town.

8. FOREST MANAGEMENT – no issues

9. COMMUNITY COHORT - ECC Conservation Master Plan comments

Work on mitigation of invasive species might best be focused on water borne species like milfoil which is easily spread but can also be contained if caught early. Buckthorn and targeted growths of Knotweed can also be tackled if interventions could yield reasonable results.

Communication with the Town will be important in order to hear what is important to the townspeople, to get people on board before actions are taken, and to inform them of ECC's priorities and work. Forums used currently are Eaton Ears (which may not go to all residents), Tattler (goal 2x per year), Nancy's column in the newspaper, and Community Cohort meetings. Ideas include posters/flyers and people stationed at the Town Hall at election and Town Hall Meeting times, ECC members on Foss talking to people, targeted letters in the mail and an expansion of the email list.

The draft ECC Master Plan states the goal of preserving Eaton's natural resources as the job of the Commission, according to NHACC. Making Town Lands available for recreational use by the community is a subset of the ECC's mission but should be managed so as to provide protection for watersheds and habitats that would otherwise be damaged by human use.

The ECC manages Town lands directly, but also aims to invite private landowners to participate in efforts to protect shared watersheds and habitats within the Town, given our goal.

ECC's Conservation Plan will help inform the Town's 2025 Master Plan. Since objectives listed in the Town's Master Plan often result in the enactment of Ordinances, care must be taken to separate those ECC goals that would benefit from the establishment of Ordinances from those that would be better handled by reaching out for voluntary support of ECC initiatives. The overall

ECC Conservation Plan could be included in the Town's master plan as an appendix document for town information purposes.

Dennis will establish an NRI study group to review mapping in depth, making recommendations to the ECC about the most critical areas in Eaton to focus on. Paul and Dagmar will join the group. Kevin Conklin and Bruce McBrien will be asked to join as well.

ECC will work on the Questionnaire that will be sent to Town residents and tax payers with the Planning Board. It was suggested that we might get help from NHACC or others accustomed to creating questionnaires to fine tune the questions to avoid leading questions and ensure that the most useful information is gathered.

10. OTHER BUSINESS –

USVLT sent a letter stating that they surveyed and certified their easement adjacent to Foss. They also appreciate being notified of the burn that took place in the spring of 2023. Marnie will reach out to Kurt Willson about coming onto the ECC and will submit the ECC's Year End Report to the Selectmen.

Next meeting: February 12, 2024 at 6 pm

Meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm

Respectfully submitted by Dagmar von Schwerin, Recording Secretary