

Town of Jackson Conservation Commission
Minutes - February 1st, 2021 - Regular Meeting
- UNOFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED

Call To Order: Jeff Sires, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M. Attending were Members Jeff Sires, Ken Kimball, Ben Halcyon, Mike Dufilho, Brian Byrne, Pam Smillie, Tom Seidel, and Selectman's Representative Dick Bennett. Public attendees included Hank Benesh. Audio and video recorded via the Zoom platform will be made available on Jacksonflicks.com.

Approval Of Minutes: Minutes from the January 4th meeting were reviewed. **Member Kimball motioned to approve the minutes, and Member Halcyon seconded. The motion was carried unanimously.**

Prospect Farm: The Commission reviewed the results of the Prospect Farm questionnaire. The questionnaire received 218 responses, with approximately 70% of responses submitted by Jackson residents and non-resident taxpayers. Chairman Sires noted that the distributions of responses were largely uniform between resident, non-resident taxpayer, and visitor demographics for each question. He also noted that responses to the first question, "Do you use Prospect Farm and/or its abutting lands to recreate?", indicated respondents visited mainly during the cross-country ski season, but he explained that results may have been skewed due to distribution of the questionnaire via the mailing list for the Jackson Ski Touring Foundation (JSTF). Member Kimball agreed that using the JSTF's mailing list may have had some effect on the tendency of responses, as he had observed considerably more use of Prospect Farm during the winter than during the summer.

On the second question, "When you recreate in the Prospect Farm area, which of the following do you use?", Chairman Sires noted that most respondents across all demographics used the town-owned Prospect Farm property and the abutting White Mountain National Forest, with over half using abutting private lands in addition to town-owned and national forest lands. Member Seidel considered whether the responses for the question could be used to gauge which lands were used during summer or winter. Member Kimball noted that overlapping use of Prospect Farm and abutting National Forest lands, alongside the fact that the original will for the property indicated it should be managed in concert with the National Forest, were demonstrative of the fact that a management plan for Prospect Farm would be best served by aligning the properties regulations with the National Forest wherever possible. This would reduce confusion on the part of users who travel between the two sets of land, among other management benefits.

On the third question, “When you recreate in the Prospect Farm area, are you aware of the boundaries between Town-owned land, abutting private properties, and lands within the White Mountain National Forest?”, Chairman Sires noted that respondents across all demographics were generally aware of boundaries on Prospect Farm but found that significantly more visitors than residents or non-resident taxpayers were not aware of the boundaries until looking at a map of said boundaries. This suggested that some improvements could be made to education about the use and boundaries of Prospect Farm. Member Dufilho suggested remaining mindful of remaining consistent with educational practices, including posting of informational signage, on adjacent properties.

On the fourth question, “In what ways do you recreate at Prospect Farm or its abutting lands?”, Chairman Sires noted that respondents across all demographics tended to use the Prospect Farm area for similar purposes, with the most respondents selecting cross-country skiing, hiking, and snowshoeing. On the fifth question, regarding recreation at Prospect Farm alone or in a group, Chairman Sires noted that responses were distributed evenly across the three provided responses (“as a family”, “with friends”, and “alone”). Member Kimball reminded that all three responses could have been selected by any respondent, which could have contributed to the even distribution of responses.

On the sixth question, regarding awareness of the JSTF’s role in providing and maintaining parking at Prospect Farm, Chairman Sires remarked that a surprising number of respondents indicated they were aware of the JSTF’s role. Member Kimball, however, noted that the preamble to the questionnaire might have given away that information. In response to Chairman Sires asking if that information ought to be more prominently displayed at the parking lot, Member Kimball remarked that the JSTF had a long-term lease for the lot with the private landowner and that, were the lot abused, the owner could retract the lease and prohibit parking. Member Seidel considered parking management a major consideration as part of the General Management Plan. Member Halcyon agreed that parking was a significant concern and noted that numerous responses to the questionnaire highlighted this issue. Some responses to the questionnaire indicated an impression that the Town was limiting winter parking at Prospect Farm, where the parking areas were instead managed by the JSTF. It would be important to effectively communicate different roles as they related to parking and generally to devote significant consideration to the issue as part of the management plan. Member Kimball noted that the size of the parking lot was determined by the landowner and that the JSTF had discussed some small expansions to the lot. Chairman Sires noted that individual comments from some respondents had advised against expanding the lot.

On the seventh question, regarding which activities respondents thought should be permitted on Town-owned Prospect Farm property, Chairman Sires noted that respondents across all demographics suggested permitting activities that were already common on Prospect Farm property but minimal votes for and significant individual comments suggesting against permitting use of snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), and other off-highway recreational vehicles (OHRVs). Member Kimball noted that this would require a change to a previously-passed Town article which permitted residents to use snowmobiles. Because there was no legal parking for snowmobiles nor developed snowmobile trails, and because snowmobiling on the abutting National Forest land was not permitted, the use of snowmobiling on the Prospect Farm parcel was not practical. On the eighth question, regarding whether sustainable forestry on Town-owned Prospect Farm property would be appropriate, Chairman Sires observed that a wide majority of respondents across all demographics supported sustainable forestry. Member Halcyon suggested clarifying the definition and implications of sustainable forestry in order to address concerns raised in some respondents' comments. On the ninth question, regarding respondents' opinions of changes in recreational use of Prospect Farm, Chairman Sires observed that a majority of respondents across all demographics either noticed a considerable increase in use of Prospect Farm or did not notice or could not tell if use had changed.

Chairman Sires asked Member Kimball how he intended to move forward with development of the general management plan in response to the questionnaire responses. Member Kimball stated his intent to complete a draft of the document, submit the document to Members Dufilho and Byrne in the sub-committee for their input, and then bring the document back to the Commission. Chairman Sires also proposed distributing a summary update from the questionnaire via Jackson eNews and the JSTF mailing list, including some clarifications about terms used in the questionnaire. Member Kimball remarked that the summary would make a useful appendix to the general management plan draft.

Jackson Falls: Chairman Sires noted that a Save Jackson Falls Committee meeting was ongoing at the same time as the Commission's meeting. He mentioned that the Committee would be considering the Commission's feedback on their suggestions before bringing their suggestions before the Board of Selectmen. Based on positive feedback from Jackson Police Chief Chris Perley, Selectmen's Representative Bennett asked for the Commission's opinion on instituting time-limited parking to dissuade visitors from staying at the Falls for long periods of time. Member Kimball responded that the idea was discussed at the previous meeting and that the Commission had been under the impression that enforcing time limits on parking would be difficult. Member Smillie agreed with this concern but insisted that time limits on parking would help alleviate some parking issues. Member Dufilho concurred with Member Smillie's support of the idea, so long as it could be reasonably enforced. The Commission agreed to propose to the Police Department an experimental trial of a time limit policy, using chalked tires to keep track of vehicles parked at the Falls. **Member Kimball motioned to propose a trial run of time-**

limited parking at Jackson Falls, and Member Seidel seconded. The motion was approved 6-0-1; Members Sires, Kimball, Halcyon, Seidel, Dufilho, and Smillie approved, and Member Byrne abstained from voting.

Dundee Forest Project: Chairman Sires stated that William Abbott had reached out from Upper Saco Valley Land Trust and informed him that the Land Trust would not continue to pursue a donation to the Dundee Forest Project from the Town of Jackson at that time. The Land Trust would continue to consider the logistics and benefits of requesting a donation from the Town at a later date, possibly in 2022.

Wildcat River: There were no updates to this matter at time of meeting.

Gray's Inn: There were no updates to this matter at time of meeting.

Conservation Easements: There were no updates to this matter at time of meeting.

Wetlands: There were no updates to this matter at time of meeting.

New Business: Chairman Sires stated that the Saco Headwaters Alliance reached out to the Commission and requested a date to present some educational resources at a future meeting. Chairman Sires had suggested that the Alliance present at the Commission's meeting in either April or May. He asked Selectmen's Representative Bennett to determine representatives from the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board to attend the presentation as well, to facilitate joint efforts toward water protection efforts in the future.

Public Comment: Public attendees did not express any public comments for non-agenda discussion.

Chairman Sires motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Member Byrne seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:41 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Will Reisig