



Town of Warner

Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee

APPROVED - Meeting Minutes

April 12, 2021, 7:00 PM

No physical location for this meeting; it was conducted via Zoom.

The meeting was opened by Clyde Carson at 7:04pm.

Present: Clyde Carson (Selectmen's Representative): 1 other person in the house, Craig Tufts (Regional Planning Commission): alone, David Minton: alone, Andy Duncan: alone, Sarah Allen: alone, Jason Mutschler: alone, Rebecca Courser: 1 other person in the house, Peter Bates: 1 other person in the house, Nancy Martin (arrived late)

Also present: James Oehler, NH Fish & Game

Covid-19 Preamble

I am declaring that an emergency exists and I am invoking the provisions of RSA 91-A:2, III (b). Federal, state, and local officials have determined that gatherings of 10 or more people pose a substantial risk to our community in its continuing efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. In concurring with their determination, I also find that this meeting is imperative to the continued operation of Town of Warner government and services, which are vital to public safety and confidence during this emergency. As such, this meeting will be conducted without a quorum of this body physically present in the same location.

At this time, I also welcome members of the public accessing this meeting remotely. Even though this meeting is being conducted in a unique manner under unusual circumstances, the usual rules of conduct and decorum apply. Any person found to be disrupting this meeting will be asked to cease the disruption. Should the disruptive behavior continue thereafter, that person will be removed from this meeting.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote.

Jim Oehler was given the floor to give his presentation on Trails for People and Wildlife. He has been working for NH Fish and Game since 2003. The slides may be viewed on the NH Fish & Game website. There is also a guidebook available online to help with trail planning in your town. The link is <https://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/trails/index.html>

Sarah Allen said they have over 10,000 acres they are trying to assess in the Minks. She wondered how best to approach the minimum unfragmented size that they should look for. They are trying to figure out if they have enough trails, or if they should do more trails. Mr. Oehler said he they should think about the species that are present and their minimum area sizes they require. If something requires a minimum of 80 acres, they need to provide more than 80 acres; if they stick with the minimum required, they will not have a healthy population of the species.

Craig said with such a large area, would a strategy be to cluster trails in one or two parts of the property? Mr. Oehler said that was a good idea.

There was discussion about the property owners of the Minks and how they have been approached. Rebecca said that some of the owners have been approached. Her biggest concern is continuing to fragment the large area, which is special.

Nancy Martin asked if they should overlay the Mink Hills maps and look for the blue areas and consider the class VI roads running through the Minks now and identify those passing through the blue and red. Then consider what they can do about managing or eliminating the ones going through the red? Mr. Oehler answered in the affirmative. Using the heat map over the existing roads and trails, and adding any other ecological features will be helpful. They will then decide what the desired trail layout would be; some class VI roads might go through some high habitat value areas. To decommission class VI roads, there must be a vote taken at town meeting and the landowner then needs to determine what to do with the roads afterwards. It isn't an easy thing to do.

Andy Duncan asked if Mr. Oehler had any experience in class A trails. Mr. Oehler said he wasn't well-versed in those trails, but the municipal association has some good information available. Craig offered his help with mapping.

Alice Chamberlin asked if there was a hierarchy for disturbance. Mr. Oehler said there are a variety of disturbance factors. Noise is one, but there are also direct impacts of recreating on the trail (removing wildlife), and mountain-bikers or ATV'ers running over wildlife.

Andy Duncan commented on the slide with the bar charts showing the different types of recreation. Alice commented that other parts of the world and country look different when it comes to these charts; the results depend on the habitat being studied.

Dave Minton said asked what defines a positive impact in the chart. Mr. Oehler said an increase of a species, which works fine with the landscape. Mr. Duncan said hiking and running is being compared with ATVs and 4WD vehicles, which he thought was interesting. Mr. Oehler said while this is true, he doesn't like to compare the recreational activities.

Nancy said that everything they do impacts the environment. The takeaway is they should worry less about what the activities are that are done, but focusing on centralizing where they prohibit activities. Mr. Oehler said that is part of it. They want people to still get outside but to leave some areas undisturbed so all of NH's wildlife can survive. He prefers multi-use trails versus having more trails designated for separate things.

Nancy Ladd said on the chart, people are obsessing with the percentage shown. The percentage is how many results showed any impact, not the percentage of the impact.

Andy asked what kind of data would be good that could go into a map that might not be on the typical GIS layers. Mr. Oehler said vernal pools or locations of rare species would be important to have. Recent aerial photos of wetlands put over the heat map will show how things may have changed. Andy suggested social trails vs. official trails. Mr. Oehler agreed.

Ms. Ladd said she knows Jim McLaughlin tried to fix the errors in the latest geological maps. Some streams are still shown on the map to be going backwards in her area. How do the plots they provide get put into official maps? Mr. Oehler said the participating landowners may have the data and someone like Craig could compile the data. Ms. Ladd said the trees tend to be taller where the water is, so it appears that things like a gully isn't present, when it is. The aerial maps aren't very accurate because of things like this. Mr. Oehler said that shows the importance of "boots on the ground" assistance.

Rebecca said there is a hike starting at route 114 just beyond Day Pond, to hike to the Cisco Corner and Wiggin's Trace property. The hike was to begin at 10am on Saturday the 16th. Craig said he may be able to help with mapping to plot their walk, but wasn't sure if he could go on the hike.

Clyde said the next meeting is May 10, 2021 at 7pm via Zoom.

With no other business, Clyde closed the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:26pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary

Town of Warner