



Town of Warner, New Hampshire
Conservation Commission
Tuesday, November 21, 2023

Work Session
Warner Town Hall 1:00 pm
In Person Meeting
Zoom Access

Warner Conservation Commission (WCC) members present: Alice Chamberlin, Michael Amaral, Susi von Oettingen, Jackie Germaine (Alternate), Phil Stockwell (Alternate), and Nancy Martin, Chair.

Others present: Joshua Megyesy, NH Fish and Game (NHFG), Wildlife Biologist, Tim Blagden, David Carroll, Turtle researcher.

Meeting began at 1:00 pm. Ended at 3:20 pm.

Joshua Megyesy gave a presentation on wood turtle life history, habitat, and threats. Look to Northeastturtles.org for more information on conservation measures to minimize and avoid impacts to turtles. The following summarizes his presentation:

Wood Turtles (WTs) are a species of special concern in NH. Recently, the USFWS received a petition to list them under the Federal T/E Species Act. Based on element occurrence records, WTs in NH have a statewide distribution but do not occur at higher elevations. They require streams with gravel and sandy bottoms, cool water that is oxygen rich, and the ability to move into intact, terrestrial habitats. WTs are much more terrestrial than many other aquatic species. Through telemetry studies, WTs are known to use an area 300-700 meters from their home streams and can wander out to 1000 m. They need open sandy areas for nesting. The Warner River has all the aquatic and terrestrial features they need, especially an intact floodplain with minimal fragmentation.

Josh provided an overview of two meta data studies (one examined results from 69 individual studies and the other 274 studies), that demonstrated that human recreation impacts wildlife negatively. Josh also summarized the Garber and Burger 1995 20-year study that showed that an apparently healthy WT population in southeastern CT became extirpated after human recreation (hiking and fishing) was allowed.

Evidence was provided that there is deliberate, targeted take of WTs for illegal sale on the black market for food, medicine and the pet trade. In addition, incidental take of WTs is also known to occur. Well intentioned acts of picking up and transporting turtles out of their home territories and releasing them in unsuitable pond or lake habitats were noted. Other individuals may simply be taken and kept as pets. WTs show high

site fidelity even when their path is obstructed by silt or other fencing. WTs may spend an inordinate amount of time probing a silt fence looking for an opening and then may become trapped and die from predation or exposure if they do penetrate the barrier.

The website, <https://www.northeastturtles.org> Has Best Management Practices for WTs and other species.

In a comment during Josh's presentation, David Carroll made the point rivers, streams and riparian floodplains are high in biodiversity. To minimize impacts on turtles and many other species that use water and riparian areas, human trails should not parallel water courses.

WTs occur all along the Warner River at one density or another, and extend along the rail trail corridor, from Warner to Sunapee.

The primary focus of the working meeting was on wood turtle population within the rail trail corridor.

Alice Chamberlin – role of highway on the population of wood turtles? Is it currently protecting? Historically most likely a significant impact on wood turtles.

Questions focused on:

- Specifically, where does the turtle habitat overlap the rail trail corridor? Throughout the proposed rail trail corridor within the Warner River floodplain and associated streams.
- Is the turtle population viable? Yes.
- What portion of the population might be affected by the development of a rail trail in or near turtle habitat? The entire population.
- Seasonality – winter months, no turtle movement, June significant because of nesting season, building trail and ground disturbance must occur when turtles are not present.

Primary concern of putting a trail near turtle habitat is collection – casual or commercial. Translocated turtles have a high mortality rate.

The rail trail corridor could include low traffic roads to get around sensitive areas. Tim Blagden gave a few potential examples.

Update – Project bridge at Bagley to the field. Has the DES permit and have coordinated with NHFG. Hope to access the project from the interstate. NHFG provides recommendations on a DES permit only. Occurring on surplus DOT lands.

Exit 9 Project – West side of interstate to East side, bridges the Warner River (up to 2 bridges). Concept plan is on the website. Has federal funding, will have multiple public hearings required by the process. Will be opportunity to weigh in on the project. Will go through the National Environmental Protection Act.

At some point a project may be designed to connect Bagley Field to the Village.