



Town of Warner

Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee

DRAFT - Meeting Minutes

May 10, 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, Nancy Martin, alone

Absent: John France, Rebecca Courser, Bill Dragon, Peter Bates

Also present: Nancy Ladd (Library Director)

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.

Review of Minutes

March 22, 2021

It was moved by Nancy Martin and seconded by Jason Mutschler to approve the minutes of March 22, 2021 as circulated.

A hand-vote showed a unanimous approval of the motion.

The motion passed.

April 12, 2021

Clyde said that it should be added that the materials from the presentation were on the Fish and Game website. The link should be added to the minutes.

It was moved by Andy Duncan and seconded by Nancy Martin to approve the minutes of April 12, 2021 as amended.

A hand-vote showed a unanimous approval of the motion.

The motion passed.

Hike Update

Chair Carson asked Nancy Martin to discuss the hike on April 17th. Nancy said they walked on Mink Hill Road to Wiggin Trace to the end, where it hooks into a trail from Henniker, and then to a trail that is closed now, to Schoolhouse Lane. There were about eight people on the walk. The scenery along the walk was wonderful. There are a lot of wetlands and beaver ponds. They were introduced to the Mink Hills Chapel, which is owned by a resident of Hopkinton. At the end of Wiggin Trace, there is a trail regularly used by ATVs. She had been asked to place a sign saying "No ATVs" at that intersection. People coming in from Henniker will now know that ATVs are not permitted on Class VI roads in Warner except for Hoyt Lane. A trail that connects with Wiggin Trace to Schoolhouse Lane is closed. It is posted as an Ausbon Sargent Conservation Easement property and is owned by Spencer Roy. The trail ran across private property so they have made it clear that they don't want people accessing that part of the Minks from the Schoolhouse Lane Trail.

Andy showed a photo of the intersection that shows the unnamed Class VI road where the sign was put up. There were visible ATV and 4WD vehicle tracks. Andy added that Mink Hill Road is quite wet and from the perspective of road use and wildlife and ecological value, it is going through areas that a road shouldn't go through. Parts were under water. Ideally, this shouldn't be a traversed area, particularly with vehicles. There was some discussion on the hike about whether or not the town can close the road during mud season. This will be discussed further at the June meeting.

Jason said they were also able to track the walk with the GIS map that Craig supplied. He tried to take some pictures of some of the wet areas as they were walking. He thinks they were probably tagged to the proper locations. Craig said he didn't see those points but said he would take another look. Craig said he did get the GPS track. Jason said there was no cell service at the start of the walk so he had to start it after they started.

Dave said that he, Rebecca Courser and her husband walked past the wet area before Sisco Trace and Wiggins Trace and saw evidence of ATV activity off Cunningham Road through the woods (to avoid the wet areas) on the western edge.

Nancy Martin wondered if a Beaver Deceiver on a strategic place on the pond would work. Sarah said that that may work for a year or two, but the deceivers don't work for long; they get bogged down with debris and buried in sand. Jason agreed and said that they saw evidence of this malfunction on the walk.

Nancy shared that Mike Amaral, on the Conservation Commission, attended Ausbon Sargent's Conservation Commission Roundtable meeting recently. There was discussion about the Beaver Deceivers, especially from the town of Andover. They are using seven deceivers and put them as part of Highway Department maintenance and have included in the budget money to manage them. They have volunteers who monitor and help maintain the deceivers to keep them functioning. Sarah said that if they don't have many options to close or reroute the road, this is something they may need to do. She prefers to remove the humans, but if that's not the case, they may need to resort to using the deceivers. Nancy said she would find out if any of the roads they are using the deceivers on in Andover were Class VI roads.

Clyde said something he noticed on the walk was the number of town boundary markers along the trail. This reinforces to him that other towns share the Minks and they need to work together.

Andy said he had thoughts of road access, timber tax, forestry, logging and recreation. Sarah said that this brings up the topic of advising loggers on how to stabilize roads. Clyde agreed. This is something that they should bring up with their Highway Department. Andy said there is a best practices management guide on minimizing impact in this regard.

Dave asked if the town is obligated to maintain a class VI road, what would happen if the beavers do what they do and continually flood the road? It was noted that the ATVs and 4WD vehicles are making the flooding worse. Nancy said that the vehicular traffic is breaking off the trail, going onto private road, damaging stone walls, etc.

Craig showed a Strava heat map showing the traffic in that area. He could differentiate bikers from walkers.

Nancy asked Clyde if he asked the Boundtree and Henniker ATV clubs to remove their signs. Clyde said he did. He has heard back from Henniker that they would remove their signs.

Foster Farm Visit

Andy said April 24th they visited Foster Farm off of West Joppa Road. Rebecca Courser said at one point, 30% of the population of Warner lived in this area. Rebecca led the group to a nice spot where there was a pond that was once a mill pond. The community land trust that is in the process of getting formed is trying to create more diversity with housing in Warner and being welcoming to a wider variety of people. Recreation was only part of the topic they talked about on the visit. There was other talk about education and what could be happening at the old farm for non-profit organizations regarding agriculture, passing on stories, and ecological and historical features. They talked about how the farm may be returned to a working farm. They also talked about nature wildness and outdoor recreation. Nancy Ladd, Nancy Martin and Jason Mutschler were present as well. An interesting theme was that the Mink Hills was a secret and

whether or not they should get the word out or not. There is tension between people on what to do in this regard. Andy said they talked about diversity and the future of Warner. Some discussion was had about not wanting to turn into a New London.

Nancy Martin said that at the Ausbon Sargent Roundtable meeting, Mike Amaral reported on the Fish & Game's presentation on Trails for People and Wildlife and the use of tracking activity using heat maps, etc. He felt that a number of people there were upset that all the extensive networks of trails they have built are probably doing more harm than good to wildlife.

Survey Slides – Nancy Martin

Nancy said the first survey, done in 2018 by the Friends of Mink Hills, was an effort to learn how the landowners felt about the increased activity and changing nature of the ATV traffic. She thinks there were 44 responses from landowners in the Minks. This does cause a bias.

The slides illustrate an array of feelings about the Minks, for example, the recreation there, limitations on OHRV use, and concerns that landowners have about the downside of inviting further recreation to the area.

The second survey, done in 2020 done by the Conservation Commission, assessed how people were feeling since the 2011 survey was done. They wanted to know if people were supportive about how conservation resources were used. The 2011 survey was essentially duplicated for 2020 to see how attitudes had changed over the last 9 years. There were 140 responses to this survey. This was town-wide, not just for landowners.

Andy asked if there were big changes in the answers about recreation from one survey to another. Nancy said she would look to see if there were any noticeable differences. The overall feeling was that people felt pretty much the same between the two years.

Nancy and Sarah agreed that they may not need to build more trails in the Minks if there are other trails available elsewhere in town.

Sarah said they are losing their window to address vernal pools. If others are out in the Minks and they pass a productive vernal pool, take note. They can try to get them on a map.

Nancy said she is involved in a UNH Cooperative Extension program (Coverts) where she learned that they have stopped mapping vernal pools. They are so unpredictable and disappear from year to year. Sarah said ecologically, that is one of the reasons they are so valuable; they come and go. When they come, they can produce enough salamanders for a couple years. That makes them more important for long-term protection. Nancy wondered if there was a biologist that could take a group out to teach people about vernal pools and their importance. Sarah said they could do this, but it is getting late in the season. This would be a good idea for next spring. Nancy said she would offer a vernal pool on her property to look at and map. Sarah said she could certainly do this.

Andy said he was on Wilder Lane and Badger Lane recently. He stopped some young people in a Jeep from going to Loud Lane. There are many who don't understand about mud season and don't read the signs.

Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee May 10, 2021 DRAFT

Nancy Martin said that weight limits can be used to post roads for mud season. Clyde said this is done in Warner. For all intents and purposes, these posted roads are closed to through traffic during mud season. They may need to add an additional sign saying "KEEP OUT" along with the weight limit sign.

Clyde said the next meeting would be held June 14, 2021 at 7pm via Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary

Town of Warner