

Upper Missisquoi and Trout Rivers Wild and Scenic Committee Minutes
Thursday, March 16th, 2023 6:30 PM – via Zoom

Attendees: Sarah Lunn, Jim MacCartney, Jacques Couture, Susan Staples, Wendy Scott, John Little, Russ Ford, Dan Seeley, and Lindsey Wight; guests included Megan Hampton, Dea Devlin, Roland Berube, Pam Ploof, Dean Pierce, Emmalee, Susan, an additional guest, and presenter Tyler Brown

The Value of Beaver-Created Wetland Habitat in Vermont: Tyler Brown from the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife presented on his multiple projects across the state navigating the sometimes tense relationship between humans and beavers in Vermont wetlands. Tyler runs the statewide Beaver Baffle Project which is supported through the Vermont Furbearer program. This program is a statewide program that allows landowners, road crews, and anyone having conflicts with beavers to find solutions that involve a compromise for landowner and beaver. They tend to receive around 400 calls per year, with around 50 site visits leading to ~15 installments of Beaver Baffles. Beaver Baffles are types of devices that help mitigate the water flow created when a beaver dams an area, and allows for the water to flow through the beaver baffle and create less of a flooded area. Common conflicts with beavers include the damming of culverts (and other similar running water) which can lead to threatening roadways, floods, and property. Baffles work by water entering the pipe, flowing over the dam, and that keeps the water levels stable without disturbing the beavers dam. The protection and preservation of beavers is important because of how wetland functions. Beaver dams slow water, let sediments fall out, and create the basis of the food web which is vital for supporting wildlife and people. Inactive beaver areas also provide protection for wildlife and can be incentivized by installing bird boxes, pollinator habitat, volunteering, and donating for projects that protect beavers. Anyone with beaver issues can reach out directly to Tyler Brown at tyler.brown@vermont.gov.

Business meeting was called to order at 7:07pm

Review of the February meeting minutes: JL motioned to approve minutes; SS seconded; minutes were approved as written.

Updates on business from the February meeting: The newsletter has been mailed out. John visited with the landowner in East Richford where we'd like to put an access point and parking – seemed intrigued by the idea; JL will revisit sometime this spring/early summer.

Event Overview: Our guided snowshoe events were complicated but also successful this year – the cold temps led us to cancel the Orleans County event; Jared would like to lead a paddle tour instead – this is now scheduled for June 24th. The Franklin County event happened despite the snowstorm on March 4th. A great crew turned up, even though circumstances made neither Sarah (sickness) nor Lindsey (truck stuck in a snowbank) able to attend: our great hosts and Nancy Patch pulled off the event seamless!

Administrative: Discussion of best ways to reach towns – should we “trial” the idea of sending postcards as recruitment to one of our towns and see if it is successful, or just send recruiting postcards to all towns at once? JL motioned to send all at once; WS seconded; motioned passed. Other points of discussion included trying to attract student reps (for the summertime, at least?), and playing on people's fear of missing out with the language we use: “Spots are open... here's your chance”, etc.
ACTION ITEM SL will finalize postcard design

- **Staffing:** JC summarized the results of Lindsey's review (which sort of became a review of how the Committee functions, as well); thank you to all who responded to the online survey form, and to the executive committee who conducted the review. Some suggestions included: making a written annual workplan, so there is something to review against; add a "business from the previous meeting" to each agenda, so we keep on top of things; add a "to-do" list (send this out earlier in the month), so people remember what they said they would do before the next meeting – or else **BOLD** action items in the minute and flag them to call attention; send a meeting reminder the Monday before the meeting. One other thing that came up is our hiring process. Do we need to follow/develop any particular protocols? The Committee can make decisions in its usual fashion – personnel are technically hired by the MRBA, which then provides services to UMATR – so hiring staff needs to follow MRBA procurement procedures (hiring contractors is different).

ACTION ITEM LW will draft up a workplan for the next meeting and adjust the minutes and agenda as outlined.

2024 Budget: Lindsey presented 3 different budgets for us to consider: Version A reduces town grants, and keeps events and projects high; Version B reduces grants, events, and projects, but all only a small amount; Version C reduces events/projects, but keeps grants high. After discussion, DS motioned that we accept Budget Version B; SS seconded; and the motion passed. WS said that we should commit to fundraising to make up for the lack. Lindsey will send out the finalized budget to all.

Grants/Projects: Trout Brook signage, discussed last meeting: UMATR will fund \$37.50 for the signs; they will be installed by NFC or VTF&W.

Open House: March 19th 9-11am, please come – enjoy visitors, the office space, coffee and baked good from local businesses.

2023 Upcoming Events: Sunday Mar 19: New Office Open House – 9-11am. Tuesday Mar 21: Amphibian Road Crossing Training – 7-8pm via Zoom. Thursday Mar 23: MRBA's River Community Soiree. April/May: Salamander Night Patrol. May 20: Richford BioBlitz. June 17: Flatwater Paddle Instruction. June 17: FCNRCD Fishing Festival. June 24: Nature Paddle with Jared Nunery. July 9: Swiftwater Paddle Instruction. July 15: Missisquoi River Paddle-Pedal.

Winter Speaker Series – April 20 – geology of Northern Vermont

Other/Public Comment: JL has been communicating with Tim Palmer – planted the seed of doing a book on PWSRs. He's pretty booked up for a year or two, but hopefully in the future; JL will circle back in a few months. Perhaps we can identify some potential funding sources.

Upcoming meetings: May 11 – potluck at the office. Lindsey has a conflict (will be canoeing!) on May 18th, so we have moved this meeting up a week.

DS motioned to adjourn; SS seconded; meeting adjourned at 8:28pm.