

Minutes for September 27, 2022

RSC Representatives present: Anne Slugg, Chair (Sudbury), Emma Lord (NPS), Ron Chick (Framingham), Dan Cook (Carlisle), Christine Dugan (Lincoln-Alt), Bill Fadden (Framingham-Alt), Alison Field-Juma (OARS), Marlies Henderson (Billerica and Lead River Ambassador), Linh Phu (USFWS), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt), Katherine Sorrows (Assistant River Ambassador)

RSC Representatives absent: Amber Carr (SVT), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Trek Reef (Billerica-Alt), Frank Richichi (Bedford-Alt)

7:01 pm Ms. Field-Juma opened the meeting. The Council welcomed Dan Cook, the new Carlisle representative.

7:07 pm Ms. Field-Juma asked for edits to the July minutes. Ms. Henderson made one correction and then motioned to accept the minutes with that correction. Mr. Chick seconded, and the minutes passed unanimously.

7:09 pm **River Ambassadors Report**

Ms. Henderson began the season overview of the River Ambassadors' work. The River Ambassadors met with Mass Audubon staff at Brewster Woods along the Concord River to give their input on a new river access and the possibility of making it ADA accessible. The Ambassadors joined several OARS outings to pull water chestnuts from the Concord River. The Ambassadors led many paddles, including sunset, twilight, and Sturgeon Moon trips. Ms. Henderson continued her bimonthly cleaning of the dissolved oxygen logger upstream of the Talbot Dam. She and Ms. Sorrows paddled the entire length of the SuAsCo Wild and Scenic segments over the course of this season. Ms. Henderson continued to work on social media postings even after the River Ambassador season ended. She continues to work with OARS as a volunteer and continues to clear the logger for the dissolved oxygen study. She also leads paddles for the Billerica Recreation Department and the Shawsheen River Watershed Association.

The Ambassadors researched and compiled the names of organizations the Council can work with moving forward, such as farmers markets, conservation groups, etc. They had several suggestions for creating more diverse activities and outreach in 2023. These included creating a structured calendar, adding guided walks as well as paddles, attending more farmers markets, conducting survey questions which have quantifiable values, reaching out to South Bridge Boat House about leading paddles with rented boats from their location, and reaching out early in the season to ask about any planned river programming in member towns, such as fishing derbies. They suggested attending farmers markets from the beginning of the Ambassadors' next season. While working at the Carlisle farmers market Ms. Sorrows learned that several people wanted to join in river cleanups. Many were interested in attending paddles but did not have their own boats. Ms. Sorrows created a shared Google album of photographs from every paddle this season, including their geographic locations. She compiled relevant conversations with people she and Ms. Henderson met over the season. She presented charts to the Council on river usage, noting those who used canoes, any type of kayak, paddleboards, bass boats, or who fished from the shore. She charted how frequent their trips to the river were, from those there for the first time to those who came multiple times per week. Most people had their own transportation to the river for themselves and their boats for Ambassador-led paddles. This data came only from people that the River Ambassadors spoke to. It does not reflect every recreational user they saw on the river. Multilingual signs warning that fish were not safe to eat were placed at the Bedford and Carlisle boat launches by the Bedford Board of Health.

Mr. Cook asked if the Ambassadors saw any fish kills due to the drought. They did not see any. Ms. Field-Juma said that OARS looked for reports of fish kills and cyanobacteria blooms occurring this year, as those are the worst events that can happen during a drought. They did not find any. She said that this year we had a flash drought, which is occurring more often. Flash drought conditions occur with both a lack of rainfall and very high temperatures at the same time. Conditions worsen more rapidly in flash droughts than in other droughts.

Ms. Phu referred to Ms. Sorrows' list of potential SuAsCo partners. She said that she belongs to POCIE, the Massachusetts Professionals of Color in the Environment. She thought that the River Ambassadors could consider lending boats and leading a paddle for that organization, perhaps along the Assabet River.

Commenting on Ms. Sorrows' presentation, Mr. Chick said that he was surprised that 9% of boats that the River Ambassadors encountered were inflatables. He thought it would be helpful if the River Ambassadors could leave a volunteer sign-up sheet for river clean ups when they were working at local farmers markets, and pass that along to the town representatives.

7:46 pm **Sudbury River intersex fish study**

Mr. Sciacca referred to a 2008 USGS study on endocrine disruptors in the Sudbury River in which intersex fish were discovered. Mr. Sciacca recently reached out to the USGS to see if the Council could commission a simple follow up study. He learned that a new study would have to involve a scientist at the river and the fish would have to be immediately analyzed there on the river. Portions of the fish can be frozen and analyzed for various other contaminants after the initial sampling. The USGS staff thought that there might not be much of a correlation between PFAS and intersex fish, but that mercury might act as an endocrine disruptor. Mr. Sciacca noted that there is a lot of mercury in our river. Mr. Cook spoke about endocrine disruptors found near wastewater treatment plants. He wondered if, under the climate sections of the Inflation Reduction Act, there might be money available for this particular study. Mr. Sciacca noted that the source of the endocrine disruptors is unknown. Ms. Lord asked if there was general agreement that the Council should continue discussions with USGS about commissioning this new study for approximately \$10,000. Mr. Sciacca suggested that the USGS be encouraged to leverage any additional funding where appropriate. Ms. Slugg did not favor asking the USGS to fund a second study. She thought the first study would be useful as it is proposed, and the Council could allocate more money for a second study depending on what it learns after the first study is completed. Ms. Lord said that she would contact the USGS to further the conversation on this issue.

8:03 pm **Riverfest and awards 2023**

Ms. Lord reminded the Council about a previous discussion on whether Riverfest should continue in its current form of about 20-30 events over one weekend or whether events could be offered over a longer time frame. She said that conversation could be the next item for discussion or perhaps taken up by a new Riverfest Subcommittee. Topics for the subcommittee would include the ways in which River Ambassador work could tie in with a Riverfest outreach event and whether Riverfest should be a series of events or limited to a specific weekend.

Ms. Henderson thought the entire Council should be involved in the discussion. Ms. Field-Juma liked the idea of a new approach but thought the concept of Riverfest could be lost if events were spread over many weeks. Mr. Chick spoke in favor of maintaining Riverfest as one weekend of events and said that the River Ambassadors are laying a good foundation for more Riverfest promotion. Ms. Lord said she had received feedback from the most recent Riverfest. Many people found the timing difficult this year due to several factors. Some reasons included: Riverfest fell on a 3-day weekend when they planned to be away, it was a struggle to get people to help host events, due to staff turnovers our partner organizations have lost their institutional knowledge of planning Riverfest events. Riverfest is not as turnkey as it used to be. She thought it would be a good time to reimagine what Riverfest could be in the future. An earlier date in June was discussed, although the cooler weather and the graduation season were thought to be drawbacks. A fall Riverfest weekend was discussed, with the advantages being the changing foliage and warmer water. Ms. Slugg thought some events, like paddles and a photography session, could be offered throughout the season but believed it was important to have a hub with lots of events to encourage turnout, especially among families. Ms. Field-Juma thought an earlier day in June would introduce people to the river's recreational opportunities and encourage future visits later that

season. Ms. Henderson and Mr. Chick agreed to form a Riverfest subcommittee. Ms. Phu said that after any changes to the programming have been decided she and some staff members could consider how GMNWR could re-engage in Riverfest. Ms. Lord suggested that the new subcommittee could come back in October with recommendations to the full Council about how to proceed with Riverfest. Ms. Lord said the League of Women Voters has expressed an interest in continuing to be involved with the Riverfest Award each year or perhaps every few years because it is challenging to get nominations every year. The award ceremony could be added to the Riverfest discussion on outreach and events.

8:17 pm Ms. Lord said the Community Grant RFP has been posted since mid-August. The application deadline is October 11th. She has received two applications so far and asked Council members to help advertise this grant opportunity. The community grants are open to nonprofits and municipalities for any projects ranging from \$500 to \$15,000 and are intended to protect and enhance the rivers and their value.

8:10 pm Ms. Lord said that the Partnership WSR is having a gathering on the Wekiva PWSR in Florida from Dec. 7-9 this year. There is an attempt every 2 years to have an NPS gathering of WSR staff and members of each of the 16 Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Councils. Ms. Field-Juma and Mr. Chick previously expressed interest in attending. This would be an opportunity to meet with people from other river councils and with National Park Service staff from other areas in the Northeast as well as Florida. This opportunity could be covered with RSC funding if anyone is interested in attending.

8:22 pm Ms. Field-Juma spoke about a September river clean up at Stone's Bridge in Wayland. There was a good turnout of volunteers who did not find much trash but did find a lot of wood and debris that had piled up under the bridge. Wayland's DPW generously agreed to dispose of the debris.

8:23 pm Ms. Field-Juma said that the Merrimack River Watershed Council is designing a website, a webpage, and a story map on the Talbot Dam. Basic items such as press meetings about the possibility of removing the dam are on the OARS website. She thought the MEPA review process could begin at the end of October.

8:25 pm Mr. Chick said that he is collaborating with Framingham's Planning Department and Disability Commission to advocate for an ADA dock. They have submitted a grant for a site on Lake Waushakum because of its easy access and because it is in an Environmental Justice community. Another Framingham grant was submitted for an observation platform on Little Farms Road end of the Carol Getchell Trail. The deck will be approximately 15 by 25 feet. Mass Audubon expressed interest in collaborating on that project because of their work with the Framingham schools. They believe the platform could serve as an educational setting for instruction. Mass Audubon submitted a letter of support for the grant application. He asked the Council to submit a letter of support as well. There was general agreement in favor of the letter of support among Council members

8:32 pm Ms. Phu reported on this year's water chestnut control project on the Sudbury River. GMNWR contracted with Mass Wetlands and Waterways for two chemical treatments of a section of the river south of the Refuge's Headquarters. These parcels are located on federal, state, and private lands and required a Notice of Intent for both Wayland and Sudbury as well as state approval. The treatments were so successful that she has budgeted only for an assessment next year and for spot treatments if necessary. She said this approach worked much better than using their extra-large harvester and hopes this is the beginning of an ability to keep water chestnuts at bay.

8:36 pm Ms. Field-Juma announced that the Council's next meeting would be on October 25th. She then adjourned the meeting.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan