



Minutes for February 28, 2023

RSC Representatives present: Anne Slugg, Chair (Sudbury), Dan Cook (Carlisle), Sam Corbin (SVT), Christine Dugan (Lincoln-Alt), Bill Fadden (Framingham-Alt), Alison Field-Juma (OARS), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Marlies Henderson (Billerica), Linh Phu (USFWS), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt)

RSC Representatives absent: Ron Chick (Framingham), Carlene Hempel (Concord), Emma Lord (NPS), Trek Reef (Billerica-Alt), Frank Richichi (Bedford-Alt)

Guest: Stephanie Koch (USFWS)

7:02 Ms. Slugg opened the meeting by saying that she would act as Chair in place of Ms. Lord, who was traveling for work. Ms. Slugg asked for corrections to the January Minutes. There were none. Ms. Field-Juma motioned to accept the Minutes as circulated, Mr. Sciacca seconded and the motion passed 10-0.

Updates

7:10 pm Ms. Slugg said that River Ambassador Applications are open. The RSC has yet to receive any applicants.

7:12 pm Ms. Field-Juma invited Council members to attend a SuAsCo Climate Coalition meeting on March 1st. Building green infrastructure in local communities and dam removal are 2 of the agenda items. This is a watershed wide climate resiliency organization which includes local community members and some nonprofits. Council members are also invited to the March 3rd Music and Water concert by the Concord Conservatory which the RSC funded with a community grant. Ms. Field-Juma will speak about the SuAsCo at that event.

7:14 pm Ms. Slugg said that there would be a public hearing on March 2nd about the Mass Central Rail Trail expansion. Mr. Sciacca explained that the Trail now runs from Weston into Wayland Center. Planning has begun to continue it along the Washbrook marsh into Sudbury. MassDOT will lead the meeting. Mr. Sciacca said that because the design work had federal funding the RSC has an official responsibility to offer comments. The RSC is advisory to the NPS. Linda Hansen, Wayland's Conservation Administrator, has submitted comments saying that the confluence of the Washbrook Marsh and Sudbury River is the most ecologically sensitive and important wildlife habitat in Wayland. The proposed Rail Trail is located within priority and estimated habitats for rare and threatened species. Mr. Sciacca had some suggestions for RSC comments, including banning dogs on this part of the Trail and installing multiple signs explaining how valuable the habitat is. Ms. Phu said that DOT will have to work through the NEPA process that looks at all the federally listed species, critical habitat, and migratory birds in the area. She wondered if the public meeting concerned a NOI. Mr. Sciacca did not think the process has gotten that far. Ms. Phu noted that Eversource is putting in a high transmission line from Sudbury to Hudson. They have partnered with DCR and other proponents of the Rail Trail to build a stronger case for doing this work. Her biggest concern is that new paved trails and long connecting trails will invite activities such as dog walking and bike riding which would potentially have negative impacts on the Refuge. Mr. Cook wondered who would maintain this new section and who would police it. Ms. Phu thought that most probably DCR would be responsible for maintenance. Ms. Henderson thought that the Trail expansion would be beneficial. She noted that the area around the railroad track is swampy and overgrown, and that there is poor usage by some people. She thought that with a new trail and educational signs, usage would be more controlled. Mr. Sciacca thought the expansion would encourage new visitors to the marsh area who were unlikely ever to visit it by boat. He wondered about effective controls to keep visitors from damaging this sensitive and valuable environment. Ms. Field-Juma thought the expansion would be a good opportunity to have people

see the WSR and learn about wetlands. Ms. Slugg said that she would reach out to the Sudbury Conservation Commission to learn what they think about the project and when the RSC's comments would be needed.

Ms. Phu announced that she had received a promotion and will be moving to the Washington, DC area. She will lead the Visitor Services department for the entire National Wildlife Refuge system. She introduced USFWS Biologist Stephanie Koch, saying that Ms. Koch would be the RSC's new USFWS representative.

7:44 pm Mr. Fadden noted that the RSC has not had a state representative for quite some time. Ms. Slugg said that we have been unable to fill 2 vacant seats. A discussion followed on actions the RSC might take to try to fill those positions. Ms. Slugg said that the topic would be put on the March meeting agenda.

7:47 pm Ms. Slugg opened a discussion on the Council's 2023-2024 Workplan and Budget. She started with a review of the preliminary FY2024 Budget. She listed the amount designated for each line item: \$2,200 to be paid to SVT for the RSC's Financial Administration; \$540 for website maintenance and administration; \$250 for membership in the Mass Rivers Alliance; \$500 for RSC storage of educational and promotional materials; \$35,000 for Internal Projects; and \$5,000 for Education and Outreach. Ms. Slugg said that she and Ms. Lord were proposing to budget \$35,000 for the River Ambassador program, which would include any items the Ambassadors would need to fulfill their jobs. The Lead Ambassador would be more of a year-round position to help with social media posts, outreach, and would spend more time on the river than the Ambassadors did in 2022. She said that this budget did not include Partner Grant Proposals or the anticipated \$40,000 that has been discussed for Community Grants. Ms. Slugg asked for a vote to approve the non-Partner Grants portion of the FY2024 budget with the understanding that any unspent money would be added to Community Grants funding. The vote was 10-0 in favor.

Ms. Field-Juma and Ms. Corbin recused themselves from the meeting before discussion began on Partner Grants.

Partner Grant Proposals

7:58 pm Ms. Slugg opened the Partner Grant discussion with Mass Audubon's request for \$35,000 for "Rivers to Sea: Metro West RiverSchools" programming, including new programs outside of school hours and in underserved communities. Ms. Phu said Mass Audubon has been on the forefront of DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility) issues. She would have liked to see more clarity in their proposal, such as which of the schools they are working with are targeting which underrepresented communities, and how they are reaching them. She said it is important for organizations working in underrepresented communities not to tell them what they want or need but to work with them to offer what they might be interested in. She wondered if Mass Audubon would be offering multilingual programs and highlighting particular interests of each community, outreach actions that would build connections instead of only offering traditional programs. She did not see those issues discussed in the proposal. Ms. Phu thought part of the problem might have been not being able to find right teacher. Ms. Slugg said that she would ask Mass Audubon about the issues Ms. Phu raised. Mr. Hammond said that it is difficult for Mass Audubon to find teachers with the time to dedicate to working on RiverSchools. He wondered if Mass Audubon might consider working with town recreation departments instead. Ms. Slugg said she would bring that up that idea with Mass Audubon. She noted that Mass Audubon has primarily worked with schools in Sudbury and Wayland. She said that this year they are branching out by working in the more culturally diverse communities of Billerica and Framingham.

8:12 pm Ms. Slugg asked for comments on SVT's proposal of \$16,440 for "Land Protection and Stewardship in the SuAsCo Watershed." Mr. Sciacca appreciated that the proposal included several stewardship projects directly along the river. Ms. Phu said that it would be a good practice when reviewing Partner Proposals to look at what parts of the RSC's Strategic Plan the partner organization is addressing. The proposal should benefit RSC goals, such as supporting scenic or natural resource values, or addressing water quality. A discussion followed on updating the RSC's Strategic Plan with the goal of capturing additional work. Ms. Slugg said that she and Ms. Lord would work on language for the Strategic Plan which would introduce goals and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) objectives. Ms. Henderson motioned to update the Strategic Plan to include SMART objectives, adding some metrics and measurable targets. Mr. Fadden seconded, and the motion passed 8-0.

8: 25 pm Ms. Slugg asked if there were any questions about CISMA's proposal of \$7,900 for invasives management. There was a short discussion about CISMA being physically located at SVT but being its own entity and submitting a grant for its own work.

8:33 pm Ms. Slugg took up OARS' proposal of \$30,845 to fund "Science and Stakeholder Engagement for Ecological Restoration." Ms. Henderson was happy to see a partnership with the new management of the South Bridge Boathouse. Ms. Phu thought it was very well written and that it laid out very specific objectives and measurables that can be related back to the RSC's Strategic Plan and Conservation Plan. Mr. Cook said the monitoring was excellent work.

8:35 pm The Council considered Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust's proposal of \$7,750 for anadromous fish monitoring in addition to headstarting and monitoring Blanding's turtles.

8:38 pm Ms. Slugg motioned that the Council fully fund all the Partner Proposals. That motion passed 8-0.

9: 01 pm Mr. Cook said that Carlisle will have an Earth Day event this year and hoped that the RSC would participate. The town is offering the RSC a booth and the opportunity to talk about the Council's protection efforts.

9:12 pm Ms. Phu motioned to adjourn, Ms. Henderson seconded and the motion passed 8-0.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan