



River Stewardship Council Minutes for July 26, 2022

RSC Representatives present: Anne Slugg, Chair (Sudbury), Emma Lord (NPS), Ron Chick (Framingham), Christine Dugan (Lincoln-Alt), Bill Fadden (Framingham-Alt), Alison Field-Juma (OARS), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Marlies Henderson (Billerica and River Ambassador), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt), Frank Richichi (Bedford-Alt), Katherine Sorrows (River Ambassador)

RSC Representatives absent: Amber Carr (SVT), Linh Phu (USFWS), Trek Reef (Billerica-Alt)

7:06 pm Ms. Field-Juma opened the meeting and asked for any corrections to the June Minutes. Ms. Henderson offered two edits. She then motioned that the Council accept the Minutes as corrected. Ms. Lord seconded. The motion passed with a vote of 9-0.

7:11 pm River Ambassador Report

Ms. Henderson said that she and Ms. Sorrows had filled map boxes with 60 OARS maps at each kiosk along the river. All the maps were gone by the end of the month. She suggested that at the September meeting the Council discuss the possibility of posting QR codes for the OARS maps at various kiosks. She shared photos of low water at various points along the river and spoke about the visible evidence of drought that she and Ms. Sorrows saw on their many paddles. A discussion followed on what the current gauge reading was at the Saxonville dam and whether this was very different from other years. Mr. Sciacca said that the reading had been as low as 2 CFS in the past. Ms. Field-Juma searched online and discovered that the number was 8 CFS on July 26, 1993, which was not much different from the current day's reading of 11.8 CFS. Ms. Henderson shared photos of parking lots on the weekend of July 9-10th, saying that there were no cars at the boat launch on Route 117. The lots were busier in Bedford and Carlisle.

Ms. Henderson and Ms. Sorrows attended the Drying Rivers and Drought webinar by Mass Rivers Alliance. Dam removal was discussed as being a cost effective and important resilience strategy. A Slovakian scientist explained the New Water Paradigm which differentiates between the Small Water Cycle (recirculation of moisture on land) and the Long Water Cycle (drawing moisture primarily from the ocean). The River Ambassadors also assisted with collecting samples for the Dragonfly Mercury Project. Ms. Henderson attended a Middlesex Canal Commission meeting on what the liabilities to the Middlesex Canal Commission and the Middlesex County Association would be if they were to accept ownership of the dam. A vote to seek legal advice and draft a letter of intent to the dam owner passed. Eric Hutchins from NOAA listed other considerations that would need to be addressed if the dam was purchased: \$100,000+ in needed repairs, an ongoing engineering report, an emergency response plan, and noted that by law, fish passage must be provided.

Ms. Sorrows showed several photos of the low water levels she documented in early July. She said that turtles and birds were abundant. Ms. Sorrows said she attended the First Religious Society of Carlisle's annual paddle which starts at Route 225. There were 21 attendees. Boats were provided for half the attendees which gave them river access they would not have otherwise had. She also attended the Carlisle Conservation picnic and mentioned the need for a SuAsCo representative from Carlisle. Ms. Henderson said that Mr. Sciacca led a boat tour for the River Ambassadors along the Sudbury River in Wayland. They viewed multiple historical bridges, including the Old Town Bridge which was first built in 1643. It was the first frame bridge in Middlesex County, the first 4 arch stone bridge in Massachusetts, and Native Americans were forced to walk over it during King Philip's War. Mr. Sciacca also included a land tour near Wolbach Farm where they saw the original road over the river. Ms. Sorrows showed photos of Concord trips where the water had dropped significantly and her paddle nearly touched the bottom of the river for much of the time. Ms. Henderson spoke of recording data for the dissolved oxygen study.

Ms. Field Juma asked if the people attending the river paddles were mainly repeat visitors or if they were new each time, and also wondered where Ms. Henderson posted about upcoming trips on social media. Ms. Henderson thought that there were a lot of repeat paddlers. She said that she posted on Instagram and Facebook, on the SuAsCo website, Boat Beautiful Billerica, and with the Shawsheen River Water Association because she knows people there.

Ms. Sorrows spent a few hours at the Bedford boat launch in July. She mainly saw motorboats and people fishing. Ms. Sorrows said that she sees many inflatable boats when she is on the river. She has had difficulties talking to people at the Bedford boat launch because perhaps 50% speak Spanish and only minimal English. She tried to talk to one Portuguese-speaking family fishing next to a sign warning about not eating the fish. She noticed that they had a cooler full of fish. She wondered if the Council could install multi-lingual signs. A discussion followed on how to have signs created in Spanish and Portuguese as well as in English and how the Council could obtain a list from Mass DEP on the places where the signs need to be posted. In general Ms. Sorrows thought that the River Ambassadors were not reaching many young people. Most of the people she meets are older or retired, with the exception of those at the South Bridge Boat House. Mr. Sciacca advised her to go to the Route 20 boat launch where he see lots of families. In conversations she had along the river many people said they visited the river regularly, though there were also many who said it was their first time. Many remarked on the birds they saw, especially herons. Ms. Sorrows herself saw an osprey nest. She sees lots of people in motorboats but has not asked them survey questions. Ms. Field-Juma suggested that perhaps we should think about including them in conversations next year. Ms. Sorrows said that Mr. Sciacca had provided her with the locations for local fishing spots which she visited. She said that she and Ms. Henderson were moving forward with planning outreach at local farmer's markets as well as to other local groups. They have planned their August paddles.

8:08 pm Ms. Slugg thanked the River Ambassadors for all their work, for reporting back on river conditions and on what they saw on their many paddles. She said their presentations were always informative and interesting and that the Council always learned new things from them.

8:10 pm Ms. Sorrows said that she is planning to organize all the photos that she and Ms. Henderson took over the summer by date and location and place them in a folder on Google Drive which would be accessible to the Council. Ms. Field-Juma suggested that she send some drought photos to Mass Rivers Alliance to use in their literature.

8:13 pm **Riverfest Assessment**

Ms. Lord said that the next item on the agenda was the Riverfest Assessment. She wondered if the Council would like to postpone that discussion to the September meeting, considering that the planned discussion time was 35-40 minutes and the meeting was running late. Ms. Sorrows asked if Ms. Lord could share some brief thoughts on the topic since she might not be able to attend the next meeting. Ms. Slugg said that the Co-Chairs were not interested as much in reflecting upon what we have done in the past, but are more interested in discussing how we are approaching Riverfests in general and why we are having them.

Ms. Lord thought we could take a step back and look at past Riverfests as a whole. She shared an outline of steps for re-thinking Riverfest. She said our goals had always been celebrating the Wild & Scenic River, building constituencies, and engaging as many people as possible. She said that there have been recent difficulties in planning events. We haven't always had the capacity to lead events. Organizations that have participated in the past have had large staff turnovers, meaning that the new staff has no organizational knowledge about what types of events and activities their organization has put on in the past. She said that a result of COVID people are shifting their priorities and how they spend their time on summer weekends. She said that this is an opportunity for the Council to reimagine how Riverfest could be held, perhaps it would mean hosting a series of events or a mix of music and art events. Perhaps it would take place over multiple weekends and not be limited to summer. She asked Council members to think about this before the September meeting and to send her any ideas they have.

Ms. Sorrows thought we should reconsider our children's events. They didn't seem interested in the last ponding activity and she thought that perhaps we could teach them to kayak or canoe. She also said that people she met on the river had suggested a river clean up. Mr. Chick thought a scenic paddle in the fall would be good. Mr. Sciacca said that we should give some thought to getting people who don't own boats out on the river. Ms. Field-Juma said that a past photography event was popular, as were history paddles. She thinks fish are a big draw for families but it has been extremely difficult to get the needed equipment. Ms. Field-Juma thought perhaps we could rent boats and hire someone to drive people to the river. Ms. Henderson thought we could reach out to Recreation Departments to see if they have boats or fishing equipment we could borrow.

8:29 pm **Community Grant RFP's**

It was agreed that Community Grant range would be increased to \$500-\$15,000 per applicant and that the RFP would be released in August, with an early October deadline for submission.

8:46 Mr. Chick reported that water chestnut removal in Framingham has been extremely successful and that the river is wide open.

8:47 pm The River Ambassadors will email Council members about choosing a date for the Council's August paddle. Ms. Lord will share the final reports received from Community Grant recipients and a copy of the final Community Grant RFP.

8:48 pm. Ms. Field-Juma moved to adjourn, Ms. Henderson seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan