

SuAsCo RSC Minutes for November 26, 2024

RSC Representatives present: Marlies Henderson, Chair (Billerica), Emma Lord (NPS), Elissa Brown (Lead River Ambassador), Matt Brown (OARS), Ron Chick (Framingham), Dan Cook (Carlisle), John Drobinski (Sudbury), Christine Dugan (Lincoln), Bill Fadden (Framingham), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Stephanie Koch (USFWS), Laura Mattei (SVT), Tom Sciacca (Wayland),
RSC Representatives absent: Carlene Hempel (Concord), Frank Richichi (Bedford-Alt), Eric Simms (Wayland-Alt)

Guests: Jane Calvin (Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust), Kristin O'Brien (SVT)

Welcome and October Minutes

7:02 pm Ms. Henderson opened the meeting. She asked if there were any changes to the October Minutes. Ms. Mattei had an attribution correction. Mr. Sciacca motioned to accept the Minutes as amended, Ms. Mattei seconded, and the motion passed 8-0 with 3 abstentions.

2023-2024 Partner Grant Presentations

7:04 pm Ms. Lord introduced Jane Calvin from the **Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust (LP&CT)** to speak about its grant. Ms. Calvin began with the LP&CT's Alewife Monitoring program at Centennial Island. She said that volunteer monitors counted fish for 10 minutes every hour, 7 days a week, from May until June. The 2024 season was the first time that 100% of every counting day had at least nine total counts, which makes it statistically valuable. Unfortunately, the monitors did not see any alewife this year. She said the recovery of striped bass has been so successful that herring are scared off from using the fish elevator. The dam's trash gate was replaced by the owner and was lowered so that eel will not be caught. She and Matt Brown are working on a cooperative grant to NOAA which has a deadline of February 2025. They have spoken with fisheries biologists and others about designing a replacement fish ladder. Some changes could include moving the ladder to the other side of the river, making it longer and with a lower slope, and designing it for an optimal submergence depth of 18" for herring. They are considering multiple weirs to create a natural rock ramp.

7:16 pm Ms. Calvin said that the RSC's grant enabled the LP&CT to protect over 100 Blanding's turtle hatchlings in 2024. Eight of the neediest hatchlings are currently being cared for by volunteers in LP&CT's offices. As a result of having so many women volunteers, LP&CT has launched a Women in Stewardship program. LP&CT uses radio telemetry to track the turtles year-round. Volunteers have given over 1,700 service hours this year. LP&CT is working with students in three local schools. The Blanding's turtle program is overseen by Mass Wildlife and Zoo New England through their permitting processes.

7:26 pm Ms. Lord introduced Kristin O'Brien from SVT to discuss its **SuAsCo CISMA grant**. Ms. O'Brien reported that their grant included \$900 for website maintenance and \$7,000 for the CISMA Small Grants program. Website maintenance involved administrative tasks, server migration, and a new feature that allows Weed Warrior partners to manage participant registrations for their events. Three CISMA Small Grant proposals were funded for a total cost of \$6,110. The Acton Conservation Dept. received \$3,100 to supplement their MVP grant for removing invasives and creating rain gardens. The Hudson Land Trust (HLT) received \$1,213. It worked with the Hudson Conservation Commission and a consultant to train volunteer Weed Warriors. HLT organized two training sessions on identifying invasive plants. Starting in May 2024,

weekly Weed Warrior events began on a property located next to the Assabet River and which connects to the Assabet River Trail. The Friends of Minuteman National Park were awarded \$1,760 to support a horticultural intern to manage invasive plants located primarily in the North Bridge Unit of the Park. Much of that work was done directly along the river. The intern worked with many volunteers, including over 100 students.

7:37 pm Ms. Henderson invited Ms. Mattei to give **SVT's Presentation**. Ms. Mattei spoke about **SVT's** involvement with the Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA). The MCA includes 36 communities that support both land protection and stewardship. **SVT** dedicated a Conservation Associate to work with, and to help rejuvenate, the MCA. The MCA's February meeting had 40 participants from 18 communities, which was a record high. The discussion at that meeting was about SVT's recently completed land priority analyses. MCA has since met with 16 communities to discuss prioritization, maps, and action plans. Ms. Mattei said that MCA has worked on an outstanding number of Bumblebee Project activities. They had 50 attendees at Carlisle's United Unitarian church for a winter workshop. They had a full auditorium for their presentation at the Chelmsford Garden Club. Both Westford and Chelmsford TV stations broadcast interviews with them. The Bumblebee Project hosted six garden tours with a total of 100 attendees. Through MCA Kristin O'Brien helped to revitalize SVT's Deer Management-Forest Health Subcommittee.

SVT worked on land protection for the Conant project in Acton. It has a co-held CR with the Acton Conservation Dept. which protects 57 acres along the Rail Trail and Nashoba Brook. That land is important for water supply. SVT worked on land protection for the Eastern Greenway in Harvard, which is an important wildlife corridor. There have been delays at the state level for approving CR's for SVT properties in Berlin (100 acres), Concord (6.7 acres along the Concord River), and Upton (94 acres). SVT's stewardship efforts included volunteer work and an herbicide application for invasives at the Greenways in Wayland. SVT works every year on buckthorn removal at the Elliot Concord River Preserve. That property includes rare plant habitat. SVT worked on plant mapping and organized volunteer Weed Warriors for invasive plant control at Wolbach Farm.

7:50 pm Ms. Henderson moved on to OARS' presentation. Mr. Brown used **OARS'** newly redesigned website to share his presentation. He began with the importance of **Water Quality** and Quantity and biomass monitoring which are documented in the website's River Science section. He noted that OARS' Annual Reports and Water Quality reports are available to download. OARS conducted bacteria flow and water chemistry monitoring for all three rivers in 2024. That data will be submitted to Mass DEP. In the past year OARS has done some small focus studies, such as assisting Green Acton with their phosphorus study and conducting several dissolved oxygen studies, including the Talbot Mill impoundment. Their River Report Card is an important part of OARS' water quality science. **Policy and Advocacy** efforts include action alerts on OARS' website in addition to Support and Comment letters on issues such as the proposed plan to expand TMDL's and legislative invasive species and drought bills. Over the past year OARS delivered many public presentations on ecological restoration projects, and on dam removal in particular. OARS gave expert testimony at the State House concerning PFAS in water and also discussed stewardship, its monitoring efforts, and the River Report Card. OARS published an updated Water Chestnut Management Plan and hosted three river cleanups.

OARS' Community Engagement efforts included water chestnut pulls in Billerica and Acton, planting a rain garden in Marlborough, and hosting a training session on rain garden installations and maintenance that was open to the public. OARS provides public updates via its website and two newsletters. Last summer it hosted a public swim at the Bedford boat ramp and paddles at RiverFest, Boats and Brews, and a Recovery Month paddle with Riverbend. OARS also partnered with Boys and Girls Clubs in Marlborough, Framingham, and Hudson. It expanded its Water Wise program to Water Wise After School. OARS has contracts and agreements with Concord for a pilot program at an elementary school and with the nonprofit Coalition for a Better Acre which is a community resource and serves new immigrants.

OARS is working to launch the 86 Mile Club on May 4th at the Concord River Race at the Bedford boat ramp. This kayak race will offer competitions of one, three, and six miles. The 86 Mile Club will be a season long event to encourage participants to paddle an 86-mile course mapped by OARS. There will be free team

paddles in Maynard, Framingham, and potentially Billerica for people who do not own a boat. OARS is also developing "Three Rivers Adventures" which will provide outreach to companies, nonprofits, and schools.

River Ambassador Report

8:13 pm Ms. Brown reported on meetings she attended over the past month. She attended CISMA's annual meeting and listened to some presentations. One was done by Julia Flannery from Maynard who talked about an invasive removal planting project where instead of planting immediately after removing invasive plants her team did not plant at all. They waited to see if native plants would come back on their own and were pleased to see that they did appear. Maynard will try repeating this experiment in a wetland environment. Ms. Brown attended a meeting for the WR Grace Superfund site along the Assabet River in Acton, just over the Concord line. The site has been contaminated with vinyl chloride, vinylidene chloride, and benzene. There are still two plumes along the Assabet. Kara Nirenberg conducted a question and answer session but there was no presentation. Ms. Brown did learn that the two remnant plumes are not impacting the river, although no data was presented or made available. She and Ms. Henderson went to the LP&CT annual meeting. After the meeting people walked the trail under the Lowell Connector where locals and Boston graffiti artists have created fabulous art. Jane Calvin is hoping that this artwork can be deemed to be the first aerosol art gallery in the area. The Warner's Pond Task Force is still active. The dam removal, dredging and limited action subgroups have put together the proposals they will bring to the Task Force. The Task Force will decide which one they want to present at Town Meeting. The costs for these options have not been determined yet. The subgroups would like to make their presentations sometime in January. There is a fish ladder that has not been considered by any subgroup and will need an independent evaluator. DCR has contacted Ms. Brown to ask if she would like any Stop Aquatic Hitchhiker signs. Lincoln will take one. Ms. Brown thinks that Wayland and Bedford could use a sign but they would have to be installed on USFWS property. Mr. Hammond said he would take one for Bedford. Mr. Chick thought one could be posted at Little Farms Road in Framingham. Ms. Brown said that is USFWS property and would have to be Ms. Koch's decision.

20024-22-225 Community Grant Application Review and Decisions

8:28 pm Ms. Lord reminded the Council that at our October meeting we reviewed four Community Grant proposals. The RSC fully funded grants for Concord Land Conservation Trust and the Concord Museum. The RSC had questions about proposals from Mass Rivers for its Dam Busters 201 program and for a novel invasive species project for knotweed and phragmites control which was submitted by the Westborough Conservation Dept. Ms. Lord contacted both Mass Rivers and Westborough Conservation about those questions. She shared their replies. After some discussion it was decided by a show of hands to fully fund the Westborough proposal for \$10,000 and to award Mass Rivers the remaining available grant money of \$11,838 for Dam Busters 201.

Updates and Other

8:44 pm Ms. Hempel met with the two videographers working on the Warner's Pond project. The film makers need to conduct two more interviews. The Council will be able to view a rough cut once the video is completed.

8:46 pm Mr. Chick asked the Council to send a letter of support for a grant he has submitted to Framingham for building an accessible walkway to connect the North and South sections of the Carol Getchell Trail. Ms. Lord said that she would use the talking points that Mr. Chick previously sent her to draft a letter of support for Council members to review.

8:57 pm Ms. Lord said that the RSC has signed onto a letter of support for the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Group about the over-fishing of river herring. Mr. Chick first heard about this initiative at a Herring Network meeting in Weymouth.

8:59 pm Mr. Sciacca said that the state-owned, historic Old Town Bridge in Wayland is in need of repair. A state representative will be important for getting that project approved. He asked that Ms. Henderson and Ms. Lord investigate finding someone to fill this years-long vacancy on the RSC.

9: 01 pm The Council discussed the possibility of a social gathering in December. Ms. Henderson suggested a field trip to Great Meadows in Concord. The meeting concluded with holiday wishes.

9:06 pm Ms. Henderson adjourned the meeting.