



Minutes for the November 24, 2020 meeting

RSC Representatives present: Anne Slugg, Chair (Sudbury), Emma Lord (NPS), Amber Carr (SVT incoming representative), Ron Chick (Framingham-Alt), Christine Dugan (Lincoln), Alison Field-Juma (OARS), Bill Fadden (Framingham), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Marlies Henderson (Billerica), Laura Mattei (SVT), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), David Witherbee (Concord)

RSC Representatives absent: Mary Antes (Wayland-Alt), Christa Collins (SVT-Alt), Linh Phu (USFWS), Joseph Piantedosi (Bedford-Alt), Trek Reef (Billerica-Alt),

Guest: Ben Wetherill, OARS Water Quality Scientist

Location: Zoom Video Call

7:05 pm

Ms. Slugg announced that no new community grant proposals had been received since our last meeting.

Two edits were made to the minutes which were then accepted unanimously.

OARS presentation

Ms. Field-Juma said that the OARS website now posts the location of trees blocking our rivers once those blockages are reported to the OARS office.

OARS recently worked on the NPS' Dragonfly Mercury Project. A sample previously taken from the MMNHP had the third highest concentration of mercury found in all nationwide sites. Last summer fourteen larvae were collected from river sediment at each of three study sites as part of the project. Mr. Wetherill explained that because larvae live in sediment for about 7 years before turning into dragonflies they have a long time to absorb mercury and are a good reflection of river conditions.

OARS worked on water quality sampling with 36 volunteers organized as 14 household-based teams due to COVID-19 restrictions. OARS monitors for phosphorus, nitrates, suspended solids, and dissolved oxygen, among other parameters. It works with the state to reduce phosphorus discharge from wastewater treatment plants. Hop Brook in Sudbury is the last remaining site on the WSR found to have a high excess of phosphorus. In 2020 its tributaries were also found to be high in phosphorus. OARS found all sampling sites except for Hop Brook to be near target levels for phosphorus.

Mr. Wetherill said that work by OARS, funded last summer by a River Network grant and in collaboration with the Hop Brook Protection Association, found the highest levels of phosphorus in Hop Brook decreases as you travel downstream. Data is pointing to Carding Mill as a spot where phosphorus from previous years has accumulated and in shallow ponds from which it does not wash out. The highest phosphorus levels OARS has ever recorded were in the Assabet River during the 1990's. Those levels improved in subsequent years until they were brought down to around background levels in 2013. High biomass density continues in impoundment areas. A survey of 3 major impoundments in the Assabet

River has continued since 2005. Mr. Wetherill said that one would expect a reduced biomass level in general but a change in composition with an increase in filamentous green algae was found in the Hudson impoundment, probably because the phosphorus in the sediment is not being washed out. The Hudson impoundment is the one closest to the Westborough wastewater treatment plant.

Ms. Field-Juma said that OARS creates river report cards every two years. The next ones will be issued in 2021. They conducted visual resource assessments for the upper Sudbury River at the Mill Pond in Ashland and the Stearns Reservoir dam in Framingham.

Ms. Field-Juma said that she and Lisa Vernegaard of SVT were interviewed for Channel 5 news last summer to discuss climate change and water quality issues at the local level. OARS advocated for policy changes to strengthen the Clean Water Act.

Over the past year OARS submitted comments on wastewater permits, sent action alerts, and communicated watershed priorities to our legislators. Recently the final 2 draft permits for the Assabet were issued to reduce wastewater discharge in winter (Westborough and Marlborough Westerly). Topics discussed at OARS' annual legislative breakfast included the Green Budget, mosquito control legislation, and climate change. Topics at OARS' Watershed Roundtable included the Dragonfly Mercury Project and a presentation by the Hop Brook Protection Association on water chestnut control. OARS will work with the town of Stow to introduce proposals related to climate change.

Mr. Chick asked if a Saxonville site could be included in the dragonfly larvae sampling. Ms. Field-Juma said that Saxonville would be typical of other study sites. Ms. Henderson asked if the larvae were returned to the water. Ms. Field-Juma said that they are sent to the USGS lab for analysis.

7:48 pm

Stone's Bridge

Ms. Lord said that last September the Army Corps of Engineers issued a permit for restoration work at the Stone's Bridge in Wayland. Mr. Sciacca said that the work on this project will probably commence in August 2021 when the water level will be lower. Mr. Fadden said that the Framingham Conservation Commission will join the Wayland Conservation Commission in monitoring this project because the work is under water and therefore of concern to Framingham. Ms. Carr noted that the name of the consultant working on this project was not listed on the paperwork. Mr. Sciacca said that the bids are out but the consultant has not yet been selected. He said that Wayland is reconsidering a previous offer to contribute financially to repairs on a Framingham bridge which is located immediately upstream of the Stone's Bridge. Ms. Lord asked about a timeline and impact of possible work on the Framingham bridge. Mr. Sciacca said it would reduce funding for the Stone Bridge if the money was allocated to the Framingham bridge. Mr. Sciacca said it would reduce funding for the Stone Bridge if the money was allocated to the Framingham bridge.

7:56

Ms. Henderson spoke about the progress of an interpretive panel being created for the Middlesex Canal Museum, to be located on the new observation desk. She noted that the RSC had paid for both the observation deck and the interpretive panel. The observation deck will be ADA compliant. The panel will note changes at that particular spot in the river from prehistoric times through the year 2000, with highlights of human activity from 1710 to 2000 shown on a timeline. Images of the floating tow path at

its heyday and a section of the historic Middlesex Canal summit pond will likely be included. Mention of Native American artifacts such as a spearhead found in Concord and an arrowhead found by Thoreau may also be included. A discussion followed on how much, if any, mention should be made of the RSC on the panel since the Canal is not located on the WSR. Mr. Sciacca said that because the dam influences the WSR and had historical importance for towns upstream he would like to review a draft of the narrative when it is completed.

8:19

Mr. Chick spoke about a long vacant property on the confluence of the Sudbury River and Cochituate Brook which is located near the Framingham terminus of the Cochituate Rail Trail. Mr. Chick explained that this particular section of the Rail Trail is both unsightly and currently underutilized by cyclists. The property owner has invested \$1,000,000 in infrastructure, including the addition of irrigation and flowering plants and has put the property up for sale. Mr. Chick would like to approach the owner about donating this property as a legacy project from which a town park will be created. The property offers river access in addition to the rail trail. The site would allow for parking and includes 4 non-buildable acres along the river. He asked if the RSC would consider endorsing his approach to the owner. Mr. Sciacca said that the property was not located on the WSR but that he could support the removal of impervious surfaces, adding that if this property could provide a connection to the Carol Getchell Trail that would increase its importance to the RSC. Ms. Henderson would like recreation and conservation purposes to be part of an RSC statement should the RSC sign on. A motion was made by Ms. Slugg and seconded by Ms. Henderson that the RSC's support for the initial concept can be relayed to the property owner. The vote was unanimous, with Mr. Chick abstaining.

8:39 pm

Ms. Lord said that the December meeting will be devoted to a review of our Strategic Plan and in looking at our accomplishments. Budget discussions will be held at our January and February meetings. She said that she will circulate a copy of the Strategic Plan to the SVT before the December meeting for their comments on what they have done so far and actions they might want to take in the near future.

8:43 pm

Ms. Slugg adjourned the meeting.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan