**Sudbury, Assabet and Concord**

**Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council Meeting**

**September 24, 2019**

**RSC Representatives present:** Anne Slugg-Chair (Sudbury), Sarah Bursky, Co-Chair  (NPS), Ron Chick (Framingham-Alt), Christine Dugan (Lincoln), Bill Fadden (Framingham), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Marlies Henderson (Billerica), Jim Lagerbom (SVT Alt), Laura Mattei (SVT), Karen Pelto (MA DEP), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), David Witherbee (Concord)

**RSC Representatives absent** Mary Antes (Wayland-Alt), Elissa Brown (Concord), Alison Field-Juma (OARS), Jim Meadors (Lincoln- Alt), Joseph Piantedosi (Bedford-Alt)

Ms. Bursky opened the meeting at 7:04 pm with words of appreciation for Ms. Pelto, who has accepted a new job and is relocating. Ms. Pelto was thanked for the deep knowledge and valuable insights she shared over her many years with the RSC. All agreed that she will be greatly missed.

Mr. Sciacca moved that the minutes of the last meeting be accepted, Ms. Henderson seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**Work Groups**

Ms. Slugg spoke for Ms. Field-Juma, who was absent. Members of the **Science working group** have sent Ms. Field-Juma most of the member towns’ Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness reports. Ms. Bursky reminded the group that learning about USFWS plans concerning preparedness for climate vulnerability is also a stated group goal.

Mr. Fadden noted that he has sent multiple emails to the RSC documenting **river clearing** trips he has participated in over the past two months. Ms. Bursky recommended that the Science group present a first draft of a river clearing policy at a future meeting. Mr. Fadden preferred that the draft be written by the entire RSC. He believed that having group input on deciding the diameter of the debris to be cleared would be useful. Similarly, he thought that determining which topics to be had with town employees, such as not leaving cleared debris on riverbanks, should also be discussed with the full RSC.

Mr. Sciacca mentioned that the river at the railroad bridge in Wayland currently needs clearing for navigation and reasonable flow.

Ms. Henderson spoke about the work of the **Outreach committee.** In preparation for creating a **letter to new homeowners** the Outreach group has spoken with OARS. The group has collected welcome letters sent by member towns to new homeowners whose properties abut wetlands. Ms. Henderson is particularly interested in educating homeowners along the river about the harmful effects of using herbicides and mowing along the bank. The group is considering drafting a letter to Billerica homeowners who wonder what will happen to river levels if the Talbot Dam is removed. Mr. Witherbee said that the group would like to create a list of volunteers interested in clearing invasives. Ms. Mattei wondered if the group’s goals were too broad. She suggested that they be pared down and that the group consider what they were asking of their audience. She highly recommended the video and manual from EngagingLandowners.org as a good foundation for this work. Ms. Slugg wondered if these efforts would be repeating what Conservation Commissions already do. She thought that we could rebrand our Riverfest message as asking residents what the RSC can do for them. The Outreach committee could tell new homeowners what our mission is, noting that we comment on local river issues such as bridge reconstruction. Ms. Bursky said the Lamprey Rivers Advisory Committee identified services they could provide to abutters, such as vernal pool certification, noting that we could do the same.

**Riverfest**

Ms. Bursky said that the RSC spent about $5,000 on Riverfest this year as well as investing many volunteer hours. She asked for comments on the events. Mr. Chick said that the Framingham state representative was on one of his paddles and she later submitted a state budget amendment specifically allocating money for water chestnut pulling on the Sudbury River. Ms. Bursky noted that Ms. Slugg has vastly expanded the number of food sponsorships we get for the kickoff party. She said that we get new partners each year for Riverfest events. Participant numbers run between 1,000-1,200 each year.

Ms. Bursky opened a discussion on moving Riverfest from an annual event to being held every other year. A show of hands resulted in 3 votes for adopting the every two years schedule. Ms. Bursky asked for alternative ideas for promoting the RSC if Riverfest was not an annual event. Ms. Mattei said we could have smaller events over the summer. Mr. Fadden suggested a change of venue from the Manse. Ms. Bursky said that the Old North Bridge is treated solemnly by the MMNHP Rangers, being referred to as a cemetery by them. The park rangers are uncomfortable having the boat race there. Mr. Sciacca said that Riverfest is nearly our only opportunity to advertise the RSC. Mr. Hammond said that we would have more time for discussions at our meetings during the off-years. After a written exercise on the pros and cons for the annual versus the two year approach, the most common reasons for maintaining Riverfest annually were continuity and publicity opportunities. The most common reason for a two-year schedule was to recover meeting time that is otherwise spent on Riverfest planning. A vote on changing Riverfest to every two years was deferred to our next meeting when Ms. Field-Juma will be present since OARS is an important part of Riverfest.

**Budget**

Ms. Slugg spoke about our budget. She said that we have not spent reserved money for the mussel study update as the necessary drought conditions were not present last summer for that work. We have under $1,000 left in the total budget. We can carry over this money but she did not recommend it. Ms. Slugg said that in advance of our March budget meeting we should think about how we might use budget money to support actions listed in our strategic plan, such as updating our website.

Ms. Slugg said that our **community grant announcement** would be available soon. New changes to the grant process will state that an organization cannot reapply for the same project. Also, large organizations like SVT will be encouraged to partner with smaller groups. Ms. Bursky asked the group to brain storm ways in which the RSC could reach a wider audience with our grant proposal announcement. In response, the group suggested contacting town boards, environmental clubs at local high schools, the Metrowest Planning Council, and the Bedford NAPSP. We could call the Natural Resources or Conservation Departments and Conservation Commissions of individual towns, churches with climate councils, the Middlesex Canal Association, and Middlesex Community College. We could ask SVT to mention our grant proposal opportunity in one of its membership communications, submit items to the Wicked Local website, and post on the Nextdoor mobile app.

Ms. Bursky encouraged members to attend the Oct. 27th talk by Robert Thorson about the Concord River, the Billerica dam, and Thoreau which will be held at the Middlesex Canal Museum. Fish restoration efforts are expected to be discussed.

Mike Bailey will speak to the RSC about fish restoration on the Concord River at 6 pm on Oct. 22nd at Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge.

Ms. Slugg asked town representatives to confirm the dates of their RSC terms and check to see if they must retake their town’s oath of office.

Ms. Bursky reported that in September she and Ms. Field-Juma attended the Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers Face to Face Meeting hosted by the Great Egg Harbor River Council in New Jersey. Ms. Field-Juma presented on OARS’ River Report Card. Other meeting highlights included talks given by representatives for the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers and the Lower Farmington and Salmon Brook Wild & Scenic River Study Committee as well as a discussion on the federal budget and remarks by a coalition working to keep the Wild & Scenic Rivers funded.

Mr. Chick said that a report card for water bodies in Framingham is being discussed by the city. He voiced an interest in encouraging more access to Farm Pond, the Sudbury river, and other Framingham waterbodies.

Ms. Slugg adjourned the meeting at 9:10 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan.