Catamount Community Forest Planning Committee

Minutes of April 9, 2018

Approved

Members Present:	Terry Marron, Barb Evans, Michael Clauss, Jeff Dickinson, Rita Dessau, Ben Norris, Anthony Jordick, Kort Longenbach, Ben King.
Members Absent:	Patrice Maloney, Steve Page
Others Present:	Melinda Scott (staff), Erik Wells (staff) Kim Coleman (facilitator), Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Land), Jim McCullough, Lucy McCullough, Abbie Bowker, Sharon Gutwin, Tony and Joan Shaw, Hans Buehler, Tim Post, Peter Kenseth, Marc Stannard, Heather Tinda, Trent Coletta, David Schwartz, Leigh Samuels.

Goal: Discuss and develop recommendations for dogs at Catamount.

1. Kim introduced the Committee and the advisors to the members of the public present. She reminded the members of the public that this is not a public hearing, but a meeting in which the Committee has to get their work done. Therefore, a limited amount of time will be allotted for public comment and strictly enforced. Kim reviewed the meeting agenda and asked everyone to refrain from putting down other user groups when making comments. She will give people 2 minutes each to speak.
2. Public Comment:
    - Hans Buehler spoke. He is a Williston resident and a COFC board member. He is concerned about the nonprofit's ability to operate with dogs allowed (Hans listed several programs and activities offered by the COFC). If this were a typical town forest, it would be fine to allow dogs. However, it's unique, and allowing dogs would impact the COFC's ability to offer these community events and programs and continue to be a viable organization. There is an annual event that includes dogs.
    - Jerry Lasky stated that running and riding at Catamount is different from riding in other areas where you expect to see dogs. Collisions with dogs do occur. Bikers ride fast at Catamount, which poses serious safety issues with allowing dogs at Catamount.
    - Trent Colleta stated he has been a long time user of the Outdoor Center. Any decisions should carefully and strongly consider the needs of the Outdoor Center. He recommended an enclosed dog park as a potential compromise.
    - Peter Kenseth stated there are nearby areas that permit mountain biking and dogs, but not many places offer skiing with dogs. He asked the Committee to consider this option.
    - Tony Shaw stated he is a Williston resident, and he walks his dogs on a trail almost every day of the year, often walk dogs at Saxon Hill or other places that allow dogs. He doesn't think that dogs are an existential threat to the Outdoor

Center. He mentioned Craftsbury as a place that offers similar programs and allows dogs. He encouraged the Committee to be inclusive

- David Schwartz stated there may be room for compromise, for example, on the south side of the road on more visible terrain and on double tracked trails. If dogs are allowed many riders will choose not to go there. His concern is mainly safety, and feels some separation is needed.
- Leigh Samuels stated she has lived in Williston for many years. A precedent exists for public lands to allow dogs, and the town should continue to honor that precedent. There are 400 acres that should allow some access for all users. She urged the Committee to avoid an all or nothing approach, but instead seek solutions.
- Abbie Bowker stated she represents Catamount board of directors. The number and type of users is very different from other area parks. Other parks like Indian Brook have struggled with dogs and issues like dog waste. If the nonprofit had to deal with a lot of similar issues that would cripple them. Separate designated areas don't function well, as people continue to take their dogs where they are not supposed to.
- Heather Tinda stated she is an avid dog walker, but her interest is also just as a walker. What she is hearing is that even without a dog it's not safe to walk at Catamount. She is concerned that it will just remain exactly the same as it is, and hopes that a compromise can be reached.
- Jim Mccullough stated they started the business over 40 years ago, and they have had people walking on the trails safely since the beginning. Dogs with people are totally different, as they introduce unpredictability. Other places similar to Catamount do not allow dogs, and places that do allow them do not have the density of users that Catamount does. Wildlife are very habituated to users at Catamount, and Jim is concerned that dogs will have a significant impact on wildlife.
- Hans Buehler asked for clarification on who is responsible for the maintenance of the land? Kate Wanner stated that under the license agreement, the Outdoor Center is responsible for the maintenance of the trail network.
- Is "community forest" a misnomer? Melinda stated other town forests have similar arrangements whereby other entities maintain the trails. Kim stated that free and open pedestrian access is the hallmark of community forestry, and that will be offered at Catamount.
- Kort stated that the Outdoor Center can't charge for pedestrian access, but there are members that have stated they will not renew their membership if dogs are allowed.
- Peter Kenseth asked, wouldn't the COFC gain users that want to ski or mountain bike with their dogs? There is a lot of land there, with room for inclusivity.
- Kort stated his concerns that rules are not enforceable.

3. Housekeeping items:
   - Approve 3-26-2018 minutes: Kort suggested a revision to Jim McCullough's credentials on page 2. The minutes were approved with revisions.

- Selectboard meeting: Melinda summarized the recent discussion of the COFC License Agreement. The Selectboard had requested revisions, which were incorporated, then requested one last revision which was being incorporated. Kate stated the COFC had requested that language be added that if future management plans included any changes of use that would increase costs or liability (such as dogs and horses), the town be responsible for such costs. Melinda stated the town's position on that was to remove that provision, as it was already covered under the section on Community Forest Plan and License Agreement.
- Presenting draft plan to Selectboard – the Committee is scheduled to present the draft plan to the Selectboard either April 17 or early May. Kim asked members to begin looking at the draft plan posted on Google Drive. Jeff has drafted some language related to hunting which will be included in plan. Terry asked about trapping, hadn't it been determined that hunting and trapping considered different, and therefore the Committee would need to come up with a separate policy for trapping? Kate stated that by Vermont statute trapping can only occur by landowner permission, so the plan can simply state that and then it would be up to the Selectboard. Kim stated that this would be added to the list of items the Committee won't get to.
- Response from birding community: Kim stated testimony was heard from various experts about bird habitat, and that the Committee had carried forward several recommendations related to habitat, but one recommendation did not move forward related to grassland bird habitat. Because of that, the Green Mountain Audubon will not support the project, meaning they will not lead any more walks, nor conduct any monitoring on the property. They have asked the Committee to reconsider its recommendations. Ben stated the original proposal included botht the south and east fields. He stated there might be a compromise that considers just the east field, or just the mowing and not the trails. Terry concurred with Ben, and suggested scrapping the idea of doing a joint application to the Bobolink Project with Patrice, and perhaps not even applying to the program but that the town could simply adopt the grassland bird best management practices on its own. Kim asked if the Committee wanted to reconsider the issue in May. Mike stated that decisions on whether or not to allow dogs would also impact grassland bird habitat, therefore should be taken into consideration. Terry stated dogs would definitely need to he leashed. Tony Shaw stated he has seen coyotes running through the fields, and thinks they are a bigger threat to the birds than dogs. Kate stated that it's the constant disturbance that is the greater issue, not necessarily predation. Kim stated she could ask Andrea Shortsleeve or Carl Runge to speak to the impact of dogs.

2. Sticky dot voting of potential strategies to manage dog walking at Catamount
   - Terry asked about the timing of races and camps. Hans stated camps run from June through August but there are lots of other events throughout the spring/summer/fall. Races are on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, camps are m-f, 8-5. Tony stated that total segregation might not be not possible all the time, but could be possible most of the time. Mike asked, how is all this going to be enforced? Enforcement could be

untenable. Kate suggested a fenced in dog park as one solution to consider. Kim asked, who in town would be responsible to maintain it? Recreation department typically, as they maintain the dog waste stations at the more developed parks. Barb stated there was interest from dog walkers to walk on the trail, not just for a dog park.

3. Discuss and vote on management recommendations for dog walking 7:00 – 7:35

- Anthony suggested language stating some general policies like temporal segregation, spatial segregation, without getting too bogged down in the specific details.
- Rita stated that the enforcement of the rules is paramount. She see that users might feel uncomfortable or not want to police other users.
- Kort asked, are the other considerations in addition to or instead of the other policies? Kim stated they are addition to the others.
- Ben asked, how would the Committee's recommendations affect the outcome, given that the stated town policy is now not to make any drastic changes immediately?
- Ben King stated the Selectboard can consider none, some or all options presented.
- Mike agreed that the policies the Committee agrees to can be put forth for future consideration.
- Terry stated she has heard a lot of support for having dog walking at Catamount.
- Kort stated there are people who are uncomfortable with dogs, who don't want to see dogs at Catamount.
- Ben Norris stated there is a lot of land in Williston, but the unique value of Catamount is its programing. It also is fragile. Take away any one piece and it could crumble.
- Ben King stated he would like to leave it open to future consideration, treat dogs the same as the Committee treated horses. There needs to be some practical consideration to each of the options offered here.
- Mike stated he still supports the future consideration and stated Ben or others can write memo stating their views about the Outdoor Center.
- Kort stated that he was having a hard time accepting a policy that considers allowing dogs for inclusivity's sake alone.
- Barb agreed that the Committee should treat dogs the same as horses.
- Melinda stated that over the past few days she has received a lot of public input through emails and phone calls. What she has been hearing is: safety concerns, desire for dog free place, problems with owners not picking up after their dogs, impact to wildlife, dog bites. From the pro dog side, she has heard: Williston tax payers should all benefit from the property, desire for inclusivity, the large acreage can accommodate multiple uses including dogs, people want a place they can bring dogs.
- Hans stated, why not trust the outdoor center to make decisions on whether dogs are allowed or not, the outdoor center should have the ultimate decision making power.
- Kim asked the members if they are interested in developing a draft recommendation.
- Kate stated there needs to be an understanding of the concerns being expressed.
- Terry suggested having the north side be dog free, and the south side (90 acres) allow dogs on leash.
- Terry asked, is there some other way to accommodate dogs? A dog park?

- Jeff – people pay taxes for a lot of things they don't directly benefit from, like schools, recreation programs. Plus, Williston is only funding a portion of the purchase.
- Kate stated that Catamount would not have been ranked second in the country for the USFS grant without the Outdoor Center, and reiterated that the project has so much support because of COFC. 20,000 people a year use Catamount, which produces an indirect economic benefit to Williston.
- Kort stated the Committee should include a recommendation for public outreach to inform future decisions.
- Mike asked, have there been any discussions about the possibility of people disregarding the rules and bringing dogs there anyway, even if they were not allowed? Melinda stated yes, that's a very real possibility, and there is going to need to be enforcement regardless.
- Kim stated she would start working on a news article dispelling some of the misconceptions about the project. Kim stated there's a myth about public land that it is open to everyone for any use. In reality, there is a lot of public land in the US that is very restricted. She recommends for anyone interested, reading Governing the Commons by Elinor Ostrum. There is work to do in communicating that to our peers and neighbors.
- Melinda will create a Doodle Poll for the May meeting.

4. Discuss and vote on recommendations for trail and infrastructure maintenance 7:35 – 8:00 This was tabled for a future meeting.

5. The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 pm.