

Catamount Community Forest Planning Committee

Minutes of May 7, 2018

Approved

Members Present: Patrice Maloney, Steve Page, Terry Marron, Barb Evans, Jeff Dickinson, Ben Norris, Anthony Jordick, Kort Longenbach, Ben King (arrived at 6:30).

Members Absent: Michael Clauss, Rita Dessau

Others Present: Melinda Scott (staff), Kim Coleman (facilitator), Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Land).

Goal: Discuss and vote on recommendations for grassland bird management. Discuss and vote on recommendations for trail and infrastructure maintenance. Discuss and vote on recommendations for dogs at Catamount.

1. Kim reviewed the goals for the meeting. She reminded the group that at last month's meeting they had agreed to revisit grassland bird habitat management because that had been requested by Green Mountain Audubon Society (GMAS). Trail maintenance BMPs have been on the agenda for at least 3 previous meetings but had been tabled due to lack of time.
2. Public Comment: There was no public comment.
3. Housekeeping items:
 - o Approve 4/9/2018 minutes: The minutes were approved as written.
 - o Selectboard meeting: Melinda summarized the recent discussion of the COFC License Agreement. The Selectboard has scheduled a special meeting on May 22 to discuss the License Agreement and management plan. Melinda stated the plan is for the Committee to meet through July to revise the Management Plan as needed; however, if the Selectboard requests major revisions to the Plan, the Committee may have to schedule additional meetings. Patrice asked, should Committee members submit comments on the Plan to the Selectboard or to Melinda? Barb asked what is the new target date for closing. Melinda stated that the hope is to close as soon as possible, but likely late summer or early fall. Melinda will send the Committee Charge to the members and asked them to keep the Charge in mind, and whether the Plan adequately addresses the Charge tasks.
2. Grassland bird habitat – Kim reminded the group of the proposed recommendations from a previous meeting.
 - o Ben stated the policies were lumped together last time and were not carried. Ben recommended splitting up the policies and voting on each individually.
 - o Terry suggested focusing on the eastern field, which has Bobolinks, rather than the southern field, which does not. Suggested policies include: No mowing May 15 – Aug 15 and close off the interior trail, just leaving the perimeter trail.

- Kate stated that once the town takes ownership the mowing lease will terminate and will need to be renegotiated with the town.
- Terry stated the field is 9.5 acres. Carl saw a Bobolink in the eastern field today.
- Kort said the areas along the perimeter lower down are pretty wet.
- Carl stated bobolinks only get one chance to breed. Carl said the most problematic trail is the one looping through the field
- Kort stated that trail is along a high area, where it is less likely to be wet along the perimeter.
- Steve Page asked whether adopting this policy significantly impact the support of the GMAS? Carl stated yes, it definitely would.
- Terry reminded the group that trail closures would only be through Aug 15, and after that they could be used by the Outdoor Center for races, etc.
- The members spent some time rewording the proposed policies and voted unanimously for their adoption, as follows:
 - Mowing the field southeast of the skating pond will be avoided from May 15 to August 15 to encourage bobolink and other grassland bird nesting habitat.
 - A reroute of the through trails in this field will be implemented in consultation with Green Mountain Audubon Society.
 - In the event that there is no longer an active hay harvesting program at Catamount, all fields should be mowed or brush-hogged once a year in the autumn.

3. Trail Best Management Practices

- The group discusses the wording of the proposed policies and voted unanimously for their adoption, as follows:
 - Trail construction and maintenance in the Catamount Community Forest will have erosion control as a high priority.
 - Trails will adhere to relevant trail and recreational standards and the best available professional judgment to protect soils, water quality, and other natural resources; for example, rotating race courses on a regular basis.
 - Trail conditions causing degradation to an aquatic habitat must be remediated by installing drainage features, closing or rerouting.
 - Stream crossings will be designed so as not to impede stream function and to avoid impacting the natural plant communities in the riparian zone.
 - Size crossing structures according to the VT DEC River Management Program guidelines and Guidelines for the Design of Stream/Road Crossings for the Passage of Aquatic Organisms in Vermont (VT DFW) and/or consult with the District Stream Alteration Engineer and District Fisheries Biologist for sizing, placement, and permitting requirements.
 - Monitor the condition of the Three Rivers trail throughout the year and restrict recreational access during wet periods as necessary.
 - Concentrate recreational use on existing trails and limit the creation of new trails except as needed to 1) bypass wet, steep, ecologically sensitive or otherwise unsuitable stretches of existing trails, 2) connect trails segments interrupted by acts of nature or forest management activities, 3) connect to trails on adjacent land, or 4) allow restoration of highly degraded trails.

- There will be on-going collaboration between the town, COFC and any other user groups deemed responsible to use and maintain the trail system.
4. Discuss and vote on management recommendations for dog walking
- 100 emails received about dog walking, summarized in the attached chart. Terry and Barb recommend that if dog walking is allowed dogs should be leashed. Some compromise solution is suggested. Terry stated self-monitoring is necessary to make sure rules are being followed. She also suggested allowance of the activity on a trial basis. A user group could come forward and put forth a proposal for integration on a trial basis, on a small area for a limited amount of time.
 - Kim stated a proposal similar to the previously passed horse proposal could be put forth.
 - Kort asked for clarification on what Terry/Barb meant – a small user group will have a high likelihood of enforcement?
 - Ben Norris asked, what is a small user group?
 - Anthony stated he has heard from a number of users who would be interested in walking dogs. We don't necessarily have enough information now to develop a detailed proposal, but a focused working group could come up with a proposal.
 - Ben King asked, is there a way to define a specific area more clearly than south of Gov Chittenden Rd?
 - Barb explained the rationale for limiting dog walking to the South side, because it is more open and therefore it is less likely for different users to get surprised.
 - Patrice stated that the horse proposal has certain criteria that need to be addressed, and that a similar approach could be used for the dog policies.
 - Steve asked, where do dog walkers park? He has talked to Pat Mainer (Hinesburg Town Forest) and Hubbard Park users, who both stated that the dog issue has taken up an inordinate amount of time and has resulted in a lot of conflict. The lesson learned from the experiences of those groups is not to introduce a use that you then have to roll back later.
 - Steve said it would be helpful to reference the emails summary in the policy (attach as an Appendix)
 - Jeff stated the term "user groups" in this context needs to be better defined.
 - Melinda stated that once the property has been acquired, the Committee will probably need to conduct outreach to potential dog walkers and explain that the burden is on them to get together and form a working group.
 - Ben King suggested using Front Porch Forum for outreach.
 - Kate said you can charge user fees for walking dogs, even though pedestrian use is free, because dog walking will result in added costs for enforcement, clean-up, etc.
 - The members voted on the proposed policies but the vote did not carry forward.
 - Anthony stated that putting forth a recommendation for future consideration won't necessarily ever result in allowing dogs at Catamount, it just leaves it open.
 - Kim asked, was everyone clear on the process for voting? 85% of full Committee was agreed upon.
 - Ben Norris stated that if some language was added stating that dogs have historically not been allowed, he would change his vote.

- Kort stated if the McCulloughs saw a way to allow dogs, they would have. However, Kort recognized just shutting the use down forever is dangerous, in that it could influence public opinion of the project or the Selectboard's opinion.
- The policy language was revised to add a statement about the historic not allowing dogs and that the burden is on the user group to come up with a proposal that adequately addresses the concerns raised.
- The Committee members voted unanimously for the revised recommendations' adoption, as follows:

The Catamount Forest Committee has heard a range of viewpoints related to dog access at Catamount (see Appendix XX). The Committee has concerns about the following: safety, dog waste, enforcement of rules, effect on wildlife, trails, and erosion of existing user base.

The Committee and/or Selectboard will consider future proposals for dog walking at Catamount from an organized user group, provided any such proposal addresses the following considerations:

- *Scope of use (space and time considerations) in order to coordinate with other user groups;*
- *Animal control for safety and environmental concerns;*
- *Rules and enforcement;*
- *Coordination with the Town and COFC, and*
- *Any costs and potential impact on current activities.*

Satisfaction of the above issues shall be a high burden given that historically, the integration of dogs has not happened due to the numerous concerns raised above.

5. Kim suggested if others want to attend the May 22 Selectboard meeting it would be helpful. June 25 agenda will focus on the review of draft plan revisions suggested by the Selectboard.
6. The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.