

Conservation Land Review Committee
November 28, 2007

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Gary Langenbach at 7:20 p.m. when a quorum was present: Pine duBois, Barry Mathias, Sue Chamberlain. Mark Guidaboni arrived at 7:30.

The minutes were approved as written with the following correction: not all present at the last meeting agreed with the statement by Mark Guidaboni that the Silver Lake drainage pond might not work as a location for high school horticulture plants due to the slope and effect on the calculations.

The selectmen were asked by U Mass Cranberry Extension Service, at Barry Mathias' suggestion, if students could use Cranberry Watershed Preserve for scientific studies. They also hoped to use the building there which has subsequently been torn down. This use was approved by the Conservation Commission and Kevin Donovan wrote to U Mass to let them know that use of the property was fine, but use of the building was not due to the building's condition.

The rest of the meeting focused on the changes needed to the 1998 Cranberry Watershed Preserve Management Plan.

The following was discussed in detail:

WATER MANAGEMENT & DAM STRUCTURES

ConsCom has renewed its water withdrawal permits for agricultural use with DEP for the next five years for two areas on Pine brook and one on Howard's Brook. Howard's Brook is being diverted for cranberry growing by an abutting cranberry grower. No changes are proposed at this time for Howard Brook.

Gary Suggested that the Pine Brook side of the Preserve be considered for dam removal to restore habitat and for safety reasons. It was agreed that the decision would be made only after the results of the Pine Brook Restoration project determined if this would be best. The safety issue concerns potential flooding if the dam is breached accidentally. Gary said that the boards could be removed slowly over time and that a couple of boards have already been removed. The dam is not in good shape.

There was a lengthy discussion about the effects of taking the dam down. Would there be flooding? What would happen to the current habitat of the pond? What wildlife is there now and what would be attracted if the brook was restored. Pine said these questions would be answered by the study.

PINE BROOK RESTORATION

This study will cover the area from the Jones River up Pine Brook to Chandler's Pond. Any effects of dam removal could be seen since the study will begin downstream of the dam at the Jones River. No decisions ought to be made until the study is complete to ensure that that best practices for the habitat can be assessed.

AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT

There was discussion about agriculture on the property. It was suggested that, even if the property is used differently now since cranberries are not being commercially grown, the water withdrawal permit should be kept current. It was just recently renewed.

There needs to be a place for the SLHS nursery. There isn't much land left on the school property. There is interest and the Highway Department would like to donate mulch. Dawn has been looking into grant money – especially for environmental horticulture. There could be a benefit to growing wetland plants for sale to people who need to do replications. Students would also learn more about wetland habitats. The idea would be to have environmental, economic, and educational results for the program. Crops like blueberries and cranberries could be grown by students for both learning and profit. Beach grass and Beach Plum were also suggested. There might be opportunities for work programs during the summer. Plans would need to be drafted well ahead of the year so implementation during the growing months could be maximized. Ideally there will be potential funding for joint projects that involve teachers, students, agriculture and ecology. Pine mentioned EPA grants that might be available to create model programs that could include funding a position to monitor an innovative horticulture program during the summer.

OTHER CONCERNS

Hunting rights on the property need to be addressed. Currently, most of the conservation lands have hunting. A policy should be established. Barry suggested that perhaps licenses could be purchased to hunt on conservation land and the money could be used for conservation purposes. This might require a revolving fund, however, which is complicated.

Access to the property, neighbor relations, interactions with the school and other town committees still need to be discussed.

NEXT STEPS

Discussion on how to proceed. One suggestion was to write an addendum outlining what has changed as well as what is being proposed since the 1998 plan.

Most of the committee members attending thought that the Plan has to be rewritten to be current. The many references to commercial cranberry growing need to be removed as well as other outdated statements. Mark has already done a red-line to start this process. He recommended that the committee try to keep the Plan more general with changes of use coming before the Conservation Commission as they arise. The Committee will go through the Plan to delete what is outdated and keep what is still relevant or needed for legal purposes

The Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:
Sue Chamberlain, Secretary