**Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee**

Meeting minutes, January 27, 2020, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, Salem Town Hall

Committee and Staff Members Present:

Anthony Irving (ERWSCC Chair, Town of Lyme)

Pat Young (ERWSCC Program Director)

David Bingham (Salem Land Trust)

Kim Barber-Bradley (Town of Salem)

Riley Doherty (ESWSCC)

Jamie Fosburgh (National Park Service)

Bernie Gillis (Town of East Haddam)

Marilyn Gleeson (East Haddam Land Trust)

Anthony Griggs (Town of Salem)

David Gumbart (The Nature Conservancy)

Parker Lord (Town of Lyme)

Sue Merrow (Town of East Haddam)

Ed Natoli (Town of Salem)

Rob Smith (East Haddam Land Trust)

Eric Thomas (CT DEEP)

Melvin Woody (Lyme Land Trust)

Call to Order:

Chairman Anthony Irving called the meeting to order at 5:03 PM.

Minutes, November 25, 2019:

By consensus, minutes were accepted as presented.

Future Office Space:

Pat Young provided information on additional funding available to ERWSCC in the coming fiscal year. With a $30,000 expected increase, some amount of that can go toward leasing improved office space. A sub-committee will be formed to help in this search. One possible site is the Burnham Brook preserve of The Nature Conservancy. David Gumbart spoke about the status of the house at this site, including installation of a new septic system. It is ready for use/occupancy and the Conservancy will make a final determination about the use of this space this spring.

David Bingham inquired if the house could be used as both office space and housing. Audubon Connecticut is interested in establishing a presence in eastern Connecticut and may be interested. Marilyn Gleeson, Melvin Woody, Bingham and Irving volunteer to participate on the office space sub-committee with Young. A visit to the house at Burnham Brook will be planned.

Budget Priorities:

The effort of Congressman Joe Courtney to support the ERWSCC budget at the federal level was recognized. $150,000 will be available (30K increase from previous year). A work plan is due to the National Park Service (NPS) by the end of February. Three core areas will be addressed in that plan: i. office space; ii. staffing (increase time allotment for Riley Doherty); iii. grant and project support.

Young and Doherty work as contractors; long-term planning could include discussion of ERWSCC as a distinct non-profit organization, which would allow benefits to be included with staff compensation (and presumably help with staff retention). Different models of functioning were discussed. NPS was one option for hiring staff; using the Farmington River Watershed Association as a model was also discussed. The Lyme Land Conservation Trust currently acts as the fiscal agent for ERWSCC and its use of Wild & Scenic funds from the NPS.

National Park Service:

Jamie Fosburgh spoke briefly about the NPS budget for ERWSCC and was pleased about the $30,000 increase. To ensure regular interaction between ERWSCC and NPS, Liz Lacy may play a more active role on behalf of the NPS. Lacy is involved with the Lower Farmington River Wild & Scenic program and has participated in some ERWSCC activity previously.

Partner Updates:

*DEEP*: Eric Thomas reported that State Open Space matching grants will be announced soon. Nicole Lugli is the new contact for this program. An ERWSCC grant supported survey work for a recent DEEP acquisition project, for which the DEEP is thankful. Young stated a public comment period is open until mid-February for a planned update on the state Stormwater General Permit.

*Salem*: Tony Griggs reported for the land trust. A parking area is established at the Riverside Preserve on Darling Road and a kiosk is now at the Gungy Road preserve (land of SVC). Discussions are underway for a small number of land protection projects. A culvert replacement project for Route 85 is underway. ERWSCC was involved in review of project.

*East Haddam*: Marilyn Gleeson reported on the land trust’s successful annual meeting, which welcomed new Board members. There are new owners of the Kashanski property where the land trust and TNC hold easements. Rob Smith reported the Town of East Haddam is looking at acquiring a 100-acre parcel north of Devil’s Hopyard State Park, with another potential project near the Ayers Preserve. The Town has invested considerable resources to work on roadside trees (ash and oak, mostly) and will require more resources in the coming years to adequately handle trees that need attention. Young stated that Town of East Haddam parcel data is now available online with interactive GIS maps.

*Lyme*: Parker Lord reported the Town is planning for two bridge replacement projects; one on Birch Mill Road, the other on MacInstosh Road. Young stated the Town Engineer will present project plans at the March ERWSCC meeting. Smith added for East Haddam that the DOT may initiate a bridge replacement on Strongs Brook, on Route 82. Irving reported the Town and land trust are reviewing involvement in a carbon sequestration project, with other towns/groups considered potential partners. Bingham reported on a similar project in Michigan where significant funding was available to protect forests for their ecosystem services benefits (storing carbon). It is a good opportunity to market land conservation as a key to dealing with climate change, especially with a receptive younger audience. Irving added that the Land Trust Alliance is assisting in this project assessment.

*Salem Update on Riparian Zone and Enforcement*: Ed Natoli gave an update on a significant riparian encroachment along Shingle Mill Brook, discussed at the November 25, 2019 ERWSCC meeting. The landowner has hired an environmental consulting firm to develop a restoration plan for the cleared area. This will be reviewed by the Town Inland Wetland Commission. The Town reached out to the Army Corps of Engineers for consultation but has not had a response. Natoli also reported on Town Planning & Zoning discussions. There is some interest to revise and clarify riparian regulations. Small-scale farm operations on smaller parcels of land is one of the discussion points for the Town. ERWSCC may be able to play a role in the process, to ensure current core protection regulations per the management plan are followed. Irving indicated he had reached out to the attorney that had written the regulations. Young suggested having an independent legal review of the regulations and submitted two names for the board’s consideration, Mike Zizka and/or Mark Branse, both very experienced land-use attorneys. The board agreed she should seek a legal review.

Subcommittees:

*Outreach & Education*: Sue Merrow reported on a December meeting to plan the annual newsletter, which will feature the Wander Our Watershed program (WOW), 2020 Riverfest announcement, grant projects that ERWSCC supported, including land preservation and ADA Trail and an article on riparian buffers. Riley Doherty will be taking over coordination of WOW outreach activity. Doherty reported 1482 webpage views for WOW, from 729 “organic” individuals. 112 page visits (from 72 users) in the last 30 days. WOW will be presented at the March CLCC land trust conference. Many other activities are planned: vernal pool workshop; River Raptor fest; Earth Day in Lyme (if scheduled), Celebrate East Haddam; Earthfest in Niantic; and ERWSCC’s Programs in the Park, beginning in July.

*Protection & Management*: some maintenance is needed on the Goodwin Trail. An effort to update maps showing preserved land is underway; please forward any new parcels to be added.

*Science & Monitoring*: Young reported temperature and conductivity loggers in streams were removed in October; one needs repair and two remain in water (one temperature and one conductivity logger), owing to changes in water levels making retrieval difficult. They will look to retrieve them when flows are down in warmer months. Town road work in East Haddam may have removed a shrub which a logger was attached to. High conductivity levels were detected in Harris Brook; roadside salt getting into the stream is one possible cause. How to use and share the data is being discussed. Smith reported that State DOT is trying to reduce salt and sand usage for winter road maintenance (which will require fewer cleanings of catch basins). Doherty reported that the coldest water temperatures were recorded in a small tributary to the Eightmile on the Pleasant Valley Preserve (north of McIntosh Road). Six years of summer baseline data has been graphed, and Doherty is preparing the final report and will share this by email.

Old/New Business: none

Adjournment: Chairman Irving adjourned the meeting at 6:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted, David Gumbart, ERWSCC Secretary 