**Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee**

Meeting minutes, November 23, 2020, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, online Zoom meeting

Committee and Staff Members Present:

Anthony Irving (ERWSCC Chairman)

Pat Young (ERWSCC Program Director)

Mary Augustiny (Town of East Haddam)

Kim Barber-Bradley (Town of Salem)

David Bingham (Salem Land Trust)

Riley Doherty (ERWSCC Environmental Program Coordinator)

Bernie Gillis (Town of East Haddam)

Marilyn Gleeson (East Haddam Land Trust)

Anthony Griggs (Town of Salem)

David Gumbart (The Nature Conservancy)

Liz Lacy (National Park Service)

Parker Lord (Town of Lyme)

Ed Natoli (Town of Salem)

Rob Smith (Town of East Haddam)

Eric Thomas (DEEP)

Melvin Woody (Lyme Land Conservation Trust)

Call to Order:

Chairman Anthony Irving called the meeting to order at 5:04 PM.

Minutes, September 28, 2020:

Motion to approve the minutes, as presented, was approved (motion: Melvin Woody; second: David Bingham).

Future Office Space:

David Gumbart reported that The Nature Conservancy held meetings with the Community Foundation of Middlesex County and the Burnham Brook Preserve Stewardship Committee the week following ERWSCC’s September 28 meeting. The Conservancy presented options for use of the house at Burnham Brook, with a stated preference for using it as office space, including with one or more conservation partners. There was unanimous support for this from both groups. Gumbart will ask TNC colleague Sarah Pellegrino to reach out to Pat Young for an update on the process moving forward.

Marilyn Gleeson stated the East Haddam Land Trust would be interested in exploring opportunities to use the space, including for storage of documents. Irving reported the Lyme Land Conservation Trust (LLCT) will be discussing its office space needs in December.

National Park Service:

Liz Lacy is working with Young and Riley Doherty and other board members to facilitate a Unigrid Map for the Eightmile. Staff is also working on an article to submit for a National Wild & Scenic Rivers publication.

Executive Committee:

Young stated that ERWSCC has its Treasurer and Vice Chairman positions vacant. Earlier calls for volunteers from the Committee to fill these roles has resulted in some conversations. The positions would provide assistance for Chairman Irving, who regularly represents the Committee at multiple meetings and events. The Treasurer’s role will help with coordinating Committee finances with fiscal agent, the Lyme LCT.

Young asked Lacy if ERWSCC sought to become a not-for-profit group (not a 501(c)(3)), would it impact its ability to apply for and receive federal grant funding. Lacy stated she did not believe it would impact funding. The Committee is over 10 years old (as per formal date of recognition as a Wild & Scenic River), and with growth, the finances have grown and evolved. Assistance with keeping business practices current is needed.

Anthony Griggs asked about the need for a fiscal agent. Lacy responded that to receive federal funding right now as the Coordinating Committee is not a non-profit organization, a fiscal agent is needed.

There will be a call for election of officers at the January 2021 meeting. Irving suggested updating the roster of members, and affiliations of those members, would be helpful.

Budget:

Young stated there is not much to report. Lacy asked when ERWSCC will begin planning for the next fiscal year. Young stated that input from National Parks Service, providing a ballpark estimate of expected funding, helps kick off annual fiscal planning. Lacy said a good baseline is to expect level funding (i.e. same as last year).

Partner Updates:

*Nature Conservancy*: Gumbart stated the Conservancy will be hiring a new Land Steward, to replace an employee who left the organization several months ago. There will be a time allocation for the position to work in the Eightmile watershed.

*East Haddam Land Trust*: Gleeson reported a calendar featuring photographs is coming out shortly.

*Salem Land Trust*: Bingham reported the land trust has an application in for open space funding from the state for a 50-acre parcel with farm fields and forest. located off Darling Road. It is adjacent to existing protected land (land trust’s Alfred Bingham parcel and Nehantic State Forest). Griggs shared a map of the project area.

*Lyme LCT*: Woody stated the land trust has several projects in the early stages.

*Town of East Haddam*: Rob Smith stated the Town is waiting to hear if it will receive funding for a project on O’Connell Road Extension. Another project is moving ahead on a parcel across from Roaring Brook. All open space projects must be balanced with other town fiscal needs.

*DEEP*: Eric Thomas stated there is no announcement set for the current open space grant round.

*Town of Lyme*: Parker Lord reported one of two bridge replacement projects is moving ahead.

*Town of Salem*: Kim Barber-Bradley reported the Town Inland Wetland Commission will propose new language in its regulations, expanding the review area around wetlands. No update from the Army Corps of Engineers about the previously discussed wetland encroachment along Shingle Mill Brook. Lacy will see if there are any updates she can pass on. Ed Natoli stated a new encroachment, the third this year, was noted along Witch Meadow Road. The setback increase Inland Wetlands is discussing would take place following Planning & Zoning review of its own regulations. Young stated there was good progress working with P&Z, and the next step would be to have the Salem Town Attorney review the proposed language. A public hearing will be required to review and vote on any proposed language. Irving praised Young for her efforts, with her tone and tenor setting the stage for positive discussions.

Bingham reported that the American Chestnut Foundation is looking to establish a local nursery to grow chestnuts, and Lyme is a possible location. A nursery site on open space land could be used to educate local land trust and other partners about the value of chestnut and its future role in being reintroduced to the forests of the northeast.

Subcommittees:

*Outreach & Education*: the open space/preserve map Doherty produced has received positive feedback. ERWSCC’s Facebook page has received 110 new followers in the last month, and over 300 since the beginning of the pandemic. A unigrid map is being planned, and meeting in December will help develop design and content ideas further. Timeframe to production is one year. High quality drone photography from local content producer Frank Dinardi is being planned. Middle School programs conducted in small groups have successfully engaged students. The upcoming March issue of Estuary magazine will feature the Eightmile.

*Protection & Management*: Young is collecting samples of brochure as examples of what would be helpful in development of the Overlay Zone handout. She is hoping to get input from Salem Conservation Commission. Bingham noted the history of local lands, and information about it, needs to accurately include the role and contributions of native people and African-Americans; ensuring all visitors to open space areas feel comfortable and safe is essential. Young said she hopes to have diversity represented with future interns. Doherty stated New Haven’s Outdoor Afro Connecticut is making strides in connecting African-Americans with the outdoors, which represents an opportunity for healing in a racially divided country. Gumbart stated the Conservancy is interested in engaging a broader constituency in visiting preserves; Barber-Bradley would like to ensure residents in the New London area can be connected to the outdoors.

*Science & Monitoring*: Doherty reported that 3 programs took place in October, including at Pleasant Valley, Patrell and Walden, with positive feedback. Young reported the loggers in area rivers/streams are being gathered up for the year. Doherty’s brother has been helpful in this effort due to covid restrictions. Data will be shared with DEEP. DEEP cold water stream information on the web is here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Water/Inland-Water-Monitoring/Cold-Water-Stream-Habitat-Map> E. Thomas reported that work with the University of Hartford is being done to develop machine learning technology, using data state-launched loggers have collected. Six categories of data can be measured through Artificial Intelligence photo interpretation. This will be helpful for regulatory commissions to better understand how a dynamic system such as a river behaves. Irving asked if ERWSCC has received any reporting from contractor Bill Moorhead, who is revisiting sites he assessed during the development of the Eightmile management plan. Young stated she was still waiting for results. Gumbart stated Moorhead was working with the Native Plant Trust to collect seed of the endangered Hyssop skullcap (*Scutellaria integrifolia*) for propagation and reintroduction to local sites.

Project Review: briefly addressed earlier in meeting. Not much new to report.

Old & New Business: Young reported that 2021 meeting dates are set. For now, all meetings will be planned via Zoom platform.

Adjournment: Irving adjourned the meeting at 7:05 with a message of “stay safe, stay healthy.”

Respectfully submitted, David Gumbart, ERWSCC Secretary 