

**Fall 2018 Steering Committee Meeting
Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
73 Weir Hill Road, Sudbury
September, 28, 2018**

Meeting Minutes

Call to Order: Introductions around the table.

Minutes: Cynthia made the motion to approve the past meeting minutes and Buzz seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

MassLand Update

Directors Report: Carolyn shared a few updates. Climate change planning and Leadership training workshops over the summer. The 2019 conference is being planned, March 23rd in Worcester with Gina McCarthy as the keynote speaker. The Request for Proposals for the conference will be sent shortly and people are encouraged to send in workshop proposals. We are seeking additional sponsors, and asking each organization to bring one sponsor to the conference. The land trust/agency retreat is being hosted on November 1st and 2nd at Harvard Forest in Petersham. Bob Wilbur shared details about the retreat.

Young Land Professionals report: Greenbelt hosted an event in June that brought together YLP members from across the state. Another event in November to visit the southeast part of the state. Reggie Hall suggested that YLP members going to conference attend his reception. Mass Conservation community folks will have a couple places to gather during Rally. More information is in the eNews.

Conservation Restriction Review Subcommittee: Rob Warren reported about the start of this process. There was a meeting in mid-August to set the process and some content discussion. Made some initial progress in understanding the needs of both parties in the process. A draft outline of process will be finished soon; likely we will want to have an annual review of the CR process. There is acknowledgement that we need to accommodate the projects that are in process even when the model CR is updated. The whole community will be asked for comments about the model CR next year.

Farmland Protection update: Nathan L'Etole is the new executive director of American Farmland Trust. There is no national farm bill. Most of the conservation program funding will lapse until the next bill is passed. The Environmental Bond Bill has significant Agricultural Preservation Restriction program authorization. The spending of the money is limited based on how many bonds can be sold. There are some new policies that should allow more public input, and other revisions that should help the program. Massachusetts has a \$1M estate tax level, and there is recent reform that allows agricultural and managed forestland to be valued at Chapter 61A values. That significantly reduces family estate tax liability. This will be effective in 2019.

Do we want to set up an Agricultural Working Group subcommittee? An established group that is able to react and be proactive about agricultural issues in Massachusetts. Get your name to Carolyn Sedgwick if you want to be on the subcommittee.

Value of Open Space working group is meeting October 24th at 1:30pm at SVT to start their work.

State Update EEA

Solar Incentives SMART Program: Kurt Gaertner shared that SMART was passed last week. There is a review process being built in to make some adjustments in siting, if needed.

The money has gone to agencies for acquisition and stewardship, off to a great start for FY19, usual business is happening as it should.

State Grant Programs: Emmanuel Owusu shared that LAND, PARC and CP grants are under review now. Hopefully the announcements will be made in November. Open for application is the Landscape Partnership grant, check in with Emmanuel to get feedback on any potential projects. Recently posted the Drinking Water grant program due in November. Small Community Appraisal grants are also open. He is seeking more grant applications for these last two grant programs.

Environmental Bond Bill: Kurt shared that there is an outside section that authorized a Transfer of Development Rights program and working on regulations soon, hoping to have the regulations ready by July 2019. Also a provision for the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership. The municipalities need to approve at the local level and seek additional funding to make the program work. Renewed effort to look at the state "surplus" properties and make them officially within the conservation arena. There is a dedicated group working on trail projects, meeting bi-weekly to advance state-wide trail efforts. The Recreational Trails Program grants were just announced. The Moving Together conference is November 1st and there will be specific announcements at this event.

Conservation Restrictions: John Gioia is pleased to be engaging in the subcommittee review process, he appreciates the discussion and dependable way to interact sharing information. John and Denise Pires shared housekeeping updates, asking people to send a hardcopy of the application form only, and then everything else should come electronically. Revised instructions will be on the application form. The submission deadline for year-end CRs should be submitted as soon as possible, but there isn't a specific deadline this year. EEA is caught up on the backlog of CRs. John and Denise received a round of applause.

Legislative Update

Karen Heymann shared an update. It is the end of the session so this is a time to think about next session priorities. The operating budget has an increase for DEP and DCR, Ecological Restoration got additional funding for culvert replacement and cranberry bog restoration. Bond \$2.4B for conservation priorities including climate adaptation. Karen suggested that towns and conservation groups get involved in the Municipal Vulnerability Program grant program.

PILOT: There were a number of bills introduced but none of them moved forward. Good news for land trusts. There should be a report out on the benefit of non-profits to the Commonwealth that is likely to be finished next spring.

Conservation Land Tax Credit: The bill to increase the annual cap did not pass. We need to continue to push for an expansion of the annual cap to clear the bottleneck.

Zoning Reform: No progress was made on any of the bills that were introduced.

Article 97: The bill that would codify the No Net Loss policy did not pass. Need to work with Mass Municipal Association to see how to adjust the bill so that it can pass. It will likely be re-filed in the next session.

Energy and Climate Change: There was a small increase required for renewable energy that is required to be purchased and other energy adjustments.

Pollinator Habitat: There are efforts to improve habitat improvements and reduction of the neonicotinoid pesticide use. More work next session.

Solar: The next thing to work on adjusting is reducing the net metering cap. Also looking at ways to incentive building more solar in the built environment.

Mass Rivers Alliance is promoting legislation that give the EEA Secretary the power to impose limits on non-essential use of water during drought situations. The new Drought Management Plan will be coming out in a few months and land trusts should comment on the report.

LTA Update

Kevin Case shared his report. Rally is coming up in a few weeks. The state association gathering is planned at Rally to compare notes especially around policy and fundraising. The 1772 Foundation grant program is taking the next year off for funding in New England and only funding in New Jersey. LTA and MLTC will be having discussions about our partnership. The policy realm is moving well, especially the Farm Bill being passed, a number of LWCF bills to get reinstated, syndicated deals are still a problem, IRS is pursuing enforcement on 40 syndicated transactions. The Proceeds clause is being challenged by IRS, so need to push back on this interpretation of CR language.

Proposed IRS Regulations Affecting State Credit Tax Credit Program

Mark Robinson shared a graphic showing how proposed regulations may affect people going through the CLTC process. The full regulations are in the most recent MLTC eNews. LTA has made comments on these regulations that are posted on their website.

Open Comment

Reggie Hall announced:

- 1) The Conservation Fund has grants from Kellogg Foundation for food system, food security, food access program. CSX has a grants around transportation around food.
- 2) Training course, Balancing Nature and Commerce, is being offered in March 2019, a better way to pair economic development and the environment.
- 3) There is land in Millis that might be donated for conservation.

Meeting adjourned at 12:35pm