

**MINUTES OF MEETING
CONWAY CONSERVATION COMMISSION
July 13, 2005**

A meeting of the Conway Conservation Commission convened at 6:35 p.m. at the Whitaker Homesite in North Conway, NH. Present were: Chair, Paul Pinkham; Dan Lucy, Carol Lyman, Rob Adair, Phil Haynes, David Weathers, and Alternates, Connie Briggs and Linda Kearney.

The Chair appointed Mr. Briggs as a full voting member.

Approval of Minutes: Motion was made by Mr. Briggs, seconded by Mr. Adair, to approve the May 11th Minutes as submitted. Carried by unanimous vote. The June meeting was not held for lack of a quorum.

Reports:

Forestry - Mr. Pinkham gave a brief report in the absence of Don Johnson. Mr. Johnson advises that the CCC must decide very soon if he is to schedule work for the Commission this year.

Nature Conservancy - Jeff Lougee introduced himself as representing The Nature Conservancy (TNC) replacing Peter Benson who has taken a new job. Mr. Lougee expects to regularly attend CCC meetings and maintain the existing cooperative relationship.

Mr. Lougee reported that 1,200 acres of TNC's Bear Paw property would be sold. The Upper Saco Valley Land Trust has agreed to hold a conservation easement on the property. The large amount is being sold because of the easement restrictions that are in place. Revenue from the sale will be used to further TNC holdings elsewhere.

Mr. Pinkham then suggested the meeting be adjourned for a presentation by the NH Audubon Society and be reconvened after the presentation. **Motion was made by Mr. Weathers, seconded by Mr. Briggs and carried, that the meeting be adjourned at 6:40 p.m.**

NH Audubon Society Presentation: David Houghton, President of NH Audubon Society (NHAS) updated the Commission and public in attendance, including news media, on the Dahl Sanctuary. The meeting was videotaped by Valley Vision.

Mr. Houghton announced that NHAS is considering not moving forward with the eco-lodge plan previously being considered. While not decided, they are not considering constructing anything on the Dahl Sanctuary property itself, rather they would improve the trails and their access, and build a nature center and small shop on the former White Mountain Oil property. Mr. Lougee explained there are rare plants which need to be protected. The developer, MRM, would build a retail store of some sort there. Mr.

Houghton pointed out that the deed allows for a center to be located there. No construction would take place on the Sanctuary. No trees would be removed, trees would be added and the property made more welcoming and attractive.

The eco-lodge concept is to have people stay for a period of time. NHAS had felt that the Dahl Sanctuary was a terrific open space for this; however, “the people” have looked at it as forever protected, and they understand that the Dahl Sanctuary is one of the last pieces of green space in the area.

There was question of what plans are being made for protection of biological values that are there now. Mr. Houghton said they want to protect the sand bar, and need gates to prevent off road vehicles from getting in there. There was question of what the emphasis is of drawing people to the location? Mr. Houghton said they work hand in hand with Land Trust – the eco-lodge concept is interesting to NHAS, but they are now questioning whether the Dahl Sanctuary is the most appropriate place for that right now.

Mr. Briggs provided Mr. Houghton with copies of the Teletalk column from the local newspaper (which by and large expressed the feeling that we do not need more hotels here in town) and Mr. Briggs agreed with that. Mr. Houghton said his impression was the center was welcome, but an eco-lodge was not.

Mr. Haynes noted the reference to the use of the property to make some revenue and said it would not bother him if there was a small retail building there, but he questioned whether people would be allowed to, for instance, swim in the pool nearby, and use the parking lot. Mr. Houghton said they would like to improve trails – the trail presently runs right into an endangered plant area and they want to change that. He noted that anyone rafting in the river who wants to stop (out of the endangered plant area) would be free to do so free of charge, for the time being. Mr. Houghton stated if they were to do an eco-lodge it would be a “green” building to reduce impact, as is the case with the retail store. Ms. Kearney acknowledged having some presence there could be advantageous.

Chet Lucy commented that the White Mt. Oil property has been sold to MRM. Mr. Houghton stated there is a lease for NHAS to be able to do a center there, and a variety of other things on that property – it is not an outright sale, there are a lot of covenants and conditions. He stated the original White Mt. Oil property is nearly 7 acres, including a 2.1 acre area for the parking lot. NHAS sold it to MRM with a conservation easement on the major portion of it. The back part of the property is a charitable contribution back to NHAS, MRM does have control of the front part of the property. It was noted that potentially, there is going to be activity there other than NHAS activity. Mr. Adair asked whether there will be any accommodations at all at the center. Mr. Houghton stated no.

Martin Frank said he had done a study on the property ten years ago of the ecosystems within this relatively small site, but expressed there are ecological concerns of bringing a lot of people to that site. He felt the best thing that could happen to that piece of land is for all of this never to have happened. Mr. Houghton assured him that NHAS will do everything it can to mitigate any impact that should occur, his hope being that in a few

years those concerns will be relieved and we will see better trails at the Dahl Sanctuary, no off road vehicle use, etc.

There was question of the commercial arrangement. Mr. Houghton said they can do a fundraising campaign, or can do it some other way which would be with a for-profit entity so they would not be competing with other fundraisers in Conway.

There was question of whether there is going to be commercial activity there. Mr. Houghton said on the 2.1 acre sandy parking lot there is likely to be some kind of store that is not NHAS, and an NHAS center. They would like to try to do it without adding asphalt.

Mr. Pinkham pointed out it is a choice piece of property they are seeking to develop, which seems to be contrary to the collective wisdom of the people in the State who are earnestly trying to acquire property in order to protect it. He felt people might be more receptive to the idea of an information center with some educational capabilities – possibly sales of tapes on bird calls or T-shirts, as being appropriate. Mr. Houghton stated that is what NHAS has been thinking about there and not using it as an eco-tourism center. Mr. Pinkham commented that ownership and leasing usually indicate a revenue stream – you either make it or you don't and it reverts to something else. Mr. Houghton said it is quite a long lease – they expect the center to be there for a good long time.

Mr. Haynes said he does not see how a make-money organization could be associated with NHAS – there has to be a separation for them to be able to do what they want to do. Mr. Houghton referenced the “green” building and felt the retail would be compatible to what NHAS is about.

There was question of the time frame. Mr. Houghton said he could not comment as their direction has changed, but certainly not until late fall, early spring, or next summer.

Upon question of how it would be advertised, Mr. Houghton indicated a small sign would be used.

Mrs. Lucy questioned whether there is a commitment agreement with MRM. Mr. Houghton said there is a reciprocal agreement for leasing the back portion – NHAS gets the back land and will be able to use the parking lot. As regards building an eco-lodge, NHAS will be able to say they do not want that to happen.

There being no further questions, the CCC meeting reconvened at 7:50 p.m. to continue with reports.

Treasurer: A report is scheduled for the August meeting.

Selectmen's Report: Mr. Weathers said there were no new applications to be reviewed. He said that he needs to talk with Don Lyford of NHDOT regarding a tree buffer at Shedd Woods where the street drain was replaced. At present it appears more like a road than an access path to the picnic area and trails there. The buffer is needed to prevent cars from entering the area. There was some discussion as to whether or not there would be curbing in this area. Because the site is a picnic area, parking on the road shoulder has been used in the past; curbing would likely inhibit the ability to pull a car off Rt. 16.

Other Business:

White Mt. Milers' Request – Mr. Pinkham had given the Milers conditional approval after receiving mostly favorable responses (by mail) from the Commission. **Motion was made by Mr. Briggs to grant the White Mt. Milers' request to continue the Tuesday night race series, ratifying the conditional approval made earlier. Seconded by Ms. Kearney.** It was felt policy must be established, and Mr. Haynes said he does not feel the CCC should get into reserving a particular trail for a particular day on a regular basis - it should be there for anyone to use at any time. Mr. Adair said he feels it is an appropriate use of Whitaker Woods, it is a low impact activity, not detrimental to the trails, and is not taking up much of the day, and would not prohibit its use by others. He noted, however, that he feels groups using it should provide someone to run through the course making sure everything is picked up. It was agreed they will be advised to apply in a more timely fashion next year if they want to run such a series again; they are also to be advised that CCC policy may be developed and requests from others, as well as conflicts, could be a part of the consideration. **The vote to grant approval to continue the Tuesday night race series was approved by a vote of four to three.** Discussion of the motion included a view that casual use of the trails there was preferred; structured events should not become more regular, especially for several consecutive weeks.

It was noted that the Milers had not provided the required route map. Ms. Kearney said she would contact the Milers for a copy of the map.

Kearsarge Brook Crossing – MWV Ski Touring Association is investigating a proper bridge. A DES permit is needed.

Whitaker Trail – The trail plan for Whitaker is not complete.

Whitaker Trail Sign Project – An inventory of signs has been made and needs are known. Cost estimates are being sought for the 58 name signs, 14 directional signs, and 7 information boards. The project may become a two-year effort.

Redstone Properties – This is awaiting DOT appraisal.

Upper Saco Valley Land Trust (USVLT) – Mr. Adair inquired whether the Commission had an interest in supporting the acquisition of the conservation easement for the Kennett property on West Side Road. The USVLT is raising funds for a matching federal government grant. Mr. Pinkham is to reaffirm the understanding that the conservation

land acquisition fund held by the Town can be used for this purpose. Mr. Briggs encouraged holding onto the funds until the Redstone property matter is concluded, as it was his opinion that those funds might best be used there.

The next meeting will be held on August 10th.

Motion was made by Mr. Weathers, seconded by Mr. Haynes and carried, that the meeting be adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Kearney

&

Paul Pinkham

Co-Acting Recording Secretary

&

Gail Currier, Recording Secretary