

PEPPERELL CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes – January 22, 2008

The Pepperell Conservation Commission (PCC) held a regularly scheduled meeting under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, MGL Ch. 131, §40 and the Pepperell Wetlands Protection By-Law. The meeting was held in the Town Hall at 7:00 p.m.

Members present: Elliott presiding, Rand, Rice, Sauer, Steeves, and Tzanoudakis; member absent: Moody.

Fisher reported that the insurance company of the driver whose vehicle fell off the Keyes Conservation Area driveway culvert on December 28th had sent an adjuster to see the damage to the beaver fence in the past week. The adjuster had told her that he would recommend that the full value of the estimate for its replacement be paid.

Since there were no appointments on the agenda for the February 5th meeting, the Commissioners decided to cancel the meeting.

7:10 p.m. Discussion with David Hicks re culvert at 9 Beaver Creek Circle, DEP File #259-689

Chuck Strickland of Meisner Brem and David Hicks attended the meeting. Strickland explained that he had been contacted by Hicks when Hicks had noticed discrepancies between the dimensions of the culvert he had installed and the design plan. Upon investigation, it was discovered that Hicks had ordered and installed a culvert with an internal measurement of 2 feet above the stream bed, rather than 3 feet, as specified. Strickland said that he and Hicks had met with Fisher and Bob Lee to discuss this issue. At Fisher's request, Strickland had produced a new plan, showing the culvert as it was built and proposing stabilization measures for the stream banks both up- and downstream from the culvert. Strickland had submitted revised stormwater calculations and said that the capacity of the culvert was still adequate for the 100 year storm. Bob Lee had submitted comments saying that he had no problem with either the drainage analysis or the stabilization plans.

Elliott asked if any further specifications on the filter fabric that had been left over the stream bed had been found. Hicks said that all he knew was that it was a non-woven fabric. Rice asked if light shows through the culvert at a turtle's eye level. Fisher said that she believed that it did. Elliott said that the plan showed that the difference in internal culvert height was actually less than 1 foot. He asked if that occurred because of a variation in the footing installation. Strickland said yes, but that there was no problem with the footings.

Rice said that she was disappointed with the way the construction of this culvert had happened, that it had not reflected well on either of the companies. The other Commissioners agreed. Although no one was satisfied, the Commissioners reluctantly decided that the culvert should not be removed in order to be installed differently.

Other Business

Upon a motion by Elliott, seconded by Rand, with Sauer abstaining, it was

VOTED: to approve the minutes of January 8, 2008 as drafted.

Fisher had drafted a Memo of Understanding (MOU) between the Commission and the DPW, Sewer Division. It concerned the fence that the Commission had planned to have installed along the Conservation Land property line south of 29 Groton Street. That area is within a sewer easement. The memo stated that the Commission was aware that the Sewer Division may remove the fence if they need to access the sewer. On a motion from Rand, seconded by Elliott, all

VOTED: to sign the MOU.

The Commissioners approved vacation for Fisher on Feb. 20-21, 2008.

The Commission discussed **the Management Plan for Pepperell Springs**. MassWildlife Land Agent Phil Truesdell had offered to help the Commission to amend the plan if necessary. For this meeting Fisher had prepared a summary of the Goals and Management Summary sections of the Forest Management Plan to highlight the sections of the plan that seemed to be in conflict with the Timber Management sections. The Management Summary specifically states that timber harvest is not the primary goal for the management of Pepperell Springs, although it could be used as a tool to achieve other goals. It also says that the Commission had chosen to view biodiversity on a regional basis, and, therefore, there would be no need to create all types of habitat on this one parcel. The plan states that, in fact, Pepperell Spring's major contribution to regional biodiversity is that it is a large tract of unbroken forest. This habitat type is increasingly uncommon while other types, such as early successional habitat, are proliferating.

Rice and Rand had done a site visit to Pepperell Springs on Monday, January 21, to observe particularly the areas that had been recommended for timber harvest in the management plan. Rice had taken photos and brought an aerial photo from Mass GIS that showed that the timber harvest areas were relatively flat and had heavy cover (up to 75% cover) of white pine. She said that she believed that these areas had previously been pastures, like much of Massachusetts, and in reverting to forest they had developed 3 age classes of white pines. Rice said that the tallest two age classes were canopy trees. The tallest trees tend to be wide and have many branches. Just below them is a class of straight, narrow pines, ready to grow rapidly if shade from the largest trees were removed. There are also occasional dense patches of white pines in the understory (5-10 feet).

Rice explained that the list of goals that the Forest Management Plan allows land owners to select from have as a background assumption that the primary purpose of a forest is to produce timber products. In this part of the world, the most valuable timber resources for some years have been tall, straight white pine trees, and, therefore, the type of forests that result from forestry management plans are stands of white pine in all areas that can support that species. Secondary goals for wildlife, water quality, etc. can also be accommodated. Rice said that she would like to see the forest at Pepperell Springs allowed to develop into a different type of forest altogether. She said she would like it to be one that would be as much as possible like the forests in this area were before settlement by Europeans. This is the model that is encouraged by the researchers at Harvard Forest in Petersham and by Mass. Fisheries and Wildlife on some state-owned forest lands. On this property a pre-settlement type forest on the relatively flat areas would be primarily oaks and northern hardwoods with only scattered patches of white pine. The steep slopes on either side of the Gulf

Brook gorge would remain mostly hemlock on the east and hardwoods on the west side, as they are now. The wetland areas would also remain largely unchanged. Rice said that this type of forest is called “appropriate native biodiversity.” Rand added that this would be the “climax forest;” that is, the reasonably stable type of forest that would eventually appear if the land was left unmanaged for several centuries.

The Commissioners agreed that a pre-settlement type forest would be a preferable goal to a white pine timber stand, and they discussed methods for attaining it. Rice said that if nothing whatever were done to the property, it would eventually become a pre-settlement type, but that it would take a very long time. She said that harvesting the existing white pine, in ways that do not encourage white pine regeneration, is possible and could nudge the forest toward the goal more quickly. Elliott said that such timber harvest would be “forest management,” rather than “timber management.”

Rice suggested a 20-year plan which would result in a mostly closed canopy to encourage the growth of hardwoods and discourage further pine growth. As a first step, most of the largest pines that started growing in the abandoned fields, and therefore have branches that reduce their timber value, and some of the thinner, but almost as tall, pines could be harvested now and probably sold for the cost of the work. A few of the largest trees should be left to become standing snags for their wildlife value, and the harvest should be done carefully so as not to open up the canopy significantly. Second, in 15 to 20 years many of the remaining, then larger, branchless white pines could be sold for a profit since they would then be mature for harvest as boards. Again, the canopy should be left intact as much as possible. The hardwoods then left in the understory would be expected to outgrow the smaller white pines, and the forest would be closer to being a hardwood dominated forest with scattered white pine, instead of white pine dominated.

Fisher was asked to consult with Phil Truesdell about methods for amending the Management Plan.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen L. Fisher