

TRAILS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

141 Keyes Road, Conference Room

Concord, MA

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Reformatory Branch Trail Walk

9:15 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Attending: Bob White (chair), Delia Kaye (Natural Resources Director), Will Holden (Land Manager), David Clarke, Carlene Hempel (scribe), Bill Kemeza, Jonathan “Jay” Keyes

Members absent: Spencer Borden and Ken Miller

Stewards present: Beth Baryames, Alice Galinat, Pam Howell, Wayne Lobb, Bouke Noordzij, Ned Perry, Bill Robichaud

Visitors: Mark Gailus, Ellen Quackenbush, Matt Johnson.

Chairman Bob White called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.

Minutes:

On a motion made by Bill Kemeza and seconded by David Clarke, minutes from the February meeting were unanimously approved as amended.

STEWARD REPORTS:

[Annursnac-Baptist Book Conservation Land](#): Stewart Pam Howell says the trail is in good shape and commented that it was good to be back in person for the meeting.

[Baker Avenue Boat Launch & Picnic Area](#): Other than a Norway Maple that had to be removed, the trail is in good shape.

[Barrett’s Mill Conservation Area](#): No report.

[Cousins Park](#): No report.

[Emerson-Thoreau Amble](#): Steward Wayne Lobb said there were no problems.

[Mattison Field](#): No report.

[Moses Pond/Ridge Trail](#): Steward Ned Perry said there was nothing to report.

[October Farm Riverfront](#): Steward Bouke Noordzij reported that a snow plow had scraped up some of the crushed stone and he was planning to rake it back into place. He also noted the water was high at the beaver dam. He has reached out the stewards at Concord Land Conservation Trust to see if they could help mitigate the situation. Delia noted that the people from “Beaver Solutions” will conduct a visit in the spring.

[Old Rifle Range](#): Steward Alice Galinat reported the wood frogs are back and that she has seen a lot of eggs but worried about freezing temperatures. Delia assured her not to worry.

[Powder Mill Woods](#): No report.

[Punkatasset Preserve](#): No report.

[Reformatory Branch Trail](#): Steward Bill Robichaud reported the trails are in good shape.

[Rivers Confluence](#): No report. Bob noted he hasn't heard from the trail steward for months.

[Hapgood-Wright Town Forest](#): No report. But David Clancy reported via email there was a tree down on the yellow trail by Cambridge Turnpike.

[West Concord Park](#): Steward Beth Baryames reported the trail is clear and safe.

[Westvale-Harrington](#): No report.

[White Pond Reservation](#): No report. Bob noted he hasn't had a report for months.

REGULAR BUSINESS:

[Land Manager's Report](#). Will Holden forfeited his time so scheduled presenters could have more time to speak before a scheduled trail walk at 9.

[Reformatory Branch Trail Info/Data Presentation](#): Wayne Lobb, a former arbitrator, volunteered to assess the trail usage levels and report back to the Trails Committee. As a preface, he noted that traditionally, rail trails surfaces exist in many forms, from dirt and stone dust to paved. He noted that there is significant interest in developing a cycling “interstate” that would link rail trails and bikeways together across multiple town and jurisdictions. For the purposes of his presentation, he visited the Nashua River Rail Trail, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway, the Assabet River Rail Trail and the Mass Central Rail Trail. He noted that the Assabet River Rail Trail is paved until it hits the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge, at which point it turns to dirt.

As for the Reformatory Branch Trail, he noted that from his assessment, most users fall into these categories: walkers, joggers, cyclists, runners, birders, nature lovers and families. Most

who are on foot are in groups of two or more, side by side across the trail. Most users on wheels are using the trail “solo” and include cyclists, inline skaters and skateboarders.

One fundamental issue about the Reformatory Trail, he noted, is that there is a fair amount of noise, mostly from aircraft connected to nearby Hanscom Field. He also noted that birders can be distracted and wander or zigzag on the trail, which could affect fast-moving cyclists who wouldn't expect to see a group of slow, erratic or stop-and-start walkers.

In relation to the RBT specifically, he said

- This area is designated as a “priority habitat,” which means it has regulatory oversight from the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.. The same is true for Bedford’s portion of the trail from near Route 62 to the Concord town line that Bedford voted down developing at their 2022 Town Meeting.
- Wayne also noted that the RBT is uniquely tied to the [Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge](#). It’s No. 22 in the top 100 birding sites in the state and the only one that is inland, making it an “extremely popular loop with birders.”
- The RBT needs better services and better drainage, especially near Butternut Circle, where leaves, water and mud make drainage, and accessibility, are not ideal.

In summary, Wayne noted that there are no proper bike lanes on Concord roads and no bikeways that connect the east side of town with the west. He acknowledged that Rte. 62 between Concord center and Bedford is a problem for cyclists because of its limited sight lines and hills. As a compromise, he suggested that the two towns coordinate to build a safe bike route along Rte. 62 between the two towns. Wayne suggested even seeking access to the Massport land west of the Hanscom base.

Public comment:

Ellen Quackenbush, a trail steward (206 Prairie St.) thanked Wayne for his presentation and added that cyclists don't see turtles. She asked that Bryan Windmiller, local conversationist and president of Grassroots Wildlife Conservation who resides close to the trail, be included in any analysis of this project.

David Clarke, a trails committee member, said he has lived by the trail for over 50 years and has seen it go through many changes. He noted its intended use was for transportation and it would be wise for that ability to be preserved, while also keeping it safe for walkers and wildlife.

Citizen’s Petition to Preserve Reformatory Branch Trail Discussion: Mark Gailus (62 Prescott Road) stood to present a summary of a warrant article he sponsored, No. 47, that seeks to emphasize the benefits of the trail as it is, meaning preserving it for pedestrian use. He noted that on the Bedford side of the Reformatory Branch, the trail’s hard surface stops 800 feet before the Concord line to avoid the U.S Fish and Wildlife property. He also said that for almost 1 mile, the

trail is in direct contact with the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, where two endangered species – Britton’s Violets and Blanding’s Turtles – reside. “These species are our responsibility. If trail modifications need to be made, they should be done in a very careful, thoughtful way,” he said. He acknowledged that the trail was indeed a railway but that there are parts that are nature immersive, which teaches us how nature can restore itself, he said.

Committee chair Bob White asked Mark what “unpaved” means to him. Mark answered that he thought any “hard-bonded” surface is harmful to the experience of walking on the trail.

Bill Robichaud, a trail steward (Nancy Road) said he believes the town needs to study the trail – not to necessarily install a hard surface but to accurately assess its needs. He said article No. 47 keeps the trail where it is, and article No. 46, which asks for a study of grading and drainage, would move the conversation forward.

Reformatory Branch Trail Walk: At 9 a.m., Bob moved the meeting from a conference room at 141 Keyes Road to the start of the Reformatory Branch Trail off Lowell Road. For the next hours and 15 minutes, trail committee members, stewards and some residents including Bryan Windmiller walked the trail in dispersed groups to assess and bear witness to its condition. Both Bob and Bill Robichaud pointed out trail features including historic artifacts and some debris. There was no official discussion of what should be done, only reference to what has been done and could be done to make improvements with drainage near Monument Street and at Butternut Circle, and relocation beside the Waste Water Treatment Facility.

Adjournment: At 11:15 a.m., Bob disbanded the meeting.

Next Meeting: The next Trails Committee meeting is scheduled for April 26, 2022, at 8 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carlene Hempel