Natural Resources Committee  
Wednesday, October 14, 2015 at 2:00 pm  
In the WRC Conference Room  
Meeting Minutes

Attendance
Natural Resources Committee present: Maggie Bartenhagen, Chair, Bob Anderson, Nick Bartenhagen, David Deen, Jim Olivier, Andy Toepfer, John Whitman  
Guest present: Patti Smith  
Staff present: Kim Smith

The meeting was called to order at 2:02pm with a quorum present and led by M. Bartenhagen.

Minutes
- The minutes of September 9, 2015 Natural Resources Committee were approved unanimously (motion by J. Whitman, seconded by B. Anderson)

Introductions
- With several new members joining the Committee for fiscal year 2016, Committee members introduced themselves and shared why they were interested in being on the Committee.

Saxtons River Watershed Collaborative/High Meadows Fund
- K. Smith provided an update on the Land Management workshop, scheduled for October 17. It was shared that preparations were going well for a robust program and that additional RSVPs were still being accepted.

Flow Device Installation Initiative
- K. Smith shared that she had had a productive meeting with Chris Bernier and Rachel Bakerian, Furbearer Biologists for VT Department of Fish and Wildlife. P. Smith was also present at the meeting. The State is interested in collaborating on this initiative. They are interested in being able to offer better outreach materials to the public on alternative methods of dealing with nuisance beavers. It was shared that the *BMPs for Resolving Human-Beaver Conflicts in Vermont* has been revised; however the procedures for dealing with beavers saw little change because to do so would require legislative approval. K. Smith noted that there are conflicting statutes regulating beaver management. The Committee agreed on a proposed path forward: focus initially on the development of a flow device manual and outreach materials, followed by dedicated education and outreach to towns. Thirdly, the initiative could assist towns with the implementation of flow devices. It was noted that to make flow devices an attractive option, they needed to be relatively easy to install/maintain, be low-cost, and have a good success rate. The Committee would like to convene a meeting with C. Bernier, Kim Royer (if available), municipalities, and Skip Lisle to discuss collaborative opportunities and next steps.
Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge draft conservation plan

- The Committee discussed the draft conservation plan and the 4 proposed alternatives. It was suggested that Alternative B, which does not seek to expand Refuge lands, may be the best choice from a regional perspective because some towns do not favor federal ownership of lands due to its impact on the tax base. It was suggested that the Refuge should focus on conserving lands through alternatives to fee-ownership. K. Smith agreed to draft a letter outlining the Committee’s concerns and seek Committee input ahead of the Nov. 16 comment deadline.

Comments on Act 250

- The Committee discussed what was working/not working with Act 250. It was shared that 2014 legislation to control strip development was receiving push back from developers; however many Committee members expressed their support for this legislation which is aligned with State goals to encourage historic settlement patterns. It was suggested that the Road Rule should be reinstated in Act 250 in order to reduce forest fragmentation.

Comments for the Public Policy and Legislation Committee

- Committee members discussed four important natural resource issues that needed greater regional attention and that they would like the PPLC to address with district representatives: 1. A broader regional approach and greater awareness about the management of invasive species. 2. The need for greater awareness of the important role that beavers play in supporting flood resiliency through the creation and maintenance of wetlands. 3. The need to address the Vermont Clean Water Act’s significant impact on trail development. 4. A better approval process in order to ensure sound solar siting that protects natural resources.

Update on recent projects/programs

- Green Stormwater Infrastructure Initiative: The Committee was reminded of two Green Infrastructure workshops on October 14 and 22 and encouraged to attend.

Other business

- Turning Local Wood into Local Good Panel Discussion: A panel discussion on the forest economy has been scheduled at the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center on October 22, 7pm.
- Ecological Restoration Program Grants: The WRC submitted two ERP grant applications for Adams Brook remediation and a Stream Geomorphic Assessment/River Corridor Plan for the East Branch North River. D. Deen shared intentions to submit an ERP grant application for a fisheries assessment on the Saxtons River in the next ERP grant funding round.
- FERC: D. Deen reported that FERC is in the process of relicensing three dams. In March, FERC will publish field studies that report the impact of dams on water resources. FERC will set conditions for licensing by January 2017 in preparation for negotiations with project owners.

Next meeting

- The next Natural Resources Committee meeting will be Wednesday, November 11, 2015 at 2:00pm or as otherwise determined.

Meeting adjourned at 3:56pm

Respectfully submitted, Kim Smith