Windham Regional Commission
Natural Resources Committee Minutes
January 24, 2019

Members Present: Gabby Ciuffreda, Chair; Steve Lembke, Lise Fortin, Linda Hecker, Andy Toepfer, John Whitman, Kevin Stine.

Absent: Bill Dunkel, Liisa Kissel, Susan Hammond.

Staff present: Emily Davis.

Public: None.

Presenter: Marie Caduto, VT DEC Basin Planner.

Meeting called to order at 5:02 p.m.

1. Meeting Minutes:
   - **Action:** Minutes from the September 27, 2018 meeting were approved, given correction to several typos, on a motion by Andy Toepfer, seconded by John Whitman. Motion passes with an abstention from Steve Lembke.

2. Tactical Basin Plan for Deerfield Basin: Update from Marie Caduto
VT DEC Basin Planner Marie Caduto gave an update of the timeline for the development of the Deerfield Tactical basin Plan. She explained that the draft plan is anticipated to be done in April / May 2019, at which point this Committee and the Commissioners would have the opportunity to review the plan.

In June and July, the draft would go through revisions, and in September and October, it would be distributed for public comment.

It is anticipated that the final draft will be delivered in November 2019, with final Agency approval in December 2019. The Plan is on a 5-year draft cycle.

Marie explained that VT ANR and the other Basin Planners are coordinating on created a common template for these plans, with the intent to make the plans more readable, the writing more accessible, and the language easier overall.

Marie showed the Committee a slide show with some maps of the Deerfield Basin, and a draft of the table of content of the plan.

NOTE: These are draft minutes, which are subject to change during final review and approval.
Marie reported that there is an EPA rule that aims to protect existing uses of water, especially if there is excellent water quality on certain tributaries. So, she advised the Committee to report any swimming locations or fishing brooks (or, more broadly, any use).

The Committee discussed areas where there are public uses, as well as areas in Basin 12 that Marie is asking the Agency to be assessed as Class 1 wetlands, ultimately with the intent to protect these areas.

Marie shared waters in the Basin that are targeted for reclassification to A(1) status. She showed a map of the Basin with the sub-basins that are existing A(1), potential for A(1), and B(1), depending on water quality metrics such as monitoring data and stream macro-invertebrates. Some of the streams that are impaired are the N. Branch of the Deerfield, plus some acid-impaired lakes, the Harriman Reservoir, the Searsburg Reservoir, and the Whetstone Brook, among others.

Finally, Marie showed a chart of the towns in the Basin that have a completed road erosion inventory, as per the MRGP requirements. There was some discussion about the road erosion inventory and the MRGP requirements, and which towns in the region are compliant, or on track to be compliant, with that general permit.

3. Windham Connectivity Collaborative: Grant application to the HMF

Emily Davis reported to the Committee that a grant application was submitted to the High meadows Fund, to their Forest Integrity grant program, which was new for 2018/2019, and largely in response to the Act 171 forest fragmentation plan requirements.

If the project were to be funded, she explained that the overall intent of the program would be to fund a collaborative approach to both local and regional efforts around habitat connectivity and forest health integrity. In addition to local action (such as landowner workshops), the project would also support regional plan efforts (such as taking a deep dive into conservation planning). One important part of the proposal is to explore the feasibility of creating, staffing, and supporting a lasting regional conservation partnership.

4. Discussion of opportunities for Commissioner engagement

Gabby Ciuffreda started the conversation naming two concepts: movement on the part of the Commissioners to be more engaged in the operations and projects of the Commission, and the implementation of the Regional Energy Plan and more movement towards climate change action.

Gabby also gave an update on staffing structure, and explained why the Regional Plan update is currently on hold. There were some ideas proposed from the staff, which may serve as a way to start a conversation among Commissioners about work that they want to do.

Steve Lembke reported that Guilford is working on approving a Flood and Fluvial Hazard Erosion Ordinance. Steve advised the other Commissioners that if their towns were to pursue similar policies, start now and build awareness early, since having too much information all at once in the towns is overwhelming. It is helpful to start talking about the issues, before anything is proposed, so there would be a base of understanding.

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Andy Toepfer added that there may be certain language may be emotionally triggering for people, and if there is a way to message some of the issues that is productive. He mentioned that the Land Trust Alliance has resources that may be helpful.

John Whitman added that he thought that an interesting topic to explore would be about the cost/benefit analysis of paving roads, and at which point that makes sense.

Lise Fortin did comment that she agreed taking an informational approach to the work is more helpful than taking direct action. Linda Hecker offered that the Emerald Ash Borer invasive insect infestation in ash trees may be of interest in the region, since it is concrete, and something that we have to be doing something about. Andy said that it may be a useful workshop or training, and people would be interested in their own ash trees.

Steve Lembke said that he would love to see educational series that promoted more awareness of the ecology, and specifically around plants. This way, people would be more aware of the landscape and the natural environments around them. This could be on wetland plants, weather patterns, invasive species, toxic plants, etc.

The Committee agreed to move forward with exploring an educational series in a subsequent meeting.

5. Next Meeting:

The Natural Resources Committee’s next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 28th, at 5:00 at the Windham regional Commission’s Conference Room.

John Whitman added that the Act 250 revisions, plus the legislative amendments to those rules, would be of interest to this Committee. If possible, it may be considered for a subsequent Natural resources Committee meeting.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 pm, with a motion by Steve and seconded by Linda Hecker.