



Town of Natick
Trails and Forest Stewardship Committee

Minutes

Zoom Meeting – Remote Participation

Monday January 5 7:00 pm

Attendees: Doug Drenik, Ch; Jim Franzen, Lisa Standley, Bob Carmichel, Peter Hodges, Mary Hudson. Claire Rundelli, Conservation Agent. Guests: Cindy Bates.

1. Minutes of the November 3 meeting were approved unanimously.
2. Take-aways from Previous Meeting (TBD = to be done)

Doug

- Check the Pegan Cove bridge - TBD
- Check the Eisenmenger sign - done
- Check the Coolidge Hill glass situation – done, no abnormal amount of glass
- Re-install Coolidge Hill junction number sign - done
- Check out Coolidge Hill graffiti - done. Painting deferred until Spring. Claire notified police.

Claire

- GPS the Timothy Coolidge new Blue Trail - TBD
- Install signs at Town Forest – Posts installed, one sign placed (but may have been vandalized)
- Research access to Pine Hill – in progress
- Cost estimate for Town Forest meadow woody plant removal – done. Secured quote from Land Stewardship.
- Install Pegan Cove bridge signage – DCR has done this.
- Research, communicate with HOA concerning Takewampait Trail repairs – still working on contacts.
- Pursue Rec & Park approval for tree removal, Coolidge Hill - TBD
- Schedule work day Pickerel Pond, bridge follow-up – defer to spring
- Pursue Water & Sewer approval to paint Town Forest gates – W&S has approved, will remove signs in advance of painting. Claire asked that the TAFS committee determine what signage should be installed (at the Feb. meeting) so that it can be ordered.

Peter

- Relocate Eisenmenger asphalt bag - done
- Remove small tree, Timothy Coolidge - done

Mary and Bob

- Coordinate on app – Mary was able to resolve issue with photos, will continue to coordinate with Bob.

3. Town Updates (Claire)

- She is submitting a funding request for increased operating funds to meet the greater needs of invasives control, requesting \$20K per year for the next 5 years. Funds would be limited to lands under the control of the Conservation Commission. No guarantees that Town Meeting will approve, funds would be awarded, but Claire feels that there is a good chance of success. She has also applied for a small grant that would have to be spent in this FY, for invasives removal in Town Forest and for outreach to town residents (particularly conservation property abutters) with a guide for invasives control and training.
- Pickerel Pond bridge Notice of Intent hearing will be opened Jan. 15.
- She has been working with DCR on the Pegan Cove bridges, hoping to secure an agreement to allow volunteers to repair/replace two small bridges. DCR has posted hazard signs. DCR has determined that the town's Generic Order of Conditions does not apply on state land, and requires a new Order of Conditions. Claire will work with a DCR ecologist to prepare the Notice of Intent. Lisa suggested that a Request for Determination might be more appropriate for repair/replacement work. DCR has indicated that they would provide financial support for the project.
- She has reached out to scientists at UMass concerning studies of the Pickerel Pond Atlantic white cedar stand. UMass is conducting research at various sites around the state on white cedar restoration, and Claire would like to get the Natick stand included in the project. She would like to get a cost estimate from UMass for the next grant cycle.

4. Trail Stewards – Mary Hudson

Mary reviewed numerous items on the tracking list, particularly large trees that were toppled in the high wind conditions of late December. Volunteers (including Peter and Doug) have removed most of these. Claire said that she has reported the Timothy Coolidge cable to DPW (again) and that it is on her on-going list.

5. 2026 Goals

The Committee reviewed the 2025 Goals list and discussed modifications for 2026. Doug will edit the list and circulate for discussion and approval at the February meeting.

- There was considerable discussion about the Trail Stewards items #3 and #4 – Hold at least one Trail Steward event/training session, and produce an Annual Report out. There was a general consensus that the program is working – the trails are being maintained in good condition. Mary and Bob can pull and analyze data on steward activities, to be included in Claire's annual report of the Conservation Commission. The larger discussion focused on engaging the Stewards through a fun, interesting event (invasive species control workshop,

fun trail walks with food) that would provide the Stewards with the opportunity to meet other stewards, become more engaged, and be recognized. The group agreed that there needs to be a way to recognize and thank major volunteers, stay in contact with the larger group and encourage more participation, and provide updates on TAFS committee activities. Bob suggested developing a new structure for the program that would relieve the burden on Mary, by designating a lead steward for each property (probably involving the TAFS committee members) who could coordinate others and help in communication.

- Lisa suggested that Trail Assessments should be done at “neglected” properties such as Winter Woods and Sherman Wildlife Sanctuary (South Natick).
- Jim stated that there is an ongoing need for volunteer efforts to maintain the meadow restoration project.
- Funding for projects should be sought through the CPA program. One or more key projects should be developed and advanced.

6. Other Business

- Cindy Bates suggested that the Open Space and Trails website should be updated, and noted that she was unable to link from that page to meeting agendas and minutes. Claire provided information on the correct way to link.
- Lisa reported that she worked with the Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group, which voted to designate sapphire berry and Japanese aralia (both major invasives in the Town Forest) as invasive. The recommendation must be approved by the Department of Agriculture to place these on the official state list.
- Doug reported that he and Lisa had removed the wire and wood “tree protections” from the Rt 27 trees at the Timothy Coolidge trailhead.

7. Take-Aways

Doug

- Revise and circulate the draft 2026 Goals
- Draft an outreach message to Trail Stewards

Claire

- GPS the Timothy Coolidge new Blue Trail - TBD
- Complete installation of signs at Town Forest
- Research access to Pine Hill
- Research, communicate with HOA concerning Takewampait Trail repairs
- Pursue Rec & Park approval for tree removal, Coolidge Hill
- Schedule work day Pickerel Pond, bridge follow-up

Not Assigned

- Draft signage to be installed at Town Forest Oak Street gate (for review at February Meeting)

8. Next Meeting – Monday February 2, 7 PM

Adjourned at 8:35 PM