

Monadnock Advisory Commission
Minutes from Thursday, November 10, 2022
4pm at East Hill Farm

Attendance

Members Present:

Terry Maugeri (Marlborough)
Don Upton (Troy, acting Chair for Robin)
Dave Adams (Troy)
Dan Rogalski (Marlborough)
Peter Palmiotto (Antioch MERE)
Katy Wardlaw (Dublin)
Matt Scaccia & Carrie Deegan (SPNHF, for
Brian Hotz)
Hiel Lindquist (Fitzwilliam)
Tyler Comte (Forests & Lands, for Scott
Rolfe)
Tara Blaney (DNCR, for Brian Wilson)
Sterling Abrams (Dublin)

Members Absent:

Robin Blaise (Fitzwilliam)
Ann Royce (Jaffrey)
John Smith (Jaffrey)

Guests:

Will Kirkpatrick (Monadnock S.P., minutes)
Mary Shotton (Monadnock S.P.)

Agenda

1. Welcome & roll call

11 voting members – quorum present.

2. Review of minutes from previous meeting – 4/21/2022 as well as 11/18/2021 (April meeting had no quorum).

Both sessions' minutes approved.

3. Treasurer's report & update

Switched to M&T Bank, which charges no fee. This solved the issue, so Ann will remain treasurer. \$2743 was the last reported balance (from April meeting).

4. Monadnock State Park manager's update

Park Manager's Report handed out. From Will: This year saw a slow-down from the pandemic height – but we settle down to reasonably close to 2019 levels. The Covid swell of visitation seems to have receded back to normal levels. This was the story across Parks in NH. At Monadnock, we are a little below that since we capped visitation with the reservation system.

The reservation system is here to stay. At \$15 per car now, it is now a better deal if you have a car-full, and encourages carpooling, though kind of a hit to single hikers. It has worked well to keep crowd size and trail overcrowding in check.

Lots of staffing problems (seems to be the story everywhere), effected pretty much everything. We tried hard to keep our smaller trailheads (GPA and OTR) fully staffed as they have less ability to flex than we do at the main entrance, and I wanted to set up the new GPA manager for success. This paid off in the maintenance improvements, and increased focus on retail at GPA this year led to a 70%(!) increase in campground store sales.

Iron Ranger income from remote trailheads is up dramatically. Attendance is if anything down, so this seems to be attributed to the clarified and streamlined signage at the Iron Rangers – kudos to Carrie and SPNHF for making that happen, and Carrie confirms that this been their experience at other properties where they've done the same thing.

Rhododendron saw a big drop in income – for staffing reasons we could not send staff over there during the bloom, which clearly had an impact. Also, we have the old signage on the iron ranger there, updating it in the style of the SPNHF signs will help. We have a good volunteer working on the trails though, and staff have kept up with mowing and general maintenance.

We were not able to staff the remote trailheads as we did during the pandemic. Occasional checks showed visitation to be not what it was in 2020 or 2021. We didn't hear any neighbor complaints this year, though it was sometimes still overflowing on the biggest weekends.

The reservation system is still unknown to people – it seems that nobody is inclined to check the website before coming. We have posted on Facebook, on our website, but some kind of more widespread announcement/ advertising would help a lot. A “Chronicle” or similar story would help a lot. Can we update our Google entry? We can look into that. Looking into updating AllTrails entry as well.

Not a lot of facilities projects at HQ this year, just due to staffing (though a lot was done at GPA). But we did have a lot of trail work done – 4 SCA crews hired by the State, and pro-crew Tahawus Trails built an amazing staircase on a sloped rocky section of the White Cross really helped with specific and urgent problem areas. Hoping to have that continue next year.

SCA Interpretive Rangers program back on, programming at base, with Mtn Patrol giving out hiker safety info, as well as an evening program at GPA for campers which was wildly successful (30+ people some nights).

Rescues down slightly from last year, but a little more involved and more staff-hours. For some reason, no rescues during the big foliage weekends.

From Katy – thinking about ways to make our connection to SPNHF more visible – what about that sloped space on the Store ceiling, kind of a blank area, highly visible to public. Consider working with a student artist to paint a mural?

5. Division of Parks & Recreation update

Phil retired, though he's on the Mt Washington Commission and the SPNHF Board, so continues to play an active role. We now have a new director, Brian Wilson, due to officially start next week. Brian had previously been the NH State Parks Regional Manager for the seacoast, then went on to become the Assistant Director for CT State Parks. We will hope to see him at our April meeting.

Parks reclassified its positions, increasing the labor grades to give park staff a boost in pay and stay competitive – up from \$11.16 to \$13.18 per hour for starting positions. Unfortunately once we got that through, the rest of the world gave workers an even bigger boost (\$15 in many places), so competing has been tough this year. We have added a few benefits – reinstated holiday pay for seasonal workers, expanded our free-camping benefit for park staff, and started an upgraded training program (Park Manager 101, CPR, and National Assoc. of State Park Directors leadership training).

The seacoast region has started the One Spirit program – working with Native American residents of a reservation out West. Seemed like a very successful program, brought in good employees and giving jobs to those who need them. Will look into expanding?

The Nature Conservancy partnered with NH Parks to start a program to bring people out into parks from urban areas

Monadnock (along with several other parks) now have high-speed internet, a huge accomplishment several years in the making (not listed in the Manager's Report, Will will update).

6. Division of Forests and Lands update

Sawyer Lot timber sale is moving along – layout and marking are done, went out to bid – Kennebec Lumber has the contract, and will sub-contract out for the actual cutting. Don't know who yet.

Cutting will be done Dec 15-March 31 (most likely January), but it's a two-year contract, so they could start this year or next.

2 sections will come up to the stone wall next to the Parker Trail – Scott or Tyler will be there when that is being done to stop hiking traffic. No trucking will be done on weekends.

Questions:

Will this effect OTR Parking? Not likely more than it is already reduced in the winter time.

Phil had talked about wanting to use wood cut from State Lands for the prison's firewood program – any developments? No, we tend to only cut very small amounts at

Monadnock (occasional blow-downs), and larger timber sales are part of what the state does for income – but it’s an interesting idea. We’re not sure where the prison actually does get its wood. Occasionally SPNHF will mill lumber from their trees for signs or other projects. Parks have done this too in the past, the timber-framed entrances to our new bathroom at Monadnock being an example. Something we can look into continuing.

7. Societies for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests update

Monadnock Trails Week was very productive (stats in Park Manager’s Report). SPNHF put extra effort into hiring pro trail crew supervisors – really elevated their ability to do more. Expensive but productive, something they’ll look into continuing.

Gap looks great – new bog bridges and stone steps. White Arrow and Marlborough both saw a lot of great rock-work.

SPNHF also hired an AMC pro crew to work on the Dublin Trail, and an SCA crew (not listed in the Manager’s Report, Will will update) to work on the Marlborough Trail. For all this work, SPNHF used money from Toll Road and remote trailheads that can only be spent in maintenance of these areas.

Work on 5-year trails plan with Parks has been in a holding pattern as both the State and SPNHF hire new people into the positions that will do this work. But we’re looking forward to it.

Pumpelly Trail update: “Green” land has been transferred. Met with new owners, try to find a new route for the right of way that all can agree on. Awkward conversation, but they seem willing to work with SPNHF which is good. Current trailhead location is unprotected; we’d only use the right of way if the current land owners decided they were done.

This doesn’t do anything to address the parking issues. Things have been better this year it seems (from Katy and Sterling), but still an issue.

Sterling reports that the owners of the Bourne property are not aware of any easement, but would be willing to create one (SPNHF thinks there is already). Sterling will e-mail Brian Hotz.

Cutting on Gap: There will be a harvester treating 100 acres on Gap, lots 5,6, and 7. Near North trailhead but further down the road, will not impact the trail, but could for East Hill Farm hikers. SPNHF can update Will K when this is to begin, who will keep Dave Adams in the loop.

“Demonstration Harvest” on Marlborough on hold – oak market tanked, so maybe not this winter. May harvest in Dublin for Ash – flag female trees not to cut, hope thinning helps with Emerald Ash Borer. SPNHF will keep Will K in the loop who will update MAC.

Questions:

Where do we get the rocks we use for stairs, etc. on the mountain? On site – one thing Monadnock has plenty of is rocks.

How many cars would we want for a “Pumpelly Parking Lot” if we could create one? 30-40 based on current car-counts. Perhaps it’s an “if you build it they will come” issue, and would invite more overflow? Currently there’s no SPNHF or State ownership at the trailhead, so building a tollbooth, charging, staffing – all seem out of the question at this point.

8. MERE update

Transitioning back from pandemic has been very challenging. Didn’t have a Summit Steward this year, hopefully will for next.

Peter did go up with Dublin School studying Crevice Communities.

No Meet the Mountain Day this year (staffing issues).

Passed out examples of infographic cards. Display in the Store or Visitor’s Center, perhaps in the spring?

Concerns about litter? Not really, if the current free trail maps aren’t such a problem.

Idea is to communicate what MERE has learned in a concise and interesting way.

SPNHF suggested “Outings” on “Outer Spacial” app (free). Seems like this could be a possible collaboration for a kind of VR tour which SPNHF is currently working on in other areas. They’d need waypoints, written-up info blurbs, photos.

Tara – seems like great info, concerned paper hand-outs will just end up in trash. Looking at permanent displays in the Visitors Center and/or the Outer Spacial idea sounds promising.

Hiker Survey – this coming year will be the last. Good run of 3 years, excited for the info.

9. Open Floor/ New business

Katy - Does MAC have any influence over “Mtn Zone” for zoning? No, that’s up to the towns.

10. Set date for next meeting

April 20, 2023, 4:00-6:00 PM. Dave Adams said we’re welcome at East Hill Farm again.

11. Adjourn

Adjourned.